



Policies and Procedural Guidelines: Child Protection Policy

1.0 Child Protection Policy Statement

Children, because of their dependency and immaturity, are vulnerable to abuse in various forms. Parents or guardians have primary responsibility for the care and protection of their children. However, Just Forests has a responsibility to ensure the protection of children participating in any Just Forests activities. Just Forests is committed to a child-centred approach when we provide developmental/environmental education services and activities for children and adolescents..

This policy extends to all Board Members, staff and volunteers acting on behalf of Just Forests. All persons acting on behalf of Just Forests must be sensitive to the vulnerability of children during the course of their work and act in a responsible manner at all times. It is recognised that most persons acting on behalf of Just Forests do not have expertise in this area; it is important to note that the investigation of suspected child abuse is the responsibility of the statutory authorities and shall not be undertaken by the Child Protection Liaison Officer or other persons acting on behalf of Just Forests.

This policy is directed at all those who have contact with children in the normal course of their activities, to provide guidance on appropriate behaviour around children and what to do if physical, sexual or emotional and neglect abuse is suspected.

This Policy is not a legal interpretation of the legislation.

This policy has been developed in accordance with government guidelines Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children, a copy of which can be made available on request or can be found on the website of the Department of Health and Children – www.dohc.ie

Having clear policies and procedures in place to minimise the risk of abuse or harm to children and young people, and for dealing with complaints and allegations, should serve to support Board Members, staff and volunteers and ease anxiety around the issues of child protection and safety.

2.0 Code of Behaviour for Board Members, Staff and Volunteers

A code of behaviour for Board Members, staff and volunteers is an essential element of Just Forests Child Protection Policy. This will help to create a supportive environment for Board Members, staff and volunteers to provide a child-centred ethos of our organisation.

Just Forests endeavours to raise awareness amongst Board Members, staff and volunteers of the issues involved. There is an onus on everyone to report suspicions or concerns. It is



important for individuals to be familiar with the definitions of abuse and to be equipped to recognise any signs or symptoms and know how to take a concern or an incident forward.

The protection and welfare policies and procedures agreed by the Board are then made available to all Board Members, staff and volunteers. It is important that all those involved understand, accept and agree to abide by them.

Just Forests normally conducts its services and activities for children and young people in institutions such as schools, libraries etc, which already have an adopted Child Protection and Welfare policy and whose own staff have been vetted by the Garda Central Vetting Unit. Just Forests is committed to ensuring where practical, appropriate to the service, supervision (including a minimum of two adults, one of whom will be on the staff of the relevant institution) depending on age, abilities and activities involved.

The code of behaviour for Board Members, staff and volunteers can be categorised under the following headings;

- Child-centred Approach
- Good Practice
- Inappropriate Behaviour
- Physical Contact
- Health and Safety

2.1 Child-Centred Approach

- Treat all children and young people equally
- Listen to and respect children and young people
- Treat all children and young people as individuals
- Respect a child's or young person's personal space
- Respect differences of ability, culture, religion, race and sexual orientation

2.2 Good Practice

- Have emergency procedures in place and make all Board Members, staff and volunteers aware of these procedures
- Report any concerns to the Child Protection Liaison Officer and follow reporting procedures
- Evaluate work practices on a regular basis
- Provide appropriate training for Board Members, staff and volunteers
- Update and review policies and procedures regularly
- Don't be passive in relation to concerns, i.e., don't 'do nothing'
- Don't let a problem get out of control
- Maintain awareness around language and comments made

2.3 Inappropriate Behaviour

- Avoid spending excessive amounts of time alone with children/young people
- Don't use or allow offensive or sexually suggestive physical and/or verbal language



- Don't single out a particular child/young person for unfair favouritism, criticism, ridicule, or unwelcome focus or attention
- Don't allow/engage in inappropriate touching of any form
- Don't hit or physically chastise children/young people
- Don't socialise inappropriately with children/young people, e.g., outside of structured organisational activities

2.4 Physical Contact

- Seek consent of child/young person in relation to physical contact (except in an emergency or a dangerous situation)
- Avoid horseplay or inappropriate touch

2.5 Health and Safety

- Don't leave children unattended or unsupervised
- Manage any dangerous materials
- Provide a safe environment
- Be aware of accident procedure and follow accordingly

3.0 Definitions and Recognising Child Abuse

Child abuse can be categorised into four different types: neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse. A child may be subjected to one or more forms of abuse at any given time. Definitions of the four types of abuse, how to recognise abuse and an explanation of "reasonable grounds for concern" are outlined below, based on "Children First – National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children";

3.1 Neglect

"Neglect can be defined as being where the child suffers significant harm or impairment of development by being deprived of food, clothing, warmth, hygiene, intellectual stimulation, supervision and safety, attachment to and affection from adults, medical care. The threshold of significant harm is reached when the child's needs are neglected to the extent that his or her well-being and/or development are severely affected".

(Children First p.31)

Neglect generally becomes apparent in different ways over a period of time rather than at one specific point.

Possible indicators of this type of abuse are:

- Frequent minor or serious injuries
- Untreated illness
- Hunger, lack of nutrition
- Tiredness



- Inadequate and inappropriate clothing
- Lack of supervision
- Low self esteem
- Lack of peer relationships

3.2 Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse usually happens where there is a relationship between a care-giver and a child rather than as a specific incident or incidents.

“Unless other forms of abuse are present, it is rarely manifested in terms of physical signs or symptoms.” (Children First p.31)

Rather, it can manifest in the child’s behaviour or physical functioning. Examples of these include ‘anxious’ attachment, unhappiness, low self-esteem, educational and developmental underachievement and uncooperative or hostile behaviour.

“The threshold of significant harm is reached when interaction is predominantly abusive and become typical of the relationship between the child and the parent/carer.” (Children First p.32)

Examples of emotional abuse in children include:

- Imposition of negative attributes on children, expressed by persistent criticism, sarcasm, hostility or blaming
- Emotional unavailability by the child’s parent/carer
- Unresponsiveness, inconsistent or inappropriate expectations of the child
- Premature imposition of responsibility on the child
- Unrealistic or inappropriate expectations of the child’s capacity to understand something or to behave and control him/herself in a certain way
- Under or over-protection of the child
- Use of unreasonably harsh discipline
- Exposure to domestic violence

3.3 Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is any form of non-accidental injury or injury which results from wilful or neglectful failure to protect a child. Examples of physical injury include the following:

- Shaking
- Use of excessive force in handling
- Deliberate poisoning
- Suffocation
- Allowing or creating a substantial risk of significant physical harm to a child

Possible indicators of physical abuse are:

- Frequent bruising, fractures, cuts, burns and other injuries
- Torn clothing
- Bite marks burns or welts
- Bruises in places difficult to mark e.g. behind ears, groin



- Undue or unnecessary fear
- Aggressiveness or withdrawn
- Absconding frequently from home

3.4 Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse involves the use of a child for gratification or sexual arousal by a person for themselves or others. Examples of sexual abuse are listed in “Children First – National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children”.

4.0 Reasonable Grounds for Concern

The statutory authorities should always be informed when a person has reasonable grounds for concern that a child may have been abused, or is being abused, or is at risk of abuse.

The following examples would constitute reasonable grounds for concern:

- specific indication from the child that she/he was abused
- an account by the person who saw the child being abused
- evidence such as injury or behaviour which is consistent with abuse and unlikely to be caused in any other way
- an injury or behaviour, which is consistent both with abuse and with an innocent explanation but where there are corroborative indicators supporting the concern that it may be a case of abuse. An example of this would be a pattern of injuries, an implausible explanation, other indications of abuse, dysfunctional behaviour
- consistent indication, over a period of time, that a child is suffering from emotional or physical neglect

A suspicion, not supported by any objective indication of abuse or neglect, does not constitute a reasonable suspicion or reasonable grounds for concern.
(Children First 1999, 4.3.2 and 4.3.3)

5.0 Reporting Procedures

5.1 Just Forests is committed to appointing a Child Protection Liaison Officer to

- Act as a source of advice on child protection matters;
- Liaise with the HSE and An Garda Síochána and other agencies, where appropriate, about suspected or actual cases of child abuse;

in relation to all Just Forests services and activities.

The role of the Child Protection Liaison Officer is to:

- Provide information and advice on child protection within Just Forests ;
- Ensure that Just Forests child protection policy and procedures are followed and inform appropriate sources of relevant concerns about individual children;



- Ensure that appropriate information is available at the time of referral and that the referral is confirmed in writing under confidential cover using the HSE Standard Reporting form.
- Liaise with the Health Service Executive/An Garda Síochána and other agencies as appropriate;
- Keep relevant people within the organisation, particularly the Chair of the Board, informed of relevant issues, whilst maintaining confidentiality;
- Ensure that an individual case record is maintained of the action taken by Just Forests, the liaison with other agencies and the outcome;
- Advise the organisation of child protection training needs.

5.2 The Board of Just Forests has appointed Mary Tully, Board Member, as its current Child Protection Liaison Officer .

She can be contacted, in confidence, at mobile number 0872389812 or by email to mtully@eircom.net .

5.3 If there is an issue or concern about any aspect of a child's or young person's safety and welfare it should be discussed with the Child Protection Liaison Officer.

It is the responsibility of the the Child Protection Liaison Officer to support and advise Board Members, staff and volunteers about policy and procedures in relation to child protection and to ensure that procedures are followed.

Just Forests has developed very clear reporting procedures for matters relating to a child/young person's safety and welfare. These are;

- The reporting procedure should be known and accessible to all Board Members, staff and volunteers.
- The person who expresses the concern should be involved and kept informed
- Actions and outcomes should be noted
- Record all details, including the date, time and people involved in the concern or disclosure and the facts (for example in an incident book). Information recorded should be factual. Any opinions should be supported by facts
- Inform the Child Protection Liaison Officer
- The Child Protection Liaison Officer may contact the Health Service Executive Duty Social Work Department for an informal consultation prior to making a report
- Information will be shared on a strictly 'need to know' basis
- If there are reasonable grounds for concern as outlined above, the Child Protection Liaison Officer will contact the Duty Social Worker in the Health Service Executive area using the standard reporting form available from the Health Service Executive.
- Reports to the Duty Social Worker can be made verbally initially and then followed by the standard reporting form.
- Reports should be made to the Health Service Executive without delay
- If the Child Protection Liaison Officer is not available, contact the local Duty Social Worker of the Health Service Executive directly



- In case of emergencies outside of Health Service Executive Social Work Department hours, contact the Gardaí. In situations that threaten the immediate safety of a child/young person, it may be necessary to contact the Gardaí.

6.0 Confidentiality Statement

Just Forests are committed to ensuring peoples' rights to confidentiality. However, in relation to child protection and welfare we undertake that:

- Information will only be forwarded on a 'need to know' basis in order to safeguard the child/young person
- Giving such information to others for the protection of a child or young person is not a breach of confidentiality
- We cannot guarantee total confidentiality where the best interests of the child or young person are at risk
- Primary carers, children and young people have a right to know if personal information is being shared and/or a report is being made to the Health Service Executive, unless doing so could put the child/young person at further risk
- Images of a child/young person will not be used for any reason without the consent of the parent/carer (however, we cannot guarantee that cameras/videos will not be used at public performances)

7.0 Recruiting and Selecting Board Members/Staff/Volunteers

All people who will have or are likely to have contact with children and young people should undergo a recruitment process appropriate to their level of contact with children and young people.

In formulating this policy Just Forests takes cognisance of equal opportunities legislation. Ultimately, common sense and sound judgment should be applied in the process of selecting and recruiting Board Members/staff/volunteers.