



Child Protection Policy

Introduction

Cluas Centre Ltd. is committed to safeguarding the well-being of all the children and young people with whom our staff come into contact. Our policy on child protection is in accordance with “Children First – National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children” (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2011) and Our Duty of Care. We are committed to promoting the rights of the child to be protected, be listened to and have their own views taken into consideration. This policy is underpinned by the Childcare (Preschool Services) Regulations 2006 and Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children.

Cluas Centre Ltd nominated Designated Liaison Person is Ronan Maher, and the Deputy Designated Liaison Persons is Willemein Koelink.

Why this policy exists

This policy applies to all employees and volunteers who have contact with children and young people on our premises in Dublin or through their work on behalf of Cluas Centre Ltd.

It is of high importance to ensure all employees/ volunteers have an ability to recognise abuse as it can be defined in many ways.

Dealing with Child Protection and Welfare Concerns

All employees, and volunteers of Cluas Centre Ltd, will be made aware of and be familiar with our child protection policy through an in-house induction and ongoing training. All Board and staff are Garda Vetted.

The Designated Liaison Person acts as a liaison with outside agencies and a resource person to any staff member or volunteer who has child protection concerns. The Designated Liaison Person is responsible for reporting allegations or suspicions to the Child and Family Agency Tusla or An Garda Síochána. (See Children First 3.3).

Reporting procedure for dealing with disclosures, concerns or allegations of child abuse

1. The employee or volunteer who has received a disclosure of child abuse or who has concerns about a child should bring them to the attention of the Designated Liaison Person immediately.
2. Under no circumstances should a child be left in a situation that exposes him or her to harm or of risk to harm pending Tusla intervention. In the event of an emergency where you think a child is in immediate danger and you cannot get in contact with Tusla, you should contact the Gardaí. This may be done through any Garda station.
3. Where the Designated Liaison Person considers that a child protection or welfare concern meets the reasonable grounds for concern criteria outlined below, then the Designated Liaison Person can refer to Tusla.

Examples of reasonable grounds for concern are:

- specific indication from the child that he/she was abused;
- an account by the person who saw the child being abused;
- evidence, such as an injury or behaviour which is consistent with abuse and unlikely to be caused in another way;
- an injury or behaviour which is consistent 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.

4. Where the Designated Liaison Person remains uncertain he/she should contact the Child and Family Agency Tusla for informal advice relating to the allegation, concern or disclosure.
5. The Designated Liaison Person will ensure that the parents/ carers are informed that a report/ referral had been made to Tusla. The Designated Liaison Person will make an appointment with parents to inform them that the report has been made to Tusla unless to do so would be likely to endanger the child.
6. After consultation with the staff member the Designated Liaison Person will then take one of two options:
 - a. Report the allegation, concern or disclosure to the relevant authority (e.g. Tusla, An Garda Síochána, etc.) using the standard reporting form from Children First and in the case of out of hours or immediate danger contact An Garda Síochána.

b. In those cases where Cluas Centre Ltd decides not to report concerns to Tusla or An Garda Siochana, the individual employee or volunteer who raised the concern should be given a clear written statement of the reasons why Cluas Centre Ltd is not taking such action. The employee or volunteer should be advised that if they remain concerned about the situation, they are free as individuals to consult with, or report to, the Tusla or An Garda Siochana. The provisions of the Protections for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act 1998 apply once they communicate 'reasonably and in good faith' (see Paragraph 3.10.1 of Children First National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children).

In making a report on suspected or actual child abuse, the Designated Liaison Person must ensure that the first priority is always for the safety and welfare of the child/ young person and that no child/ young person is ever left in a situation that could place a child/young person in immediate danger.

How to Make a Report

If the report is in relation to the safety and welfare of children / young people, the report should be made to the Designated Liaison Person for Cluas Centre Ltd.

Guiding principles to reporting child abuse:

- The safety and well-being of the child or young person must take priority;
- Reports should be made without delay to the Child and Family Agency Tusla, Local Health Office area where child resides.
- A suspicion, which is not supported by an objective indication of abuse or neglect, would not constitute a reasonable suspicion or reasonable grounds for concern.

However, these suspicions should be recorded or noted internally by the Designated Liaison Person as future suspicions may lead to the decision to make a report and earlier suspicions may provide important information for the statutory child protection agency or An Garda Siochana.

Who can make a report to Cluas Centre Ltd

Reports can be made by:

- Children / young people;
- Parents / guardians;
- Employees, volunteers of Insert Service Name here;
- Other advocates on behalf of children / young people.

How to Handle a Report of Abuse by a Child / Young Person

In the event of a child / young person disclosing an incident of abuse it is essential that this is dealt with sensitively and professionally by the employee / volunteer involved. In such circumstances, the employee / volunteer should:

- React calmly;
- Listen carefully and attentively; take the young person seriously;
- Reassure the young person that they have taken the right action in talking to you;
- Do NOT promise to keep anything secret;
- Ask questions for clarification only. Do not ask leading questions, this is not an interview, but rather receiving a disclosure from a child;
- Check back with the child/young person that what you have heard is correct and understood;
- Do not express any opinions about the alleged abuser;
- Record the conversation as soon as possible, in as much detail as possible. Sign and date the record;
- Ensure that the child/young person understands the procedures which will follow;
- Pass the information to the Designated Liaison Person do not attempt to deal with the problem alone;
- Treat the information confidentially.

Retrospective Disclosures by Adults

Parents and staff who are working with children and young adults or who attend child protection training may disclose abuse which took place during their childhood. A disclosure of abuse by an adult which took place during their childhood must be noted or recorded.

If any risk is deemed to exist to any child who may be in contact with the alleged abuser, a report of the allegation should be made to the Child and Family Agency Tusla without delay. Investigation of disclosures by adult victims of past abuse frequently uncovers current incidents of abuse and is therefore an effective means of stopping the cycle of abuse.

An increasing number of adults are disclosing abuse that took place during their childhoods. Such disclosures often come to light when adults attend counselling. It is essential to establish whether there is any current risk to any child who may be in contact with the alleged abuser revealed in such disclosures.

If any risk is deemed to exist to a child who may be in contact with an alleged abuser, the Designated Liaison Person should report the allegation to the Child and Family Agency Tusla without delay.

The National Counselling Service is in place to listen to, value and understand those who have been abused in childhood. The service is a professional, confidential counselling and psychotherapy service and is available free of charge in all regions of the country (see http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/Mental_Health_Services/National_Counselling_Service/). The service can be accessed either through healthcare professionals or by way of self-referral.

Protections for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act, 1998*

Cluas Centre Ltd wish to draw the attention of the staff and volunteers to this Act. Protection for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act, 1998 provides immunity from civil liability to persons who report child abuse "reasonably and in good faith" to the HSE or An Garda Síochána. Section 3(1) of the Act states:

"A person who, apart from this section, would be so liable shall not be liable in damages in respect of the communication, whether in writing or otherwise, by him or her to an appropriate person of his or her opinion that—

- a child has been or is being assaulted, ill-treated, neglected or sexually abused, or
- a child's health, development or welfare has been or is being avoidably impaired or neglected,

Unless it is proved that he or she has not acted reasonably and in good faith in forming that opinion and communicating it to the appropriate person".