

A Parent's Guide to the Child Protection Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools

Introduction

The purpose of this leaflet is to provide parents/guardians of post- primary school children about the responsibilities and duties which schools, teachers and other school employees have in protecting children and dealing with allegations or suspicions of abuse.

Background

The Childcare Act was passed into law in 1991. It was designed to promote the welfare and protection of children (0-18 years). This Act covers the rights and responsibilities of parents, the protection of children in emergencies, children in care, the supervision of pre-schools and the duty of the Health Service Executive (HSE) to promote the welfare of children who are not receiving adequate protection and care. The Act states that, in all situations, the safety and protection of the child, is of paramount importance.

***Children First* the National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children**

In recent years Irish society has become very aware of child abuse. We know children can be severely damaged by abuse and the effects can last for years even after the abuse has stopped. Each of us has a duty to protect children. *Children First* was published by the Department of Health and Children in 1999. It offers support and guidance to everyone who comes into regular contact with children and who is, therefore, in a position of responsibility in recognising and responding to possible child abuse.

Recognising Child Abuse

'Children First' offers four definitions of abuse under the following headings:

Neglect can be defined in terms of an omission, where a child suffers harm or impairment or development by being deprived of food, clothing warmth, hygiene, intellectual stimulation, supervisions and safety, attachment to and affection from adults, medical care.

Emotional Abuse occurs when a child's need for affection, approval, consistency and security are not met.

Physical Abuse is any form of non- accidental injury, or injury which results from wilful or neglectful failure to protect a child.

Sexual Abuse occurs when a child is used by another person for his or her gratification or sexual arousal or for that of others.

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Child First notes that teachers who are in the main care givers to and educators of children outside the family, are particularly well placed to observe and monitor children for signs of

abuse. In recognition of this the Department of Education and Science published Child Protection Guidelines for Post-Primary schools in 2004. These guidelines are based on *Children First* and are intended to promote the safety and wellbeing of all children.

The guidelines oblige the Board of Management of each school to designate an senior member of staff, usually the principal, to act as the designated Liaison Person (DLP) for the school. The DLP liaises with external agencies, such as the HSE, which deals with cases of child abuse. The DLP supports staff members who may have concerns about child protection and safety.

Schools authorities and all school personnel are required to follow procedures outlines in the these guidelines when dealing with allegations or suspicions of child abuse. In situations where school personnel suspect that a child may have been abused, is being abused or is at risk of being abused they are obliged to refer this matter to the DLP. The DLP will liaise with the HSE which will in turn assess the situation and all surrounding circumstances and provide protection and support for the child concerned.