

Holy Family Senior School

Ennis, Co Clare

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Child Protection Policy

Principal: Sarah Barnes

January 2010

Reviewed May 2011

Reviewed Oct 2016

Designated Liaison Person: (DLP)

Sarah Barnes, Principal.

Deputy Liaison Person: (DLP)

Anna Marie Darmody.

<p style="text-align: center;">Holy Family Senior School Child Protection Policy</p>
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Introductory Statement

The staff, parents and management of Holy Family Senior School have developed and agreed this policy in line with

- Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures, Department of Education & Science, 2001.
- Children First National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children, Department of Health & Children, 1999.
- Dept of Education and Skills Child Protection Procedures for primary and Post primary Schools.

Copies of both documents are available in the principal's office and all teachers have been provided with internet links to them

This policy addresses the responsibilities of the school in the followings areas:-

- Prevention – curriculum provision
- Procedures - procedures for dealing with concerns / disclosures
- Practice - best practice in child protection

Definition and Recognition of Child Abuse

The 'Children First Guidelines', defines child abuse into four different types:

- neglect,
- emotional abuse,
- physical abuse
- sexual abuse.

A child may be subjected to more than one form of abuse at any time.

Neglect

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

The threshold of

significant harm is reached when the child's needs are neglected to the extent that their well-being and/or development are severely affected.

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is normally found in the relationship between a care-giver (an adult person who has responsibility for a child in the short or long term) and a child rather than in a specific event or

pattern of events. It occurs when a child's needs for affection, approval, consistency and security are not met. It is rarely manifested in terms of physical symptoms. Children show signs of emotional abuse by their behaviour (for example excessive clinginess to or avoidance of the parent or carer), their emotional state (low self-esteem, unhappiness) or their development. The threshold of significant harm is reached when abusive interactions dominate and become typical of the relationship between the child and parent or carer.

Physical Abuse

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

- shaking,
- use of excessive force in handling,
- deliberate poisoning,
- suffocation,
- Munchausen's Syndrome by proxy (where parents make up stories of illness about their child or cause physical signs of illness), or
- allowing or creating a substantial risk of significant harm to a child.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse occurs when a child is used by another person for their gratification or sexual arousal, or for that of others. Examples of sexual abuse include:

- exposing sexual organs or intentionally performing any sexual act in the presence of a child,
- intentional touching or molesting the body of a child, by a person or object, for the purpose of sexual arousal or gratification,
- masturbating in the presence of a child or involving the child in the act of masturbation,
- engaging in sexual intercourse with the child, whether oral, vaginal or anal,
- sexually exploiting a child, or
- consensual sexual activity between an adult and a child under 17 years.

(In relation to child sexual abuse, it should be noted that, for the purposes of criminal law, the age of consent to sexual intercourse is 17 years).

Aggressive/Bullying/Sexualised Behaviour:

While bullying is not a category in itself, it is important to be aware of it in relation to child abuse. Bullying can be defined as repeated verbal, psychological or physical aggression that is conducted

by an individual or group against others. It includes behaviour such as teasing, taunting, threatening and hitting.

- Bullying behaviour that is perpetrated by an adult against a child will be dealt with under the provisions of this policy.

Sexualised behaviour displayed by an individual child, or occurring between children is inappropriate. Should such behaviour occur the school:

- Meetings will be arranged with the parent(s)/guardian(s) of the child/children involved.
- May if deemed appropriate seek advice from the HSE.

In a situation where child abuse is alleged to have been carried out by another child, the child protection procedures will be adhered to for both the victim and the alleged abuser; that is, the matter will be considered a childcare and protection issue for both children.

Aims

This policy aims to

- Create a safe, trusting, responsive and caring environment
- Provide a personal safety skills education which specifically addresses abuse prevention for all children in the school
- Develop awareness and responsibility in the area of child protection amongst the whole school community
- Put in place procedures for good practice to protect all children and staff
- Ensure that all staff members are aware of and familiar with the 'Children First' and the DES guidelines and procedures in relation to reporting concerns and/or disclosures of child abuse.
- Provide for ongoing training in this and related areas for all school staff

Prevention

- The BOM of the school require all BOM members and members of staff to be Garda vetted .
- The Stay Safe programme

This programme is the primary resource used in this school to provide education for children on abuse prevention. The programme is taught as part of the schools' SPHE curriculum under the strand unit Safety and Protection.

On enrolment of their child parents will be informed that the Stay Safe programme is in use in the school and a copy of the Stay Safe 'A Parent's Guide' will be available in the Parents Room and in the principal's office.

The formal lessons of the programme will be taught in their entirety every year in accordance with the SPHE programme. The Stay safe programme will be taught during the months of January/February to each class.

Staff will make every effort to ensure that the messages of the programme are reinforced whenever possible.

Procedures

Designated Liaison Person (DLP)

Holy Family Senior School aims to provide its pupils with the highest standards of care and protection, in order to promote each child's well-being and safeguard him/her from harm. Any person who suspects that a child is being abused or is at risk of abuse, has a responsibility and a duty of care to report their concerns to the Designated Liaison Person. Sarah Barnes, the Principal teacher is the DLP. Should circumstances warrant it, Anna Marie Darmody, Deputy Principal will act as DLP. The DLP has specific responsibility for child protection and will represent the school in all dealings with Health Boards, An Garda Síochána and other parties in connection with allegations of abuse. All matters pertaining to the processing or investigation of child abuse must be processed through the DLP.

Role of the Designated Liaison Person (DLP)

- The Designated Liaison Person has specific responsibility for child protection.
- The DLP is the first point of contact within the school regarding suspicions or disclosures of abuse.
- This person is the Designated Liaison Person for the school in all dealings with the HSE, An Garda Síochána and other parties, in connection with allegations of abuse.
- In instances where there are concerns about a child the DLP will direct the teacher or concerned adult to monitor the child in a manner that is not inconsistent with their normal duties.
- In instances where there are reasonable grounds for a suspicion or allegation of child abuse the DLP is responsible for reporting the matter to the HSE, or in the case of an emergency the Garda Síochána.
- The DLP is responsible for informing the Chairperson of the Board of Management if a report involving a pupil in the school has been submitted to the HSE or Garda Síochána.

Personnel dealing with disclosures from pupils should act with tact and sensitivity. The following advice is offered to school staff to whom a child makes a disclosure of abuse

- Remain calm
- Listen to the pupil
- Do not ask leading questions or make suggestions to the pupil
- Offer reassurance but not make promises (e.g. promising not to tell anyone else)
- Do not stop a pupil recalling significant events
- Do not over react
- Explain that further help may have to be sought
- Record the conversation accurately and retain the record

- Report the matter to the DLP (or to the Chairperson of the BOM if the DLP is implicated)

When child abuse is suspected, it is essential to have a record of all the information available. Personnel should note carefully what they have observed and when they observed it. All records so created should be regarded as highly confidential and retained in a secure location by the Designated Liaison Person. If the school employee and the Designated Liaison Person are satisfied that there are **reasonable grounds** for the suspicion or allegation the Designated Liaison Person will report the matter to the HSE immediately.

Reasonable Grounds:

The following examples are quoted in *Children First Guidelines* as constituting reasonable grounds for concern:

- Specific information from the child that he/she was abused;
- An account by a person who saw the child being abused;
- Evidence, such as injury or behaviour, which is consistent with abuse and unlikely to be caused another 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 is a case of abuse e.g. a pattern of injuries, an implausible explanation, other indications of abuse, dysfunctional behaviour;
- Consistent evidence, over a period of time that a child is suffering from emotional or physical neglect.

A suspicion, which is not supported by any objective indication of abuse or neglect, would not constitute a reasonable suspicion or reasonable grounds for concern in the first instance.

The Chairperson of the Board of Management will be informed before the DLP makes contact with the relevant authorities unless the situation demands that more immediate action to be taken for the safety of the child in which case the Chairman may be informed after the report has been submitted.

Any professional who suspects child abuse should inform parents/carers if a report is to be submitted to the Health Board or An Garda Síochána unless doing so is likely to endanger the child.

In cases of emergency, where a child appears to be at immediate and serious risk, and a duty social worker is unavailable, an Garda Síochána should be contacted. Under no circumstances should a child be left in a dangerous situation pending Health Board intervention.

Allegations Against School Employees

The primary concern of the Board of Management of **Holy Family School** is to protect the pupils attending the school to whom we have a duty of care. However, as an employer, the Board of Management also has responsibilities towards its employees. In this respect, and in the event of an allegation of abuse being made against an employee of the school the Board of Management will observe the employees' right not to be judged in advance of a full and fair enquiry. The Board of Management will always seek legal advice as the circumstances can vary from one case to another.

- School employees, other than the Designated Liaison Person, who receive allegations of abuse against another school employee, will report the matter to the Designated Liaison Person.
- Where an allegation of abuse is made against a school employee, the Designated Liaison Person within the school will seek a written statement of the allegation from the person/agency making the allegation (parents/guardians may make a statement on behalf of the child).
- Whether or not the matter is being reported to the HSE, the Designated Liaison Person will inform the Chairperson of the Board of Management of the allegation.
- Where the allegation of abuse is against the Designated Liaison Person, the Chairperson of the Board of Management will assume responsibility for reporting the matter to the HSE or An Garda Síochána.
- When a Chairperson of a Board of Management becomes aware of an allegation of abuse against a school employee, the Chairperson will privately inform the employee of the following:
 - the fact that an allegation has been made against him/her;
 - the nature of the allegation;
 - whether or not the matter has been reported to the HSE or An Garda Síochána by the Designated Liaison Person.
- The employee will be given a copy of the written allegation, and any other relevant documentation. The employee will be requested to respond to the allegation in writing to the Board of Management within a specified period of time. The employee will be informed that his/her explanation to the Board of Management will also have to be passed on to the HSE.
- The priority in all cases is that no child be exposed to unnecessary risk. Therefore, as a matter of urgency, the Chairperson will take any necessary protective measures. These measure will be proportionate to the level of risk and should not unreasonably penalise the employee in any way unless to protect the child.
- If, in the Chairperson's opinion, the nature of the allegation warrants immediate action, the Chairperson, on behalf of the Board of Management, will direct that the employee absent him/herself from the school with immediate effect. Where the Chairperson is unsure as to whether the nature of the allegations warrants the absence of the employee from the school while the matter is

being investigated, s/he will consult with the HSE and/or An Garda Síochána for advice as to the

that those authorities consider necessary. Following those consultations, the Chairperson will have

due regard for the advice offered

- The employee will be given a copy of the written allegation and any other relevant documentation. The employee will be requested to respond to the allegation in writing to the Board of Management within a specified period and told that this may be passed to the Gardaí, Health Board, and legal advisers.
- The priority in all cases is that no child be exposed to unnecessary risk. Therefore, as a matter of urgency, the Chairperson will take any necessary protective measures. These measure will be proportionate to the level of risk and should not unreasonably penalise the employee in any way unless to protect the child.
- If the nature of the allegations warrant immediate action in the Chairperson's opinion, the Board of Management will be convened to consider the matter. The Board will consider feedback if any has been received from the Health Board, Gardaí or relevant source. This may result in the Board of Management directing that the employee absent him/herself from the school forthwith while the matter is being investigated (Administrative Leave). When the Board of Management is unsure as to whether this should occur, advice will be sought from the Gardaí and/or the Child Care Manager of the Health Board and the legal advisers to the Board of Management.
- Should the Board of Management direct that the employee absent him/herself as above, such absence of the employee would be regarded as administrative leave of absence with pay and not suspension and would not imply any degree of guilt. The DES should be immediately informed.
- Chairperson will inform the Board of Management of all the details and remind the members of their serious responsibility to maintain strict confidentiality on all matters relating to the issue and the principles of due process and natural justice.

Links to other policy / planning areas

- SPHE curriculum, Strand Unit on 'Safety and Protection'
- The School Code of Behaviour
- Acceptable Usage Policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy.
- Health and Safety Statement.
- Induction, Café and yard policies.

Review and Monitoring

This policy will be monitored and reviewed by the Board of Management in June 2013. The board of management will ensure that adequate training and support is provided for all staff.

Policy adopted by the BOM in May 2012

Signed: Carmel Honan
Chairperson