

Procedure for Reporting of Child Protection or Welfare Concerns to Tusla

RCBS will always inform Tusla when there are reasonable grounds for concern that a child may have been, is being, or is at risk of being abused or neglected. If we ignore what may be symptoms of abuse, it could result in ongoing harm to the child. It is not necessary for RCBS to prove that abuse has occurred to report a concern to Tusla. All that is required is that we have reasonable grounds for concern. It is Tusla's role to assess concerns that are reported to it. If RCBS reports a concern, we can be assured that the information will be carefully considered with any other information available and a child protection assessment will be carried out where sufficient risk is identified.

Reasonable grounds for a child protection or welfare concern include:

- Evidence, for example an injury or behaviour, that is consistent with abuse and is unlikely to have been caused in any other way
- Any concern about possible sexual abuse
- Consistent signs that a child is suffering from emotional or physical neglect
- A child saying or indicating by other means that he or she has been abused
- Admission or indication by an adult or a child of an alleged abuse they committed
- An account from a person who saw the child being abused

The guiding principles on reporting child abuse or neglect may be summarised as follows:

1. The safety and well-being of the child must take priority over concerns about adults against whom an allegation may be made
2. Reports of concerns should be made without delay to Tusla.

Types of Child Abuse and How they may be Recognised

Child abuse can be categorised into four different types:

- Neglect
- Emotional abuse
- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse

The following are features of child neglect:

- Children being left alone without adequate care and supervision
- Malnourishment, lacking food, unsuitable food or erratic feeding
- Non-organic failure to thrive, i.e. a child not gaining weight due not only to malnutrition but also emotional deprivation
- Failure to provide adequate care for the child's medical and developmental needs, including intellectual stimulation

- Inadequate living conditions – unhygienic conditions, environmental issues, including lack of adequate heating and furniture
- Lack of adequate clothing Inattention to basic hygiene
- Lack of protection and exposure to danger, including moral danger, or lack of supervision appropriate to the child's age
- Persistent failure to attend school
- Abandonment or desertion

Emotional abuse may be seen in some of the following ways:

- Rejection
- Lack of comfort and love
- Lack of attachment
- Lack of proper stimulation (e.g. fun and play)
- Lack of continuity of care (e.g. frequent moves, particularly unplanned)
- Continuous lack of praise and encouragement
- Persistent criticism, sarcasm, hostility or blaming of the child
- Bullying
- Conditional parenting in which care or affection of a child depends on his or her behaviours or actions
- Extreme overprotectiveness
- Inappropriate non-physical punishment (e.g. locking child in bedroom)
- Ongoing family conflicts and family violence
- Seriously inappropriate expectations of a child relative to his/her age and stage of development

Physical abuse can include the following:

- Physical punishment
- Beating, slapping, hitting or kicking
- Pushing, shaking or throwing
- Pinching, biting, choking or hair-pulling
- Use of excessive force in handling
- Deliberate poisoning
- Suffocation
- Fabricated/induced illness
- Female genital mutilation

Examples of child sexual abuse include the following:

- Any sexual act intentionally performed in the presence of a child

- An invitation to sexual touching or intentional touching or molesting of a child's body whether by a person or object for the purpose of sexual arousal or gratification
- Masturbation in the presence of a child or the involvement of a child in an act of masturbation
- Sexual intercourse with a child, whether oral, vaginal or anal
- Sexual exploitation of a child, which includes: » Inviting, inducing or coercing a child to engage in prostitution or the production of child pornography [for example, exhibition, modelling or posing for the purpose of sexual arousal, gratification or sexual act, including its recording (on film, videotape or other media) or the manipulation, for those purposes, of an image by computer or other means] » Inviting, coercing or inducing a child to participate in, or to observe, any sexual, indecent or obscene act » Showing sexually explicit material to children, which is often a feature of the 'grooming' process by perpetrators of abuse
- Exposing a child to inappropriate or abusive material through information and communication technology
- Consensual sexual activity involving an adult and an underage person

BULLYING

It is recognised that bullying affects the lives of an increasing number of children and can be the cause of genuine concerns about a child's welfare.

Bullying can be defined as repeated aggression – whether it is verbal, psychological or physical – that is conducted by an individual or group against others. It is behaviour that is intentionally aggravating and intimidating, and occurs mainly among children in social environments such as schools. It includes behaviours such as physical aggression, cyberbullying, damage to property, intimidation, isolation/exclusion, name calling, malicious gossip and extortion. Bullying can also take the form of abuse based on gender identity, sexual preference, race, ethnicity and religious factors. With developments in modern technology, children can also be the victims of non-contact bullying, via mobile phones, the internet and other personal devices.

While bullying can happen to any child, some may be more vulnerable. These include: children with disabilities or special educational needs; those from ethnic minority and migrant groups; from the Traveller community; lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) children and those perceived to be LGBT; and children of minority religious faiths.

There can be an increased vulnerability to bullying among children with special educational needs. This is particularly so among those who do not understand social cues and/or have difficulty communicating. Some children with complex needs may lack understanding of social situations and therefore trust everyone implicitly. Such children may be more vulnerable because they do not have the same social skills or capacity as others to recognise and defend themselves against bullying behaviour.

In cases of serious instances of bullying where the behaviour is regarded as possibly abusive, RCBS may need to make a referral to Tusla and/or An Garda Síochána.

Reporting Procedure:

Any adult with RCBS who has concerns about a child should report his/her concerns immediately to the Designated Liason Person, or Deputy Designated Liason Person, where the DLP is unavailable. The DLP can contact the Children First Information and Advice Officer for advice in how to deal with the concern. The DLP can report his/her concern in person, by telephone or in writing to the local social work duty service in the area where the child lives.

Contact details for local social workers are below:

Jan Perrin,
Children First Information and Advice Officer,
Child and Family Agency,
Block B, Civic Centre,
Main Street,
Bray,
Co. Wicklow.
Phone: 01-2744245
Fax: 01-2744287
Mobile: 086-3803926
Email: jan.perrin@tusla.ie

Edwina Flavin,
Children First Information and Advice Officer,
Child and Family Agency,
Clane Primary Care Centre,
Abbey Lands,
Clane, Co. Kildare.
Phone:045-986332
Mobile: 086-3803925
Email: edwina.flavin@tusla.ie

The DLP may, in some circumstances, report the concern directly to An Garda Siochana. The Gardai will be contacted in the case of an immediate risk to a child.

Tusla has two forms for reporting child protection and welfare concerns – the Child Protection and Welfare Report Form (CPWRF) and the Retrospective Abuse Report Form (RARF). The Child Protection and Welfare Report Form is to be completed and submitted to Tusla for concerns about children under the age of 18. A web portal has been developed to allow for the secure submission of CPWRFs to Tusla. The Retrospective Abuse Report Form is to be completed and submitted to Tusla for cases of adults disclosing childhood abuse. It is not currently possible to submit RARFs using the web portal. Both the CPWRF and RARF can be downloaded from www.tusla.ie and are attached to this procedure. If using a hardcopy CPWRF or RARF, the completed form should be sent to the Duty Social Work team in the area where the child resides.

Parents/guardians may be informed that a report is being made in relation to a concern about a child. However, the parents/guardians may not be informed if by doing so will place the child at further risk of harm, or in cases where the family's knowledge of the report could impair Tusla's ability to carry out an assessment. Also, the family will not be informed if the person making the report reasonably believes it may place him/her at risk of harm from the family.

The reasons for not reporting a case to Tusla will be recorded, outlining the reasons for the decision and any actions taken.

All information will be treated confidentially. All information will be dealt with on a "need to know" basis and will only be discussed with relevant parties.