

03

Responding, Reporting & Recording



TAKINGCARE

www.presbyterianireland.org/takingcare

3. RESPONDING, REPORTING AND RECORDING

3.1 RESPONDING TO INCIDENTS/ACCIDENTS/CONCERNS

Responding to incidents and accidents

Many issues that are brought to leaders' attention are not necessarily a concern about a child's welfare or allegation of abuse but may be a minor problem, in other words, an incident or an accident. An example of an incident would be a male leader who takes a young girl home by himself without previous knowledge from or communication to parents/carers or other leaders. An example of an accident would be a teenager falling over in youth club and needing first aid treatment. It is important that leaders know how to handle problems, no matter how minor, and that they are able to respond to more serious concerns.

Youth organisations should have copies of the Accident/Incident Report form to record details of accidents and incidences. These forms should be used for the recording of accidents, incidents, injuries and any action taken. Each entry should be signed by the leader in charge. Parents/guardians should be informed in person or by phone of the accident/incident as soon as possible.

See Section 12 for Accident/Incident Report form.

Responding to concerns

A concern about a child may refer to an incident when a child has shown signs of abuse or there has been a disclosure of abuse by the child or another person. A concern may also refer to inappropriate or difficult behaviour that an adult has shown towards a child.

Responding to concerns must be based upon a clearly defined reporting process. Knowing what to do, who to contact and who needs to know will ensure that the incident is dealt with appropriately. The primary responsibility is to report any concern as soon as possible and ensure that the concern is taken seriously.



If there is ever a concern that a child might be in danger then do not hesitate to contact PSNI/An Garda Síochána immediately.

In the event of a concern that involves alleged or suspected child abuse a Report of Concern form must be completed and passed to the Designated Person or minister who should be made aware of the situation as soon as possible.

What to do and what not to do if a child discloses to you:

Do

- ⌘ Stay calm
- ⌘ Listen
- ⌘ Give time for the child to say what they want
- ⌘ Reassure them that they have done the right thing in telling
- ⌘ Write down what was said to you or what you observed as soon as possible
- ⌘ Write down the exact words that the child used
- ⌘ Use the Report of Concern form
- ⌘ Ensure that the Designated Person is informed without delay
- ⌘ In the event of a serious concern do not hesitate to contact the Taking Care Office and appropriate advice will be given

Don't

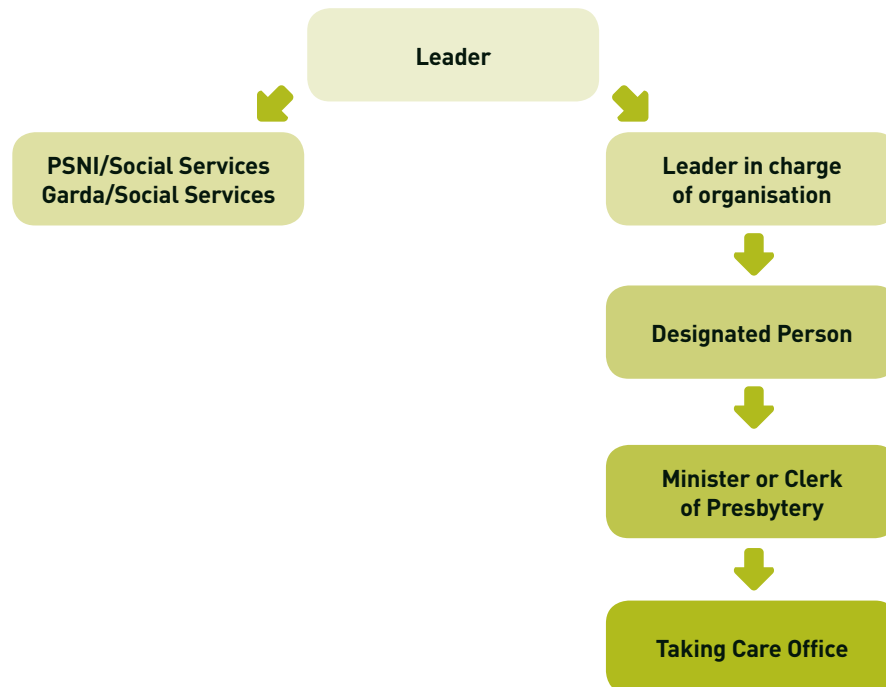
- ⌘ Do not panic
- ⌘ Do not make a child repeat the story unnecessarily
- ⌘ Do not promise to keep secrets
- ⌘ Do not investigate
- ⌘ Under no circumstances should you attempt to deal with the problem alone

Additional guidelines on dealing with allegations

In June 2004 the General Assembly approved a booklet called, 'Policy and Procedures for Dealing with Complaints of Sexual Abuse'. This policy complements the Taking Care guidelines and provides additional information on the handling of complaints against ministers and others in positions of prominent church leadership. The policy gives more guidance to Kirk Sessions and Presbyteries on taking advice, referral to statutory authorities, pastoral care and suspensions arrangements.

A copy of the policy can be obtained from the Board of Social Witness office.

3.2 THE REPORTING PROCESS



Flowchart explaining the reporting process:

1. If a child is in danger or a criminal offence has taken place, then PSNI/An Garda Síochána or Social Services must be informed immediately. Do not delay this by having a meeting. Remember that the task of deciding whether or not abuse has occurred rests with the professional agencies. If there is disagreement on whether or not to refer a concern to a child protection agency, any individual, as a concerned citizen, can still make a referral.
2. The person who has the concern should tell the leader in charge.
3. The leader-in-charge should inform the Designated Person or minister.
4. The Designated Person should meet with the minister as soon as possible, consider all the information available and decide to whom, if anyone, it needs to be reported. If for any reason it is not possible to speak to the minister or if an allegation concerns a minister or member of his/her family, the Designated Person should consult with the Clerk of Presbytery as soon as possible.
5. **All concerns, complaints and disclosures in a congregation relating to child protection must be reported to the Taking Care Office without delay as agreed by the General Assembly in 2008.** Appropriate advice and support will be given if requested.
6. Consideration should be given by the minister to offering support to the leader or other person who made the initial report. Help and advice can be provided by contacting the Taking Care Office.
7. In the congregational context, information should be restricted to the Designated Person, minister and Clerk of Session as appropriate.

::3.3 INDEPENDENT SAFEGUARDING AUTHORITY

It is a legal requirement that the Presbyterian Church in Ireland must inform the Independent Safeguarding Authority if they remove a person from volunteering or working in regulated activity with children or vulnerable adults in Northern Ireland.

According to the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (NI) Order 2007, a regulated activity provider, such as the Presbyterian Church, must refer to the ISA when they have withdrawn permission for a person to engage in regulated activity because they think that the person meets the following criteria:

- :: The person has received a caution/conviction for a relevant offence. This would be a serious offence that automatically bars a person from working with children or vulnerable adults. For example, the rape of a child.
- :: The person is suspected of being engaged in relevant conduct. Examples include conduct which endangers a child or vulnerable adult or is likely to endanger them and conduct of a sexual nature involving a child. This conduct could be acts of omission or commission.
- :: When the harm test is satisfied. The harm test is where it is thought that a person may harm a child or vulnerable adult, cause them to be harmed, or where a person has put a child/vulnerable adult at risk of harm, attempted to harm a child/vulnerable adult or incited another to harm a child/vulnerable adult. For example, a volunteer confided in a minister that he had a sexual interest in children but had never acted upon this interest.

Similar legislation will apply in the Republic of Ireland in due course.

More information can be found on the Independent Safeguarding Authority website:
www.isa.homeoffice.gov.uk



Staff at the Taking Care Office will advise on this referral process and offer support to those involved. Referrals to the Independent Safeguarding Authority should only be made by staff at the Taking Care Office.

::3.4 RECORDING

Child's words

It is very important that any words a child says are recorded accurately. If a child says something of concern to a leader, this should be recorded immediately on any piece of paper at hand and then the Report of Concern form written up at a later stage. Once completed, the Report of Concern form should be given to the Designated Person or minister and kept confidentially.

Report of Concern form

The person who has reported the concern should complete a Report of Concern form which is available in Section 12.

Try to have available the following information:

- ∴ The name and address of the child
- ∴ Age of the child
- ∴ The nature of any injury or complaint
- ∴ The need for medical attention (if any)
- ∴ What your concern actually is
- ∴ What course of action you have already taken (if any)
- ∴ Any other information you may have eg what school they attend, the name of their GP

Record of Meeting form

A record should be kept of any meetings held in relation to a child protection concern. It should be recorded what the concern was and whether or not the decision was taken to report to an outside agency. The Record of Meeting form can be used as a prompt (see Section 12) and once completed should be kept confidentially in a safe place. Such records will be sought and examined if an investigation is carried out.

∴3.5 MANAGING OFFENDERS

The Presbyterian Church believes that within the context of grace and forgiveness, attendance at worship services is open to everyone. At the same time,



the protection of our children must remain paramount at all times.

A person who has cautions or convictions on their record may still be involved in the life and witness of the Church. However if a person has convictions of abuse against children then they should never be in a position of leadership with children. If a congregation is following the Taking Care guidelines by having all new leaders in regulated positions undergo the vetting procedure then any convictions will be known through this process (for more information on vetting, see Section 5.2).

If it becomes known that a person who has been convicted of offences against children is attending church worship or any church organisations the Taking Care Office should be contacted. This is not to say they cannot attend but so that advice can be taken to ensure that attendance becomes safe for the protection of the children and others attending church and for the offender themselves. If an offender has restrictions placed upon them from PSNI/An Garda Síochána or Probation Services, the church must work in partnership with these agencies.

::3.6 DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS

If a young person or parent/carer has a general complaint about the running of an organisation, such complaints should be directed through the organisation leader to the minister or the Kirk Session. The complainant should be assured that the matter will be dealt with in a prompt and appropriate manner. They should be informed as soon as possible of the decisions and the action, if any, that will be taken.

::3.7 CONFIDENTIALITY

Who needs to know what?

It is always important that child protection issues are treated confidentially, only those who need to know about an incident or concern should be informed.

This will mean that where the minister or Designated Person considers that a child is at risk of abuse, or that a criminal offence may have been committed, it should be reported to:

- :: the Taking Care Office
- :: Social Services or PSNI/An Garda Síochána

Informing Parents

Depending on what the incident or concern about a child is, parents/carers may need to be informed. In certain circumstances PSNI/An Garda Síochána or Social Services will advise; if they do not then contact the Taking Care Office for advice.

Alleged Perpetrator

If an allegation has been made against a leader, advice must be taken as to whether or not they should be informed.

::3.8 REPORTING CONTACTS

Northern Ireland

Any abuse issues relating to children in Northern Ireland should be dealt with either by the PSNI or Social Services.

Police Service Northern Ireland (PSNI)

Within the PSNI, it is the Child Abuse Investigation Units (CAIU) that deals with issues relating to children. They are part of the overarching Public Protection Unit; there is one CAIU in each of the 8 policing districts. They are made up of male and female detectives who work in plain clothes and are specially trained to investigate all alleged and suspected cases of child abuse.

Contact the central number **0845 600 8000** or in the event of an emergency phone **999**.

Health and Social Service Trusts

All reports of a child protection nature in Northern Ireland are dealt with by either PSNI or by a local Gateway Team located within the Health & Social Service Trusts, who provide integrated health and social care services across Northern Ireland. Contact details for Social Services located within each Trust can be found on the Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland website www.n-i.nhs.uk.

Republic of Ireland

Any abuse issues relating to children in the Republic of Ireland should be dealt with either by An Garda Síochána or by social workers.

An Garda Síochána

If a child is believed to be at immediate risk, contact An Garda Síochána at the appropriate Garda station, in case of emergency ring **999** or **112**.

Health Service Executive

Any abuse issues relating to children in the Republic of Ireland should be dealt with by An Garda Síochána or social workers. There is a Duty Social Worker located within the HSE Child and Family Services Office. Offices are normally open 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday. Contact details for the 32 local health offices can be found on the HSE website www.hse.ie.

