Coláiste Chara: Child Protection Policy

Introduction

Coiste Choláiste Chara recognises that child protection and welfare considerations permeate all aspects of college life and must be reflected in all of the coláiste policies, practices and activities. Accordingly, in accordance with the requirements of The Children First Act 2015 and the Department of Education and Skills' Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools, Coiste Choláiste Chara has agreed the following child protection policy. In all instances of suspicion or allegations of abuse or neglect, the following Act will be referenced. Children First Act 2015 Children First National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children AIMS OF POLICY The aims of this Child Protection Policy are to:

• Put in place clear procedures for dealing with and reporting suspected/alleged cases of child neglect or abuse
• Endeavour to safeguard the wellbeing of the child and intervene when necessary to protect their rights
• Help school personnel recognise the signs of neglect or abuse
• Provide a safe, trusting, responsive and caring environment for our school community.
• Put in place procedures for good practice to protect all children and staff of Coláiste Chara.
DEFINITION OF ABUSE Child abuse can be categorised into four different types:
• Neglect
• Emotional abuse
• Physical abuse
• Sexual Abuse

DEFINITION OF 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, attachment to and affection from adults (3.2.Children First)

DEFINITION OF EMOTIONAL ABUSE:
Emotional Abuse is normally to be found in the relationship between caregiver and a child rather than in specific events or patterns of events. It occurs when a child's needs for affection, approval, consistency and security are not met. Unless other forms of abuse are present, it is rarely manifested in terms of physical signs or symptoms (3.3 Children First)

DEFINITION OF SEXUAL ABUSE: Sexual abuse occurs when a child is used by another person for his/her gratification or sexual arousal (Children First). More details of each type of abuse is contained in (Appendix 1, Children First) GUIDELINES FOR RECOGNISING THE SIGNS OF ABUSE (Children First) Recognition of abuse normally runs along three stages:
1. Considering the possibility – if a child appears to have suffered an inexplicable and suspicious injury, seems distressed without obvious reason, display usual behaviour problems or appears fearful in the company of parents/carers
2. Observing signs of abuse- a cluster of pattern of signs is the most reliable indicator of abuse. Children may make direct or indirect disclosures, which should always be taken seriously. Less obvious disclosures may be gently explored with a child, without direct questioning (which may be more usefully be carried by the Health Board or Gardaí). Play situations such as drawing or story telling may reveal significant information which could be considered in relation to the child's social and family context, and it is important to always be open to alternative

explanations.
3. Recording of Information- it is important to establish the grounds for concern, by obtaining as much information as possible. Observations should be recorded and should include dates, times, names, locations context and any information which could be considered relevant or which might facilitate further assessment/investigation.

HANDLING DISCLOSURES FROM CHILDREN
(DES Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures) An abused child is likely to be under severe emotional stress and staff members may be the only adult whom the child is prepared to trust. Great care should be taken not to damage that trust. When information is offered in confidence, the member of staff will need tact and sensitivity in responding to the disclosure. The member of staff will need to reassure the child and retain his/her trust while explaining the need for action and the possible consequence, which will necessarily involve other adults being informed. It is important to tell the child that everything possible will be done to protect and support him/her, but not to make promises that cannot be kept e.g. promising not to tell anyone else.

While the basis for concern must be established as comprehensively as possible, school personnel will adhere to the following procedures:
Procedures in dealing with a disclosure/suspicion from a Child/Third Party
• Teachers who suspect child abuse/neglect should report their concerns to the DLP at the first instance and carefully record their observations.
• Disclosures of child abuse/neglect from a third party will be reported to the DLP. If a third party starts to tell a teacher about an alleged abuse incident, the teacher will ask them to speak to the DLP. If the person does not inform the DLP the teacher will do so.
• Where a child discloses alleged abuse/neglect to a staff member, the person receiving that information will listen carefully and offer support.

IT IS NOT THE ROLE OF ANY STAFF MEMBER OR DLP TO INVESTIGATE AN INCIDENT, ALLEGATION OR SUSPICION. HIS/HER ROLE IS TO LISTEN AND RECORD INFORMATION.

Great care must be taken not to abuse the child's trust. Staff are advised to:
• Listen to the child
• Do not ask leading questions nor make suggestions to the child
• Offer reassurance but do not make promises
• Do not stop a child recalling significant events
• Do not react
• Explain that further help may have to be sought
• Record the discussion accurately and retain the record This written information should be given to and retained by the DLP.
All records will be held in a central, securely locked location.

DESIGNATED LIAISON PERSONS

(DLP) (2.2 DES Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures) The Committee has designated a senior member of staff to have specific responsibility for child protection. This person is the Designated Liaison Person for the college in dealing with Túsla, Gardaí Síochána and other parties in connection with allegations of abuse. All other parties are advised that they should

conduct all matters pertaining to the processing or investigations of alleged child abuse through the Designated Liaison Person (DLP).

Where the Designated Liaison Person is unavailable for whatever reason, arrangements are in place for another nominated member of staff to assume his/her responsibility i.e. the Deputy Designated DLP: Maireád Uí Bhrádraigh The Deputy D Liaison Person: Sorcha Ní Chonaire The DLP has specific responsibility for child protection and will in conjunction with any mandated person who has received a disclosure, represent the school in all dealings with Túsla, Garda Síochána and other parties, in connection with allegations of abuse.

ACTION TO BE TAKEN BY THE DESIGNATED LIAISON PERSON
(DES Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures) If a staff member and the designated liaison person are satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for the suspicion or allegation, they should jointly report the matter to Túsla immediately. This will be done on Túsla Child Protection and Welfare Report Form. In the event of an emergency or the non-availability of Túsla Staff the report will be made to the local Gardaí. The report should include as much information as possible on the standard Reporting Form.

WHEN SUCH A REPORT IS BEING MADE TO THE HEALTH BOARD THE RÚNAÍ OF THE COISTE WILL BE INFORMED.
In the case where a staff member has concerns about a child, but are not sure whether to report the matter to Túsla they will seek appropriate advice. To do so, the DLP will consult the appropriate Túsla staff member (duty social worker). In consulting the appropriate Túsla staff, the DLP would not have to give identifying details as are required when a report is being made. If Túsla advises that a referral will be made, the DLP will act on that advice. If following the discussion outlined, the DLP decides that the concerns of the school employee will not be referred to Túsla; the school employee will be given a clear statement, in writing, as to the reason why the action is not being taken. The school employee will be advised that, if he/she remains concerned about the situation, he/she is free to consult with or report to Túsla. Again, the standard reporting form will be used. Any such report would be covered by the Protection for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act, 1998.

CONFIDENTIALITY
(DES Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures) All information regarding concerns of possible child abuse will only be shared on a need to know basis, in the interest of the child. Giving information to those who need to have that information for the protection of the child who may have been or has been abused, is not a breach of confidentiality. The DLP who is submitting a report to Túsla or Garda Síochána will inform a parent/guardian, unless doing so is likely to endanger the child or place that child at further risk. A decision not to inform a parent/guardian will be briefly recorded together with the reason for not doing so. In emergency situations, where Túsla cannot be contacted, and the child appears at immediate and serious risk, An Garda Síochána will be contacted immediately. Under no circumstances will a child be left in a dangerous situation pending Túsla intervention.

PROTECTION FOR PERSONS REPORTING CHILD ABUSE
(DES Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures: Children First) The protection for persons Reporting Child Abuse Act 1998, provides immunity from civil liability to any person who reports suspicions of child abuse reasonably and in good faith to designated officers of Túsla, or any member of an Garda Síochána. This means that even if a reported suspicion of child abuse proves unfounded, a plaintiff who took an action would have to prove that the reporter had not

acted reasonably and in good faith making the report. The Act provides significant protection for employees who report child abuse. These protections cover all employees and all forms of discrimination up to and including dismissal.

QUALIFIED PRIVILEGE
(DES Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures) While the legal protection outlined above only applies to reports made to the appropriate authorities (i,e, Túsla and an Gardaí Síochána), Common Law qualified privilege continues to apply as heretofore. Consequently, should a committee member or staff member furnish information with regard to suspicions of child abuse to the DLP or Chairperson of the Coiste, such communication would be regarded under common law as having qualified privilege. Qualified privilege arises where the person making the communication has a duty to do so, or a right, or interest to protect the child and where the communication is made to a person with a similar duty, right or interest. The person making the report, acting in loco parentis, would be expected to act in the child's best interests and in making the report would be regarded as acting in such a manner. Privilege can be displaced only where it can be established that the person making the report acted maliciously. Furthermore, those reporting a child's disclosure are not regarded as making an allegation as a matter of charge, but simply carrying out of their duty in good faith. They are not accusing or bringing a charge. Freedom of Information Act 1997

1. DES Guidelines
2. Children First Reports made to Túsla may be subject to provisions of Freedom of Information Act 1997, which enables members of public to obtain access to personal information relating to them which is in the possession of public bodies. However, the Act also provides that public bodies may refuse access to information obtained by them in confidence. Reporting to the College Committee At each College Committee meeting the principal's report shall:
1. state the number of reports made to Túsla by the DLP, since the last committee meeting and
2. state the number of cases, since the last committee meeting, where the DLP sought advice from the Túsla and as a result of this advice, no report was made, or
3. where there were no such cases at (1) or (2) above, state this fact.

Allegations against an Employee:
1. Procedures followed are similar to those of a disclosure
2. Employee is made aware of the allegation against him/her
3. Employee will be given the opportunity to respond to the allegation in writing and at a meeting of the Committee
4. Committee meeting to review the allegation, giving due consideration to any advice given by Túsla and Gardaí
5. The Committee will consider placing the employee on administrative leave, with full pay, pending the outcome of investigations by Túsla and Gardaí
6. On conclusion of any investigation the Coiste will then determine the employment status of the employee

EXISTING COLLEGE POLICIES The following college policies which complement the Child Protection Policy are already in place in the college:
• Child Safe Guarding Statement
• Code of Behaviour
• Anti-Bullying Policy
• Health & Safety Statement
• Critical Incident Policy

• Guidelines for Children away from Home
• Rules of the College
• Code of Good Practise – All Staff including Mná / Fir Tí
• Illness and Medication Policy
• Policy for use of media Review and Monitoring This policy will be monitored and reviewed on an on-going basis and/or when the need arises.

Policy adopted by Coiste Choláiste Chara on 02/10/25

Signed: Maireád Uí Bhrádaigh (cathaoirleach)