



## **Child Welfare & Protection Policy**

### **Scope**

The Policy applies to all ISACS Network employees as well as volunteers and Board members either working remotely, at the office and while representing the company at other venues. The ISACS Network does not usually work directly with children in its day-to-day activities, but does engage on an occasional basis with organisations that work directly with children.

### **Key Principles of the Policy**

The following principles underpin the Child Protection Policy:

- The welfare and best interests of children are of paramount importance. ISACS is committed to respecting the right to dignity and bodily integrity of every child and to protecting those rights in line with the core principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).
- ISACS fully accepts and endorses Children First Guidance and encourages its member organisations to develop child protection policies endorsing Children First Guidance.
- ISACS will not knowingly engage with any person, organisation or fund any project that poses a risk to children or that does not meet the child protection and safeguards outlined in the *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (2011)*.
- ISACS ensures that all employees receive the appropriate training in child protection and welfare.
- The ISACS recruitment policy adheres to best practice and that anyone employed by ISACS or contracted on a consultancy basis to work on projects that involve contact with children, works alongside an ISACS staff member who has been vetted by the Garda Central Vetting Unit (GCVU).

Our Designated Liaison Person is Lucy Medlycott.

Contact details: [director@isacs.ie](mailto:director@isacs.ie)

Our Deputy Designated Liaison Person is Amanda Usher

Contact details: [info@isacs.ie](mailto:info@isacs.ie)

### **Definitions**

Children and young people are defined as anyone who is under the age of 18.

A vulnerable adult is defined as anyone over the age of 18 who is:

- In need of community care services.
- Unable to care for themselves.
- Unable to protect themselves against significant harm or exploitation.

ISACS recognises that child abuse falls into four main categories as identified in the *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children*. These are:

- Neglect;
- Emotional abuse;
- Physical abuse;
- Sexual abuse.

Neglect: Neglect can be defined in terms of an omission, where the child suffers significant harm and impairment of development by being deprived of such things as food, clothing, warmth, hygiene, intellectual stimulation, supervision and safety, attachment to and affection from adults and/or medical care. Harm can be defined as the ill treatment or the impairment of the health and development of a child. Whether it is significant is determined by the child's health and development as compared to that which could reasonably be expected of a child of similar age. Neglect generally becomes apparent in different ways over a period rather than at one specific point. For example, a child whose height or weight is significantly below average may be being deprived of adequate nutrition. The threshold of significant harm is reached when the child's needs are neglected to the extent that his or her wellbeing and/or development are severely affected.

Emotional abuse: Emotional abuse is normally to be found in the relationship between a parent/carer and child rather than in a specific pattern of events. It occurs when a child's developmental need 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/symptoms. It includes, for example, persistent criticism and sarcasm, unresponsiveness of the parent/carer, use of over harsh disciplinary measures and exposure to domestic violence.

Emotional abuse can be manifested in terms of the child's behavioural, cognitive, affective or physical functioning. Examples of these include insecure attachment, unhappiness, low self-esteem, educational and developmental underachievement and oppositional behaviour. The threshold of significant harm is reached when abusive interactions dominate and become typical of the relationship between the child and the parent/carer.

Physical abuse: Physical abuse of a child is that which results in actual or potential physical harm from an interaction, or lack of interaction, which is reasonably within the control of a parent or person in a position of responsibility, power or trust. There may be single or repeated incidents.

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

All potential signs and symptoms of abuse or neglect must be examined in the total context of the child's situation and family circumstances. Even the most unusual injuries or presentations may or may not be accidental, and an open, objective and enquiring approach must be

taken in all circumstances. Staff should also be aware of the circumstances which may make some children more vulnerable to harm than others, and act in a respectful, yet responsibly vigilant manner when they notice signs or symptoms that may indicate a child in need or a child at risk of abuse or neglect

### **Recognising A Concern**

ISACS employees should be aware of the signs and symptoms of abuse and neglect, as well as the circumstances which may make children more vulnerable to harm. Ignoring what may be symptoms of abuse could result in ongoing harm to the child. Employees may become alert to the possibility of a child protection or welfare issue through their own observation of a concern, through an allegation reported to them by a service user or member of the public, or a child/adult may disclose abuse to them.

Note: ISACS employees do not investigate child protection concerns or welfare concerns. Employees record what they see and hear and pass it on to the Tusla Child and Family Agency or to the Gardai in an emergency.

### **Risk Factors for Consideration in Child Protection**

Alongside the signs and symptoms of abuse there may also be several known risk factors that need to be considered when responding to child protection concerns. Risk factors are features of a child's circumstances that are known to be associated with heightened risk to health, development and welfare. They can be grouped into four main domains: parent/caregiver factors, family factors, child factors, environmental factors.

Other factors that need to be considered are:

- Age of the child
- Domestic violence/Sexual violence
- Parental mental health problems
- Parental substance misuse
- Parental intellectual disability
- Unknown partners
- Poverty and social exclusion

### **Reasonable Grounds For Concern**

The following extract from Childrens First sets out examples, which are by no means an exhaustive list, of reasonable grounds for concern to report to the Tusla Child and Family Agency:

- A specific indication from the young person that he/she was abused.
- A specific indication from a third party that a young person was abused.
- Evidence, such as an injury, of behaviour which is consistent with abuse and unlikely to be caused another way.
- Signs of injury which are 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 there are indicators supporting the concern that it may be a case of abuse. E.g. A pattern of injuries with an implausible explanation
- Consistent indication, over a period, that a child is suffering from emotional and physical neglect.

### **Responding To A Child/Young Person Who Discloses Abuse**

A young person may disclose an abuse/abuses perpetrated against them. It is essential that they feel supported in what may be an extremely traumatic experience. The act of disclosing is a huge act of trust and must be treated with respect, sensitivity and care. A child or young person may allege or disclose abuse or a welfare concern to any adult leader during their work with them. For this reason, all adults involved in the organisation need to be aware of the possibility and familiar with these guidelines on handling a disclosure.

ISACS employees must remember the following key points if they receive a disclosure of abuse or have a suspicion of abuse:

- The wellbeing of the young person is the most important consideration.
- The one thing you must not do is nothing.
- Never attempt to confront an alleged abuser.
- Do not investigate yourself. This is the job of the Child and Family Agency and/or Gardai.

### **Code of Behaviour between Employees and Children**

ISACS Employees must act in accordance with the Child Protection Policy, behave respectfully towards children at all times and maintain the standards of behaviour that are expected of them.

For the protection of all concerned, ISACS employees must never:

- Engage in rough, physical games including horseplay with children.
- Employees should be sensitive to the risks involved in such activities.
- Allow or engage in inappropriate touching of any kind. While physical contact is a valid way of comforting, reassuring and showing concern for children, it should only take place when it is acceptable to all persons concerned. Touch should always be in response to the child's need and should always be appropriate to the age and stage of development of the child.
- Be verbally abusive to a child, nor should they tell jokes of a sexual nature in the presence of children.
- Physically restrain a child or young person unless the restraint is to:
  - a) Prevent physical injury of the child/other children/visitors or staff/yourself;
  - b) Prevent damage to valuable property;
  - c) Prevent or stop a criminal offence.

In all circumstances physical restraint must be appropriate and reasonable; otherwise, the act of restraint could be defined as assault.

- Do things of a personal nature for children that they can do for themselves or that their parent/leader can do for them. Employees should be sensitive to the possibility of developing favouritism, or becoming over involved or spending a great deal of time with any one child.

It is recommended, except in emergency situations, that staff do not:

- Travel alone with children or young people
- Go into a toilet cubicle with children unless another adult is present or gives permission (this may include a parent, member of staff or group leader)
- Spend time alone with a child on his/her own, including online. If you find yourself in a situation where you are alone with a child, ensure that you can be clearly observed or seen by others.

### **Membership Engagement and Offsite Work**

In situations where ISACS Employees are visiting members offsite that interact with children, there should always be a discussion and exchange of child protection and welfare policies between ISACS and the host venue.

When working offsite, ISACS staff should always adhere to the same code of behaviour and reporting procedures and policies as set out in this policy.

### **Digital Engagement**

In situations where ISACS employees may interact with children who have contacted the company online or digitally, the principle that the online space is an extension of the physical space should apply. All activities should be fully risk-assessed to ensure adherence to the child protection policy.

When working digitally, staff should always adhere to the same code of behaviour and reporting procedures and policies as set out in this policy.

### **Recruitment**

ISACS adopts the Public Appointments Service principles of fairness, transparency and parity when recruiting all employees, volunteers and freelance contractors. In all cases, each employee/volunteer/contractor must complete and sign a contract of employment (or related services agreement) along with relevant commencement forms. Each employee/volunteer/contractor must also confirm their compliance with this policy.

All employees will participate in recognised and appropriate Child Protection Training and complete Garda-vetting where necessary.

The National Vetting Bureau releases criminal history and other specified information on the person to be vetted to the recruiting organisation. The results of this vetting will impact on the decision to exclude a person from working or volunteering in ISACS.

### **Managing & Supervising Employees**

ISACS wishes to protect staff (paid and voluntary) and young people and in order to do this we will ensure that:

- New employees will take part in a mandatory induction training session.

- New employees are made aware of the organisation's code of conduct, child protection procedures, and the identity and role of the Designated Liaison Person.
- New employees undergo a probationary period.
- Existing employees will receive an adequate level of supervision and review of their work practises.
- Existing employees have read and signed the Child Safeguarding Statement & Child Safeguarding Policy & Procedures.
- Existing employees will be provided with child safeguarding training.

### **Designated Child Protection Officer**

The Designated Child Protection Officer & Liaison Person is:

- Lucy Medlycott, Executive Director.
- Contact: 00353 870541812 / director@isacs.ie

The Deputy Designated Child Protection Officer & Liaison Person is:

- Amanda Usher, Company Administrator and Membership Officer.
- Contact: info@isacs.ie

The function of the Child Protection Officer is as follows:

- Ensure that the Child Protection Policy is followed.
- Delegate responsibility to the appropriate employee(s).
- Ensure that the child protection policies and documents implement the principles and procedures of the National Guidance and Children First legislation.
- Review and update the company child protection policies and procedures.
- Act as a resource person to other employees, providing support and guidance in matters relating to child protection.
- Ensure that a detailed record of all persons working on behalf of ISACS who have access to children is kept by the organisation include the following:
  - Full contact name and address.
  - Description of their role.
  - Confirmation that they have been vetted.
  - Any other relevant information such as training or qualifications.
- Ensure that all employees who have access to children have received sufficient training in accordance with guidance and standards set down by the HSE under the Safeguarding Guidance for Organisations.
- Report suspicions and allegations of child abuse to the statutory authorities, i.e., Tusla or An Garda Síochána.
- Maintain proper records on all cases referred to him/her in a secure and confidential manner.

### **Mandated Persons**

Mandated persons have two main legal obligations under the *Children First Act 2015* in relation to reporting and assisting. [Schedule 2](#) of *The Children First Act 2015* outlines who qualifies as a mandated person. ISACS does not currently employ any person that qualifies as a mandated person.

## **Reporting Procedures**

When an ISACS employee is told or becomes otherwise aware or suspicious that a child/young person may have been, is being or is at risk of being abused or neglected, they should consider the situation calmly and be guided by the paramountcy principle, that the young person's protection and welfare must be the staff member's overriding concern. In these instances the following procedure should be followed:

Contact the designated Child Protection Officer who should make a referral to the TUSLA - Child and Family Agency (TUSLA)'s Social Work Service by using their Standard Report Form.

If the Child Protection Officer believes that the concern is urgent and that there is an imminent risk to a child, they should make the report by telephone and then follow it up with the completed form.

This procedure should be followed even where the suspicion arises in another organisational context but is disclosed to an employee visiting/working on that organisational site. In this instance the employee should report to the Child Protection Officer.

In the event of allegations being made against a staff member, the protection of the young persons is the first and paramount consideration. The company has a dual responsibility in respect of both the young person and the employees. The same person will not have the responsibility for dealing with both the reporting issues and the employment issues. An allegation against an employee must be assessed promptly and carefully.

## **Speaking to Parents/Guardians**

Children First Act 2015: Please note that in an emergency situation, where you believe the child is at risk of immediate harm, you should contact Tusla without delay before making a written report. Under no circumstances should a child be left in a situation that exposes him or her to harm or risk of harm, while waiting for Tusla to intervene. If you think the child is in immediate danger and you cannot contact Tusla, you should contact An Garda Síochána. In such an emergency situation, The Designated person must follow up with a mandated report to Tusla within three days.

The Designated person takes responsibility for informing a parent about a child protection concern/report. The Designated Person must discuss the situation with the Welfare committee or Deputy Designated Person before they inform a parent about a child protection report, to ascertain whether that they are putting themselves or a young person in any danger. The DP will liaise with the Child and Family Agency before informing a parent. If a decision is taken to go ahead and inform the parents/primary carers, the duty social worker can advise the Designated Person on the best way to do so.

## **Sharing Guiding Principles & Safeguarding Procedures**

Parents/guardians will be made aware of ISACS's guiding principles and child safeguarding procedures on initial contact with our service. In these instances, parents/guardians will be directed to the company website, where these documents can be viewed.

When communicating with parents/guardians, families, children and young people, all employees are expected to be mindful of possible literacy issues, language barriers and communication differences.

## **Allegations Against an Employee**

In the case of allegations being made against an employee:

- The employee should be informed as soon as possible that an allegation has been made against them and the nature of the allegation.
- The parents/ guardians and the young person should be informed of actions planned and taken.
- The employee should be given an opportunity to respond.
- The ISACS Chairperson should be informed as soon as possible.
- Any action against the employee should be taken in consultation with Tusla and An Garda Síochána.
- After consultation the Chairperson will advise the accused and agreed procedures will be followed.
- In the case where allegations are made against the Child Protection Officer, it will be dealt with by the Chairperson.

## **Dealing With Retrospective Disclosures & Allegations**

If a retrospective disclosure made by an adult to an employee, that poses any risk to a child or young person who may be in contact with the alleged abuser, the allegation must be reported to Tusla Child and Family agency without delay following the same reporting procedures outlined above.

A concern about a potential risk to children posed by a specific person, even if the children are unidentifiable, should also be communicated to the TUSLA Child and Family agency.

## **Recording & Retention & Storage of Information**

In all situations, including those in which the cause of concern arises from a disclosure made in confidence, it is extremely important to record the details of an allegation or reported incident, regardless of whether or not a referral is subsequently made to a statutory agency. This should happen as soon as possible after an incident takes place.

Any reports/completed forms should be stored in a safe and secure location. The need for good record keeping at all stages of the child protection process cannot be overemphasized. Employees need to be mindful of the *General Data Protection Regulations 2018* and the *Freedom of Information Act*.

Adjustments cannot be made to an existing document. In the event of new developments/information, a new document should be completed which will accompany the existing document. These documents should be stored permanently as they belong to the organisation, not to the person who first made the report.

When an individual makes a report to the statutory authorities, the possibility always exists that they may be called to give evidence should legal action be taken. It is therefore important to record details of disclosure and any other relevant information that may have been heard and seen.

## **Confidentiality**

ISACS is committed to ensuring people's rights to confidentiality. However, in relation to child protection and welfare we undertake that:

- Information will only be forwarded on a need-to-know basis in order to safeguard the young person.
- Giving such information to others for the protection of a young person is not a breach of confidentiality.
- We cannot guarantee total confidentiality where the best interests of the child or young person are at risk.
- Primary carers, children and young people have a right to know if personal information is being shared and/or a report is being made to Túsla, unless doing so could put the young person at further risk.
- Images of a child/young person will not be used for any reason without the consent of the parent/carer.

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