

TAKING CARE
Child Protection Policy, Methodist
Church in Ireland

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Taking Care is the name of the child protection programme of the Methodist Church in Ireland. Our aim is to create and promote a safe environment for children, young people, leaders and staff. Our Church receives through its doors every year over five thousand children and young people. We have a legal duty of care to look after these children and provide a safe environment for them as best we can. These guidelines provide guidance to all involved in youth and children's work and ministry within the Methodist Church in Ireland to help ensure that children and young people enjoy their activities with optimum physical safety and are free from the threat of abuse. It will also alert leaders to signs of distress which may indicate that a child has been harmed.

Each Church Council/ Circuit Executive must:

- appoint a Designated Person(s) for child protection;
- follow the recruitment and appointment process for new leaders which includes the vetting process;
- make sure the correct ratios are observed;
- ensure all leaders attend child protection training;
- and are fully aware of the reporting process in case a child protection concern or incident were to arise.

By adopting and using these guidelines each congregation will be raising the standard of care for those entrusted to them, no matter how brief the event or small the organisation they attend.

The Methodist Church in Ireland reaches out to children and young people throughout the island of Ireland and welcomes those from households where there is no Methodist or other denominational connection. Every congregation in the Methodist Church in Ireland must have adopted these guidelines and should be implementing them in all its organisations which work with children and young people, according to the Methodist Conference.

This policy is reflective of the fact that the Methodist Church in Ireland operates over two distinct jurisdictions. Accordingly, while the principles are largely the same between Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, there are significant differences in reporting mechanisms and procedures. Accordingly, there is a separate, Republic of Ireland-focussed chapter.

1.2 WHY DOES THE CHURCH NEED A CHILD PROTECTION POLICY?

There are four main reasons why we need to have a child Protection Policy within the Church:

1. A Legal Requirement

The law rightly requires us to have a policy in place and says we have a duty of care to children and young people that we work with. The UN Convention on the rights of the Child stipulates that "children have the right to be protected from all forms of violence. They must be kept safe from harm. They must be given proper care by those looking after them".

Five Key Principles of Child Care.

The Children (NI) order 1995 and the Child First Act (ROI) 2015 emphasise the following key principles:

- *Paramount Consideration* – it is a fundamental principle in child care law and practice that the welfare of the child must be the paramount consideration in decisions taken about him/her;
- *Parental Responsibility* – parents have a responsibility to children rather than rights over them. There may be situations where other significant adults share this responsibility with one or both parents;
- *Prevention* – We should aim to prevent situations arising where children are separated from their families. The state should provide support and services to keep children within their families and communities, in order to promote their health and welfare;
- *Partnership* – The most effective way of ensuring that a child's needs are met is by working in partnership. The provision of services must therefore take into account the views of parents;
- *Protection* – Children should be safe and should be protected by intervention if they are in danger.

2. Biblical Basis

As well as a legal imperative, there is also a biblical one. We have our own duty of care found in the bible. 1 Peter 5:2 says, “be shepherds of god’s flock that is under your care, watching over them – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be”.

3. Our own Protection

Taking Care is not there only to protect children and young people but leaders and staff too and ultimately the organisations of the Church. sometimes leaders may think that aspects of the guidelines are not necessary, however it should be remembered that it is for their own protection and they should not rely on their reputation to protect them.

4. The world that we live in

No denomination is immune from the problem of trusted adults misusing their position. This requires a response which is aimed at both prevention and care for those who may have been mistreated. We must not be naive to the fact that there are people in the world today who want to harm children and so we as a Church must do all that we can to protect our children, promote good practice and prevent abuse.

1.3 CLARIFICATION OF TERMS

A child is a person under 18 years old. Where either children or young people are mentioned in the guidelines, both are intended.

A leader is anyone 18 years old or over who is engaged in work or voluntary activity which involves regular contact with children or young persons.

A young leader or helper is a person aged between 15 and 18 years who assists in organisations working with children.

A leader in a regulated position is an adult working either as a volunteer or in a paid position, four or more times a year, in direct contact with children or vulnerable adults. A vulnerable adult* is anyone aged 18 or over who cannot take care of himself or herself. This may be because they have a mental health problem, a disability, visual or hearing problems, are old and frail, or are ill. (*This definition is from the leaflet 'Adult Abuse - Guidance for Staff', published by the Northern Ireland Office and Department of Health, TUSLA (ROI)/ Social Services (NI) and Public Safety in 2009.)

1.4 CHILD PROTECTION POLICY.

The Child Protection Policy should relate to all children and youth organisations within the Church. A Child Protection Policy should be displayed clearly on church premises. A sample policy is found in section 11.1. This sample policy should be developed to suit the congregation's individual needs and formally adopted by the Church Council/ Circuit Executive. Each leader should be given a copy, physically or digitally, of the congregation's Child Protection Policy and be in agreement with it.

Chapter 2: Abuse

2.1 WHAT IS CHILD ABUSE?

There are many reasons why a perpetrator abuses children. It is very important that abuse is stopped as soon as it is discovered for the sake of both the victim and the abuser. The sooner action is taken, the more likely it is that the abuse will stop and that the child will recover from his or her experiences. It is not only adults who abuse children. Teenage abuse is a growing concern; this is when older children abuse younger children or their peers. Child abuse does not refer solely to sexual abuse; there are five main types of child abuse. The following definitions of abuse are taken from, 'Working Together to Safeguard Children'. We have included some of the signs which can act as clues to tell us that abuse has taken place. This list is by no means definitive nor does it mean that if a child shows one or more of the signs they have definitely been abused.

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces illness in a child.

Signs may include:

- unexplained recurrent injuries or burns;
- improbable excuses or refusal to explain injuries;
- self-destructive tendencies;
- fear of physical contact, a shrinking back if touched.

Neglect

Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health and development. Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance misuse.

Once a child is born, neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to:

- provide adequate food, clothing and shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment);
- protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger;
- ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate care-takers);
- ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment.

It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to a child's basic emotional needs.

Signs may include:

- constant hunger;
- inadequate clothing;
- constant tiredness;
- poor personal hygiene.

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to children that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person. It may include not giving the child opportunities to express their views, deliberately silencing them or 'making

fun' of what they say or how they communicate. It may feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. These may include interactions that are beyond the child's developmental capability, as well as overprotection and limitation of exploration and learning, or preventing the child participating in normal social interaction. It may involve seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another. It may involve serious bullying (including cyber bullying), causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of children.

Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment of a child, though it may occur alone.

Signs may include:

- delays in physical, mental and emotional development;
- continual belittling of oneself;
- over-reaction to mistakes;
- extreme fear of any new situation;
- inappropriate response to pain;
- neurotic behaviour.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse (including via the internet). Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children.

Signs may include:

- sexual knowledge, including drawing sexually explicit pictures, or use of language inappropriate for the child's age;
- being overly affectionate in a sexual way that is inappropriate to the child's age;
- regression to younger behavioural patterns such as thumb sucking;
- self-mutilation, suicide attempts, running away, overdosing, anorexia;
- sudden loss of appetite or compulsive eating.

Exploitation

The intentional ill-treatment, manipulation or abuse of power and control over a child or young person

It may manifest itself in many forms such as child labour, slavery, servitude, engagement in criminal activity, begging, benefit or other financial fraud or child trafficking.

Signs may include:

- anxiety or depression;
- low self-esteem;
- poor school attendance;
- underachievement;

- self-harm;
- theft;
- symptoms related to physical/sexual abuse.

2.2 SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Young people attending church organisations are also at risk of being exposed to substance abuse. This can range from smoking to experimenting with solvents, alcohol and drugs. It is important that leaders are aware of the danger signs and include awareness training in their programme planning for high-risk groups.

2.3 DOMESTIC ABUSE AND CHILDREN

Violence against women and men in the home is a serious crime, which causes enormous health and social problems and emotional and psychological damage, not only to the victims, but also to their children. Children are often witnesses and are necessarily affected by the anxiety and personal threat to themselves. Domestic Violence is the most common form of interpersonal crime and also the least reported. Leaders should be aware that children may not only overhear or observe violence in the home, but may become direct victims, either accidentally or deliberately. The social pressures to remain within a violent home and the stigma which parents perceive in relation to living in refuges or temporary accommodation as single parents should not be underestimated. It is important for leaders of church organisations to be aware that agencies such as An Garda Síochána/PSNI and Health & Social Care Trusts have developed policies to help in situations of domestic violence and that advice, support and help are available from the Women's Aid Federation (ROI & NI). Men experiencing Domestic Violence may also have to seek refuge; accommodation may be available in the Simon Community (ROI & NI). The impact of Domestic Violence on children can lead to physical, psychological and behavioural disorders and may subsequently affect them when they become parents. Many of these concerns will have a pastoral response from the Church.

2.4 BULLYING

All kinds of bullying are wrong and should not be tolerated within organisations of the Methodist Church in Ireland. Our organisations should be a safe and welcoming place for all children. All organisations should develop a culture of openness where children and leaders feel able to say if they or their friends are being bullied.

What is bullying?

Bullying is defined as, "deliberately hurtful behaviour repeated often over a period of time". Bullying can happen anywhere to anyone; anyone has the potential to bully others.

What forms does it take?

Bullying can be name calling or teasing. Bullying is often physical; victims can be pushed, punched, kicked and hit. Victims can be forced to do things they do not want to do, or are left out of games or ignored by others. Cyber-bullying is when bullies contact their victims via direct messaging or the internet. This often intensifies the bullying as victims may have little chance to escape from their bullies.

Preventative Measures

All leaders should try to prevent bullying within their organisation. However, if it does happen, leaders must deal with it immediately and should never ignore it. All organisations are encouraged to write an anti-bullying policy based on these guidelines to suit their own needs (a sample policy is available in section 11.2). Children and young people should be a part of that process. If children are new to the group or spend a lot of time on their own, leaders should encourage others to befriend them. Having good friends is one of the best defences against bullying. Leaders should always reward and acknowledge positive behaviour, especially young people who befriend others or prevent or stop bullying. Bullying should be discussed openly within the group and young people should be regularly encouraged to talk to the leaders about anything that is bothering them.

How to deal with bullying:

- Any instance of alleged bullying must be reported to both the Designated Person and the parents of both the victim(s) and the perpetrator(s);
- The leadership of the group should talk with the victim(s) and find out what has happened. The victim(s) should be reassured that it is not their fault and they have made the right decision in speaking out. The leader should ensure they are supported throughout the process;
- The leadership of the group should meet with those involved. It might be suitable to discuss the issue with all members of the group, not just those who are bullying. It is not necessary to mention the victim by name. Talk about how they would feel if they were being marginalised, belittled or harassed;
- The group should discuss how the situation could be improved - if bullying is happening how, it can be stopped and how can everyone feel happier in the group?
- The leadership team should ensure everyone within the group is adhering to the code of conduct or anti-bullying policy. Once everyone has agreed that bullying should not take place, consequences should be agreed and implemented, were the behaviour to continue;
- The leadership team should provide pastoral support for the victim(s) as well as the perpetrator(s);
- The situation should be reviewed regularly.

2.5 SELF-HARM AND SUICIDE

Increasingly people who work with children and young people are being faced with the issue of self-harm. Self-harm is the external manifestation of an internal conflict. This can lead to an individual inflicting physical pain to mask an emotional imbalance.

Anyone in this situation needs to be supported. In 2004 the Royal College of Psychiatrists observed, 'deliberate self-harm is a term used when someone injures or harms themselves on purpose... self-harm is always a sign of something being seriously wrong.'

Common examples include:

- self-poisoning;
- hitting;

- cutting, or burning oneself;
- pulling hair;
- obsessively picking skin;
- self-strangulation;
- ingestion of illegal drugs;
- ingestion of excessive amounts of alcohol.

Disclosure of any self-harm should never be ignored; it is a clear sign that someone needs help, and that self-esteem is low. Care should always be taken in how this problem is managed and advice should be sought at all times. Our colleagues from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland have produced a leaflet on self-harm; contact the Connexional Safeguarding Officer for a copy.

Suicide

Whilst self-harm does not always lead to suicide, nor do those who attempt suicide self-harm, suicide can at times be seen as the ultimate act of self-harm. Leaders must be aware that if a child discloses that they are suicidal then the leaders have a duty to inform parents or make sure they are informed. As in the case of all other pastoral concerns, ensure that individuals of any age are safe and have a network of support.

Some signs of suicide might include:

- withdrawing from friends and family;
- loss of interest in usual activities;
- signs of sadness, hopelessness and irritability
- making negative remarks about themselves;
- talking or writing about suicide;
- putting their affairs in order;
- giving away personal items;
- a sudden change from extreme depression to appearing to cope and being calm.

These signs are not definitive but are possibly some of the signs displayed by someone who is suicidal. Others may show no sign of their pain at all. The only way to address our concern is to ask.

If a leader is concerned that a child or young person is suicidal, the leader must:

- listen carefully;
- take the issue seriously;
- offer support;
- encourage the individual to seek professional help ie a doctor, therapist or counsellor;
- encourage the individual to disclose this to a parent or close adult family member;
- follow the reporting process (see section 3.2);

If the individual appears acutely suicidal and unable to talk, it may be necessary to seek immediate help through the closest hospital casualty department;

Our colleagues from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland has produced a leaflet on suicide; contact the Connexional Safeguarding Officer for a copy.

Chapter 3: Reporting and Responding to Child Protection and Welfare Concerns - Republic of Ireland

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Reporting and Responding to Child Protection and Welfare Concerns - Republic of Ireland

3.1 OVERVIEW

The Methodist Church in Ireland (MCI) has congregations across the Republic of Ireland. MCI provides weekly opportunities for corporate acts of worship, for all ages. Activities for under 18s include faith-based Christian discipleship activities in a variety of settings.

Status of this document

This chapter is based on the legal framework provide by the Children First Act (2015). Information given is based on the child protection guidelines as set out in Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017 and Child Safeguarding: A Guide for Policy, Procedure and Practice (2nd Edition).

Guiding Principles

The Methodist Church in Ireland recognises that:

- The welfare and safety of every child and young person who attends our activities is paramount;
- Our guiding principles and procedures to safeguard children and young people reflect national policy and legislation and we will review our guiding principles and child safeguarding procedures every two years;
- All children and young people have an equal right to attend our activities that respects them as individuals and encourages them to reach their potential, regardless of their background;
- We are committed to upholding the rights of every child and young person who attends our activities, including the rights to be kept safe and protected from harm, listened to and heard;
- Our guiding principles apply to everyone who works or volunteers in the Methodist Church in Ireland;
- Workers/volunteers must conduct themselves in a way that reflects the principles of the Methodist Church in Ireland.

Governance Structures

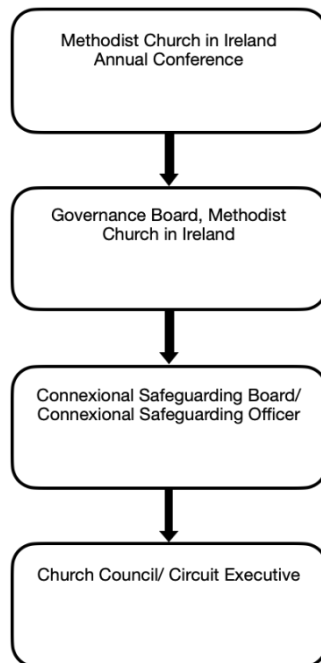
The Governance Board of MCI operates under the delegated authority of Conference to act as the body responsible for the day-to-day control, direction, administration and management of the affairs of the Church. The Governance Board has overall responsibility for all aspects of the life of the church.

The task of Safeguarding has been delegated to the Connexional Safeguarding Board (CSB). The CSB manages the day-to-day running and administration of Safeguarding across the Connexion. The work of CSB is supported by its Chair, on a part-time basis, and the Connexional Safeguarding Officer (CSO) on a full-time basis.

Implementation at the local level is delegated to the Church Council/ Circuit Executive. While the Governance Board is ultimately responsible for Connexional Safeguarding, it

is incumbent upon the local church to ensure that the highest standards are observed, and that there is no variance between policy and practice.

An annual report is submitted by each superintendent minister on behalf of the circuit outlining the commitment to best practice, giving assurances of compliance and affirming that volunteers have been vetted and trained in accordance with MCI policy.



3.2 GLOSSARY

Child means a person under 18 years excluding a person who is or has been married.

Staff means anyone with a formal contract of employment who is employed and paid by the Methodist Church in Ireland. This also includes stipendiary and non-stipendiary ministers.

Volunteer means anyone engaged by the Methodist Church in Ireland in a position of responsibility towards children or assisting with a group or organisation providing activities involving children, or care or supervision of children, and who is not paid for this involvement.

Child Safeguarding Officer (CSO) is the Designated Liaison Person for the Methodist Church in Ireland. The Chair of the Connexional Safeguarding Board is the Deputy Designated Liaison Person.

Safeguarding Team; at local-level, responsibility for child protection is delegated to the Safeguarding Team. This team consists of the Designated Person (DP), who is a lay-person appointed by the Church Council/ Circuit Executive, and the Deputy DP, who is a Minister/ Lay Pastor appointed by MCI. The DP works alongside the Minister and

have responsibility for ensuring that the correct child protection procedures are followed.

Statutory Authorities refers to Tusla (The Child and Family Agency) which is the statutory body responsible for child protection matters, who is responsible for keeping children safe and protected from harm. An Garda Síochána are empowered under legislation to investigate possible criminal offences.

Mandated Person means those defined in the Children First Act 2015 that have by law an obligation to report concerns which reach a particular threshold to Tusla and to cooperate with Tusla in the assessment of mandated reports.

3.3 RECOGNISING ABUSE

The legal and moral responsibility to report child protection or welfare concerns applies to everyone who has contact with children whether paid, voluntary, lay or ordained.

Knowing and recognising what the signs and symptoms of abuse are, is an important step to being alert to the possibility that children may be experiencing abuse and neglect.

- It is important to remember that a child may be subjected to one or more forms of abuse at any given time.
- Abuse and neglect can occur within the family, in the community or in an institutional setting.
- The abuser may be someone known to the child or a stranger, and can be an adult or another child. In a situation where abuse is alleged to have been carried out by another child, it should be considered a child welfare and protection issue for both children and child protection procedures should be followed for both the victim and the alleged abuser.
- Abuse is not always committed through personal contact with a child or young person, sometimes it is perpetrated through social media or the use of information and communication technology.
- A child needs to have someone they can trust in order to feel able to disclose abuse they may be experiencing. They need to know that they will be believed and will get the help they need. Without these things, they may be vulnerable to continuing abuse.
- Other indicators may be related to the child's behaviour such as being aggressive, impulsive, or withdrawn. A cluster or pattern of signs is more likely to be indicative of neglect or abuse.

3.4 CATEGORIES AND INDICATORS OF ABUSE

Child abuse can be categorised into four different types: neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse. The definitions of neglect and abuse outlined below are taken from Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017.

Neglect

Child neglect is the most frequently reported category of abuse, both in Ireland and internationally. Ongoing chronic neglect is recognised as being extremely harmful to the development and well-being of the child and may have serious long-term negative consequences.

Neglect occurs when a child does not receive adequate care or supervision to the extent that the child is harmed physically or developmentally. It is generally defined in terms of an omission of care, where a child's health, development or welfare is impaired by being deprived of food, clothing, warmth, hygiene, medical care, intellectual stimulation or supervision and safety.

Emotional neglect may also lead to the child having attachment difficulties. The extent of the damage to the child's health, development or welfare is influenced by a range of factors. These factors include the extent, if any, of positive influence in the child's life as well as the age of the child and the frequency and consistency of neglect.

Neglect is associated with poverty but not necessarily caused by it. It is strongly linked to parental substance misuse, domestic violence, and parental mental illness and disability.

A reasonable concern for the child's welfare would exist when neglect becomes typical of the relationship between the child and the parent or carer. This may become apparent where you see the child over a period of time, or the effects of neglect may be obvious based on having seen the child once.

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

Emotional abuse is the systematic emotional or psychological ill-treatment of a child as part of the overall relationship between a caregiver and a child. Once-off and occasional difficulties between a parent/carer and child are not considered emotional abuse. Abuse occurs when a child's basic need for attention, affection, approval,

consistency and security are not met, due to incapacity or indifference from their parent or caregiver. Emotional abuse can also occur when adults responsible for taking care of children are unaware of and unable (for a range of reasons) to meet their children's emotional and developmental needs.

Emotional abuse is not easy to recognise because the effects are not easily seen. A reasonable concern for the child's welfare would exist when the behaviour becomes typical of the relationship between the child and the parent or carer.

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 over-protectiveness;
- inappropriate non-physical punishment (e.g. locking child in bedroom);
- on-going family conflicts and family violence;
- seriously inappropriate expectations of a child relative to his/her age and stage of development.

There may be no physical signs of emotional abuse unless it occurs with another type of abuse. A child may show signs of emotional abuse through their actions or emotions in several ways. These include insecure attachment, unhappiness, low self-esteem, educational and developmental underachievement, risk taking and aggressive behaviour.

It should be noted that no one indicator is conclusive evidence of emotional abuse. Emotional abuse is more likely to impact negatively on a child where it is persistent over time and where there is a lack of other protective factors.

Physical abuse

Physical abuse is when someone deliberately hurts a child physically or puts them at risk of being physically hurt. It may occur as a single incident or as a pattern of incidents. A reasonable concern exists where the child's health and/ or development is, may be, or has been damaged as a result of suspected physical abuse.

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.

The Children First Act 2015 includes a provision that abolishes the common law defence of reasonable chastisement in court proceedings. This defence could previously be invoked by a parent or other person in authority who physically disciplined a child. The change in the legislation now means that in prosecutions relating to assault or physical cruelty, a person who administers such punishment to a child cannot rely on the defence of reasonable chastisement in the legal proceedings. The result of this is that the protections in law relating to assault now apply to a child in the same way as they do to an adult.

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse occurs when a child is used by another person for his or her gratification or arousal, or for that of others. It includes the child being involved in sexual acts (masturbation, fondling, oral or penetrative sex) or exposing the child to sexual activity directly or through pornography.

Child sexual abuse may cover a wide spectrum of abusive activities. It rarely involves just a single incident and, in some instances, occurs over a number of years. Child sexual abuse most commonly happens within the family, including older siblings and extended family members.

Cases of sexual abuse mainly come to light through disclosure by the child or his or her siblings/friends, from the suspicions of an adult, and/or by physical symptoms.

It should be remembered that sexual activity involving a young person may be sexual abuse even if the young person concerned does not themselves recognise it as abusive.

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.

An Garda Síochána will deal with any criminal aspects of a sexual abuse case under the relevant criminal justice legislation. The prosecution of a sexual offence against a child will be considered within the wider objective of child welfare and protection. The safety of the child is paramount and at no stage should a child's safety be compromised because of concern for the integrity of a criminal investigation. In relation to child sexual abuse, it should be noted that in criminal law the age of consent to sexual intercourse is 17 years for both boys and girls. Any sexual relationship where one or both parties are under the age of 17 is illegal. However, it may not necessarily be regarded as child sexual abuse.

Child Welfare Concern

The Child Protection and Welfare Practice Handbook defines a child welfare concern as "a problem experienced directly by a child, or the family of a child, that is seen to impact negatively on the child's health, development and welfare, and that warrants assessment and support, but may not require a (statutory) child protection response".

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.

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

For more information, please see MCI Bullying and Harassment policy.

3.5 CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH MAY MAKE CHILDREN MORE VULNERABLE TO HARM

Some children may be more vulnerable to abuse than others. There may be particular times or circumstances when a child may be more vulnerable to abuse in their lives. In particular, children with disabilities, children with communication difficulties, children in care or living away from home, or children with a parent or parents with problems in their own lives may be more susceptible to harm.

The following list is intended to help you identify the range of issues in a child's life that may place them at greater risk of abuse or neglect. It is important to remember that the presence of any of these factors does not necessarily mean that a child in those circumstances or settings is being abused.

Parent or carer factors:

- Drug and alcohol misuse
- Addiction, including gambling

- Mental health issues
- Conflictual relationships
- Parental disability issues including intellectual disability

- Domestic violence
- Adolescent parents

Child Factors:

- Age
- Communication difficulties
- Gender
- Trafficked/Exploited
- Sexuality
- Previous abuse
- Disability
- Young carer
- Mental health issues, including self-harm and suicide

Community factors:

- Cultural, ethnic, religious or faith-based norms in the family or community which may not meet the standards of child welfare or protection required in this jurisdiction
- Culture-specific practices, including:
 - Female genital mutilation
 - Forced marriage
 - Honour-based violence
 - Radicalisation

Environmental factors:

- Housing issues
- Children who are out of home and not living with their parents, whether temporarily or permanently.
- Poverty/Begging
- Bullying
- Internet and social media-related concerns

Poor motivation or willingness of parents/guardians to engage:

- non-attendance at appointments;
- lack of insight or understanding of how the child is being affected;
- lack of understanding about what needs to happen to bring about change;
- avoidance of contact and reluctance to work with services;
- inability or unwillingness to comply with agreed plans.

These factors should be considered as part of being alert to the possibility that a child may be at risk of suffering abuse and in bringing reasonable concerns to the attention of Tusla.

3.6 IDENTIFYING REASONABLE GROUNDS FOR CONCERN

There are many reasons why staff/volunteers may be concerned about the welfare and protection of a child or young person.

Tusla should always be informed when a person has reasonable grounds for concern that a child may have been, is being, or is at risk of being abused or neglected. If symptoms are ignored, there is the potential the abuse may continue or worsen.

It is not necessary to prove that abuse has occurred to report a concern to Tusla. All that is required is that reasonable grounds for concern exist. It is Tusla's role to assess concerns that are reported to them.

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 a child being abused.

3.7 PROCEDURES FOR REPORTING CHILD PROTECTION OR WELFARE CONCERNS (NON-MANDATED PERSONS)

Within MCI, concerns regarding the welfare and safety of all must be paramount. Advice from the Connexional Safeguarding Officer can also be sought at any time. (+44 7843 143 434)

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

- The safety and well-being of the child must take priority over concerns about adults against whom an allegation may be made;
- Reports of concerns should be made without delay;
- The rule is *if in doubt, pass it on*.

If any leader thinks a child is in immediate danger and cannot make contact with Tusla, that leader should contact the Gardaí without delay.

These are the standard reporting procedures for all staff and volunteers regardless of how a concern comes to their attention. This may arise from a disclosure/allegation being made or from a staff/volunteer's own observations.

Step 1

- Contact the Safeguarding Team (DP/ Deputy DP) on the day the concern arises to discuss concern. The concern should be recording in writing what as much detail as possible.

Step 2 (A)

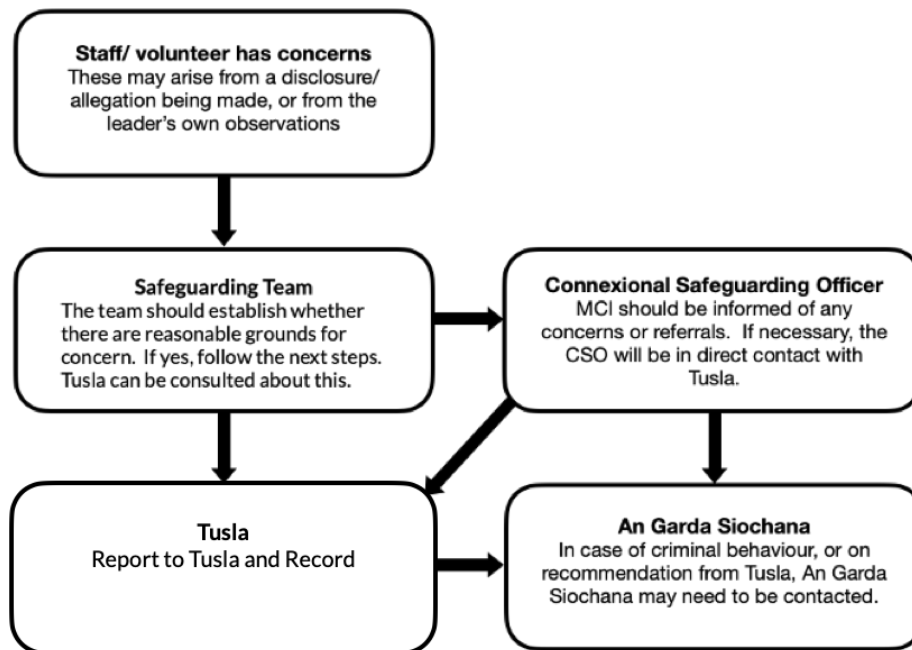
- If the Safeguarding Team, in consultation with the person who raised the concern, decides that reasonable grounds for concern exist, then contact should be made with the Duty Social Worker in the local Tusla office to seek advice about the concern and whether a report needs to be made.
- Record and follow the advice given and actions to be taken including whether the parents should be informed of the report being made.
- Tusla can be contacted for informal advice. This provides an opportunity to discuss the query in general and to decide whether a formal report of the concern to Tusla is appropriate at this stage. If the concern is below the threshold for reporting, Tusla may be able to provide advice in terms of keeping an eye on the child and other services that may be more suitable to meeting the needs of the child and/or family.
- If advised to make a formal report, the staff or volunteer who raised the concern and the DP should jointly fill in the Child Protection Report Form which is available on the Tusla website www.tusla.ie
- If advised by Tusla not to make a formal report, the reason should be recorded including the name of the of the Social Worker spoken to. Continue to monitor the child and report any further concerns as above.
- The Safeguarding Team should record the advice given by Tusla
- In cases where a criminal offence has been committed and, on the recommendation, of Tusla, An Garda Síochána may also need to be informed.
- The Connexional Safeguarding Officer should be informed of all reports made to Tusla and/or An Garda Síochána.

Step 2 (B)

- If the Safeguarding Team in consultation with the person who raised the concern decide not to make a report to Tusla then the following steps should be taken:
 - The reasons for not reporting are to be recorded;
 - If any actions are taken as a result of the concern, these should be recorded;
 - The staff or volunteer who raised the concern should be given a clear written explanation of the reasons why the concern is not being reported to Tusla;

- The staff or volunteer should be advised that if they remain concerned about the situation, they are free to make a report to Tusla or An Garda Síochána.
- The staff or volunteer who raised the concern should also be reassured that if they do choose to further pursue the matter, they are covered by the Protections for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act 1998.

Reporting procedure in summary - (non mandated persons)



3.8 RESPONDING TO A CHILD WHO DISCLOSES ABUSE

A child may disclose to a staff member or a volunteer that they have been or are being harmed or abused. Children will often have different ways of communicating that they are being abused. If a child or young person hints at or tells a worker or volunteer that he or she is being harmed by someone, be it a parent/carer, another adult or by another child/young person (peer abuse), it should be treated in a sensitive way.

A child may disclose abuse to a trusted adult at any time during their work with them. It is important that leaders are aware and prepared for this. Leaders should observe the following:

- Be as calm and natural as possible;
- Remember that leaders are approached because they are trusted and possibly liked;
- The leader should not panic;
- The leader must not promise to keep secrets;
- The leader should be aware that disclosures can be very difficult for the child/young person.

- The child or young person may initially be testing the reaction of the leader and may only fully open up over a period of time;
- Listen to what the child/young person has to say. The child/ young person should be given the time and opportunity to tell as much as they are able and wish to;
- Do not pressurise the child/young person. Allow him or her to disclose at their own pace and in their own language;
- Conceal any signs of disgust, anger or disbelief;
- Accept what the child or young person has to say – false disclosures are very rare;
- It is important to differentiate between the person who carried out the abuse and the act of abuse itself. The child/young person quite possibly may love or strongly like the alleged abuser while also disliking what was done to them. It is important therefore to avoid expressing any judgement on, or anger towards the alleged perpetrator while talking with the child.
- It may be necessary for the leader to reassure the child/young person that the leader's feelings towards him or her have not been affected in a negative way as a result of what they have disclosed;
- Reassure the child/young person that they have taken the right action in talking about this issue;
- Do not ask leading questions;
- Explain to the child that this information will only be shared with the people who can help.

TIP BOX

Some useful phrases when responding to a disclosure

Things to say:

- I want to listen to what you have to say
- I am going to do my best to help you
- You did the right thing by telling me, this is what I am going to do next...
- You are not to blame
- Is there anything else you want to share?

Things not to say:

- Wait until I get the main leader so you can tell them too.
- I can't do anything.
- I can't believe it, I'm shocked.
- This is your fault.
- Don't tell me anymore.

3.9 (& 3.13) CONFIDENTIALITY (please note this is also referred to later)

The leader should not promise to keep secrets

At the earliest opportunity, the leader should:

- acknowledge that the child/ young person has made this disclosure because of the trust in the leader;
- tell the child/young person that this information will be shared only with people who understand this area and who can help;
- tell the young person that there are secrets which are not helpful and should not be kept because they make matters worse. Such secrets hide things that need to be known if people are to be helped and protected from further on-going hurt.

It should be noted that by refusing to make a commitment to secrecy to the child/young person, there is a risk that the individual may not disclose everything (or, indeed, anything) there and then. However, it is better to do this than to tell a lie and ruin the child/young person's confidence in yet another adult. By being honest, it is more likely that the child/young person will return to the leader at another time.

The leader should always think before making a promise. The leader should not make a promise that cannot be kept.

Recording

As soon as possible, the leader should:

- Record in writing, in a factual manner, what the child/young person has said, including, as far as possible, the exact words used by the child/young person.
- Inform the Safeguarding Team immediately who will agree measures to protect the child/young person, e.g., report the matter directly to Tusla.
- Maintain appropriate confidentiality.

On-going support

Following a disclosure by a child, it is important that staff/volunteers continue in a supportive relationship with the child. Disclosure is a huge step for a child.

Staff/volunteers should continue to offer support, particularly by:

- Maintaining a positive relationship with the child/young person;
- Keeping lines of communication open by listening carefully to the child/young person;
- Continuing to include the child/young person in the usual activities.
- Any further disclosure should be treated as a first disclosure and responded to as indicated above. Where necessary, immediate action should be taken to ensure the child/young person's safety.

3.10 MANDATED PERSONS

Mandated persons are people who have ongoing contact with children and/or families and who because of their qualifications, training and/or employment role, are in a key position to help protect children from harm.

Within MCI, any paid employee who works with children and young people are mandated persons. Within MCI, this includes Ordained Ministers, pastorally-focussed

vocational employees, Professional Youth Workers/Pastors and the Connexional Safeguarding Officer. For further information on who is considered to be a Mandated Person, please see Appendix 1.

Under the Children First Act 2015 mandated persons are required to report any knowledge, belief or reasonable suspicion that a child:

- has been harmed;
- is being harmed;
- or is at risk of being harmed;

and to assist Tusla, if requested, in assessing a concern which has been the subject of a mandated report known as 'mandated assisting'.

'Harm' as defined by the Children First Act 2015: 'harm' means in relation to a child:

- (a) assault, ill-treatment or neglect of the child in a manner that seriously affects, or is likely to seriously affect the child's health, development or welfare, or,
- (b) sexual abuse of the child whether caused by a single act, omission or circumstances or a series or combination of acts, omissions or circumstances, or otherwise.

Section 14(1) of the Children First Act 2015 states:

'...where a mandated person knows, believes or has reasonable grounds to suspect, on the basis of information that he or she has received, acquired or becomes aware of in the course of his or her employment or profession as such a mandated person, that a child-

- (a) has been harmed;*
- (b) is being harmed;*
- (c) or is at risk of being harmed;*

he or she shall, as soon as practicable, report that knowledge, belief or suspicion, as the case may be, to the Agency.'

Section 14(2) of the Children First Act 2015 also places obligations on mandated persons to report any disclosures made by a child:

'Where a child believes that he or she-

- (a) has been harmed;*
- (b) is being harmed;*
- (c) or is at risk of being harmed,*

and discloses this belief to a mandated person in the course of a mandated person's employment or profession as such a person, the mandated person shall, as soon as is practicable, report that disclosure to the Agency.'

The threshold of harm for each category of abuse at which mandated persons have a legal obligation to report concerns is outlined in Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017 or in Appendix 2.

If mandated persons are in doubt about whether a concern reaches the legal definition of harm for making a mandated report, Tusla can provide advice in this regard. Details of how to contact Tusla's Dedicated Contact Point and Duty Social Worker to discuss a concern can be found on the Tusla website www.tusla.ie

The CSO can also provide advice in this regard.

Out of Hours Social Work Service

Mandated persons can access Tusla's emergency out-of-hours social work service on 0818 776 315 between 6pm and 6am every week night and between 9am and 5pm on Saturdays, Sundays and bank holidays. In an emergency, An Garda Síochána should be contacted outside of these hours.

3.11 MANDATED PERSONS REPORTING PROCEDURES

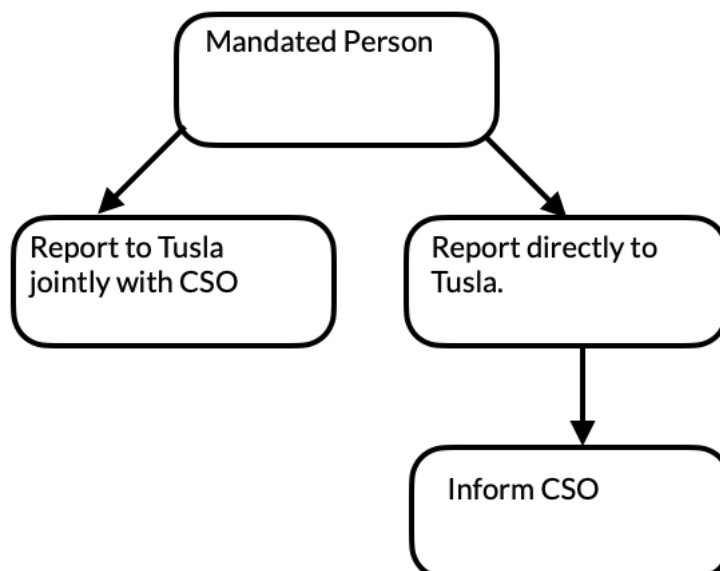
Where a mandated person has a concern that they believe reaches the threshold for a mandated report they should contact Tusla to make a mandated report using the Child Protection and Welfare Report Form which is available on the Tusla website www.tusla.ie The report can be made independently or jointly with the Connexional Safeguarding Officer.

Subsequent to any report being made to Tusla, the CSO should always be informed, and provided with a copy of the report.

The Mandated Person must discharge their duty to report under the Children First Act 2015 and cannot be discharged by the CSO on their behalf. The CSO can provide support in this process and a report can be submitted jointly. Importantly the CSO cannot make a report on behalf of a Mandated Person.

Mandated Reports must be made using the Child Protection and Welfare Report Form which is available on the Tusla website www.tusla.ie

Mandated Reporting Procedures in summary -



The legal obligation to report as a mandated person under the Children First Act 2015 applies only to information that mandated persons acquire in the course of their professional work or employment. It does not apply to information they acquire outside of work, during a voluntary role, or information given to them on the basis of a personal rather than a professional relationship.

If a concern does not reach the threshold of harm for mandating reporting, but the mandated person feels there are reasonable grounds for concern about the welfare or protection of a child, Tusla should be consulted about the appropriateness of whether a non-mandated report should be submitted.

Reporting suspected crimes to An Garda Síochána

The Criminal Justice (Withholding of Information on Offences against Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012 requires that any person who has information about a serious offence against a child, which may result in charges or prosecution, must report this to An Garda Síochána as soon as is practicable. Failure to report under the Act is a criminal offence under that legislation. This obligation is in addition to any obligations under the Children First Act 2015.

(In general terms, they are more serious offences, including murder, manslaughter, rape and a large number of sexual offences).

Informing family members of a mandated report

It may be prejudicial to the outcomes of the individual for the family to be informed that a Mandated Report has been made. Therefore, before a family is informed of a mandated report, advice should always be sought from Tusla on the suitability of such an action.

Mandating Assisting

Mandated persons can be asked by Tusla to provide any necessary and proportionate assistance to aid Tusla in assessing the risk to a child arising from a mandated report. Legally, Mandated Persons must comply with this request, regardless of who made the report.

The policy of MCI is provide any and all help that is requested or required by Tusla and/or An Garda Síochána in regard to any matter pertaining to welfare of an individual.

Exemptions from the Requirement to Report

Underage Consensual Sexual Activity

Under the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2006, the legal age of consent is 17 years. While a sexual relationship where one or both parties are under 17 years of age is illegal, when making a report to Tusla, it might not be regarded as child sexual abuse. There are certain exemptions from reporting underage consensual sexual activity. If a mandated person or Safeguarding Team is satisfied that **all** of the following criteria are met, they are not required to make a report to Tusla:

- The young persons concerned are between 15 and 17 years old.
- The age difference between them is not more than 24 months.

- There is no material difference in their maturity or capacity to consent.
- The relationship between the people engaged in the sexual activity does not involve intimidation or exploitation of either person.
- The young person states clearly that they do not want any information about the activity to be disclosed to Tusla.

In effect, this means that if all of the above criteria are met, a mandated person or Safeguarding Team do not have to report consensual sexual activity between older teenagers as sexual abuse to Tusla. However, all persons must uphold the key principle that the welfare of the child is paramount and if a mandated person or Safeguarding Team have any concerns, even where all the above criteria are met, a report should be made to Tusla and/or An Garda Síochána.

3.12 RESPONDING TO ADULTS WHO DISCLOSE CHILDHOOD ABUSE

There are an increasing number of adults disclosing abuse that took place during their childhood. Such disclosures may come to light during the provision of pastoral support.

Where such a disclosure is made it is essential to establish whether there may be current risk to any child or young person who may be in contact with the alleged abuser revealed in the disclosure. This is important even where the children/young people about whom there may be a concern are still to be identified.

When a retrospective disclosure is made by an adult to a staff member or volunteer it should be reported to the Safeguarding Team in the same way as if a child made a disclosure.

The Safeguarding Team must consult with Tusla and seek advice as to whether a report should be made. If making a report to Tusla the Retrospective Abuse Report Form should be used which is available on the Tusla website www.tusla.ie

The CSO can be consulted in regard to the disclosure of retrospective child abuse. If a Retrospective Abuse Report Form is submitted to Tusla, the CSO must be informed.

It is recommended when working with adults, to let them know that if a child protection issue arises and if the alleged abuser is identifiable staff/volunteers are obliged to pass the information on to Tusla, as the alleged abuser may still pose a risk to children.

3.13 (& 3.9) CONFIDENTIALITY (please note this is also referred to earlier)

While reporting mechanisms dictate that the correct people are informed, it is imperative that the dignity of the individual is respected. All information should be handled in a confidential and sensitive manner.

It is the policy of MCI that any relevant information will be shared with Tusla and/or An Garda Síochána where required or requested for the protection or welfare of a child. Therefore, only those who 'need to know' are informed about allegations/disclosures/ concerns. Confidentiality should never be promised to an individual who is making an allegation/ disclosure, as they must always be

reported. Those who are considered as 'need to know' are the DP, the Minister, the CSO unless there is a conflict of interest that would negate their being informed.

No undertakings regarding secrecy can be given. Those working with children and families should make this clear to parents/guardians and to the child. The proportionate provision of information to the statutory agencies necessary for the protection of a child is not a breach of confidentiality or data protection. Parents/guardians and children/young people have a right to know if personal information is being shared, unless doing so could put the child/young person at further risk or may put the reporter at risk.

3.14 RECORD KEEPING

It is important that information about concerns for the welfare or protection of a child/young person is gathered early and shared as soon as possible with the appropriate person.

The ability of Tusla to assess and investigate suspicions or allegations of child abuse or neglect will be influenced by the amount and quality of information conveyed to it by the individual or organisation reporting the concerns.

Child Protection Records

Records should be factual and include details of contacts, consultations and any actions taken.

All agencies dealing with children must cooperate in the sharing of records with Tusla where a child protection or welfare issue arises.

Ensure that records on child protection concerns, allegations and disclosures are kept securely and safely within the organisation.

Records should only be used for the purpose for which they are intended.

Records should only be shared on a need-to-know basis in the best interests of the child/young person.

Within MCI, it is incumbent upon each circuit and society to have high record-keeping standards, as poor record-keeping can lead to inaction, avoidable delay and can potentially inhibit recognition of abuse. Any records should only be accessible by the current DP, the current Minister and the current CSO. The hard copy of any child protection reports or concerns and any notes relating to the case should be stored in a secure folder within the Manse. Digital copies should be sent to the CSO, who will store them as a 'master file.' This file will reference any other documentation and state clearly how any such documentation can be accessed. If digital copies are held at the local level, they should be stored securely within Irish Methodism's Microsoft 365 account. Under no circumstances should personal email addresses or storage be used in relation to sensitive documentation.

Any information relating to the welfare of children, including reports, concerns and notes, will be kept indefinitely. Incident/ Accident Forms and attendance records at all church organisations, including children and leaders, will also be kept indefinitely as a historical record.

3.15 RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE MADE AGAINST STAFF/VOLUNTEERS

An allegation of abuse may relate to a person who works with children who has:

- Behaved in a way that has or may have harmed a child/young person;
- Possibly committed a criminal offence in relation to a child/young person;
- Behaved towards a child/young person or children/young people in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to a child/young person;
- Behaved in a way that is contrary to MCI's code of behaviour for workers and volunteers;
- Behaved in a way that is contrary to professional practice guidelines.

If an allegation is made against a staff member or volunteer, there is dual responsibility in respect of both the child and the staff member/volunteer. There are two separate procedures to be followed:

- The reporting procedure to Tusla in respect of the child and the alleged abuser;
- The internal personnel procedure for dealing with the staff member/volunteer.

Reporting Procedures to Tusla in respect of the child

As with any child protection or welfare concerns, the appropriate reporting procedure must be followed including reporting to Tusla. Allegations of abuse are very serious for both the child involved and the worker/volunteer concerned. The priority is to protect the child/young person while taking account of the worker/volunteer's right to due process.

When the local Safeguarding Team (Designated Person/ Minister) become aware of an allegation made against a staff member/volunteer and if an opinion is reasonably formed that abuse may have taken place the child protection reporting procedures should be followed as laid out previously (please refer to section on procedures for reporting child protection concerns in Taking Care).

It is the policy of MCI to seek advice from Tusla when a question arises about reasonable grounds for concern. A report should be made to Tusla or, in an emergency where a child is believed to be at immediate risk, An Garda Síochána.

If making a formal report to Tusla advise them that the report is being made in relation to a staff member/volunteer within MCI. This will allow Tusla to apply the necessary policies and procedures in relation to allegations against staff or volunteers in organisations. Parents/guardians should be informed of any action planned while having regard to the confidentiality and rights of others, such as the person against whom the allegation has been made. The Connexional Safeguarding Officer (CSO) should be made aware of any allegation without delay by the Mandated Person/ Designated Person

Internal personnel procedures

Procedures for dealing with the staff member/volunteer who is the subject of an allegation of abuse:

The risk of harm to a child will be at the forefront of any decisions made or actions taken;

- The first priority is to ensure that no child/young person is exposed to unnecessary risk. As a matter of urgency, protective measures will be agreed while taking into account the staff members/volunteers right to due process. 'Protective measures' do not presume guilt;
- MCI's disciplinary procedures will ensure that fair procedure is followed and will take account of any applicable employment contract or volunteer arrangement as well as the rules of natural justice and employment law;
- MCI will privately inform the staff member/volunteer that an allegation has been made against him or her and the nature of the allegation. The worker/volunteer should be afforded an opportunity to respond;
- MCI will note the response and pass on this information if making a formal report to Tusla;
- The worker/volunteer should be offered the option to have representation at this stage and should be informed that any response may be shared with Tusla;
- MCI will ensure that actions taken do not frustrate or undermine any investigations or assessments undertaken by Tusla or An Garda Síochána. MCI will liaise closely with the investigating bodies to ensure this;
- The requirements of fair procedure and natural justice mean that Tusla usually will not share the detail of any assessment regarding allegations of abuse against a worker/volunteer until the worker/volunteer has had an opportunity to fully respond to the allegation and any findings and decisions of Tusla;

Within MCI, each situation will be treated on its own merits, therefore there is no such thing as precedence. It is not possible in these guidelines to deal with every scenario as conditions of employment can vary greatly from individual to individual. In a situation where the statutory investigation does not lead to prosecution or conviction, MCI will reserve the right to conduct an internal review of the issue. It may be that this review is held subsequent to the conclusion of, or concurrent with, any statutory review.

The Connexional Safeguarding Board and District Superintendent will appoint a panel to investigate the situation. This panel will prepare a report with any necessary actions or recommendations in relation to the subject's suitability to return to their position. The subject will have the right to be accompanied to the meeting by a nominated companion, and will have the right to appeal. In the event of an appeal, a panel will be convened.

When an allegation is made against a staff member/volunteer a quick solution should be sought for the benefit of all concerned.

In a situation where a staff member is the subject of an allegation the following should be remembered:

- The Connexional Safeguarding Board (CSB) through the Connexional Safeguarding Officer (CSO) should be made aware of this allegation without delay;
- The Secretary of Conference will be made aware of these allegations;
- It is a requirement that advice be sought by the local Safeguarding Team from MCI's HR department as quickly as possible to ensure that employment law procedures and natural justice principles are correctly followed;
- MCI will advise Methodist Insurance of any issue of alleged abuse.

If the person is a paid employee or Minister, in some cases MCI may decide to suspend the employee or cease to use the services of a volunteer. Suspension does not indicate guilt and will not happen automatically where an allegation has been made. Any suspension is considered to be without prejudice, pending further investigation by the statutory authorities/ Connexional Safeguarding Board, may be appropriate. It may be appropriate to re-assign the staff member to work that does not involve contact with children.

Any person who has been suspended should be advised to seek his/her own independent legal advice. Both the person alleged victim and the subject of the allegation, together with family, should be offered pastoral care. This pastoral support should come from different sources.

All stages of the process must be recorded

3.16 ERRONEOUS ALLEGATIONS

Staff members or volunteers working with children/young people may feel vulnerable to accusations of child abuse. There may have been occasions when erroneous or untrue allegations have been made against staff members/volunteers. This might have been because of a misunderstanding of what has happened or a genuine mistake. Any allegation of abuse against a staff members/volunteer will be dealt with sensitively and support provided, for both the staff member or volunteer who allegedly abused a child/young person and the staff member or volunteer who reported the alleged abuse. Appropriate levels of confidentiality will be ensured. Deliberately making a false claim of abuse against an individual is a criminal offence.

3.17 WHISTLEBLOWING – A RESPONSIBILITY TO SPEAK OUT

Whistle blowing as part of the safeguarding procedures, is intended to encourage and enable staff members/volunteers with a serious concern, to raise that concern to the appropriate authorities outside the organisation if they are inhibited, for any reason, in reporting an incident internally or where they are dissatisfied with the internal response.

It is very important that everyone knows that if they raise a concern, which through Tusla's investigation is not validated, they have not in any way been wrong in their initial action.

For further information on this, please see MCI's Whistleblowing Policy.

This policy was adopted by MCI's Child Safeguarding Board in
May 2022

It will be reviewed by MCI's Child Safeguarding Board in
September 2023

It will be reviewed by MCI's Child Safeguarding Board in
July 2024

3.18 APPENDIXES

Appendix 1

Who are considered to be Mandated Persons?

Schedule 2 of the Children First Act 2015 specifies the following classes of persons as Mandated Persons for the purposes of the Act:

1. Registered medical practitioner within the meaning of section 2 of the Medical Practitioners Act 2007.
2. Registered nurse or registered midwife within the meaning of section 2(1) of the Nurses and Midwives Act 2011.
3. Physiotherapist registered in the register of members of that profession.
4. Speech and language therapist registered in the register of members of that profession.
5. Occupational therapist registered in the register of members of that profession.
6. Registered dentist within the meaning of section 2 of the Dentists Act 1985.
7. Psychologist who practises as such and who is eligible for registration in the register (if any) of members of that profession.
8. Social care worker who practises as such and who is eligible for registration in accordance with Part 4 of the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 in the register of that profession.
9. Social worker who practises as such and who is eligible for registration in accordance with Part 4 of the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 in the register (if any) of that profession.
10. Emergency medical technician, paramedic and advanced paramedic registered with the Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council under the Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council (Establishment) Order 2000 (S.I. No. 109 of 2000).
11. Probation officer within the meaning of section 1 of the Criminal Justice (Community Service) Act 1983.
12. Teacher registered with the Teaching Council.
13. Member of An Garda Síochána.
14. Guardian ad litem appointed in accordance with section 26 of the Child Care Act 1991.
15. Person employed in any of the following capacities:
 - (a) manager of domestic violence shelter;
 - (b) manager of homeless provision or emergency accommodation facility;
 - (c) manager of asylum seeker accommodation (direct provision) centre;
 - (d) addiction counsellor employed by a body funded, wholly or partly, out of moneys provided by the Oireachtas;
 - (e) psychotherapist or a person providing counselling who is registered with one of the voluntary professional bodies;
 - (f) manager of a language school or other recreational school where children reside away from home;
 - (g) member of the clergy (howsoever described) or pastoral care worker

- (howsoever described) of a church or other religious community;
- (h) director of any institution where a child is detained by an order of a court;
- (i) safeguarding officer, child protection officer or other person (howsoever described) who is employed for the purpose of performing the child welfare and protection function of religious, sporting, recreational, cultural, educational and other bodies and organisations offering services to children;
- (j) child care staff member employed in a pre-school service within the meaning of Part VIIA of the Child Care Act 1991;
- (k) person responsible for the care or management of a youth work service within the meaning of section 2 of the Youth Work Act 2001.

16. Youth worker who—

- (a) holds a professional qualification that is recognised by the National Qualifications Authority in youth work within the meaning of section 3 of the Youth Work Act 2001 or a related discipline, and
- (b) is employed in a youth work service within the meaning of section 2 of the Youth Work Act 2001.

17. Foster carer registered with the Agency.

18. A person carrying on a pre-school service within the meaning of Part VIIA of the Child Care Act 1991

Appendix 2

REPORTING MANDATED CONCERNS

Criteria for reporting: definitions and thresholds (Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017)

NEGLECT

Neglect is defined as 'to deprive a child of adequate food, warmth, clothing, hygiene, supervision, safety or medical care'. The threshold of harm, at which you must report to Tusla under the Children First Act 2015, is reached when you know, believe or have reasonable grounds to suspect that a child's needs have been neglected, are being neglected, or are at risk of being neglected to the point where the child's health, development or welfare have been or are being seriously affected, or are likely to be seriously affected.

EMOTIONAL ABUSE/ILL-TREATMENT

ILL-treatment is defined as 'to abandon or cruelly treat the child, or to cause or procure or allow the child to be abandoned or cruelly treated'. Emotional abuse is covered in the definition of ill-treatment used in the Children First Act 2015. The threshold of harm, at which you must report to Tusla under the Children First Act 2015, is reached when you know, believe or have reasonable grounds to suspect that a child has been, is being, or is at risk of being ill-treated to the point where the child's health, development or welfare have been or are being seriously affected, or are likely to be seriously affected.

PHYSICAL ABUSE

Physical abuse is covered in the references to assault in the Children First Act 2015. The threshold of harm, at which you must report to Tusla under the Children First Act 2015, is reached when you know, believe or have reasonable grounds to suspect that a child has been, is being, or is at risk of being assaulted and that as a result the child's health, development or welfare have been or are being seriously affected, or are likely to be seriously affected.

SEXUAL ABUSE

If, as a mandated person, you know, believe or have reasonable grounds to suspect that a child has been, is being, or is at risk of being sexually abused, then you must report this to Tusla under the Children First Act 2015. Sexual abuse to be reported under the Children First Act 2015 [as amended by section 55 of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017] is defined as an offence against the child, as listed in Schedule 3 of the Children First Act 2015.

A full list of relevant offences against the child which are considered sexual abuse is set out in Appendix 3 of Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children.

As all sexual abuse falls within the category of seriously affecting a child's health, welfare or development, you must submit all concerns about sexual abuse as a mandated report to Tusla. There is one exception, which deals with certain consensual sexual activity between teenagers which is outlined previously.

Appendix 3 Child Safeguarding: Relevant Legislation

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Child Care Act 1991.

Children First Act 2015.

Protection for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act 1998.

Criminal Justice Act, 2006.

Criminal Justice (Withholding of Information on Offences against Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012.

National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons Act), 2012 - 2016.

Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017.

Criminal Justice Act 2006, Section 176: Reckless Endangerment of Children

Reference information -

Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017

Child Protection and Welfare Handbook 2011 (HSE)

Child Safeguarding: A Guide for Policy, Procedure and Practice 2018 (Tusla)

Chapter 4: Responding, Reporting and Recording

4.1 RESPONDING TO INCIDENTS/ ACCIDENTS/ CONCERNS (Northern Ireland)

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 and children's 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 12.3 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 immediately 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 Gateway immediately. If, for whatever reason, they are unavailable, PSNI should be contacted 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/ Minister/ Lay Pastor who should be made aware of the situation as soon as possible.

If a disclosure or allegation is made to a leader, the following should be observed:

What to do:

- stay calm;
- listen;
- give time for the child to say what he or she wants;
- give reassurance that he or she has done the right thing in speaking out;
- write down what was said or observed accurately and immediately, using the child's own language;
- keep the original note which should be passed on to the Designated Person;
- ensure that the Designated Person is informed without delay;
- in the event of a serious concern the Connexional Safeguarding Officer should be contacted immediately and appropriate advice will be given;
- if there is the potential for immediate risk of harm to the child, the statutory authorities should be informed immediately.

Things not to do:

- panic;
- make a child repeat the story unnecessarily;
- promise to keep secrets;
- investigate;
- speculate, or ask leading questions;

Under no circumstances should any leader attempt to deal with the problem alone;

Additional guidelines on dealing with allegations

In June 2019 the Methodist Conference approved a bullying and harassment policy. 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 Church Council/Circuit Executives and congregations on taking advice, referral to statutory authorities, pastoral care and suspensions arrangements. A copy of the policy can be obtained from the office of the Secretary of Conference.

The reporting procedure

This is the procedure which must be observed should a leader have concerns regarding the safety or welfare of a child or young person.

1. If a child is in immediate danger or a criminal offence has taken place, then Social Services (NI) (NI) or PSNI 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 Connexional Safeguarding Officer as soon as possible.
5. All concerns, complaints and disclosures in a congregation relating to child protection must be reported to the Connexional Safeguarding Officer without delay as agreed by the Methodist Conference 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 Connexional Safeguarding Officer.
7. In the congregational context, information should be restricted to the Designated Person, minister and Society Steward as appropriate.

4.2 RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS REGARDING THE CONDUCT OF LEADERS

It is a legal requirement that the Methodist Church in Ireland must inform the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA) 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 Methodist 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.

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

4.3 RECORDING

It is critical that the exact 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 close to hand. This can be re-written, but the original must always be retained. This should be given to the Designated Person or minister and kept confidentially.

As far as possible, the leader should record:

- the full 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 the nature of the concern is;
- what course of action has already been taken (if any);
- any other relevant information available, such as school attended or GP name.

Record of Meeting

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 11.4) and once completed should be kept confidentially in a safe place. Such records will be sought and examined if an investigation is carried out.

4.4 MANAGING OFFENDERS

The Methodist Church in Ireland believes that within the context of grace and forgiveness, attendance at worship services is open to everyone. At the same time, 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 an individual has serious convictions against an adult, extreme caution should be employed with regards to any potential leadership role. In the case of a sexual offence against an adult, the offender will almost certainly never be in a position of leadership. If a congregation is following the Taking Care guidelines by having all new leaders in regulated positions undergo the vetting procedure then any relevant 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 Connexional Safeguarding Officer 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 himself or herself. If an offender has restrictions placed upon him or her from PSNI or probation services, the church must work in partnership with these agencies.

4.5 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 Church Council/ Circuit Executive. 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.

4.6 CONFIDENTIALITY

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/ Lay Pastor 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:

- Social Services (NI) or;
- PSNI;
- the Connexional Safeguarding Officer.

Informing Parents

Depending on what the incident or concern about a child is, parents/carers may need to be informed. In certain circumstances An Garda Síochána/PSNI or TUSLA (ROI)/ Social Services (NI) will advise. If they do not, then contact the Connexional Safeguarding Officer for advice.

Alleged Perpetrator

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

4.7 REPORTING CONTACTS

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

Health and Social Service Trusts

Local Gateway Teams are located within the Health & Social Service Trusts, who provide integrated health and social care services across Northern Ireland. Contact details for Social Services (NI) located within each Trust can be found on the health and social Care in Northern Ireland website www.n-i.nhs.uk.

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.

Chapter 5: Areas of Responsibility

5.1 THE ROLE OF CHURCH COUNCIL/ CIRCUIT EXECUTIVE.

Church Council/ Circuit Executive is responsible for the protection of children within the congregation and its organisations. An exception to this would be independent organisations such as the Scout Association or local community groups using church premises (see section 5.5).

Appointment of a Designated Person

Every Church Council/ Circuit Executive must appoint at least one Designated Person whose role is to co-ordinate the area of child protection within the congregation/ circuit. Aspects of this role can be shared among a number of people. Where appropriate, a Designated Person can have responsibility for more than one society in a circuit. A minister, nor anyone related to the minister, can be the Designated Person. Once appointed, it is important that the Designated Person is supported in his or her role. In order to carry out his or her responsibilities thoroughly, the Designated Person will need help from other leaders and Church Council/ Circuit Executive members. Some may need more help than others depending on the size of the congregation and the level of youth and children's activities (see section 6.2).

Oversight of the appointment of leaders

It is the responsibility of Church Council/ Circuit Executive to oversee the recruitment process for volunteers and paid youth/children's workers and to appoint them formally in their role. Once appointed, all leaders need to be supported and should feel appreciated (see section 5).

Adopt a Child Protection Policy and review it regularly

It is the responsibility of Church Council/ Circuit Executive to adopt formally a Child Protection Policy for their congregation and to carry out a review of the policy every three years. See section 11.1 for a sample Child Protection Policy and the Child Protection Policy review factsheet that will help to identify areas that would need to be looked at during a review. This scheduled review should not be considered an inspection but more of a 'health check' to look at issues that have risen, how they have been dealt with and any further work which needs to be done. Contact the Connexional Safeguarding Officer for help and advice. Safeguarding should be an agenda item at each meeting of the Church Council/ Circuit Executive.

Church Council/ Circuit Executive has the responsibility to appoint and oversee all new leaders, so they need to be informed of each new appointment. It is Church Council/ Circuit Executive's responsibility to be aware of child protection issues and concerns relevant to their congregation. That said, the whole of Church Council/ Circuit Executive should not always be made aware of every incident or issue because of confidentiality reasons, and in most cases, they may simply be informed that there was an incident and no other specifics will be given. In order to ensure that Church Council/ Circuit Executive is kept up to date, child protection should be an item on each Church Council/ Circuit Executive meeting agenda. If there is nothing to report, it should be recorded as such.

5.2 THE APPOINTMENT OF A DESIGNATED PERSON

The appointment of a Designated Person is very important and should be considered carefully. The people best suited for this task are those whose occupations, or lengthy voluntary experience, have brought them into contact with children e.g. nurses, doctors, teachers, social workers or probation officers may be particularly suitable. The Designated Person cannot be the minister or Society Steward. The Church Council/ Circuit Executive may wish to appoint two people to the role, particularly if the congregation is dealing with large numbers of children, young people and volunteers. The Church Council/ Circuit Executive may wish to appoint one male and one female. When a small congregation is unable to appoint a suitable person to the position of Designated Person, the assistance of a neighbouring church or circuit should be sought. One Designated Person can represent a joint charge. The Designated Person should complete the Registration for Designated Person form (available on request from Connexional Safeguarding Officer) and send a copy to the Connexional Safeguarding Officer.

5.3 THE ROLE OF THE DESIGNATED PERSON

There are five main roles of the Designated Person:

1. The Designated Person must be consulted with if a child protection incident arises. If this were to occur the guidelines in section 3 should be followed;
2. To organise Taking Care training for leaders within the congregation. The Designated Person does this by contacting the Connexional Safeguarding Officer who will provide a training;
3. To oversee the appointment process for new leaders including co-ordinating the distribution of applications forms and making sure that leaders are vetted where appropriate and reference request forms are sent. Members of church council, leaders in charge of organisations and administrative staff can help with this process;
4. To remain a point of contact with the Connexional Safeguarding Officer so that relevant information such as the Taking Care update can be sent. Therefore, it is important that the office is informed of any change in a Designated Person's contact details;
5. To report to Church Council/ Circuit Executive on a regular basis about any child protection issues, this does not include specific details about a child protection incident (as this information may have to remain confidential) but for example, changes to the vetting system, information about a training session or concerns to do with leader compliance of the policy in one of the organisations. Some congregations have widened the role of the Designated Person to include responsibilities such as interviewing new leaders. It is important not to expect too much of the Designated Person and to ensure that he or she is supported by Church Council/ Circuit Executive in his or her role.

5.4 THE ROLE OF THE CONNEXIONAL SAFEGUARDING OFFICER

The role of Connexional Safeguarding Officer was established in 2019. The main functions of the staff at the Connexional Safeguarding Officer are:

1. To offer support and advice on child protection issues to ministers, Designated Persons, Church Councils/ Circuit Executives, leaders and parents.

2. To provide child protection training for: volunteer leaders, Designated Persons, youth and Children's Workers, ministers and other groups.
3. To review and update safeguarding policies regularly.
4. To keep up to date with changing legislation and inform those who need to know.
5. To facilitate the vetting of leaders where appropriate.
6. To work with An Garda Síochána/PSNI, TUSLA (ROI)/ Social Services (NI) and probation services on behalf of a congregation where necessary. Staff regularly update the website with the most up to date information and news. Most forms and information are available to download.

Please contact the Connexional Safeguarding Officer to discuss any issues or ask any questions to do with Child Protection or Adult Safeguarding

Chapter 6: Recruitment & Appointment Process

6.1 THE RECRUITMENT AND APPOINTMENT PROCESS

It is necessary to have a recruitment and appointment policy in place to select leaders in order to provide a safe environment for children and young people. A proper appointment procedure is one of the most sensible and effective ways of assessing a person's suitability to work with children and young people, and may in itself act as a deterrent to potential abusers. This is often felt to be an unnecessary burden, particularly if the person is part-time, a volunteer or already known to the minister or members of the congregation. However, the more routine the procedure becomes, the less intimidating it will be to all concerned. By having good standards of practice in our organisations, people are more likely to want to join. Increasingly parents want evidence of good recruitment. Care needs to be taken to ensure that anyone who is unsuitable for working with young people is not given the opportunity to become a leader. *The Appointment of Leaders Process Application Form*

An application form must be completed by everyone applying to work with children and young people in regulated positions. The application form includes the vetting process according to legislation and good practice. Applicants will be asked to declare any past criminal convictions.

Interview

- a. If the applicant has progressed through the ranks of the organisation, then an informal interview with the leader of that organisation will be required;
- b. If the applicant is already a member of the society, then an informal meeting with the two of the organisation's leadership team will be required;
- c. If the applicant is unknown to the church, or from outside the society, then an informal interview with the minister and the leader of the organisation will be required. Applicants will be required to provide two references by persons who are not relatives.

Referees

The names of two referees should be given by the applicant. The referees should not be family members, the minister, Designated Person or either of the interviewers. If the applicant is coming from a previous place of worship, a reference should be sought from his or her previous minister. Otherwise, references should be from people who have had first-hand knowledge of their work with children/young people and have known the applicant for at least two years. The leader of the organisation should organise to send a reference request form (see section 11.5) to the referees given. These should be kept for the congregation's own records.

6.2 VETTING

General vetting principles

In order to comply with the law and good practice, all leaders taking up a regulated position to work with children and young people must be vetted at least once every three years by the Methodist Church in Ireland. The process of vetting leaders involves a criminal records check which will show if an applicant has any relevant criminal convictions. The vetting process can take some time and because of this, congregations are urged to recruit their leaders well in advance and allow for this time

when planning events such as a Holiday Bible Club. Contact the Connexional Safeguarding Officer to find out how long the process is currently taking. Please remember that vetting is only a part of the appointment process. Just because some people do not have a criminal record, does not mean that they are suitable to work with children, it simply means they have no criminal record. A person who does have a criminal conviction will not necessarily be barred from working with children and young people within a church setting. Only convictions considered relevant will be taken into consideration when an appointment is made. Please be assured that all certificates, forms and conviction information are treated sensitively and confidentially by the Connexional Safeguarding Officer.

Republic of Ireland

New leaders (since September 2006) who are working with children and young people should complete an application form for leaders which includes a Garda vetting form.

Northern Ireland

New leaders (since April 2005) who are working in a regulated position with children and young people should complete the most recent application form for leaders which includes an AccessNI Form. Regulated activity includes unsupervised access to children, teaching, providing medical care, intimate care or any residential activity. The leader in charge of each organisation eg Sunday School Superintendent, should also be vetted. Please contact the Connexional Safeguarding Officer for the most up-to-date information.

6.3 TRAINING

The importance of training

As well as being appointed properly, it is important that leaders have adequate training to do the job required of them. It is the responsibility of Church Council/ Circuit Executive not only to appoint leaders, but to support them in their role; this includes providing appropriate opportunities for training. The Methodist Church in Ireland offers a variety of training resources from:

- the Connexional Safeguarding Officer ;
- Ministries Team (formerly Edgehill College);
- World Mission Partnership for those planning on going overseas;
- Home Missions Department for those working within Ireland.

Additional training is provided on request from our partners in YouthLink.

Child protection training is essential to all people who work with children and young people in all fields of life, within a professional and voluntary basis. Within the Methodist Church, the child protection training delivered at a congregational level is called 'Taking Care' training.

Trainers are kept up to date continually with changes to policy, law and practice as well as resources available and upcoming events.

Taking Care training

Leaders and helpers who work with children and young people should attend Taking Care training at least once every three years. This includes young leaders/helpers (for definition, see section 1.3), as well as leaders on a rota basis for organisations such as crèche and children's church. Even though they may not be working with children regularly, they should still attend training to be aware of signs and behaviour to be

vigilant about. Even those who have a good knowledge of child protection issues in another field should attend as Taking Care training is the only training available that is specific to the policy of the Methodist Church in Ireland. It is recommended that the congregation keep a record of all training that has been undertaken and who has attended.

Training for Designated Persons

Specific training is available for Designated Persons via the Connexional Safeguarding Officer. This is typically carried out remotely, or before a face-to-face session. Please contact the Connexional Safeguarding Officer to find out about this training.

6.4 REGISTER OF ALL LEADERS

A register of all leaders working with children within a congregation should be kept and reviewed on an annual basis. This register should be a record of all leaders and helpers in all organisations under the auspices of Church Council/ Circuit Executive, whether they have completed an application form or not, are on a rota basis, or are under the age of 18. A register of all leaders is available in section 11.6, as well as an annual update form which should be used to update the register.

6.5 JOINT COMMON PROTOCOL

The Joint Common Protocol is an agreed procedure for churches relating to independent organisations working with children and young people, regularly using church premises. The protocol has been agreed by the Methodist Church in Ireland, Church of Ireland, Presbyterian Church in Ireland and Boys' Brigade (NI), Girls' Brigade (NI), the Scouting Association (NI) and Girl Guiding Ulster. It also has application with any other Christian, sporting, arts or leisure groups using church premises. The protocol can be found in section 11.7 or downloaded from the website where an information leaflet is also available.

General principles are set out below:

What does it do?

The Common protocol clearly sets out the expectations and responsibilities of both the churches and the independent organisations, particularly in the areas of child protection, appointment of leaders, information sharing, and reporting of concerns of a child protection nature which may arise within an organisation.

Who should use it?

Congregations whose premises are used by independent organisations (ie not under the auspices of Church Council/ Circuit Executive).

All independent organisations working with children and young people, and regularly using church premises.

What is an independent organisation?

The nature of the independence of children's and youth organisations varies. In Northern Ireland, Boys' Brigade (NI) and Girls' Brigade (NI) are integral to the congregations where they exist; the Scouting Association (NI) and Girl Guiding Ulster are national young people's organisations and are fully independent, albeit in some instances with considerable input and support from the congregation. Sporting, arts or leisure groups may be affiliated to national networks or may be smaller stand-alone organisations. The Joint Common Protocol has application for churches and organisations in all of these settings.

What the church is responsible for?

Recruiting, selecting and appointing (including vetting) all church-based children's/youth leaders including leaders for BB (NI) and GB (NI);

Providing child protection training to all church-based children's and youth leaders and leaders for BB (NI) and GB (NI). BB (NI) and GB (NI) are organisations operated by the local church but also have separate external headquarters. Leaders are nominated, approved and appointed by the local church hence for these organisations points 3 and 4 above do not apply;

Supplying to the leader of the fully independent organisation the names and contact details of the church personnel who are responsible for the premises and the Designated Person for child protection in the congregation;

Ensuring that the Society Steward signs annually, on behalf of the church, the Joint Common Protocol with each fully independent organisation using church premises;

Ensuring the safety of the premises. BB(NI) and GB(NI) companies should satisfy themselves of the extent of insurance cover provided for their activities within their organisation's annual capitation.

What a fully independent organisation is responsible for:

- Recruiting, selecting and appointing (including vetting) leaders/ workers in their organisations;
- Providing child protection training to the leaders/workers of their organisation;
- Providing annually to the congregation the names and contact details of all leaders following appointment and confirming that all new appointees have been subject to vetting;
- Reporting to the statutory agencies any concerns of a child protection nature that have arisen within the independent organisation;
- Provide written confirmation to the church that adequate insurance cover is in place for its activities;
- Ensuring that the leader in charge signs annually on behalf of the organisation, the Joint Common protocol with the congregation providing premises for the organisation's meetings.

Chapter 7: Working together

7.1 RESPONSIBILITIES OF ALL LEADERS

The Church Council/ Circuit Executive should ensure that:

- each organisation responds in a correct and prompt manner to concerns, accidents and incidents within an organisation, all leaders need to check that:
- there are accident/incident report forms on the premises;
- the leader in charge has immediate access to names, addresses and phone numbers of the children/young people attending;
- there is access to a phone in the event of an emergency;
- all leaders are aware of the reporting procedure in the event of a concern or accident/incident;
- all leaders should know the name and contact details of the Designated Person(s);
- all leaders should have a good understanding of the need to keep personal details of young people and other leaders confidential;
- leaders should be sensitive and where appropriate, exercise confidentiality to the backgrounds, medical history and family circumstances of all children.

7.2 TEAM WORK

The leadership teams of each organisation should work together to ensure that the culture and ethos of the group is a positive, encouraging, enjoyable environment, for all participants, including children/ young people, and leaders. The Church Council/ Circuit Executive should ensure that;

- each leader and helper must be fully acquainted with the Taking Care, the Child Protection Policy of the Methodist Church in Ireland, along with its associated reporting process;
- each organisation should draw up clearly defined aims and objectives for its overall running and review this on a scheduled basis.
- each leader and helper should be acquainted with, and be in full support of, the code of conduct for the organisation;
- within each organisation, a clearly defined line of accountability should be in place, whereby all leaders and helpers report to the appointed leader in charge. The leader in charge reports to the Church Council/ Circuit Executive with which ultimate responsibility lies.
- at any given meeting, leaders and helpers should be informed of the specific programme, and be clear about one another's responsibilities.
- acquaint the team (especially new leaders and helpers) with useful advice on getting to know children ie trying to get to know the names of the children as quickly as possible; talking to the children about themselves, what they like, what they do during the rest of the week; talking to the children about yourself.
- at the conclusion of the session/evening ie weekly meeting or at the end of June, there should be an evaluation of the programme, when leaders and helpers can share information about issues and any difficulties that may have arisen.

7.3 WORKING WITH PARENTS/CARERS

The responsibility of parents/carers parents/carers are primarily responsible for their children. They have a responsibility to return consent forms promptly within the agreed deadlines, to inform organisational leaders of any changes to their child's medication or circumstances and also encourage their child to abide by the rules of the organisation.

Parental consent forms

A parental consent form should be completed when a child enrolls in an organisation (a sample consent form can be found in section 12.8). Parents should be asked to inform the organisation of any changes in contact details, family circumstances or medical information that the leaders need to be made aware of. If a residential is organised, a specific consent form covering this should be completed. It is important to have a parent/carer signature and information regarding medication and allergies etc. The information on consent forms and sign in sheets should be kept confidential to the appropriate leaders of the organisation, in line with GDPR legislation. The forms should be kept in a secure location on church premises eg a locked filing cabinet, but should be accessible when the group meets. If the group is on an outing or residential, the leader should ensure that he or she has the information contained on consent forms with him or her.

Sign-in sheet

For the purposes of a one-off event or drop in activity eg outreach night or youth club, a sign-in sheet may be used instead of parental consent forms. This can only be used for children aged eleven plus and only in situations where it isn't deemed possible to obtain parental consent forms. It is important that young people sign out as well as sign in so that leaders are aware of how many people are in the building at any one time. It is also important that young people are asked to give a contact number and medical information in case of an emergency. An example of a sign-in sheet can be found in section 12.9.

Incidents and Concerns

Depending on what the incident or concern about a child is parents/carers may need to be informed. In certain circumstances An Garda Síochána/PSNI or TUSLA (ROI)/ Social Services (NI) will advise; if they do not then contact the Connexional Safeguarding Officer for advice.

7.4 BEHAVIOUR

Code of Conduct

In every aspect of life, organisations function best where there are clear guidelines and structures. It is important that all leaders know what the boundaries and rules of an organisation are and that these are explained to children and parents. The best way of doing this is by having a code of conduct for children and young people when attending organisations, drawn up at the commencement of the year's activities. A code of conduct will help to create a safe, secure environment and an atmosphere where children will feel that they can relate to the leaders and helpers. In some organisations it is the young people themselves who draw up the code of conduct with the help of the leaders. It can be easier to enforce the boundaries if the young people play a part in deciding what these should be, however it is not always appropriate and in some

organisations it may be more suitable that the leaders decide on the boundaries and acceptable behaviour.

Parents should be informed of the code of conduct once it is agreed upon.

Sample codes of conduct are available in section 12:

- Participant Code of Conduct in section (12.10);
- Leader Code of Conduct in section (12.11);
- Parent Code of Conduct in section (12.12).

Discipline Guidelines

If a young person or leader breaks the code of conduct or agreed rules then sanctions need to be put in place and carried out to ensure a safe environment for all. When disciplining children of all ages the following guidelines need to be adhered to:

Leaders should never:

- use force (smack, hit);
- discipline out of anger (but out of love);
- use a 'put-down' with children/young people;
- humiliate a child or young person;
- reject the child, just the behaviour;
- allow particular children to monopolise their time and energy;
- compare children with each other.

Leaders should always:

- ask God for wisdom, discernment and understanding;
- pray for and with the children;
- work on each individual child's positive characteristics;
- be a good role model and set a good example;
- take care to give quieter and well-behaved children attention;
- be consistent and work together as a team;
- be accountable to other leaders – this avoids manipulation.

Chapter 8: Good Standards of Practice

8.1 PHYSICAL CONTACT

Physical contact with children should be child-initiated and appropriate to the age and gender of the child. If a child is in distress it may be perfectly acceptable (and sometimes necessary) to offer comfort and reassurance by placing a hand on their shoulder or taking their hand. This is a valid way of expressing concern and care for children and most children will feel comfortable with it. Making staff and volunteers frightened of any physical contact with children is not an effective way of reducing abuse. Leaders must avoid physical contact which may be misconstrued by a young person or other observer.

Leaders should never:

- Spend an excessive amount of time alone with children away from others;
- Take children to your home without the child's parents and the leader of the organisation or other responsible person knowing;
- Allow or engage in inappropriate touching in any form;
- Allow children to use inappropriate language unchallenged;
- Make sexually suggestive comments about, or to, a child, even in fun;
- Let allegations made by a child go unchallenged or unrecorded;
- Do things of a personal nature for children that they can do for themselves;
- Engage in rough or inappropriate behaviour;
- Rely solely on their reputation to protect themselves.

It may sometimes be necessary for leaders to do things of a personal nature for children, particularly if they are very young or have disabilities. In such situations leaders need to be sensitive to the child and undertake personal care with the utmost discretion (see section 7.7 for more information on working with children who have special needs, and section 11.13 for a personal care plan and section 11.14 for a personal care log).

Using Restraint

Sometimes restraint may need to be applied to a child in order to protect him/her from harming themselves or others, or seriously damaging property. The priority at all times must be to protect all children from harm. The proper use of restraint requires skill and judgement. Only the minimum force necessary to prevent injury or damage should be applied. Leaders should never try to restrain a young person on their own. Another leader may act as an assistant or as a witness. Remember that restraint should be an act of care, not punishment. Following an incident when restraint has been used, a report should be inserted in an accident/incident report form and parents/carers should be notified.

8.2 RECOMMENDED RATIOS

All organisations must abide by the recommended ratios of children/young people to leaders. In determining the ratios of staff to children organisation leaders should bear in mind that there should be a minimum of at least 2 leaders/helpers present at all times. Young leaders/helpers young leaders (aged between 15 and 18) should not be left alone in a supervisory capacity with children. They may, however, be counted in the ratios as long as other adult leaders are present and in charge.

Ratios for indoor activities

- 0 to 2 years = 1 leader to 3 children;
- to 3 years = 1 leader to 4 children;
- to 7 years = 1 leader to 8 children.
- 8 years and over = 1 leader to 10 children/young people.

There should be a gender mix of leaders with a mixed gender group of children or young people.

Ratios for outdoor activities:

- 0 to 2 years = 1 leader to 3 children;
- to 3 years = 1 leader to 4 children;
- to 7 years = 1 leader to 6 children;
- 8 to 13 years = 2 leaders to 15 children (with one additional leader for every 8 extra children, or part thereof);
- 13 years and over = 2 leaders to 20 children (preferably one of each gender, with one additional leader for every 10 young people, or part thereof).

8.3 TRANSPORT

Youth work may involve transporting young people at some stage.

Drivers

When planning an outing, leaders of organisations must exercise discretion as to who the drivers of the vehicles will be. A driver transporting other people's children must be aware of his/her responsibility towards the passengers and drive carefully within the national speed limit. Drivers should know what to do in the event of a breakdown or accident and must ensure that they have adequate and up to date insurance cover. Greater consideration should be given to using 'R' (NI) drivers and recently qualified drivers (ROI) as nominated drivers on an outing or residential due to their lack of driving experience. In addition leaders should observe the guidelines below which will help ensure protection for both them and the young people.

Minibus drivers in Republic of Ireland

In the Republic of Ireland, a person driving a minibus must have a full category D driving licence for which they must sit a theory and practical test.

Minibus drivers in Northern Ireland

Drivers who obtained their full car driving licence before 1 January 1997 may drive a minibus in the UK (until their licence expires) if they hold a valid full driving licence for private cars and if the vehicle is not being used for hire or reward. Drivers who obtained their full car driving licence on or after 1 January 1997 are only licenced to drive a vehicle with up to eight seats (in addition to the driver). To drive a minibus, such drivers need to gain category D1 PCV entitlement on their licence by meeting higher medical standards and passing an appropriate test. However, a volunteer driver is allowed to drive a minibus with up to 16 passenger seats (in addition to the driver) for social purposes by a non-commercial body, provided that the driver has held a full B licence for at least two years, is 21 years old or over and under 70 years old (unless s/he has passed PCV medical and gained restriction 120) and the vehicle meets the weight restriction.

Private Cars

Leaders should avoid transporting a child or young person on their own. It is good practice to have another leader or other children in the car. However, if a situation

does occur when a leader has to transport a child alone, they should ensure that other leaders know this is happening and that the child is in the back seat. If possible, parents should be made aware that their child will be in the car on their own with a leader, affording them the opportunity to make alternative arrangements. Drivers should declare in writing to their insurers that they carry children in their vehicles, and keep a copy of relevant paperwork with their insurance documents.

Seatbelts and child restraints

Organisations or individuals who carry other people's children in cars must make sure they use child restraints for each child carried, or adult seatbelts appropriately.

Child restraints are:

- Rearward-facing baby seats;
- Forward-facing child seats;
- Booster seats;
- Booster cushions.

Seatbelts must be worn for any journey, no matter how short. In the Republic of Ireland it is the driver's responsibility that seatbelts are worn for all passengers under 17 years old. In Northern Ireland it is legally the driver's responsibility to ensure that seatbelts are worn for all passengers under the age of 14.

Booster seats must be used when travelling by car in line with relevant legislation:

- *Republic of Ireland*
Children under 5'/150 cm in height and weighing less than 36 kilograms (generally children up to 11 or 12 years old) must use the correct child seat or booster cushion. The only exception to using a child seat, booster seat or booster cushion is if a child is travelling in a taxi.
- *Northern Ireland*
- Children under 12 years old or less than 4' 5"/135cm in height must use a booster seat. The exceptions according to the law are:
 - when travelling by a taxi;
 - when there are already two booster seats in the back and no room for a third;
 - where there is an 'unforeseen circumstance' eg giving a child a lift home when their parents have not turned up.

Minibuses, buses and coaches

If driving the congregation's minibus(es), drivers must be named on the congregation's insurance policy. accident/incident report forms and a breakdown logbook should be carried in church minibuses and kept up to date. A first aid kit and fire extinguisher should also be on board and drivers should be familiar with their use. The law states that it is the driver's responsibility to make sure that each vehicle is in a road-worthy condition before use. Failure to do so may result in the driver being legally liable in the event of any accident. Therefore, each driver must carry out a range of checks to ensure the road-worthiness of the vehicle. if in doubt, the vehicle should not be driven. In minibuses, children over 3 years old must wear seatbelts or use child restraints if available. In the Republic of Ireland road traffic regulations require the fitting of seatbelts in all forward-facing seats in minibuses. On larger buses and coaches all seated passengers aged 14 years and above must wear seatbelts if they are fitted. The

driver must notify passengers when they board that they have to wear their seatbelts and/or signs must be displayed at every seat. When booking a minibus, bus or coach, make sure it has seatbelts and ask whether child restraints can be provided or whether you can use your own. Be aware that it may not be possible to fit them properly because the seats and seatbelts are different from cars.

Supervision while travelling

Leaders who accompany young people in minibuses/coaches/boats/trains etc should, where possible, sit among the young people and be dispersed in the vehicle. For example, there should be at least one adult travelling in the back of a minibus and preferably near the exit points of the vehicle. Their group members must be in the sight of a leader at all times.

Recruitment of Drivers

If there is any driving of under 18s under the auspices of church activities, the following protocol should be observed:

- The volunteer must be in possession of a full driver's licence. (If there are any penalty points or driving convictions, a judgement call must be made on the suitability of the driving, bearing in mind precedent);
- The volunteer must have proof of tax and insurance which must be shown to the person nominated by the Church Council/ Circuit Executive or the Minister/ Designated Person. The insurance must stipulate that the driver is insured to carry passengers;
- The car must have a valid NCT (ROI) or MOT (NI) certificate, if applicable, which should be shown to the person nominated by the Church Council / Circuit Executive or the Minister/ Designated Person.

8.4 RESIDENTIAL PROGRAMMES AND OUTINGS

Churches and organisations can offer a wide range of activities outside church premises. These may include day trips to the seaside, forest parks, theme parks, visits to the cinema, theatre, museums and shopping trips. As well as this, residential programmes often become the highlight of any congregation's youth programme, offering more opportunity to enhance friendships within the group. While recognising the tremendous impact these trips can have on a young person's emotional, physical and spiritual development, the leader in charge ought to note the following:

The Residential Centre

Check your location and accommodation. Ensure that it is adequate for your groups and activity. The centre must have adequate insurance cover for your group and the activities it hopes to engage in. Insurance should in particular cover high-risk activities eg canoeing, rock climbing etc. The centre should inform you of its rules and regulations. Make every effort to be aware of its timetable eg whether it has a lights-out time, meal-times, what time it expects the group to arrive and to depart. The centre should provide access to first aid/GP in the event of an emergency. The centre should also provide separate sleeping accommodation for males/females.

Parental Consent

Parents'/carers' consent must be obtained when taking any young person away for a residential or outing. The parental consent form should be used (see section 12.8). Before taking a group away, ensure that parents/carers are aware of the following:

- the programme/activities their child is encouraged/expected to participate in, especially high-risk activities eg bouldering, canoeing or other activities provided by the centre's suitably qualified staff;
- whether there will be shopping trips or other free time in town areas and, if so, the level of supervision during such trips;
- the names of leaders/helpers accompanying the group and a contact number (Where possible it is advisable to arrange a pre-residential briefing for the parents, giving information and allowing parents an opportunity to meet the leaders/helpers);
- the centre telephone number and address;
- the group's 'contract' ie what rules the young people will be asked to abide by, and possible consequences if these are broken;
- what clothes and other items the young people might be expected to need;
- how much pocket money might be sufficient (it is advisable to set a limit on this);
- that the names and contact details of all young people and leaders attending a residential/camp etc will be left with a nominated person in the congregation. (see section 12.15)

Young people

Young people must have parental/carer consent to participate in the residential programme and its named activities. They should be fully informed of the nature of the residential programme, ie what is expected of them. They should never be coerced or forced into any activity with which they are uncomfortable. They should be involved in the drawing up of rules and a contract for behaviour and be made aware of sanctions should they fail to comply.

Risk assessment

Risk assessment will help leaders when planning events, to consider the hazards and risks that the group will come across during the time that the children are in their care. A risk assessment form should be completed for each outing, residential or community/outreach event eg church auction or Sunday School picnic (for more information on risk assessment, see section 9.2).

Checklist:

- what is the best time to go – time of year, time of week, time of day?
- how will the group get there?
- how much will it cost?
- have the leaders completed a risk assessment form? (see risk assessment form in section 12.16)
- is the place being visited suitable for the age range being taken?
- is the proposed outing age appropriate, eg is the film, or the theatre show suitable?
- can the venue cater for any children who have special needs?
- what food will be provided and will this be appropriate for children who have allergies?
- are there adequate numbers of leaders?
- is there a good gender mix of leaders (if appropriate)?
- does the outing warrant additional insurance?

- has consent been given by parents/carers? (see parental consent form in section 12.8)
- has consideration been given to places to stop for refreshments/toilets?
- is there an alternative plan if the venue is weather dependent?

A nominated person from the congregation should be informed of the group's exact location. The leader should always have contact mobile phone number and home contact numbers in case of emergency for all children, young people and leaders (see residential contact form in section 12.15). When the outing or residential is over, leaders should carry out a thorough review of the trip.

8.5 CHURCH SLEEPOVERS

Youth groups are increasingly using church halls as overnight accommodation. Before such a venture is considered, organisers should think through security and safety issues. A risk assessment form is recommended (see section 12.16).

The following checklist should be used to ensure the accommodation is suitable:

- parental consent must be sought;
- there should be appropriate male/female segregation and supervision (for ratios see section 7.2);
- sleeping accommodation for leaders/helpers and young people, where possible, should be separate, but the young people's accommodation ought to be easily accessible;
- leaders/helpers must always avoid staying on their own with a young person;
- there must always be other leaders/helpers or young people present;
- there should be at least one nominated first aider and a complete first aid box;
- the accommodation should be suitable for any child attending who has special needs;
- there should be adequate mobile phone reception or a landline;
- there should be at least two separate routes leading from the sleeping accommodation and out of the building;
- fire extinguishers should be positioned in appropriate and accessible locations;
- doors should be checked for ease of opening in an emergency;
- exits should be clearly marked and unblocked;
- clear instructions in the event of an evacuation should be given to both young people and leaders/helpers; Portable heating appliances should not impede exits and should be turned off during sleeping hours; Leaders/helpers should have torches in case of power failure;
- there should be a no smoking, no alcohol, drug-free rule applied to the premises;
- a record of sleeping arrangements should be kept detailing the names of children and leaders who stayed over and where they slept.

Once these issues have been considered organisers should only proceed if they are confident that the facilities are adequate to meet the needs of the group.

8.6 PHOTOGRAPHS, VIDEOS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Since the introduction of the data protection act in 2018, churches must be very careful if they use photographs, videos and webcams of clearly identifiable people. The following guidelines should be adhered to:

- written permission should be obtained of all the people (children and adults) who will appear in a photograph, video or webcam image before the photograph is taken or footage recorded;
- it should be made clear why that person's image is being used, what use will be made of it, and who might want to look at the pictures;
- children and young people should not be identified by name or other personal details. These details include email, phone or postal addresses;
- when using photographs of children and young people, it is preferable to use group pictures;
- location and pose should be carefully considered;
- child participation should not be insisted upon;
- written and specific consent should be obtained from parents or carers before using photographs on a website. Please note that the sample consent form contains a parental consent for use of images of children for general church purposes.

Young people taking photographs of each other

Leaders should encourage young people to be sensible when taking photos or videoing each other, especially if they are to be posted on the internet. Young people should be encouraged to let their friends know if their intention is to post photographs online, giving them the opportunity to object. Young people may need to be reminded that once photographs are on the internet, they have no control over where they end up. Organisation leaders may want to include this issue in their code of conduct.

8.7 WORKING WITH CHILDREN WHO HAVE SPECIAL NEEDS

The church should be a place where all children and their families are welcome.

The group leadership should communicate effectively with the parents or carers to find out what a child's specific needs are and how they are normally met at home or at school.

Some children with special needs may require one-to-one help in a group or organisation; perhaps an extra leader will be needed for this responsibility. For extra information and advice about working with children who have particular special needs and conditions contact the Connexional Safeguarding Officer.

Personal care

Children and young people who have a disability can be at greater risk of abuse. They will often require more help with personal care, such as washing, dressing, toileting, feeding, mobility etc, or may have limited intellectual capacity, understanding or behave in a non-age appropriate way. If a child needs help with toileting or more intimate care it is important to make sure their dignity is preserved. It is good practice that the same leader as far as possible and the same gender as the child is involved in helping them. A personal care plan can be drawn up by parents/carers to advise leaders on how to best meet the needs of the child. Leaders can complete a personal care log (see section 12.13 for an example) to record how the needs of the child were met each time they attend the organisation.

As far as possible, groups should endeavour to ensure that all children can participate in the activities that organised. Leaders should not rely on one particular method of teaching. For example, a word search is not a suitable activity for a child who is

dyslexic; other children may struggle with running or ball games due to poor mobility skills. Biblical teaching can be used to show that we are all different and yet we are all special to God.

Chapter 9: Technology

In an increasingly complex world, the opportunities for child abuse are growing. Those who care for children need to be aware of the opportunities for abuse through the misuse of the internet, text messaging, video and other media. While good use of such media can be beneficial, we must be vigilant and alert to the possibilities of misuse and the consequent harm to young people that can result.

9.1 USING COMPUTERS

If there is a computer being used within the programme of your organisation, it is important that guidelines are drawn up in order to ensure that it is used for its correct purpose and that it is looked after properly. The leaders could agree on a contract which would be given to and possibly signed by all children, parents and leaders. Leaders need to be agreed upon the primary purpose of using computers as part of their programme. For example, is it primarily used for the purposes of research in a homework club or recreational games as part of the youth club? Leaders need to agree which websites are suitable and which websites are unsuitable for the age group of children that they are working with. Computers need to be secure with up-to-date anti-virus software and appropriate parental controls. When young people are using computers on church premises, they should be well supervised (see section 12.17 for a sample computer contract for use within a church organisation).

9.2 CHILDREN AND THE INTERNET

Whilst the development of the internet has revolutionised communication systems throughout the world and appropriately used is an excellent resource, care in its application needs to be exercised so that the safety of a child is not compromised. Children need to be aware of online safety in the same way they are taught road safety. As well as the prevalence of online grooming, children can often be the victims of cyber bullying. bullying through the use of social media can be more intense and more difficult to escape than bullying children experience within the playground or school.

9.3 CHURCH WEBSITES

When designing or developing a church or youth website or an internet page the following should be observed:

- parental permission must be obtained before using any pictures of a child/group of children on a website; Avoid using photographs of individual children which can be easily copied on to other websites, it is preferable to use a group photograph;
- names, addresses, phone numbers and email addresses should not be given;
- leaders should be aware that by advertising dates and times of events online, there is the possibility that other people, who would not have otherwise heard of an event, may target the event and turn up without warning;
- it should be made very clear to young people that the website should not be used to make arrangements to meet up with each other casually, eg going out for coffee. They need to be reminded that they don't know who is reading their conversation;
- a 'closed' page or password protected site can help to limit who can view the site.

9.4 COMMUNICATION WITH YOUNG PEOPLE VIA THE INTERNET

Working with young people often requires a balancing act between being part of the world in which they live, in order to reach them, and yet maintaining a leadership role. In order to understand young people, it is important to live in their culture and at the same time be a role model to them. No place is this balancing act more difficult to get right than in the area of technology, namely the internet and, in particular, social networking sites, blogs, micro-blogs and other public domain publishing methods. If used well, methods of communication via the internet can be effective tools in youth ministry. For example, social networking sites have a group facility which allows online groups to meet in a virtual space where all information and comments are seen by everyone in that group but no-one else. It is worth noting that everything posted on the internet – comments, opinions and photos – can potentially be seen and copied by anyone else using the internet. Social networking sites have privacy settings for this reason and these limit what any other person, whom you have not accepted as a friend, can view. Leaders should think carefully before adding a child or young person in the organisation in which they are leaders, as a friend or follower on a social networking site. If a leader does choose to accept a child or young person as a friend or follower, it is important always to remember that the child or young person has access to all comments, opinions, information and photos which are posted on the leader's profile, either by the leader or by their other friends. Leaders are recommended to evaluate photos of themselves that are posted on these sites and consider deleting or 'untagging' any photos in which they are depicted in what could possibly be construed as compromising situations, thus preventing the photograph or other material being used inappropriately. Leaders should not post photographs of young people from the organisation in which they are leaders, on a social networking site or anywhere on the internet, unless they have written parental consent. Comments made on the internet should be considered the same as if they were made in a public place. If a child discloses something to a leader via a social networking site, a chat room or any other public domain publishing method, then the disclosure must be dealt with by following the normal reporting process (see section 3), even if the accepted protocols of the group have not been adhered to. If a leader is concerned about something that a young person communicates to him or her via the internet, he or she should encourage the child to talk to a suitable adult about it or arrange to meet with the child (within the usual child protection parameters). It would be wise for leaders not to get involved in lengthy or intense engagements online, setting boundaries is encouraged. While communication via the internet can be highly effective, all such communication with children and young people should, as far as possible, be within an open forum, in order to protect both young people and leaders.

9.5 COMMUNICATION WITH YOUNG PEOPLE VIA MOBILE PHONES

Those who work with children need to be aware of the opportunities for abuse through the misuse of mobile phone and text messaging. While good use of such media can be beneficial, we must be vigilant and alert to the possibilities of misuse and consequent harm that can result to young people. Leaders must also take care to protect themselves and Church Council/ Circuit Executives should take an active role to ensure that good practice is followed. Leaders involved in youth and children's work

should only have children's mobile numbers if the nature of their involvement requires them to phone or text children. Such leaders might include those running an organisation for older teenagers, or an employed youth worker or a volunteer involved in co-ordinating youth work within the congregation. Church Council/ Circuit Executive should be informed which leaders need to contact children for their specific roles.

Guidelines on using mobile phones:

- parental permission should be sought if the leader in this role will be contacting children via mobile phone;
- a method of accountability should be arranged eg copies of texts could also be sent to the minister or to parents;
- if a leader has a child's phone number, it should only be used for the purposes it has been given ie the leader should not share this information with other church members;
- it is recommended that an employed youth worker has a separate phone for work purposes rather than using their personal phone for contacting young people;
- texts should be used for the purposes of reminding young people about events which are forthcoming;
- texts can also be used as a means to encourage young people if it is appropriate eg 'hope exam goes ok'; If it turns into a conversation, communications should be ended;
- a leader can suggest discussing the subject further at the next event or, if they are concerned about the young person arrange to meet up to talk further (within the usual child protection parameters).

9.6 DVD MINISTRY

Many congregations now film services for home ministry purposes. Children can be recorded in a group setting, for example, a wide view taken at the children's talk, but they should not be identified. The congregation should be given prior notice at least two weeks in advance, either from the pulpit or printed on the announcement sheet and the DVD should not be used for any reason other than its primary purpose.

Chapter 10: Health & Safety

10.1 GENERAL SAFETY

Safety is of prime importance during any activity. The Taking Care guidelines brings together the two agendas of child protection and health and safety in order to create a safe environment for everyone. That is not only the responsibility of the leader in charge but of every leader and helper. Always check the premises that you are using to highlight any obvious hazards or potential risks. Do your best to have anything removed that should not be there and may cause a significant risk to the members of the group. Adequate supervision should be provided at all times and extra care should be taken when using sports equipment. Areas where maintenance work is taking place should never be used and must be screened off. Committees and Church Council/Circuit Executives should keep organisation leaders informed about maintenance work.

The leader in charge should have:

- access to a phone in case of emergency (make sure there is adequate mobile phone reception if there is no landline on church premises);
- accident report forms readily available;
- contact details for all children and young people;
- knowledge of how many people are present at each event (in case of an evacuation).

10.2 RISK ASSESSMENT

The Taking Care risk assessment form is available in section 12.16 and should be completed/reviewed for each organisation on at least an annual basis or more frequently in the event of new activities being introduced. A risk assessment form should also be completed for each outing, residential or community/outreach event eg Church auction or Sunday School picnic. There may be times when risk assessments are carried out for a specific purpose or period of time eg an individual with a temporary mobility issue or a leader who is pregnant. It is the role of the person in charge of the organisation along with others to help them if necessary, to complete the risk assessment form as they will be most familiar with the activities and members of the group. The forms should be returned to the Property Steward who should collect a completed risk assessment form for each organisation, consider the hazards highlighted and the controls suggested. It is important that if a risk is identified on a risk assessment form, an adequate control is put in place. Health and safety should be a regular agenda item at Church Council/ Circuit Executive meetings.

The following guidance will help leaders when completing a risk assessment form:

- a hazard is something which may cause harm eg chairs piled high which a small child could climb on to. hazards should be identified and noted on the risk assessment form;
- a risk is the chance that a person may be hurt by a hazard. Risks may vary according to different age groups who attend the organisation eg piled up chairs would not be considered a risk to an older person but would definitely be a risk to a toddler or small child;
- a control is something that can be put in place or something that can be changed to limit the risk eg the chairs could be set around the hall instead or only piled together in pairs. Congregations need to demonstrate in the event of an

insurance claim that they took 'reasonable care' to protect the children and adults attending their organisations.

10.3 INSURANCE

The provision of insurance protection for churches remains a complex issue. The three main areas of cover relate to offsetting legal expenses in the event of a claim; public liability cover relating to claims for inadequate supervision, negligence, etc, and management indemnity to cover errors, omissions, negligent advice or a wrongful act. Churches are advised to contact their insurance broker for more detailed and up to date information on these insurances.

10.4 HIGH RISK ACTIVITIES

Some activities such as trampolining and bouncy castles are described as 'high risk' by insurance companies. These activities require a little extra thought and sometimes extra supervision perhaps by trained people. You may also require parental consent depending on what the activity is. Additional insurance is often needed to cover these higher risk activities; on occasion cover may not be available. Please always plan ahead and check with your insurance broker in advance of the event.

10.5 FIRE

All leaders should be aware of the location of fire exits and ensure that access is not obstructed. Leaders should know where the nearest fire extinguishers are located; these must be checked regularly by a qualified person. Fire drills should be conducted to ensure that all members know what evacuation procedure to follow in the event of a real fire.

10.6 FIRST AID

Leaders should be aware of any medical conditions or allergies that children have and any medication they are currently taking. This information should be provided on parental consent forms. Medication should never be given without written consent from parents or doctors; it should be clearly marked and be kept out of reach of children. Each organisation should have at least one nominated and adequately trained first aider. All leaders should be aware who the first aiders are and alert them in the event of an injury or accident. Once first aid has been administered, an accident form should be completed and leaders should make every effort to communicate with parents/carers what has happened and any treatment that has been given. If a child needs taken to the hospital leaders should make every effort to contact parents/carers as soon as possible. See section 11.3 for a sample accident/incident report form and section 3.1 for more information on accident/incident forms. A first aid kit should always be available on church premises and at planned events away from the church. It is important that the first aid kit is stocked with all the appropriate in-date items and equipment and that a person has responsibility for replacing items especially if it is used by various organisations within the church.

Chapter 11: Legal Matters

11.1 RELEVANT LEGISLATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Within the Republic of Ireland the main legislation governing the care and protection of children is:

- The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989);
- The Child Care Acts 1991;
- The Domestic Violence Acts 1996;
- The Protection for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act 1998;
- Children first guidelines 1999;
- Freedom of Information Act 2000;
- Children's Act 2001;
- Children Trafficking and Prostitution/Sex Offender Act 2001;
- Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2006;
- Criminal Justice Act 2006;
- Children First Act (2015).

11.2 RELEVANT LEGISLATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND

The main relevant legislation relating to child protection in Northern Ireland includes:

- The Criminal Law act 1967;
- The United Nations Convention of the rights of the Child (1989);
- The Children (NI) Order 1995;
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995;
- The Sex Offenders Act 1997;
- The Family Homes and Domestic Violence (NI) Order 1998;
- The Criminal Justice (Children) (NI) Order 1998;
- The Human Rights Act 1998;
- The Sexual Offences Act 2003;
- Protection of Children & Vulnerable Adults (NI) Order 2003;
- Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006;
- Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (NI) Order 2007.

11.3 DATA PROTECTION

Under the Data Protection Act (2018) registered organisations should be aware that they must be careful when handling personal data belonging to children and leaders eg names, phone numbers, addresses and medical information. Organisations must only hold data which is adequate, relevant and not excessive in relation to the purpose for which it is held. They must ensure that personal data is accurate and where necessary, kept up to date. Organisations must do what they can to prevent unauthorised or accidental access to personal data and must hold data for no longer than necessary. Therefore, the following principles should be followed for all organisations in answer to the questions below:

- where should forms be kept?
- all consent forms, accident forms, or any information on children or leaders should be kept in a confidential but accessible location. A locked filing cabinet on church premises is a good example;
- all consent forms, accident forms, or any information on children or leaders should not be kept in a person's own home for long periods of time;

- leaders must ensure that they have easy access to relevant data such as children's contact details and medical information when the organisation is meeting;
- incident/accident forms should also be held securely on church premises. Who should have access to information on children and leaders?
- information about children and leaders should be on a need-to-know basis;
- the exception to this is medical information where it is important that all relevant leaders in a supervisory role are aware of conditions that children have;
- information about leaders and children should not be given to any external party but only used for the purpose for which it was given;

The same rules apply for data kept on computers; data is confidential and should be kept on church premises. In order to keep the data protected, it should be held on a dedicated password protected file;

Consent forms (basic information such as name, date of birth and address) should be kept for up to six years after the child has left the organisation. Thereafter, it should either be destroyed (ie shredded or burnt) or given back to the child or parent. The same applies to information on leaders – ie it is retained for up to six years after they have left their position. Incident/accident forms and the register of all leaders should be kept indefinitely.

Chapter 12: Resources

Chapter 12.1

Child Protection Policy

Creating a safe environment for children, young people,
leaders and staff



The Methodist Church in Ireland reaches out to children and young people throughout Ireland and welcomes those from households where there is no Methodist or other denominational connection. We have a legal duty of care to look after *all* children and provide a safe environment for them as best we can.

Parents/carers expect the church to have and enforce a child protection policy.

This policy is aimed at creating an environment where children and young people may enjoy social contact, personal and spiritual development and where they and the leaders and helpers working with them will be kept safe.

Adoption of Methodist Church in Ireland Child Protection Guidelines

The Church Council/Circuit Executive of _____ Methodist Church has adopted the Methodist Church in Ireland's Child Protection Guidelines, Taking Care, approved by the Conference and revised in 2011. All organisations must adhere to these guidelines as agreed by the Conference. The Church Council/Circuit Executive will review the policy every three years and keep Taking Care on the agenda of the Church Council/Circuit Executive meetings.

1. Leadership

The Church Council/Circuit Executive believes that the recruitment and appointment process outlined in the Taking Care guidelines greatly assist the assessment of a person's suitability to work with children and young people. As a result of implementing such procedures, leaders and helpers within this congregation will be more assured of their position and of the confidence placed in them by the Church Council/Circuit Executive.

The following procedures must be followed for the appointment of leaders who will be 18 years and over:

- 1) All leaders will be required to complete an application form for Leaders.
- 2) The application form includes the vetting process according to legislation and good practice.
- 3) The Church Council/Circuit Executive will appoint up to two interviewers to meet informally with the applicant. At the interview the child protection policy will be provided and explained, the Taking Care Leader's Guide will also be provided.
- 4) Applicants will be required to provide two references by persons who are not relatives.

2. Training

Leaders and helpers who work with children and young people should attend Taking Care Training on a regular basis (as church policy or legislation demands). Even those who have a good knowledge of child protection issues in another field should attend as Taking Care Training is the only training available that is specifically dealing with church activities within a church environment.

3. Reporting of Concerns

The leaders in each of our organisations will be fully conversant with the reporting procedure where there is a concern about the welfare of a child, as outlined in the Taking Care Guidelines. Leaders must not hesitate to report a concern about a child if they are at any time worried about their welfare.

4. The Designated Person

The Church Council/Circuit Executive has appointed the following Designated Person(s):-

The Designated Person(s) will give advice and support to organisations and to the Church Council/Circuit Executive on matters concerning the welfare of children and young people. The Church Council/Circuit Executive will keep organisational leaders updated with the name of the Designated Person(s). Any matter brought to the attention of the Designated Person will be treated in strict confidence. Information will be divulged only where there is a legitimate need to know.

5. Parental Consent Forms

Organisational leaders must ensure that they have home contact numbers, parental consent and medical information regarding the children in the organisations which they are working with. Special consent forms will be issued for any 'off the premises' activity and residential programmes.

6. Good Standards of Practice

Each organisation will be expected to comply with good standards of practice as outlined in the Taking Care Guidelines. This includes: physical contact, recommended ratios, transport, residential programmes and outings, church sleepovers, photographs and working with children who have special needs.

7. Working Together

It is important that all leaders know the boundaries and rules of an organisation and that these are explained to children and parents. A code of conduct for children and young people will be drawn up at the commencement of the year's activities in each organisation. A code of conduct will help to create a safe, secure environment and an atmosphere where children will feel that they can relate to the leaders and helpers.

All leaders must abide by the discipline guidelines as set out in the Taking Care manual.

8. Technology

Leaders should limit the direct Internet communication they have with individual children and young people in the organisation of which they are leaders. All such communication with children and young people should, as far as possible, be within an open forum; in order to protect both young people and leaders. Leaders should be wise as to how they use this form of communication.

Leaders should not post photographs of young people from the organisation in which they are leaders, on a social networking site or anywhere on the Internet, unless they have written parental consent.

Leaders involved in Youth and Children's work should only have children's mobile numbers if the nature of their involvement requires them to phone or text children and if this is the case, contacting children through the use of mobile phones should be done in line with the Taking Care guidelines.

9. Health and Safety

The Church Council/Circuit Executive expects organisations to adhere to the guidance on health and safety matters outlined in the Taking Care guidelines. A Risk Assessment form should be completed for each organisation as well as for any outings or occasional events. Leaders will be informed of fire and first aid procedures.

10. Implementation and Review

The Church Council/Circuit Executive is responsible for overseeing the implementation of this policy and will review it every three years.

Signed _____ (Minister)

_____ (Secretary of the Church Council/Circuit Executive)

_____ (Designated Person/s)

Chapter 12.2

Anti-bullying Policy

All kinds of bullying are wrong and should not be tolerated within organisations of the Methodist Church in Ireland. Our organisations should be a safe and welcoming place for all children and young people.



What is bullying?

Bullying is defined as; *“Deliberately hurtful behaviour repeated often over a period of time”*.

What forms does it take?

- Bullying can be name calling or teasing.
- Bullying is often physical; victims are pushed, punched, kicked and hit.
- Victims can be forced to do things they don't want to do, are left out of games or ignored by others.
- Cyber bullying is when bullies contact their victims via text messaging or via the Internet.

Why do we have a bullying policy?

- All leaders, parents and children who attend this organisation should have an understanding of what bullying is and know that it is not tolerated within the organisation.
- All leaders should know what to do if bullying arises.
- As an organisation we take bullying seriously, children and parents should be assured that they would be supported when bullying is reported.

Why is it important to respond to Bullying?

- Bullying hurts.
- Everyone has the right to be treated with respect.
- Individuals who are bullying need to learn to stop.
- This organisation has a responsibility to respond effectively to bullying issues.

Preventative Measures

- Leaders should encourage children to befriend others who are alone within the group.
- Bullying should be discussed openly within the group, perhaps through activities such as circle time.
- Young people should regularly be encouraged to talk to leaders about anything that is bothering them.

What will happen if bullying occurs?

1. Attempt reconciliation by getting the parties together to talk, it may be that a genuine apology solves the problem.
2. If bullying continues or it is serious, leaders should meet with the parent and child(ren) who is/are being bullied.
3. Leaders should also meet with the child(ren) who is bullying and their parent/s.
4. If serious, bullying should be reported to the Designated Person as a child protection issue.
5. Leaders should consider appropriate consequences for the bully and make sure these are carried through.
6. Keep the situation under review.

Chapter 12.3

Accident / Incident Form

This form should be completed immediately after any accident or significant incident. Once completed, please store confidentially on church premises and keep indefinitely. The worker should discuss with the Designated Person and/or Minister if follow up action is required.



Day: Date: Time:

Name, contact details and ages of those involved in the accident/incident:

1.
2.
3.
4.

Where did this accident/incident take place?

.....

.....

Who is normally responsible for the group? (Name, address and telephone number)

Name:

Address:

.....

.....Tel. No.:

Who witnessed the accident/incident? (Names, addresses, telephone numbers and ages if under 16). Normally only two witnesses would be needed.

Name:	Name:
Address:	Address:
.....
.....
Tel. No.:	Tel. No.:

Describe the accident/incident (include injuries received and any first aid or medical treatment given) continue on separate sheet if necessary.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Have you retained any defective equipment?

YES NO NONE INVOLVED (Please tick)

If so, where is it being kept and by whom?

.....

.....

What action have you taken to prevent a recurrence of the accident/incident?

.....

.....

.....

Is the site or premises still safe for your group to use? YES NO (Please tick)

Is the equipment still safe for your group to use? YES NO (Please tick)

Have the parents/carers been informed? YES NO (Please tick)

Date: Time:

Has Designated Person been informed? YES NO (Please tick)

Has Minister been informed YES NO (Please tick)

Has Leader in charge been informed? YES NO (Please tick)

Signature of person in charge of group at time of accident/incident

Signed: PRINT Name:

Date:

Form seen by Minister/Leader in charge

Signed: PRINT Name:

Date:

Chapter 12.4

Record of Meeting Form



Date of Meeting:

Names of those present:

Names of those present:

Details of concern (be clear about what is fact and what is fiction):

What has the child/young person said (if anything):

Decision reached – choose at least one of the following options:		
<i>Please tick those selected.</i>		
	1.	Take no further action. Why?
	2.	Talk to the parents/carers Why? Who will do this?
	3.	Arrange a discussion with an outside body Why? With whom? Who will do this?
	4.	Make a formal report to social services or Police/An Garda Síochána Why? Who will do this?
	5.	Has IMYCD been contacted for advice or to report?

Signatures of those present:

.....
.....
.....
.....

Print Name:
Print Name:
Print Name:
Print Name:

Chapter 12.5

Reference Request Form



Reference for

.....

The above named person has volunteered for the position of:

.....

In Congregation

1. How long have you known the applicant? years
2. In what capacity do you know the applicant?
3. How would you rate him/her as suitable for the above position?

1 = Excellent 2 = Very Good 3 = Good 4 = Satisfactory 5 = Poor 6 = Unknown

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Relationship with children and young people?						
Experience in working with children and young people?						
Ability to relate to other leaders?						
Energy/commitment?						
Flexibility and approach?						
Self motivation?						
Ability to act on own initiative?						
Ability to act as part of a team?						

Any additional information including other church involvement and Christian commitment which you feel may be relevant:

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Name:

Signature: Date:

Chapter 12.7

Inter-Church Child Protection Group

(The Church of Ireland, The Presbyterian Church in Ireland, The Methodist Church in Ireland)

A Common Protocol for Churches relating to Independent Organisations working with children and young people



INTRODUCTION

The Context

The Church of Ireland, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland (hereafter referred to as the Churches) each have their own Child Protection Guidelines. It is considered helpful if these Guidelines substantially agree with each other in respect of minimum standards of good practice in dealing with children and young people. As each set of Church Guidelines is based upon either *Getting it Right* and *Our Duty to Care* (N. Ireland) or *Children First* and *Child Protection for the Youth Work Sector* (Rep. of Ireland), we believe that they do substantially agree in their policy and procedures while allowing for flexibility of practice depending on the individual Church's structure of government and administration.

It is recognised that it would also be helpful if the Churches agreed a common protocol for dealing with external organisations which regularly use church premises. This document seeks to clarify the expectations and responsibilities of both the churches and the independent organisations, especially in the areas of child protection policy, appointment of leaders, information sharing and reporting of concerns that may arise within an organisation.

Definitions

An independent organisation is a group that while not operated by the church, nonetheless uses church premises. Such organisations may be specifically youth organisations, or may be organisations which occasionally work with children e.g. St John Ambulance.

The organisation may have an outside headquarters and a separate method for the appointment of leaders e.g. Scouts, Crusaders, Guides. Although some of the leaders may attend the local host church they are not appointed by the church and are not directly responsible to the church.

There are also youth organisations which are operated by local churches, but which also have outside headquarters, such as BB and GB. The leaders are appointed or approved by the church but with a measure of involvement and training by the outside headquarters. The principles and the criteria below are also relevant to this type of organisation, and normally will be met by the organisation. However if this is not the case the requirements stated below will apply.

1 General Guiding Principles

- 1.1 In all our practice the Churches and organisations agree that the welfare and safety of children is the paramount consideration.
- 1.2 It is recognised that churches and organisations are interdependent and it is therefore vital that constructive working relationships are developed and maintained.
- 1.3 If an organisation using church premises is operated independently of the local church, while the church will not be responsible for the appointment of leaders or general running of the organisation, it is recognised that the Church still has some interest in the organisation being run to an acceptable standard. The Church has a responsibility for what happens on Church property and the Church will give formal permission for the organisation / unit to use the premises. It is recognised that even if an organisation is independent of the church, the public's perception may be that it is still a church organisation.
- 1.4 If a church has concerns that certain practices breach child protection guidelines, such concerns should be raised with the organisation leader and/or the headquarters of the organisation. If the concerns are not satisfactorily dealt with the host church may withdraw permission for use of the premises by that organisation.
- 1.5 While the church is not to be responsible for the appointment of leaders to an independent organisation it is good practice for the Kirk Session / Parish Panel / Church Council to be informed annually (September) of the names of the leaders in writing.
- 1.6 This protocol should be reviewed on an annual basis at a meeting of the Inter-Church Child Protection Group and representatives of independent organisations, in the light of any revision of church or organisation policies.

2 AGREED CRITERIA

The churches suggest that the following criteria be agreed with independent organisations using church premises, e.g. Scouts, Guides, Crusaders, Christian Endeavour and other groups.

It is the duty of the organisation to ensure that the premises are suitable and appropriate for planned activities. The organisation shall also seek to ensure that activities shall be carried out safely. Any safety concerns regarding the premises shall be notified by the organisation leader to the appropriate person within the church as soon as possible.

- 2.1 The organisation shall confirm to the local church that it has adopted and consistently implements a child protection policy which accords with the standard of *Getting it Right* and *Our Duty to Care* (NI) or *Children First* and *Child Protection for the Youth Work Sector* (RI). A copy of the organisation's policy shall be supplied to the Kirk Session / Parish Panel / Church Council or written verification that the policy is accepted by the church at central level.
- 2.2 The local church shall supply to the organisation leader the names and contact details of the church officials responsible for the premises. The organisation shall supply to the Kirk Session / Parish Panel / Church Council the names and contact details of all the leaders immediately following appointment. The organisation shall confirm that new appointees have been (NI) subject to a Access(NI) check or (RI) have been vetted where possible; that no information was received which debarred their appointment and they have been found suitable to work with children and young people.
- 2.3 The organisation shall ensure that leaders and helpers in the organisation receive appropriate child protection training and are aware of the organisation's reporting procedures.
- 2.4 If a report has been made by the organisation of a child protection concern, suspicion or allegation through its procedures, the person(s) responsible for child protection in the local church should be informed in confidence that a report has been made.
- 2.5 The organisation shall supply written confirmation from the insurer that adequate insurance cover is in place for the organisation's activities or written verification that the insurance policy of the organisation is accepted by the Church at central level.
- 2.6 A Form of Approval (sample below) shall be signed by the leader of the organisation / unit and a church representative confirming that the conditions have been met. It is appropriate for this to be completed annually or at least every three years depending upon church requirements.

3 BOYS' BRIGADE (NI/RI) AND GIRLS' BRIGADE (NI)

These are organisations which are operated by the local church but also have a separate external headquarters. Thus, there is a measure of independent input to these organisations and the following is suggested as good practice to avoid unnecessary duplication and communication breakdown.

- 3.1 Leaders are nominated and approved by the local church and appointed by the Boys' Brigade. Leaders are jointly accountable to the local church and to the Boys' Brigade.
- 3.2 For BB it is necessary to complete both the BB Appointment Form and the church's Application Form.
- 3.3 For GB the church's Application Form only is completed.
- 3.4 The BB/GB should use the church's procedure for reporting concerns.
- 3.5 The BB/GB should submit a list of its officers/helpers and contact details to the Kirk Session / Parish Panel / Church Council each September.
- 3.6 The church shall confirm in writing to the BB/GB that the appointment procedure (including AccessNI check) has been completed, before any new appointee is approved for BB/GB registration and training.
- 3.7 The church shall provide appropriate child protection training for new appointees.
- 3.8 All leaders must sign a declaration that they shall uphold the church's Child Protection policy.

Sample Form of Approval for Independent Organisations wishing to use Church Premises.

Name of church _____

Name of organisation _____

Name of person in charge of organisation _____ Tel. No. _____

Time and place of organisation's meeting _____

CONDITIONS

1. The organisation confirms that it has adopted and implements a child protection policy which accords with the standard of either *Getting it Right* and *Our Duty to Care* (N Ireland) or *Children First* and *Child Protection for the Youth Work Sector* (Rep. of Ireland). A copy of the organisation's policy is now produced or written verification that the policy is accepted by the Church at central level.
2. The local church shall supply to the organisation leader the names and contact details of the church officials responsible for the premises and for child protection. The organisation shall supply annually (September) to the Kirk Session / Parish Panel / Church Council the names and contact details of all leaders immediately following appointment. The organisation shall confirm that new appointees have been (NI) subject to a AccessNI check or (RI) have been vetted where possible; that no

information was received which debarred their appointment and they have been found suitable to work with children and young people.

3. The organisation shall ensure that leaders/helpers in the organisation shall receive appropriate child protection training and are aware of the reporting procedures.
4. If a report is made by the organisation of a child protection concern through its procedures, the person responsible for child protection in the local church should be informed in confidence that a report has been made.
5. The organisation confirms that adequate insurance cover is in place for its activities (copy of policy attached), or written verification that the insurance policy is accepted by the Church at central level.

The organisation shall seek to ensure that activities shall be carried out safely. Any safety concerns regarding the premises shall be notified by the organisation leader to the appropriate person within the church as soon as possible.

We confirm that the church and the organisation agree to the above conditions.

Signed: (*Organisation Leader*)

Date:

PLEASE TICK AS APPLICABLE:

The church grants the above organisation use of the premises

OR

The church grants the above organisation use of the premises in accordance with the attached agreement.

Signed:

(Clerk of Session / Secretary of the Select Vestry / Secretary of the Church Council)

Date:

Chapter 12.8

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM Methodist Church in Ireland



Anything written on this form will be held in confidence. The leaders need to know these details in order to help meet the specific needs of your child.

Group/ Congregation: _____

PARTICIPANT DETAILS

Child's full name: _____

Preferred name: _____

Home address: _____

Personal details:

D.O.B.

Age:

Gender:

PARENT/ CARER DETAILS

Parent/ Carer Name: _____

Relationship to child: _____

Best Contact Number: _____

CONTACT COMMITMENT

I agree that I will be contactable by phone at all times during any programmes that my child attends.

EMERGENCY CONTACT DETAILS

2nd Emergency contact.

(Please note that this number must be contactable at all times during programme.)

Name: _____

Relationship to child: _____

Best phone number: _____

3rd Emergency contact.

(Please note that this number must be contactable at all times during programme.)

Name: _____

Relationship to child: _____

Best phone number: _____

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM
Methodist Church in Ireland



During the time your child will spend with us, photographs and/ or video may be taken for general church purposes and social media, both throughout and subsequent to our programmes. For this, we need your permission. Online video-conferencing or streaming services hosted by the church may be used to facilitate programmes. These will involve teaching, worship, prayer ministry and social gatherings. As part of this participants may be visible on screen to other individuals, including their name. Some activities may require different participants engaging in smaller break out rooms, occasionally with new people. These will always be supervised appropriately and monitored carefully. Occasionally interactive social media platforms may be used in strict adherence to IMYC's guidelines. Parents will be given a relevant factsheet prior to their use.

If you are happy with this, please tick this box:

MEDICAL DECLARATION

Name of GP: _____ Contact number: _____

Known conditions, allergies or medication: _____

Special needs or requirements: _____

I will inform the leaders of any important changes to my child's health, medication or needs and also of any changes to our address or to any of the contact details given above. In the event of illness or accident, having parental responsibility for the above named child, I give permission for first aid to be administered where considered necessary by a trained first aider, if available, or medical treatment to be administered by a suitably qualified medical practitioner. If I cannot be contacted and my child should require emergency hospital treatment, I authorise the leadership team to take my child to a suitable hospital. I understand that every effort will be made to contact me as soon as possible.

PARENTAL CONSENT

I give permission for my child to attend and to participate in the activities associated and organised by the named church/ organisation.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

GDPR STATEMENT

The data collected on this form is held for the sole purpose of the named church. Written consent will be kept securely on file by the named church for a minimum of seven years, as per the regulations stated in the General Data Protection Regulations for the Methodist Church in Ireland. If and when the form is no longer required it will be destroyed safely and securely. All members have the 'right to be forgotten' and can request that the named church clarify what details have been stored about them. However, due to any potential child protection, health and safety or security issues, information may need to be retained, if deemed necessary. If you wish to understand more about how the named church collects and processes data to be compliant with GDPR, please request the privacy policy.

Sign-in Sheet



Name of Organisation..... Date.....

Name	Parent/guardian Telephone	Address	Do you have any medication/medical conditions/allergies?	Sign in time	Sign out time

Signed.....(Leader in Charge)

Chapter 12.9

Chapter 12.10

Participant Code of Conduct (children)



As members of this organisation we will:

1. Respect our leaders and helpers.
2. Respect the views and feelings of other members.
3. Respect the right of every member to express their views.
4. Respect the right of every member to be heard/listened to.
5. Respect leaders' and helpers' and other members' personal privacy and property.
6. Take care of equipment and property.
7. Not engage in any of the following activities or behaviour:
 - (i) Consumption of alcohol and the use of drugs and smoking during organisation activities, whether within the confines of the organisation building or otherwise;
 - (ii) Physical abuse of other members, leaders, hosts, volunteers or helpers;
 - (iii) Verbal abuse including "put-downs" of other team members, leaders, hosts, volunteers or helpers, either directly or electronically e.g. mobile phones, chat rooms etc;
 - (iv) Access inappropriate material online, whether using personal or church-owned internet devices;
 - (v) Destruction or damage of property or equipment;
 - (vi) Forming intimate or sexual relationships with any team member, host, volunteer or local;
 - (vii) Exploitation of any local people for personal gain. If payment for a service is expected and agreed, this must be reasonable, fair and timely. People or circumstances should never be manipulated to gain a service for free.
8. Where there is a sensitivity around use of alcohol or tobacco, all team members should refrain from its use.
9. All local laws, customs and age-limits must be adhered to. These local laws must not contravene British or Irish Laws, which must be abided by.

When implementing the code of conduct, leaders need to be insistent, consistent and persistent.

I agree to keep to the contract.

Signed: _____ (Child)

I have read through this agreement with my child and agree to these safety restrictions.

Signed: _____ (Parent/Carer)

Chapter 12.11

Leaders Code of Conduct



As members of this organisation we will:

1. Respect our participants, parents, leaders and helpers.
2. Respect the views and feelings of other members.
3. Respect the right of every member to express their views.
4. Respect the right of every member to be heard/listened to.
5. Respect the personal privacy and property of participants, leaders, helpers and other facility users.
6. Take care of equipment and property.
7. Not engage in any of the following activities or behaviour:
 - (i) Consumption of and the use of narcotic or psychotropic drugs, unless prescription, during organisation activities, whether within the confines of the organisation building or otherwise;
 - (ii) Physical abuse of other members, leaders, hosts, volunteers or helpers;
 - (iii) Verbal abuse including “put-downs” of other team members, leaders, hosts, volunteers or helpers, either directly or electronically e.g. mobile phones, chat rooms etc;
 - (iv) Access inappropriate material online, whether using personal or church-owned internet devices;
 - (v) Destruction or damage of property or equipment;
 - (vi) Forming intimate or sexual relationships with any team member, host, volunteer or local;
 - (vii) Exploitation of any local people for personal gain. If payment for a service is expected and agreed, this must be reasonable, fair and timely. People or circumstances should never be manipulated to gain a service for free.
8. Where there is a sensitivity around use of alcohol or tobacco, all team members should refrain from its use.
9. All local laws, customs and age-limits must be adhered to. These local laws must not contravene British or Irish Laws, which must be abided by.

When implementing the code of conduct, leaders need to be insistent, consistent and persistent.

I agree to keep to the contract.

Signed: _____ (Individual Leader)

Signed: _____ (Group Leader)

Chapter 12.12

Parent Code of Conduct



As a parent, whose child attends this organisation, I will ensure that I and my child(ren) will abide by the following rules:

1. Respect the participants, other parents, leaders and helpers.
2. Respect the views and feelings of other people.
3. Respect the right of every person to express their views.
4. Respect the right of every person to be heard/listened to.
5. Respect the personal privacy and property of participants, leaders, helpers and other facility users.
6. Take proper care of equipment and property.
7. When participating in, or spectating on, sporting activities, respect the match officials and their decisions.
8. Not engage in any of the following activities or behaviour:
 - (i) Consumption of and the use of alcohol, tobacco, narcotic or psychotropic drugs, unless prescription, during organisation activities, whether within the confines of the organisation building or otherwise;
 - (ii) Physical abuse of other members, leaders, hosts, volunteers or helpers;
 - (iii) Verbal abuse or bullying, including “put-downs” of other children, team members, leaders, hosts, volunteers or helpers, either directly or electronically e.g. mobile phones, chat rooms etc;
 - (iv) Access inappropriate material online, whether using personal or church-owned internet devices;
 - (v) Destruction or damage of property or equipment;
 - (vi) Forming intimate or sexual relationships with any team member, host, volunteer or local.
9. All local laws, customs and age-limits must be adhered to. These local laws must not contravene British or Irish Laws, which must be abided by.

When implementing the code of conduct, leaders need to be insistent, consistent and persistent.

I agree to keep to the contract.

Signed: _____ (Parent)

Personal Care Plan

Name:

Date drawn up:

Chapter 12.13

	Instructions for leaders
Toileting	e.g. needs help with buttons/zips
Eating/drinking	e.g. drinks from his own cup
Medical	e.g. needs to use inhaler if out of breath
Behaviour	e.g. reacts badly to loud noises
Mobility	e.g. has difficulty running and jumping
Likes/dislikes	e.g. likes stickers, does not like colouring in

Personal Care Log

Name: _____

Date: _____

	Information for Parents
Toileting	e.g. went to the toilet at 7:15pm and 8:05pm with -----
Eating/drinking	e.g. drank juice, refused snack
Medical	e.g. did not need to use inhaler
Behaviour	e.g. interacted well with other children and leaders
Mobility	e.g. wasn't able to join in the basketball game but enjoyed passing the ball with -----
Likes/Dislikes	e.g. liked watching the drama, did not like it when the balloon burst

Chapter 12.14



Children and Young People - Risk Assessment

Name of Organisation/Event: _____ Date Undertaken: _____ By Whom: _____

Chapter 12.16

Hazard	Area	Who might be harmed?	Existing Controls – what is already in place to minimise the risk?	Action – what are you going to do in order to minimise the risk?	Date Achieved

Chapter 12.17

Computer Contract



- I will only use the computer when there is a member of staff or volunteer present.
- I will only use websites and programmes that a member of staff or volunteer has chosen or approves.
- I will not go on to social networking sites or chat rooms.
- I will only log on using my own login and password.
- I will not share my password with others.
- I will only send emails that are polite and friendly and not use rude language.
- I will not share personal information with other people over the internet.
- If I come across anything I am uncomfortable with whilst on the computer I will tell an adult.
- I will ask permission before printing anything.

I agree to keep to the contract.

Signed: _____ (Child)

I have read through this agreement with my child and agree to these safety restrictions.

Signed: _____ (Parent/Carer)