



Safeguarding Policy
and Procedures for
the Protection of

**CHILDREN AND
YOUNG PEOPLE**



Sinn Féin

April 2026





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1. OUR SAFEGUARDING RESPONSIBILITIES

- 1.1 All Sinn Féin party members, activists, elected representatives, staff and associated staff share a collective responsibility to protect children and promote their welfare. The party firmly believes that abuse in any form, including online or via social media, is wholly unacceptable. Children and young people, have a legal right to be safeguarded from all forms of abuse.
- 1.2 Sinn Féin embraces its duty to safeguard and promote the welfare and wellbeing of all children at risk. The party is committed to implementing robust safeguarding practices and procedures that protect individuals while fostering a safe and welcoming environment for engagement in Sinn Féin's activities.
- 1.3 Safeguarding concerns will always be treated with the utmost seriousness. Sinn Féin is dedicated to valuing, listening to, and respecting children and young people and encouraging open communication about any issues that may cause them concern. The party will consistently act in the best interests of the child.

2. SCOPE

- 2.1 This policy applies to all party members, activists, elected representatives, staff and associated staff.
- 2.2 Where Sinn Féin is working in partnership with other organisations, including affiliated organisations, they are expected to have their own safeguarding arrangements in place but where these do not exist then extracts of Sinn Féin safeguarding policies, related procedures and the Sinn Féin Safeguarding Code of Behaviour (**Appendix E**) will apply to them and this will form part of any partnership or contractual arrangements at the outset.
- 2.3 This policy and procedure replaces the Sinn Féin Child Protection and Welfare Policy 2015.

3. PURPOSE

The aim of this policy is to:

- Affirm Sinn Féin's dedication to safeguarding and promoting the welfare and well-being of children and young people who are members, activists or otherwise interact with the party. This includes the children of members, affiliated supporters, and members of the public engaging with Sinn Féin.
- Provide party members, activists, elected representatives, staff and associated staff with the fundamental principles that shape our approach to safeguarding and child protection.

4. PRINCIPLES

We recognise that:

The welfare of the child is of utmost importance, as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1991) and supported by the relevant legislation and statutory guidance applicable in both the 6 Counties



and the 26 Counties. These include the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, the Child Care Act 1991, The Children First Act 2015 (Republic of Ireland) and associated safeguarding frameworks.

- Every child or young person has the right to be protected from harm and supported to thrive.
- Certain children and young people may face additional vulnerabilities due to factors such as past experiences, high levels of dependency, communication needs, or other challenges. These vulnerabilities must be recognised and addressed.
- Collaboration with children, young people, their parents or carers, and relevant agencies is essential to effectively promote and safeguard their welfare.
- It is not the role of Sinn Féin to determine whether abuse has occurred. However, it is the duty of party members, activists, elected representatives, staff and associated staff to act on any concerns, ensuring that appropriate agencies are informed so they can investigate and take necessary protective measures.

5. OUR COMMITMENT TO SAFEGUARDING

We will seek to:

- Safeguard children and young people from abuse during their participation in any activities organised by the party.
- Prioritise and actively promote the safety and well-being of children and young people.
- Foster a party culture where children/young people, carers, and others feel empowered to report concerns or instances of abuse affecting themselves or others.
- Ensure party members, activists, elected representatives, staff and associated staff fully understand their safeguarding responsibilities and are equipped with the knowledge and support needed to identify, respond to, and address signs of abuse, neglect, or other safeguarding concerns.
- Establish and maintain robust safeguarding arrangements and procedures.
- Promote safeguarding procedures widely and enforce them as mandatory for all party members.
- Take appropriate and timely action in response to incidents or concerns of abuse, providing support to those who raise or disclose such concerns.
- Emphasise collaboration with partner agencies to achieve the best possible outcomes for children/young people at risk of abuse.
- Maintain and securely store confidential, detailed, and accurate records of all safeguarding concerns in line with GDPR compliance.
- Ensure that non-compliance is addressed promptly and in line with the party's disciplinary procedures which may result in dismissal or exclusion from the party.
- Prevent the recruitment or deployment of unsuitable individuals through rigorous recruitment, selection, and vetting processes where necessary for the post.
- Implement a safeguarding governance structure with clearly defined roles and responsibilities, which will include Designated Liaison Persons for the 6 and 26 counties, and Cathaoirleach an Pháirtí through their role on the Ard Chomhairle. This ensures safeguarding is embedded throughout all activities at both strategic and operational levels of the party.



6. LEGISLATION AND STATUTORY GUIDANCE

- 6.1 The practices and procedures within this policy are based on the principles contained within the legislation of the 6 and 26 Counties and their government guidance. They take the following into consideration:
- The Child Care Act 1991
 - Children NI Order 1995
 - Children Act 2004
 - The Children First Act 2015
 - Data Protection Act 2018
 - United Nations Convention on The Rights of The Child
 - Children First National Guidance for The Protection and Welfare of Children 2017 (Department of Children)
 - Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People (2017) (Dept of Health and Children)
 - Criminal Justice Act 2006 [Section 176] Reckless Endangerment Protection for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act 1998 (26 Counties)
 - The Sex Offenders Act 2001(26 Counties)
 - Data Protection Act 2018 (26 Counties)
 - The Criminal Justice (Withholding of Information Act on Offences Against Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012
 - The Criminal Law Act 1967
 - Justice Act NI 2003
 - PSNI Act (Known as Part 5 of the PSNI Act 1997) (6 Counties)
 - The Sex Offenders Act 1997 (6 Counties)
 - The Sexual Offences (NI) Order 2008 (6 Counties)
 - The Sexual Offences Act 2003 (6 Counties)
 - Data Protection Act 1998 (6 Counties)

7. DEFINITIONS AND TERMINOLOGY

- 7.1 The following definitions and terminology are referred to in the Sinn Féin Safeguarding Children Policy:

Child: In the 6 Counties and 26 Counties a child is someone under the age of 18.

Legal Age of Sexual Consent: The Sexual Offences NI Order 2008 stipulates that the legal age of sexual consent in the 6 Counties is 16 years of age. The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2006 states that the age of sexual consent is 17 years of age in the 26 Counties.

Safeguarding: Protecting a child or young person from harm, promoting their welfare, and in doing so creating an environment which enables children and young people to grow, develop and achieve their full potential.¹

Safeguarding concern: When there is information that a child or young person has been harmed, or is at risk of being harmed, by their own or someone else's behaviour.

Safeguarding allegation: Where a person is an employee, party member, activist, elected representative and staff or associated staff, has:

1. Adapted from Children First National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (2017) and Co-operating To Safe Guard Children and Young people 2017.



- a) Behaved in a way that has harmed a child or young person, may have harmed a child or young person, or behaved in a way that might lead to a child or young person being harmed;
- b) Committed or is planning to commit a criminal offence against a child or young person or;
- c) Behaved towards a child or young person in a way that indicates they are, or would be, unsuitable to work with children or young people.

Abuse: Refers to any form of mistreatment that causes harm to a child. This harm may result from direct actions—such as physical or emotional assault—or from a failure to act to protect the child. Abuse can occur within families, institutions, or communities, and may be carried out by people known to the child or, less commonly, by strangers. It can also happen entirely online, or through the use of technology to facilitate abuse in other settings. ²

Poor practice: Sometimes, concerns may relate to poor practice, where an adult's or another young person's behaviour is inappropriate and may be causing distress to a child or young person. In the application of this policy, poor practice includes any behaviour which contravenes the principles of this document or the Sinn Féin Safeguarding Code of Behaviour.

Activist: Any person engaged in an activity related to Sinn Féin which involves spending time, unpaid (except for travel and other approved out-of-pocket expenses), doing something which aims to benefit Sinn Féin.

Party Member: All Party Office Holders, including any member of the Ard Chomhairle, and any registered Party Member.

Elected Representative: Any member of Sinn Féin elected to City and County Council, Dáil Éireann, The Assembly, Seanad Éireann, Westminster, or the European Parliament.

Staff: Staff who are paid directly by Sinn Féin.

Associated Staff: Any person who is employed directly by a Sinn Féin elected representative or an institution on behalf of a Sinn Féin elected representative.

8. AIM

- 8.1 All individuals involved in party activities have a duty to take immediate and appropriate action if they identify or suspect that a child or young person is at risk of harm, or they suspect that a child or young person is suffering abuse. The following are some indicators:
- A child or young person makes a disclosure or reports that they, or someone else, has been abused.
 - The behaviour of an adult or child towards a child gives them cause for concern.
 - They discover or are exposed to child sexual abuse images online or via electronic devices.
 - They identify a breach of the Sinn Féin Safeguarding Code of Behaviour.

2. Adapted from Children First and Co-operating to Safeguarding.



9. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SINN FÉIN SAFEGUARDING CODE OF BEHAVIOUR

- 9.1. The Code of Behaviour (**Appendix E**) outlines the behaviour expected of all party members, activists, elected representatives and staff, staff and volunteers of other organisations who engage with children through Sinn Féin and its activities. Following the Code of Behaviour will protect children from abuse and/or inappropriate behaviour.
- 9.2. Any breach of the Code of Behaviour should be reported to the Designated Liaison Person (DLP). Serious breaches of the Code of Behaviour may also result in a referral being made to the Gardai/PSNI or HSE/HSC if it is thought the breach amounts to a risk of harm to a child and/or constitutes a crime.
- 9.3. All party members, activists, elected representatives, staff and associated staff have a responsibility to be alert to the fact that children may be being abused. They **MUST** report safeguarding concerns. In the 26 counties it is an offence not to do so (**Appendix G**).

10. SINN FÉIN SAFEGUARDING PRINCIPLES

- 10.1 All party members, activists, elected representatives, staff and associated staff can keep children who may be at risk of abuse safe from harm by following the four simple safeguarding principles of:

Table 1. The four safeguarding principles

RECOGNISE	That a child is being harmed or may be at risk of harm
RESPOND	To what you are being told or to what you see
RECORD	Your concerns accurately and comprehensively
REPORT	To DLP/and relevant authorities

Adapted from NSPCC 4Rs of Safeguarding and Child Protection.



11. RECOGNISE: THAT A CHILD IS BEING HARMED OR IS AT RISK OF BEING HARMED

- 11.1** We should all be alert for the signs and indicators that children and young people who interact or engage with Sinn Féin may be suffering abuse. We should remember that children may be abused by other children and young people as well as by adults.
- 11.2** Indicators that a child may be being abused may include the following:
- Unexplained or suspicious injuries such as bruising, cuts or burns, particularly if situated on a part of the body not normally prone to such injuries.
 - An injury for which the explanation seems inconsistent.
 - The young person describes what appears to be an abusive act involving themselves or someone else (a young person or adult).
 - A young person or adult expresses concern about the welfare of another.
 - Anonymous report.
 - Admission or indication by someone of an alleged abuse.
 - Unexplained changes in behaviour (e.g. becoming very quiet, withdrawn or displaying sudden outbursts of temper).
 - Inappropriate sexual awareness.
 - Engaging in sexually explicit behaviour.
 - Sudden or unusual distrust of adults, particularly those with whom a close relationship would normally be expected.
 - Having difficulty in making friends.
 - Being prevented from socialising with other young people.
 - Displaying variations in eating patterns including overeating or loss of appetite; or a sudden weight change.
 - Becoming increasingly dirty or unkempt.
- 11.3** The different types of child abuse and possible indicators and signs that a child is being abused can be found in **Appendix F**.
- 11.4** If you recognise the signs and indicators that a child or young person is being abused and you are alert to the fact that children and young people may be suffering harm, you will be better able to keep them safe by responding to them appropriately and reporting your concerns.

12. RESPOND: APPROPRIATELY TO WHAT YOU ARE BEING TOLD OR WHAT YOU SEE

- 12.1** It is always difficult to hear about or witness harm or abuse experienced by a child or young person. The following points will be helpful for both you and the child should they choose to disclose abuse to you:
- Remain calm to provide reassurance and stability.
 - Listen attentively and allow the person to speak without interruption, ensuring they feel heard.



- At an appropriate moment, clarify that the information may need to be shared with others to ensure their safety—avoid making promises to keep secrets.
 - Let them speak at their own pace without pressuring them or rushing the disclosure.
 - Ask questions only for clarification and refrain from leading questions that might suggest specific answers.
 - Provide reassurance, letting them know they are not to blame and that sharing the information was the right decision.
 - If the concern is significant, explain that trained professionals will be involved to provide necessary support and protection. Make it clear that the information must be shared, even if they wish for it to remain confidential.
 - Inform them of the next steps, including who the information will be shared with, the Designated Liaison Person (DLP), who will decide if the matter should be reported to An Garda Síochána/PSNI, HSE/HSC.
 - If they strongly resist, explain that the matter will be brought to the DLP for further discussion.
 - Be mindful of the possibility of forensic evidence, particularly in cases involving recent physical harm or injury. Preserve any relevant materials such as clothing, where appropriate.
 - You should contact the DLP to report your concern no later than the next working day (see section 14 below).
- 12.2** A child or young person may indicate either through what they say or their behaviour that they have serious concerns or worries but they are unwilling to discuss them with you directly. In these circumstances you should make it clear you are available if they wish to talk further. You should also give them the following contact details: ChildLine - Tel. 0800 1111 6 & 26 Counties (24/7) Samaritans Tel. +44116123 (24/7) 6 & 26 Counties.
- 12.3** During the course of your Sinn Féin activism, you may witness, or someone may tell you that they have seen, an adult or child behave towards a child in a way that is concerning or worrying. In these circumstances you must refer any concerns directly to the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) as soon as possible. If they are not available contact HSE/HSC, see **Appendix C**.
- 12.4** You should not worry about the consequences of reporting your concerns. If you are mistaken it is better to report your concern and enable a proper investigation and assessment to happen than not to report it at all. Safeguarding concerns are managed in confidence and the welfare and safety of children is paramount. It is an offence not to do so, see relevant legislation in **Appendix G**.
- 12.5** You should never:
- Ignore concerns.
 - Confront the person.
 - Discuss the matter with anyone other than those identified in this procedure.
 - Investigate concerns.
- 12.6** There is increasing concern about the distribution of abusive images of children via the internet. Such images should be referred to as ‘child sexual abuse images’ not ‘child pornography’. Remember, it is illegal to take, make, share or distribute abusive images of children and this includes “sexting”.
- 12.7** If you are exposed to child sexual abuse images whilst using the internet or via other mediums as part of Sinn Féin business the DLP must be advised as soon as possible and a Safeguarding Report Form (**Appendix B**) completed and forwarded to the DLP safeguarding@sinnfein.ie who will inform Cathaoirleach an Pháirtí and/or HR.
- 12.8** Child sexual abuse images must never be shared with anyone. The URL (webpage addresses) which contains the suspect images should be reported to the Internet Watch Foundation www.iwf.uk (6 Counties) and hotline.ie (26 counties). All images should be deleted from the PC or device following consultation with the relevant authorities.
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13. RECORD: YOUR CONCERNS CORRECTLY

- 13.1** Be accurate and comprehensive. It is important that you keep an accurate written record of any safeguarding concern that you have or that someone raises with you on the Safeguarding Report Form (**Appendix B**). Your written record should:
- Be made as soon as possible after the event/concern is raised.
 - Contain the date, time, people present, anything said (verbatim if possible).
 - Detail the behaviour and demeanour of the person disclosing the safeguarding issue.
 - Detail any action you have taken (i.e. how you have reduced risk or whether you have referred the matter to your Designated Liaison Person).
 - Be a factual account of what has happened.
- 13.2** Do not record any opinion about what has happened. You are not there to judge or ascertain whether what you are being told is correct.
- 13.3** All Safeguarding Reports must be emailed to the DLP with a follow up phone call.
- 13.4** After discussion with the DLP you may be advised to complete **Appendix C**.
- 13.5** If the DLP is not available or this is an emergency situation contact HSE/HSC see **Appendix C&D**.

14. REPORT: CONCERNS THAT YOU HAVE TO YOUR DESIGNATED LIAISON PERSON

- 14.1** Remember it is not the responsibility of party members, activists, elected representatives, staff and associated staff to decide if child abuse is occurring, but it is their responsibility to act on any concerns by reporting them.
- 14.2** Safeguarding concerns **MUST** be reported immediately (or where this is not possible, at the earliest opportunity) so that the report can be assessed, and action taken to protect the person involved. If any person is at immediate risk of harm or requires medical attention, then the emergency services should be contacted immediately by telephoning 999 (6 Counties) 112 or 999 (26 Counties).
- 14.3** Where circumstances prevent an immediate referral, party members, activists, elected representatives, staff and associated staff **MUST** report safeguarding concerns to the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) no later than the next working day that the concern is raised or received. Tel: **Cliona O’Kane (6 Counties)** or **Joanne McDaid (26 Counties)** or Email your report (**Appendix B**) to: **safeguarding@sinnfein.ie**
- 14.4** Any party member, activist, elected representative, staff and associated staff can contact the DLP for support or guidance.
- 14.5** There are several ways to report a safeguarding concern:
- In urgent cases you may refer concerns directly to HSE/ HSC and/or the An Garda Síochána/PSNI see **Appendix D**.
 - In all cases, escalate the report to the DLP.
 - If the DLP is not available or this is an emergency, you should refer concerns directly to HSE/HSC **Appendix C**.



- In non-urgent cases, party members, activists, elected representatives, staff and associated staff **MUST** report safeguarding concerns directly to the DLP who will offer advice and guidance on next steps.
- Members of the public, the Gardai and PSNI and/or HSE/HSC can report safeguarding concerns via Cathaoirleach an Pháirtí or directly to the DLP.

14.6 If a member of the public, An Garda Síochána/PSNI or HSE/HSC reports a safeguarding concern to another individual or unit within Sinn Féin then the matter must be referred to the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) for assessment as soon as possible and no later than the next working day.

14.7. If for any reason the DLP cannot be contacted, the following organisations can be contacted for advice:

Concern about a child - You should contact HSE or HSC (out of hours services numbers see **Appendix D**).

Local An Garda Síochána/PSNI - Telephone 112 or 999 (26 counties) and 101 or 999 (6 counties).

15. CONFIDENTIALITY AND SHARING INFORMATION

- 15.1** Effective and timely sharing of information is essential for the early indication of a child's needs and to ensure that the most appropriate services are provided to keep them safe.
- 15.2** Those with concerns should be proactive in sharing information as early as possible to help other professionals identify, assess and respond to risks or concerns about the safety and welfare of children.
- 15.3** Fears about sharing information must not be allowed to stand in the way of the need to promote the welfare, and protect the safety, of children, which must always be the paramount concern. The Data Protection Act (2003) (6 Counties) and the Data Protection Act (2018) (26 Counties) do not prevent you sharing information in relation to safeguarding.
- 15.4** The DLP must always be contacted before information is shared with an external organisation except in cases where there is a risk of immediate or serious harm and an emergency referral is necessary. The DLP / Cathaoirleach an Pháirtí will manage the process of sharing information with the PSNI/An Garda Síochána and or HSC/HSE or any third-party organisations.
- 15.5** Party members, activists, elected representatives, staff and associated staff should aim to gain the consent of any individual who is the victim of a safeguarding concern, to share information, but should be mindful of situations where to do so would place a child at increased risk of harm (threats from perpetrator, fear of further abuse).
- 15.6** Information may be shared without consent if the party member, activist, elected representative, staff and associated staff, have reason to believe that there is good reason to do so, and that the sharing of information will enhance the safeguarding of a child in a timely manner. When decisions are made to share or withhold information, party members, activists, elected representatives, staff and associated staff, should record who has been given the information and why.
- 15.7** Information should be kept confidential and should only be shared with Sinn Féin staff members who need to know the information. If party members, activists, elected representatives, staff and associated staff are unsure about whether to share information, or who to share it with, they should contact the DLP (**Appendix A**) for advice before disclosing any information.



16. THE ROLE OF THE DESIGNATED LIAISON PERSON

- 16.1** The Designated Liaison Persons (DLP) are the designated child protection officers for the Party and their role is to be a conduit for concerns reported to Cathaoirleach an Pháirtí. There will be a Designated Liaison Person for the 6 counties and a Designated Liaison Person for the 26 counties. The DLPs will report jointly to An Cathaoirleach to support a best practice approach. The Designated Liaison Person does not hold responsibility for, or manage, safeguarding investigations.
- 16.2** It is the role of the DLP in:
- Liaising with outside agencies and any party members or employees who have child protection or welfare concerns.
 - Ensuring that the standard reporting procedure is followed, so that suspected cases of child neglect or abuse are immediately referred to HSE/HSC and An Garda Síochána/PSNI. Referrals are made using the HSE Standard Reporting Form (26 Counties) and Understanding the Needs of Children and Young People in NI (UNOCINI) (6 Counties) – **Appendix C**.
 - Facilitating follow-up action (e.g. where HSE/HSC may need to contact other party members for information, this will be facilitated by the Designated Liaison Person).
 - Ensuring that they are knowledgeable about child protection and welfare and undertake any training necessary to keep themselves updated on new developments.
 - Advising on best practice and ensure that the party's Safeguarding Policy and Procedures for the Protection of Children and Young People are followed.
 - Ensuring that everyone in the party understands clearly their remit and undergo appropriate training.
 - Organising and/or facilitate training and workshops on the guidelines for child protection and welfare/wellbeing for party members/employees as required.
 - Maintaining proper records on all cases referred to them in a secure and confidential manner and in compliance with Data Protection legislation.
 - Keeping up to date on current developments regarding provision, practice, legal obligations and policy.
 - Notifying Cathaoirleach an Pháirtí, where an allegation is made against a party member or employee.
 - Ensuring that the Safeguarding Policy and Procedures for the Protection of Children and Young People is reviewed every three years, by an tArd Runaí in conjunction with the Designated Liaison Persons.
- 16.3** When a DLP receives a safeguarding concern from party members, activists, elected representatives, staff and associated staff they will record the concern and advise of next steps.
- 16.4** Where there is an immediate risk of harm or where the information contained in the concern requires immediate action the DLP will agree who **MUST** contact An Garda Síochána/PSNI and/or HSE/HSC.

17. THE ROLE OF CATHAOIRLEACH AN PHÁIRTÍ

- As a member of the Ard Chomhairle, Cathaoirleach an Pháirtí holds responsibility for safeguarding.

- 17.1** Cathaoirleach an Pháirtí will be appraised of all safeguarding concerns reported to the DLP.
- 17.2** Cathaoirleach an Pháirtí will be actively involved in decisions taken where concerns have been reported of a party member or employee of Sinn Féin.
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18. REPORT OF CONCERN IN RESPECT OF A PARTY MEMBER

The procedures are as follows:

- 18.1** The Designated Liaison Person (DLP) must be informed immediately if an allegation of abuse/safeguarding concern is made against a member of Sinn Féin.
- 18.2** The DLP will ensure that the matter is reported to the relevant statutory authority, where deemed necessary.
- 18.3** All decisions taken will be recorded.
- 18.4** Cathaoirleach an Pháirtí in consultation with an tArd Runaí, pending an investigation by the relevant statutory authority, may immediately suspend the member.
- 18.5** The party member will be informed of the nature of the allegation and given the opportunity to respond. This response will be recorded.
- 18.6** The member will be reminded of their rights under the Constitution and must be informed of the basis of the allegation.
- 18.7** The DLP will consult with the relevant statutory authority on the form of action to take.
- 18.8** Reasonable grounds for concern will include any violation of the Safeguarding Code of Behaviour. **(Appendix G).**
- 18.9** The DLP, Cathaoirleach an Pháirtí and an tArd Runaí in consultation with the relevant statutory body will decide, on a case-by-case basis, if there is a need for an internal review as a result of any allegation made.
- 18.10** This review will not be to substantiate any allegation of abuse, but to ascertain whether the party's child protection procedures were adhered to.
- 18.11** Allegations of abuse will be investigated by the appropriate statutory authority. Any protective action that is taken will be proportionate.
- 18.12** Cathaoirleach an Pháirtí, in consultation with an tArd Runaí and the Designated Liaison Person, will establish if there are reasonable grounds for suspending a party member for the duration of an investigation of a statutory body's investigation into an incident.
- 18.13** Where an allegation is made about a party member, but the alleged victim has not made a complaint, or not reported the allegation to the statutory authorities, the DLP will still consult with the statutory authorities, and Cathaoirleach an Pháirtí, and in consultation with an tArd Runaí, a decision may be taken to suspend the party member.
- 18.14** The Designated Liaison Person and Cathaoirleach an Pháirtí (where relevant) will liaise closely with the HSE or HSC or An Gardaí or the PSNI to ensure that actions taken by the organisation do not undermine or frustrate any investigations.
- 18.15** Cathaoirleach an Pháirtí and an tArd Runaí may after suspension, recommend dismissal of the member in accordance with the Constitution and Rules.
- 18.16** Where the concern relates to Cathaoirleach an Pháirtí, the matter shall be escalated to the Party leader or designated governance lead, who shall initiate appropriate safeguarding and disciplinary procedures.
- 18.17** Where the concern relates to the DLP, the matter will be escalated to Cathaoirleach an Pháirtí, who will initiate appropriate safeguarding and disciplinary procedures.



19. REPORT OF CONCERN IN RESPECT OF AN EMPLOYEE

- 19.1 Allegations made against party employees will be addressed using the employee handbook.
- 19.2 All concerns should be made immediately to the DLP.
- 19.3 The DLP will report to Human Resources (HR) and Cathaoirleach an Pháirtí.
- 19.4 The DLP, HR Manager and Cathaoirleach an Pháirtí will decide who will inform the employee that an allegation has been made against them and the nature of the allegation.
- 19.5 The employee will be given an opportunity to respond. The response will be noted and the information included when making the standard report to HSE/HSC if the response is received within the mandatory reporting timeframe.
- 19.6 Further action will be guided by the employment contract and the rules of natural justice. The first priority is to ensure that no child is exposed to unnecessary risk.
- 19.7 Any protective action that is taken will be proportionate. In certain cases, for example in cases involving gross misconduct, consideration will be given to suspension on full pay while an investigation is conducted.
- 19.8 Follow up action on the allegation must be taken in consultation with the statutory authorities. After this consultation, when dealing with the question of the future position of the employee, the designated person will advise the employee of the agreed procedures to be followed.
- 19.9 The Disciplinary and Dismissal Procedures outlined in the Employee Handbook apply to party employees. All stages of any process initiated will be recorded. When a safeguarding concern is reported, the HR Manager & Cathaoirleach an Pháirtí will determine what action is needed. The action taken may include monitoring the situation, a referral to HSE/HSC and or An Garda Síochána/PSNI or taking no action. Whatever decision is taken they will record it on the Safeguarding Investigation Form, with a rationale, even if no further action is to be taken. A decision to take no further action, monitor, or defer a decision is taken as seriously as a decision to make a referral. The party will maintain close contact with HSE/HSC and/or Gardaí/PSNI during the course of their investigation.
- 19.10 The HR Manager & Cathaoirleach an Pháirtí must consider if consent is required to share the concern with the statutory agencies. The HR Manager & Cathaoirleach an Pháirtí may consult with one of the statutory services, or the Sinn Féin solicitor or legal advisor if they are unsure how to proceed with the concern or any aspects of information sharing.
- 19.11 Any referrals to statutory services must be made by the by the next working day, unless it is an emergency, or they consider it better for another person to make the referral and report back.
- 19.12 Any referrals to statutory services must be followed up in writing within 48 hours and feedback received/ sought within 3 working days of having made the referral to check what action is being taken. It is the responsibility of the HR Manager to ensure this takes place and to ensure that comprehensive records are maintained.
- 19.13 Each HSE/ HSC agency has a process for receiving referrals and Sinn Féin must use the relevant process in their area. The member of staff making the referral will complete the relevant referral form when making a formal referral about child protection. **(Appendix C)**.
- 19.14 The HR Manager/DLP will oversee the management of all safeguarding allegations in relation to employees and hold accountability for them.

20. REPORT OF CONCERN IN RESPECT OF AN ASSOCIATED STAFF MEMBER

- 20.1 Report the matter to the Designated Liaison Person.
- 20.2 The DLP will ensure the matter is reported to the relevant statutory authorities, where deemed necessary.
- 20.3 All decisions will be documented and recorded.
- 20.4 The employer of the individual will be informed within 48 hours of becoming aware of the safeguarding concern, allowing them to activate their safeguarding procedures.

21. ESCALATION OF SAFEGUARDING CONCERN

- 21.1 If, after reporting a concern, it is evident that HSE/HSC or other agency has not taken appropriate next steps in relation to the safeguarding concern, then the DLP (all non-employee referrals) or HR Manager (in employee referrals) will determine if the matter needs escalating.
- 21.2 The Child safeguarding boards - Safeguarding Board Northern Ireland (SBNI) (6 Counties) and TUSLA complaints procedure (26 Counties) will have specific procedures to be followed in such instances where escalation is warranted. Contact the manager of the Gateway team (**Appendix D**) or email tellus@tusla.ie to escalate a concern. A record of any decisions and outcomes must be kept by the DLP in relation to non-employees and the HR Manager, in relation to employees.

22. COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

- 22.1 If, at the conclusion of the management of a safeguarding concern, party members, activists, elected representatives, staff and associated staff believes the response by HR and or Cathaoirleach an Pháirtí was inappropriate or insufficient they should follow the procedure below.
 1. Any concerns should be raised with the HR Manager in relation to employees and Designated Liaison Person (DLP) in relation to party members. Any approach will be treated in strictest confidence and the complainant's identity will not be disclosed without their prior consent.
 2. If the person does not feel confident contacting either the HR Manager or DLP, they should contact an tArd Runaí of Sinn Féin to report their concern.
 3. If they do not feel their concern has been addressed at stages 1 and/or 2 they should contact the NSPCC helpline (6 counties) by telephoning 0808 800 5000 or ISPCCC helpline (26 counties) 1800 66 66 66 to report their concern.

23. POLICY APPROVAL AND REVIEW

- 23.1 This policy and procedure was approved and adopted by the Ard Chomhairle on 28th February 2026
- 23.2 Monthly reports will be submitted to the Ard Chomhairle in the event that any safeguarding concerns have been reported during that month.
- 23.3 The Sinn Féin Safeguarding Policies, Procedures, Safeguarding Code of Behaviour and associated guidance will be reviewed every three years by the Ard Chomhairle or sooner if required by legislative change or if an incident warrants it.



Appendix A



Key contacts

Sinn Féin

Sinn Féin Ard Oifig / Head Office

44 Parnell Square
Dublin 1
Ireland
Telephone: +353 1 8726 100
Email: admin@sinnfein.ie

Joanne McDaid

Designated Liaison Person 26 Counties
Email: safeguarding@sinnfein.ie
Contact Ard Oifig for telephone number

Cliona O’Kane

Designated Liaison Person 6 Counties
Email: safeguarding@sinnfein.ie
Contact Ard Oifig for telephone number

Caoimhe Tolan

Human Resources Manager
Email: hr@sinnfein.ie
Contact Ard Oifig for telephone number



Appendix B



Safeguarding Report Form

Complete as much detail as possible. For advice completing this form please contact the Designated Liaison Person: **safeguarding@sinnfein.ie**, contact Ard Oifig on **+353 1 8726 100** for telephone number of Designated Liaison Person. If any person is at immediate risk of harm or needs medical attention contact the emergency services on **999**.

1. YOUR DETAILS

Name:
Contact Telephone Number and Email:
Address:
Are you a member or employee of Sinn Féin? (enter your membership number):
Role or position held:
When did you become aware of the information of concern or the allegation?
Date and time:

2. CHILD(REN) INVOLVED (A CHILD IS ANY PERSON AGED UNDER EIGHTEEN YEARS OLD)

Please give the full names and ages of any children involved. Please include any contact details, the address of the child and parent/guardian's names if possible:

3. INDIVIDUAL(S) ABOUT WHOM YOU ARE CONCERNED

If you are concerned about the behaviour of an adult or child please provide their name and any details you have about them. Please include as much detail as possible:
Describe the behaviour you are concerned about. Please give as much detail as possible:

4. YOUR SAFEGUARDING CONCERN

What are you concerned about? Please provide as much detail as possible. Include the names and any details of the people involved, what happened and where it happened. Please include details of any vulnerabilities any of the people involved have:

Thank you for completing the Safeguarding Report Form.


Please email this form to **safeguarding@sinnfein.ie** and telephone Cliona O’Kane (6 Counties) or Joanne McDaid (26 Counties), contact Ard Oifig on **+353 1 8726 100** to access telephone numbers for Designated Liaison Persons, to report your concern. All referrals are treated in the strictest confidence.



Appendix C



HSE/TUSLA Standard Report Form



An Ghníomhaireacht um
Linnáil agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

Child Protection and Welfare Report Form

MANDATED PERSONS AND NON MANDATED PERSONS
(Children First Act 2015 & Children First National Guidance)

Use block letters when filling out this form.
Fields marked with an * are mandatory.

1. Tusla Area (this is where the child resides)*

2. Date of Report*

3. Details of Child

First Name*		Surname*	
Male*	<input type="checkbox"/>	Female*	<input type="checkbox"/>
Address*	Date of Birth*		
	Estimated Age*		
	School Name		
	School Address		
Eircode			

4. Details of Concerns*

Please complete the following section with as much detail about the specific child protection or welfare concern or allegation as possible. Include dates, times, incident details and names of anyone who observed any incident. Please include the parents and child's view, if known. Please attach additional sheets, if necessary

Please see 'Tusla Children First – A Guide for the Reporting of Child Protection and Welfare Concerns' for additional assistance on the steps to consider in making a report to Tusla

5. Type of Concern

Child Welfare Concern	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Emotional Abuse	<input type="checkbox"/>	Physical Abuse
Neglect	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sexual Abuse

6. Details of Reporter

First Name		Surname	
Address if reporting in a professional capacity, please use your professional address		Organisation	
		Position Held	
		Mobile No.	
		Telephone No.	
Eircode		Email Address	

For Full proforma click on link below

<https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Child Protection and Welfare Report Form FINAL.pdf>



Appendix C



HSC Report process

In the 6 counties, if you have a safeguarding concern about a child, you should refer the concern to the local Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust's Gateway Team, which is the first point of contact for all new child protection referrals.

HOW TO MAKE A REFERRAL TO THE GATEWAY TEAM

STEP 1: IDENTIFY THE RELEVANT HSC TRUST

The north of Ireland is divided into five Health and Social Care Trusts:

1. Belfast Trust
2. Northern Trust
3. Southeastern Trust
4. Southern Trust
5. Western Trust

STEP 2: CONTACT THE GATEWAY TEAM

You can make a referral by telephone during office hours. If it's outside of working hours, you should contact the Regional Emergency Social Work Service.

The Gateway Team contact numbers are provided in **Appendix D**.

STEP 3: PROVIDE INFORMATION

When making a referral, provide:

- Your name and role (if professional)
- Details of the child or young person (name, DOB, address)
- Nature of the concern
- Any immediate risks
- Relevant family details
- Whether the family is aware of the referral (unless it puts the child at further risk)

You may be asked to follow up your phone call with a written referral using the UNOCINI (Understanding the Needs of Children in Northern Ireland) framework. Please use link below.

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/understanding-needs-children-northern-ireland-unocini-guidance>



Appendix D



CONTACT INFORMATION FOR TUSLA, THE CHILD AND FAMILY AGENCY ADVICE OFFICERS, SOCIAL SERVICES, GARDAÍ AND PSNI AND OTHER RELEVANT ORGANISATIONS

TUSLA NUMBERS

County	Contact Number	County	Contact Number
Carlow	052 6177302	Limerick	061 588688
Cavan	049 4369801	Longford	044 9353997
West Cavan	071 9155133	Louth	046 9098560
Clare	061 588688	Mayo	094 9049137
Cork	021 2373774	Meath	046 9098560
Donegal	074 9102233	Monaghan	049 4369801
Dublin North	01 8708000	Offaly	044 9353997
Dublin North City	01 7718670	Roscommon	091 881860
Dublin South Central	01 6400650	Sligo	071 9155133
Dublin South East	01 9213400	North Tipperary	061 588688
Dublin South West	045 839300	South Tipperary	052 6177302
Galway	091 881860	Waterford	053 9198134
Kerry	064 6678065	Westmeath	044 9353997
Kildare	045 839300	Wexford	053 9198134
Kilkenny	052 6177302	Wicklow	01 9213400
Laois	044 9353997	West Wicklow	045 839300
Leitrim	071 9155133		

Further information is available from the TUSLA, the Child and Family Agency on their website www.tusla.ie

GARDA TELEPHONE NUMBERS

For emergency reports please contact your local Garda Station, a full list of Garda stations is available at www.garda.ie

SOCIAL CARE TRUST NUMBERS

Gateway Teams

Belfast Trust Tel: 028 9050 7000

Out of hours Tel: 028 9504 9999

Northern Trust Tel: 0300 1234 333

Out of Hours Tel: 0800 197 9995

South Eastern Trust Tel: 0300 1000 300

Out of hours Tel: 028 9056 5444



Southern Trust Tel: 028 3756 7100

Out of hours Tel: 028 9504 9999

Western Trust Tel: 028 7131 4090 (Derry) 028 8283 5156 (Omagh) 028 6634 4103 (Enniskillen)

Out of hours Tel: 028 9504 9999

PSNI TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Should you need to report any incident of child abuse contact:

The PSNI on **101**, the non-emergency telephone number,
where you will be put in contact with a specially trained officer.

In an emergency situation dial 999



Appendix E



SINN FÉIN SAFEGUARDING CODE OF BEHAVIOUR

The purpose of this code of behaviour is to clarify how to interact with children and young people in a way that respects them as individuals and their right to be treated fairly, listened to and valued. Sinn Féin upholds a commitment to treat all children, i.e. all persons under the age of 18, and young people equally, regardless of any perceived differences between them.

This code applies to all members of Sinn Féin at all levels of the organisation. Members must be aware of the Code of Behaviour when taking part in activities with young people. The Code of Behaviour is to protect you and guide you in your engagement with children and young people.

When interacting with children or young people, members should:

- prioritise the well-being and safety of the child or young person at all times;
- always attempt to develop a positive attitude among young people that respects the personal space, safety and privacy of their peers;
- never take or use photographs of children without prior written consent of a parent or guardian;
- avoid becoming too involved with or spending a lot of time with any one child or young person in the course of your party work;
- never invite or allow a child or young person into your home where they will be alone with you;
- avoid meeting alone with a young person in a room. Where this cannot be avoided, you should leave the door open or inform another colleague that you will be alone in the room with the individual in question;
- never single out a particular child for unfair criticism, favouritism or ridicule;
- never engage in rough physical or sexually provocative activity;
- never physically punish or be verbally abusive to a child or young person;
- never allow children or young people to use inappropriate language unchallenged;
- never make sexually suggestive comments, even in fun;
- never share a bedroom with a child or young person you are not related to, even with parental consent;
- never do things of a personal nature for a child or young person that they can do for themselves;
- if providing transport to participants during their involvement with the party, ensure that there are two or more passengers in the car. Any transport should only be provided with the full knowledge and consent of the child or young person and their parents or guardians;
- ensure the ratio of adult party members to children or young people is appropriate when doing various activities. There should be at least one adult for every ten young people and a minimum of two adults per group. This number may need to be varied in accordance with the ratio of male to female participants, the gender of the leaders, and the type of activity being undertaken.
- never fail to act when you witness abuse or bullying;
- never allow allegations made by a child or young person to go unchallenged, unrecorded or not acted upon;
- if you have a concern about the nature of a particular relationship involving yourself or another member or child or young person, you should discuss it with a supervisor or Designated Liaison Person.



Appendix F

Types and indicators of child abuse and neglect

The information below has been adapted from Children First National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (2017) and Co-operating To Safeguard Children and Young People 2017.

Some of the following signs might be indicators of abuse or neglect:

- Children whose behaviour changes – they may become aggressive, challenging, disruptive, withdrawn or clingy, or they might have difficulty sleeping or start wetting the bed.
- Children with clothes which are ill-fitting and/or dirty or with consistently poor hygiene.
- Children who make strong efforts to avoid specific family members or friends, without an obvious reason.
- Children who talk about being left home alone, with inappropriate carers or with strangers.
- Children who reach developmental milestones, such as learning to speak or walk, late, with no medical reason.
- Children who are regularly missing from school or education or who are reluctant to go home after school.
- Parents who are dismissive and non-responsive to professionals' concerns.
- Parents who collect their children from activities when inebriated, or under the influence of drugs.
- Children who drink alcohol regularly from an early age.
- Children who are concerned for younger siblings without explaining why.
- Children who talk about running away; and
- Children who shy away from being touched or flinch at sudden movements.

There are a number of different types of abuse which children may suffer. Each has its own specific indicators, which you should be alert to.

PHYSICAL ABUSE

A form of abuse which 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.

Physical abuse can happen in any family, but children may be more at risk if their parents have problems with drugs, alcohol and mental health or if they live in a home where domestic abuse occurs. Babies and disabled children also have a higher risk of suffering physical abuse. Physical abuse can also occur outside of the family environment.

Possible indicators are:

- Children with frequent injuries;
- Children with unexplained or unusual fractures or broken bones;
- Children with unexplained: bruises, cuts, burns, scalds, bite marks.

EMOTIONAL ABUSE

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 a child that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person.
- 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.
- Serious bullying – including online bullying through social networks, online games or mobile phones – by a child's peers.

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 also feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. These may include interactions that are beyond a child's developmental capability, as well as overprotection and limitation of exploration and learning, or preventing the child participating in normal social interaction.



Possible indicators are:

- Children who are excessively withdrawn, fearful, or anxious about doing something wrong.
- Parents or carers who withdraw their attention from their child, giving the child the 'cold shoulder'.
- Parents or carers blaming their problems on their child.
- Parents or carers who humiliate their child, for example, by name-calling or making negative comparisons.

SEXUAL ABUSE

Involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving violence, or whether 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.

Possible indicators of sexual abuse are:

- Children who display knowledge or interest in sexual acts inappropriate to their age.
- Children who use sexual language or have sexual knowledge beyond their years.
- Children who ask others to behave sexually or play sexual games.
- Children with physical sexual health problems, including soreness in the genital and anal areas, sexually transmitted infections or underage pregnancy.

SEXTING

Sexting is when someone shares sexual, naked or semi-naked images or videos of themselves or others or sends sexual messages. It's online abuse if a child or young person is pressured or coerced into creating or sending these types of images. It is illegal to take, possess or share 'indecent images' of anyone under 18 years, even if they are the person in the picture.

CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur using technology.

Possible indicators of sexual exploitation are:

- Children who appear with unexplained gifts or new possessions;
- Children who associate with other young people involved in exploitation;
- Children who have older boyfriends or girlfriends;
- Children who suffer from sexually transmitted infections or become pregnant;
- Children who suffer from changes in emotional well-being;
- Children who misuse drugs and alcohol;
- Children who go missing for periods of time or regularly come home late;
- Children who regularly miss school or education or don't take part in education.

NEGLECT

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 or development. Neglect may occur during pregnancy because of maternal substance abuse. 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 caregivers), or;
- Ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment.

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

Neglect may occur if a parent becomes physically or mentally unable to care for a child. A parent may also have an addiction to alcohol or drugs, which could impair their ability to keep a child safe or result in them prioritising buying drugs, or alcohol, over food,



clothing or warmth for the child. Neglect may occur during pregnancy because of maternal drug or alcohol abuse.

Possible indicators are:

- Children who are living in a home that is persistently dirty or unsafe;
- Children who are left hungry or dirty;
- Children who are left without adequate clothing for the weather conditions;
- Children who are living in dangerous conditions, i.e. around drugs, alcohol or violence;
- Children who are often angry, aggressive or self-harm;
- Children who fail to receive basic health care;
- Parents who fail to seek medical treatment when their children are ill or are injured.

HONOUR BASED VIOLENCE

There is no specific criminal offence of “honour-based crime”. It is an umbrella term to encompass various offences covered by existing legislation. Honour based violence (HBV) can be described as a collection of practices, which are used to control behaviour within families or other social groups to protect perceived cultural and religious beliefs and/or honour. Such violence can occur when perpetrators perceive that a relative has shamed the family and/or community by breaking their honour code.

The PSNI and support groups have a common definition of HBV:

“‘Honour based violence’ is a crime or incident which has or may have been committed to protect or defend the honour of the family and/or community.”

Honour based violence cuts across all cultures and communities.

The perceived immoral behaviour which could precipitate HBV include:

- Inappropriate make-up or dress;
- The existence of a boyfriend;
- Kissing or intimacy in a public place;
- Rejecting a forced marriage;
- Pregnancy outside of marriage;
- Being a victim of rape;
- Inter-faith relationships;
- Leaving a spouse or seeking divorce.

Incidents, in addition to those listed above, which may precede HBV include:

- Physical abuse;
- Emotional abuse, including;
- House arrest and excessive restrictions;
- Denial of access to the telephone, internet, passport and friends.
- Threats to kill;
- Pressure to go abroad. Victims are sometimes persuaded to return to their country of origin under false pretences, when in fact the intention could be to kill them.

Children sometimes truant from school to obtain relief from being policed at home by relatives. They can feel isolated from their family and social networks and become depressed, which can on some occasions lead to self-harm or suicide.

Families may feel shame long after the incident that brought about dishonour occurred, and therefore the risk of harm to a child can persist. This means that the young person’s new boy/girlfriend, baby (if pregnancy caused the family to feel ‘shame’), associates or siblings may be at risk of harm.

FORCED MARRIAGE

A Forced Marriage (FM) is a marriage conducted without the valid consent of one or both parties and where duress is a factor. Many people (particularly girls and young women), some as young as nine, are forced into marriage each year. A ‘forced’ marriage, as distinct from a consensual ‘arranged’ one, is a marriage conducted without the full consent of both parties and where duress is a factor. Duress cannot be justified on religious or cultural grounds.

Some forced marriages take place in Ireland with no overseas element, while others involve a partner travelling from overseas or someone living in Ireland being taken abroad.

The reasons given by parents who force their children to marry include protecting their children, building stronger families, strengthening family links, protecting family honour (e.g. promiscuity or homosexuality), retaining or acquiring wealth, appeasement etc.



Suspicious that a child may be forced into marriage may arise in several ways, including:

- A family history of older siblings leaving education early and marrying early;
- Depressive behaviour including self-harming and attempted suicide;
- Unreasonable restrictions such as being kept at home by their parents ('house arrest') or being unable to complete their education;
- A child being in conflict with their parents;
- A child going missing / running away;
- A child always being accompanied including to school and doctors' appointments;
- A child talking about an upcoming family holiday that they are worried about, fears that they will be taken out of education and kept abroad; or
- A child directly disclosing that they are worried s/ he will be forced to marry.

Information about a forced marriage may come from one of the child's peer groups, a relative or member of the child's local community, from another professional or when other family issues are addressed, such as domestic violence between parents.

FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is the partial or total removal of external female genitalia for non-medical reasons. It's also known as female circumcision or cutting. Religious, social or cultural reasons are sometimes given for FGM. However, FGM is child abuse. It's dangerous and a criminal offence. There are no medical reasons to carry out FGM. It doesn't enhance fertility, and it doesn't make childbirth safer. It is used to control female sexuality and can cause severe and long-lasting damage to physical and emotional health.

A girl at immediate risk of FGM may not know what's going to happen. But she might talk about, or you may become aware of:

- A long holiday abroad or going 'home' to visit family;
- Relative or cutter visiting from abroad;
- A special occasion or ceremony to 'become a woman' or get ready for marriage;
- A female relative being cut – a sister, cousin, or an older female relative such as a mother or aunt.

A girl or woman who's had female genital mutilation (FGM) may:

- Have difficulty walking, standing or sitting;
- Spend longer in the bathroom or toilet;

- Appear withdrawn, anxious or depressed.
- Have unusual behaviour after an absence from school or college;
- Be particularly reluctant to undergo normal medical examinations;
- Ask for help but may not be explicit about the problem due to embarrassment or fear.

RADICALISATION

Radicalisation can be very difficult to spot. Signs that may indicate a child is being radicalised include:

- Isolating themselves from family and friends;
- Talking as if from a scripted speech;
- Unwillingness or inability to discuss their views;
- A sudden disrespectful attitude towards others;
- Increased levels of anger;
- Increased secretiveness, especially around internet use.

Children who are at risk of radicalisation may have low self-esteem or be victims of bullying or discrimination. Extremists might target them and tell them they can be part of something special, later brainwashing them into cutting themselves off from their friends and family. However, these signs don't necessarily mean a child is being radicalised – it may be normal teenage behaviour or a sign that something else is wrong.

PEER ON PEER ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION

Young people can be sexually exploited by people of a similar age as well as adults. Research is increasingly demonstrating that a significant number of sexually exploited young people have been abused by their peers.

Young people can be exploited by their peers in several ways. In some cases, young women and young men who have been exploited themselves by adults or peers, will recruit other young people to be abused. In other instances, sexual bullying in schools and other social settings can result in the sexual exploitation

of young people by their peers. Sexual exploitation also occurs within and between street gangs, where sex is used in exchange for safety, protection, drugs and simply belonging. For 16- and 17-year-olds who are in abusive relationships, what may appear to be a case of domestic violence may also involve sexual exploitation. In all cases of peer-on-peer exploitation, a power imbalance will still inform the relationship, but this inequality will not necessarily be the result of an age gap between the abuser and the abused.



ADDITIONAL VULNERABILITIES

Disabled children and young people and those with behaviour/conduct disorders, learning difficulties/disabilities, speech and language difficulties and deaf children are at greater risk of abuse. Disabled children and young people are more than three times more vulnerable to abuse.

This is because:

- They may be physically dependent on the person abusing them for personal care, medication or support. They may be unable to run away or afraid to tell someone about the abuse.
- They may find it difficult, or be unable, to communicate making it difficult to tell someone about the abuse.
- Abuse can cause a disability or make an existing disability worse.
- Many adults don't believe that deaf or disabled children can be abused and are therefore less likely to recognise the signs of abuse and report them.



Appendix G

Relevant Legislation and Procedural Guidance from Statutory Agencies and Other Bodies

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is a set of minimum standards that promotes the rights of the child worldwide. It contains many key Articles that have influenced national childcare and welfare legislation including the definition of a child as a person under 18 years of age. It specifically outlines non-discrimination rights and the rights of the child to express their opinion and to be heard. The Convention is a binding international treaty, and all signatories are subject to monitoring on how they implement the Convention in their own Country.

Children First National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017 (Department Of Children)

These 26 Counties Guidelines seek to assist people in identifying and reporting child abuse and to improve professional practice in both statutory and voluntary agencies and organisations that provide services for children and families. Children First caters for all children, and not just children who are victims of any form of abuse. They also highlight the importance of consistency between policies and procedures across health services and other statutory and voluntary (including sporting) organisations. The Guidelines particularly emphasise that the welfare of children is of paramount importance.

Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People (2017) (Department of Health and Children)

Sets out the principles of best practice and how to promote the rights of children. It provides advice on developing safe recruitment practices and strategies on developing safe management practice and policies within organisations while clearly stating the principle that child safety is paramount. It also suggests ways that organisations could raise awareness among their staff and volunteers about child abuse and how staff should respond to accidents or complaints and alleged or suspected abuse.

The Child Care Act, 1991 (26 Counties)

The purpose of the Act was to update the law in relation to the care of children who are assaulted, ill-treated, neglected or sexually abused or who are at risk. It places a statutory duty on former Health Boards (now the Health Service Executive) to promote the welfare

of children who are not receiving adequate care and protection and highlights the basic principle that the welfare of the child is of paramount importance. The Act defines a child as any person under the age of 18 years, excluding a person who is or who has been married.

The Children NI Order 1995 (6 Counties)

The law aims to establish new balances regarding the rights and responsibilities of parents, the duties of the government to protect child welfare, and children's own views of their needs and how they can be met. The order rests on five principles: the child's welfare as the paramount consideration, parental responsibility, partnerships among families and the government, prevention, and protection. The law establishes two new orders: the care order and the supervision order. Other possible orders include contact orders, residence orders, prohibited steps orders, and specific issues orders.

The Children First Act 2015 (26 Counties)

The Children First Act was enacted on 19th November 2015 and commenced in full on 11th December 2017. The Act places several statutory obligations on specific groups of professionals and on organisations providing services to children. Through the provisions of the Act, it is intended to:

- Raise awareness of child abuse and neglect
- Provide for mandatory reporting by key professionals
- Improve child safeguarding arrangements in organisations providing services to children
- Provide for cooperation and information-sharing between agencies when Tusla – Child and Family Agency, is undertaking child protection.

The Criminal Justice (Withholding of Information on Offences Against Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012

Makes it an offence if a person knows or believes that an offence has been committed by another person against a child, and he or she has information which he or she knows or believes might be of material assistance in securing the apprehension, prosecution or conviction of that other person for that offence and fails without reasonable excuse to disclose that information as soon as it is practicable to do so to a



member of the Garda Síochána.

Criminal Justice Act, 2006 [SECTION 176] Reckless Endangerment

Section 176, sub section (2) of the 2006 Criminal Justice Act created an offence of 'reckless endangerment of children'. This places a requirement on a person with authority or control over a child or over an abuser not to intentionally or recklessly endanger the child by leaving or placing them in a situation of substantial risk of serious harm or sexual abuse. It states that they have committed an offence if they have failed to take reasonable steps to protect a child that they know may be in a risk situation.

Protection For Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act 1998 (26 Counties)

Provides immunity from civil liability to any person who reports child abuse 'reasonably and in good faith to designated officers of the HSE or any member of An Garda Síochána. The Act also provides significant protection for employees who report child abuse. A feature of the Act is that it covers the offence of 'false reporting' where a person makes a report of child abuse to the appropriate authorities "knowing that statement to be false". This is a new criminal offence designed to protect innocent persons from malicious reports.

The Sex Offenders Act 2001(26 Counties)

The main purpose of the Act is to impose a requirement on certain sex offenders to inform An Garda Síochána of their names and addresses and any changes to these details in order to ensure that this information is kept up to date. The Act provides for post release supervision of sex offenders by the Probation and Welfare Service and makes it an offence for those who seek or accept work involving unsupervised contact with children without informing the employer of their conviction. If a person is convicted of a sexual offence outside Ireland, where that offence would constitute a sexual offence in Ireland, they are subject to the same Garda notification requirements if they subsequently come to live in Ireland. If they fail to notify the Gardaí of their details, then the Gardaí can prosecute them for noncompliance or failure to comply with the requirements.

GDPR (2018) and DATA PROTECTION ACT 2018 (26 counties)

The eight rules of Data Protection as outlined in the Act are: Obtain and process information fairly, keep it only for one or more specified, explicit and lawful purposes, use and disclose it only in ways compatible with these purposes, keep it safe and secure, keep it accurate, complete and up-to-date, ensure that it is adequate, relevant and not excessive, retain it for no longer than is necessary for the purpose or purposes, give a copy of his/her personal data to an individual, on request.



