

Seirbhísí Fóillíochta
dlr
dlr Leisure Services

Child Protection Policy

APRIL 2009

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Introduction

Child abuse is a difficult subject, and it is understandable that people may be reluctant to acknowledge that it exists. Members of the public or professionals may be afraid of being thought of as insensitive, breaking confidences or appearing disloyal if they report suspected child abuse. However, early intervention may reduce the risk of serious harm occurring to a child at that time.

DLR Leisure Services has a legal and moral responsibility to create and maintain the safest possible environment for children to enjoy sports and other recreational, social and leisure pursuits provided directly by us. DLR Leisure Services accepts that in all matters concerning child protection, the welfare and protection of the young person is paramount.

This policy document is to safeguard children placed in our care and to facilitate the best possible professional practice from DLR Leisure Services, its staff and volunteers.

Who Does this Child Protection Policy Apply to?

This child protection policy applies to all staff, and volunteers. Everyone to whom the policy applies to, is required to familiarise themselves with the policy before becoming involved with children

Policy Statement

DLR Leisure Services is committed to a child-centred approach to our work with children in all services and activities operated by the Centres. We undertake to provide a safe environment where the welfare of the child is paramount. We will adhere to the Children First National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children by implementing procedures covering:-

- Appropriate recruitment and selection of employees and volunteers;
- Implementing the Garda Vetting Procedures for all relevant employees and volunteers;
- Appropriate management, supervision and training of employees;
- Providing clear procedures for parents and children to voice their concerns or lodge complaints if they feel unsure or unhappy about any issue;
- The reporting, investigation and recording of incidents and accidents; complaints made against DLR Leisure Services, its employees/volunteers
- The reporting of suspected or disclosed abuse confidentially
- Allegations of misconduct or abuse by employees

Policy Aims

This Child Protection Policy is provided as part of an induction programme to all those employed, whether being paid or unpaid, who will have direct contact with children. The aims are as follows:-

- To create a healthy and safe environment at all activities sport programmes and sessions.
- To ensure that children are listened to and kept safe from harm.
- To support and encourage parents to voice their opinions regarding the welfare of their children.
- To ensure that staff and volunteers who administer leisure facility sessions are well informed, supported and enabled to provide the best possible practice.

Policy Objectives

The Child Protection Policy objectives are as follows:-

- To raise staff and volunteers level of awareness about child abuse and its various forms.
- To raise the level of awareness about what children are entitled to be protected from for staff and volunteers.
- To ensure that all staff are able to recognise the signs of child abuse.
- To promote general health, welfare and full development of children during all leisure facility sessions.
- To develop effective procedures in recording and responding to accidents and complaints regarding alleged or suspected incidents of abuse.

Employment Issues

Recruitment and Selection of Staff/Volunteers

All applicants who will provide recreational opportunities for children will complete a disclosure from the Criminal Records Bureau to ensure that there are no irregularities in their background, which may give cause for concern. All new employees whether being paid or unpaid will be provided with the Child Protection Policy and asked to sign to confirm that they will abide by it.

Application forms are designed to ascertain as much information as possible, such as but not limited to:-

- Past career, relevant interests, any gaps in employment and reasons for leaving, educational, National Governing Body and First Aid qualifications.
- Consent for a Criminal Records Bureau Disclosure
- At least two references are taken up and where relevant followed up by letter or telephone. References taken up will ascertain the person's suitability to work with children.
- It is made clear that all information remains confidential.
- Personal identification will be confirmed by reference to a passport, driving licence, birth or marriage certificate, National Insurance Number and utility bill.
- That coaches hold adequate professional indemnity and/or personal liability insurance to cover their coaching role.

Induction and Training

The recruitment and selection process is followed up by the relevant training.

- Staff are made aware that child abuse can and does occur and that it could be perpetrated by colleagues, who are members of staff or volunteers within DLR Leisure Services.
- It is made clear that most abusers are not the monsters most people picture them to be, but ordinary men and women, more commonly men and at the extreme they are clever, manipulative and powerful.
- Staff are made aware that children can find it difficult to tell or talk about abuse. They need to be listened to, taken seriously and have their concerns acted upon.
- Staff are made aware of that they need to do in response to concerns reaching their eyes and ears.

Supervision

In general, staff work most effectively where there is a supervisory structure that ensures that they are supported, managed and developed. DLR Leisure Services will ensure that the Designated member of staffs are sensitive to any concerns about abuse, act on them immediately and offer support to those who report abuse.

It is the responsibility of the Designated member of staff to monitor good practice, this can be done in a number of ways, for example:-

- Observation of coaching practice

- Annual appraisals of teachers/coaches
- Provide feedback on performance against work programme
- Feedback from participants who attend activities at the leisure centres.

Information to be provided to employees

Recognition of Abuse

It is not always easy to recognise a situation where abuse may occur or has already taken place even for those experienced in working with child abuse. DLR Leisure Services acknowledges its staff, whether in a paid or voluntary capacity are not experts at such recognition. It is important therefore to recognise that it is not their responsibility to decide whether or not child abuse is taking place, but to report where they have concerns or suspicions where an allegation has been made.

The concern that the child may have been abused could relate to something which has happened whilst the child is engaged in an activity provided by DLR Leisure Services, or it may be a disclosure made by the child to a staff member or volunteer or a concern about something the child has experienced outside of the activity provided by DLR Leisure Services. Either would require a proactive response.

There are many ways in which child abuse may manifest itself, for example:-

- 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 child describes what appears to be an abusive act involving him/her;
- Someone else, a child or adult, expresses concern about the welfare of another child;
- Unexplained changes in behaviour over time, e.g. becoming very quiet, withdrawn or displaying sudden outbursts of temper;
- Inappropriate sexual awareness;
- Engages in sexually explicit behaviour in games;
- Is distrustful of adults, particularly those with whom a close relationship will normally be expected;
- Has difficulty in making friends;

- Is prevented from socialising with other children;
- Displays variations in eating patterns including overeating or loss of appetite;
- Loses weight for no apparent reason;
- Becomes increasingly dirty or unkempt.

This list is **NOT** exhaustive and the presence of one or more of the above is **NOT** proof that abuse is actually taking place.

Defining and Identifying Child Abuse

In this Policy “child” is defined as an unmarried person under the age of 18 years. Child abuse generally falls into four categories:-

1. Neglect

Neglect can be defined in terms of an omission, where the child suffers significant harm or impairment of development by being deprived of food, clothing, warmth, hygiene, intellectual stimulation, supervision and safety, medical care or attachment to and affection from adults. The threshold of significant harm is reached when the child’s needs are neglected to the extent that their well-being and/or development are severely affected. **Neglect could occur during organised activities if young people are exposed to the risk of injury or there is a failure to ensure their safety.** (*Children First, National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children 1999, p. 31.*)

2. Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse may be caused by a persistent lack of love and affection, where a child may be constantly shouted at, threatened or taunted. It may also occur when there is constant overprotection (which prevents children from socialising), or there is neglect, physical or sexual abuse. Emotional abuse might occur if children are subjected to excessive criticism, inappropriate personal or sexual remarks, bullying, being exposed to undue or inappropriate pressure or exposed to danger. (*Children First, National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children 1999, p. 31-32.*)

3. Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is where adults physically hurt or injure children by hitting, shaking, squeezing, burning and biting or by giving children alcohol, inappropriate drugs or poison. **In a sporting situation physical abuse can occur when the type of training exceeds the capacity of**

the child's physical capability. (*Children First, National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children 1999, p. 32.*)

4. Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse occurs when a child is used by another person for their gratification or sexual arousal, or for that of others. Examples of sexual abuse include: exposing sexual organs or intentionally performing any sexual act in the presence of a child; intentional touching or molesting the body of a child; sexually exploiting a child, or; any sexual activity between staff and volunteers. In relation to child sexual abuse, it should be noted that, for the purposes of criminal law, the age of consent to sexual intercourse is 17 years. Physical contact with children could potentially create situations where sexual abuse may go unnoticed. **The role of a coach in a sporting situation could provide the means of an abusive situation occurring.** (*Children First, National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children 1999, p. 33.*)

Effects of Abuse

Abuse in all its forms can affect a child at any age. The effects can be so damaging that, if untreated, they may follow an individual into adulthood. For example, an adult who has been abused as a child may find it difficult or impossible to maintain a stable, trusting relationship, become involved with drugs or prostitution, attempt suicide or even abuse a child in the future.

There have been a number of studies that suggest children with disabilities are at increased risk of abuse through various factors such as stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, isolation and a powerlessness to protect themselves, or adequately communicate that abuse has occurred. Children from ethnic minorities' who could also be experiencing racial discrimination may feel doubly powerless.

Aggressive Behaviour

While bullying is not a category in itself, it is important to be aware of it in relation to child abuse. Bullying can be defined as repeated verbal, psychological or physical aggression that is conducted by an individual or group against others. Bullying behaviour may take place in any setting: in schools, in the home or in a DLR Leisure Services setting.

The competitive environment provided by the sports situation makes an excellent environment for the bully to ply his/her trade. In sports the bully can be: -

- A parent who pushes the child too hard
- A coach with a win at all costs attitude
- A player who intimidates

- An official placing unfair pressure on a person

Bullying can take many forms

- **Physical:** pushing, hitting etc
- **Verbal:** name calling, teasing, sarcasm
- **Emotional:** tormenting, ridiculing, humiliating
- **Racist:** taunts, graffiti, gestures
- **Sexual:** unwanted physical contact or abusive comments

There are various ways in which bullying shows itself.

- Behavioural changes such as reduced concentration, clingy, depressed, tearful, reluctant to attend training or club activities
- A reduction in the standard of play
- Physical signs such as headaches, stomach aches, difficulty in sleeping, damaged clothes
- A shortage of money or frequent loss of clothing

In the first instance, it is the responsibility of the employee/volunteer to deal with bullying that may take place within the leisure centres. The more extreme forms of bullying behaviour would be regarded as physical or emotional abuse, and are reportable to the statutory authorities. DLR Leisure Services has a clear policy on bullying behaviour. Incidents should not be tolerated under any circumstances and should be dealt with immediately.

Responsibility to Report Suspected or Actual Abuse

Any person who suspects that a child is being abused, or is at risk of abuse, has a responsibility and a duty of care to report their concerns to the Child Protection Liaison Office for each DLR Leisure Centre. The Protection for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act, 1998 provides immunity from civil liability to people who report child abuse 'reasonably and in good faith' to the Child Protection Liaison Office or the Gardaí (*Children First, National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children 1999 p.37*).

Reporting Procedures

DLR Leisure Services provides an environment that encourages security, confidence and trust, so enabling young people to share their concerns. A young person will carefully select a person to confide in. That chosen person will be someone they trust and have confidence in. It is important that a young person who discloses child abuse feels supported and facilitated in what may be a frightening and traumatic process for them. A young person may feel perplexed, afraid, angry, despondent and guilty. It is important that any negative feelings they may have are not made worse by the kind of response they receive.

A young person who divulges child abuse to a staff member or volunteer of DLR Leisure Services has engaged in an act of trust and their disclosure must be treated with respect, sensitivity, urgency and care.

How to Respond

It is of the utmost importance that disclosures are treated in a sensitive and discreet manner. Anyone responding to a young person making such a disclosure should take the following steps.

- Take what the young person says seriously.
- React calmly, as over-reaction may intimidate the young person and increase any feelings of guilt that they may have.
- Reassure the young person that they were correct to tell somebody what happened.
- Listen carefully and attentively.
- Never ask leading questions.

Reporting Procedures

- Use open-ended questions to clarify what is being said and try to avoid having them repeat what they have told you.
- Do not promise to keep secrets.
- Advise that you will offer support but that you must pass on the information.
- Do not express any opinions about the alleged abuser to the person reporting to you.
- Explain and make sure that the young person understands what will happen next.
- Do not confront the alleged abuser.
- Write down immediately after the conversation what was said, including all the names of those involved, what happened, where, when, if there were any witnesses and any other significant

factors and note any visible marks on the individual making the report or any signs you observed. The person recording the event must sign and date all reports and indicate the time the notes were made.

- Ensure that the information is restricted to those who need to know it.
- Pass any allegations to the designated member of staff immediately.
- DLR Leisure Services staff or volunteers should not investigate allegations.

What happens if there are Reasonable Grounds for Concern?

If reasonable grounds for concern exist, the designated member of staff will provide a report to the Health Service Executive and to An Garda Síochána. The following examples would constitute reasonable grounds for concern.

- Specific indication from the participant that they were abused.
- An account by a person who saw the young person being abused.
- Evidence, such as an injury or behaviour that is consistent with abuse and unlikely to be caused another way.
- An injury or behaviour that is consistent both with abuse and with an innocent explanation but where there are indicators supporting the concern that it may be an incidence of abuse. An example of this would be a pattern of injuries, an implausible explanation and other indications of abuse or dysfunctional behaviour.
- Consistent indication over a period of time that a child is suffering from emotional or physical neglect. (*Children First, National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children, 1999, p. 38.*)

If there is an immediate risk to a young person, the staff member/volunteer should contact An Garda Síochána. The Designated member of staff will consult with the young person's parents or guardian in relation to the concern and the possibility of a report being made to the Health Service Executive, unless it is not in the best interests of the young person to do so.

A suspicion that is not supported by any objective indication of abuse or neglect would not constitute a reasonable suspicion or reasonable grounds for concern. However, these suspicions should be recorded or noted internally by the Designated Person only, as future suspicions may lead to the decision to make a report. Earlier suspicions may provide important information to the Health Service Executive.

Designated Person

The Designated Person is the title given to the person appointed by DLR Leisure Services to deal with child protection issues reported by DLR Leisure Services staff/volunteers or young people participating in any activity. The Designated Person for DLR Leisure Services Monkstown is Diane Lynch. The Deputy Designated Person if Diane is not available is Anita Dalton. They are available on (01) 2301458/60/62. If neither of the above named are available you may contact the Centre Manager, Mr. Niall Cull .

The Designated Person for DLR Leisure Services Glenalbyn is Alison Jones. The Deputy Designated Person if Alison is not available is Denise Martin. They are available on (01) 2881502. If neither of the above named are available you may contact the Centre Manager, Mr. John Mitchell.

The Designated Person for DLR Leisure Services Dundrum is Eoghan O'Connor. The Deputy Designated Person if Eoghan is not available is Jenny Farrell. They are available on (01)2995610. If neither of the above named are available you may contact the Centre Manager, Ms. Clodagh Mac Govern .

The Designated Person for DLR Leisure Services Loughlinstown is Christine Lynch. The Deputy Designated Person if Christine is not available is Graham Moran. They are available on (01) 2823344. If the above named are available you may contact the Centre Manager, Mr. John McKenna .

The Designated Person will ensure they do the following or, in their absence, that another person in the company will do so.

- Report suspicions and allegations of child abuse to the Health Service Executive where there is a concern.
- Create and maintain links with the Health Service Executive and other relevant agencies and resource groups.
- Facilitate follow-up action.
- Advise DLR Leisure Services staff/volunteers about individual cases as appropriate.
- Advise on best practice and ensure that DLR Leisure Services Child Protection Policy and procedures are followed.
- Organise and/or facilitate training and workshops on the guidelines for child protection.
- Maintain proper records on all cases referred to them in a secure and confidential manner.
- Keep up to date on current developments regarding provision, practice, legal obligations and policy. Ensure that this Child Protection Policy is reviewed annually.
- Ensure that DLR Leisure Services Policies and procedures are brought to the attention of to all DLR Leisure Services Staff and volunteers.

Code of Behaviour for Staff, Volunteers and Participants

- Staff and volunteers should be sensitive to the risks involved in taking part in some contact sports with young people. Staff and volunteers should be sensitive to the implications of becoming too involved with or spending a lot of time with any one young person.
- Staff and volunteers should be sensitive to the potential risk to personal safety that may arise when they meet alone with a young person in a room. Where it is feasible, they should leave the door open or inform another colleague that they will be alone in the room with the individual in question.
- Where a staff member or volunteer of DLR Leisure Services has a concern about the nature of a particular relationship involving themselves or another staff member, volunteer or young person, they should discuss it with a Centre Manager or an experienced colleague.
- A staff member or volunteer should not have a physical relationship with a participant.
- Attempts should be made among young people to develop a positive attitude that respects the personal space, safety and privacy of their peers.
- If a staff member or volunteer provides transport for participants in the course of their involvement with DLR Leisure Services, there should, if possible, be two or more participants in the car. Any transport should only be provided with the full knowledge and consent of the young people's parents or guardians.
- Staff and volunteers must never physically punish or be verbally abusive to a young person.
- The ratio of adults to participants is important when doing various activities. There should be at least one adult to every ten participants 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 staff, the type of activity being undertaken and the ability of the participants.

Dealing with Allegations against Staff/Volunteers

Should a member of staff or volunteer become aware of an allegation (against a colleague) of an incident of child abuse taking, or having taken place, it is vital that the following procedures are followed: -

- Take the allegation seriously. It is your duty to consider any allegation to be potentially dangerous to the child and therefore report it.
- Make a written record of any details of which you are aware, as part of your report.

- Report the allegation to a more senior member of staff, giving details of the allegation, how you became aware of it and any other relevant details. In a case where the senior member of staff may be involved, report it to another senior colleague or staff member you can trust.
- Do not judge or investigate. As an employee or volunteer it is important not to lose focus of your role. By reporting an allegation quickly, any necessary investigations and/or judgements can then be made by trained professionals.
- Maintain confidentiality. It is extremely important that any allegations are not discussed unless absolutely necessary) as any breaches could be damaging to both the child and to any investigation that may follow.
- Any requests for information from member of the public (including parents) or the media should be directed to a designated member of staff and should be given the “no comment” response.

Confidentiality

When dealing with any case/suspicion/allegation relating to child abuse, you must be made aware that any breaches in confidentiality can be very damaging to the child, family and any child protection investigations, which may take place.

It is important that the rights of both the victim and the **alleged** perpetrator are protected by ensuring that only those who **need to know** are given the relevant information.

This will mean, at the very least, informing: -

- The Centre/Duty Manager or any other responsible person
- The Health Service Executive
- The Local Social Services Team
- The parents of the child (only if social services ask for this to be done)

Informing the parents of a child about whom you are concerned about will be handled in a sensitive way and only undertaken in consultation with the Local Social Services.

Depending upon the outcome of initial enquiries, staff and other agencies that have contact with either the child concerned or the alleged perpetrator may need to be given brief details of the incident and subsequent action. The statutory agency will provide advice as to who should be told, when they should be told and the kind of information, which is appropriate to share.

Anyone who receives information from colleagues about possible or actual child abuse must treat it as having been given in confidence. Any breaches of confidential information may be regarded as a disciplinary matter.

Records should be kept in accordance with the Data Protection Act, within an agreed HR Filing System and be available only to those directly involved and within the confines of the obligations and duties of the Data Protection Act, 2003.

Off duty Contact between Staff/Volunteers and Children

Members of staff/volunteers must maintain a professional relationship with children during any off-duty contact, continuing to follow the guidelines and policies set out in this policy.

Staff/volunteers should be particularly careful to limit and if possible eliminate any one-to-one contact. This should also include driving children to and from coaching/club sessions. Where an arrangement is made in an emergency, it is important to ensure there is a second adult in the vehicle.

Appendix 1 – Reporting Child Protection Concerns

Standard reporting form for reporting child protection and welfare concerns to a health board

- 1 Date of Report: _____
- 2 Name of person reporting: _____
- 3 Address of person reporting: _____

- 4 Relationship of reporting person with child: _____
- 5 Method of Report (telephone call, personal call to office): _____

6 Family Details:
Details of child concerned

Surname: _____

Forename: _____

Date of Birth: _____ Male/Female: _____

Alias (known as): _____

Address: _____

Telephone No: _____

- 7 State whether you consider your report to indicate
a) suspected or actual child abuse or b) need for family support, giving reasons:

	Physical Abuse	Sexual Abuse	Emotional Abuse	Neglect
Suspected	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Actual	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- 8 Details of other family/household members:

name	age	relationship to child	employment/school	location

In cases of emergency, or outside health board hours, reports should be made to An Garda Síochána.

9 Name of other professionals involved with child/ren and/or parents/carers.

Public health nurse: _____

School: _____

General Practitioner: _____

Any other agency or professional involved: _____
(please describe the nature of the involvement)

10 Report Details

Describe, as fully as possible, the nature of the problem or incident being reported, giving details of times and dates of individual incidents, the circumstances in which they occurred, any other persons who were present at the time, and their involvement.

11 Has any explanation been offered by the child and/or parents/carers, which would account for the current problem or incident? (Details)

12 As far as possible, describe the state of the child/ren's physical, mental and emotional well-being.

13 If child abuse is being alleged, who is believed to be responsible for causing it?

Include (if known)

Name: _____

Address: _____

Degree of contact with child: _____

Degree of contact with other children: _____

14 Describe (in detail) any risks to which the child/ren in this situation are believed to be exposed.

15 How did this information come to your attention?

16 What has prompted you to report your concern at this time?

17 What evidence of harm exists at present?

18 Are there any factors in the child and/or parents/carers' present situation, which may have relevance to the current concern? (For example; recent illness, bereavement, separation, addiction, mental health problem or other difficulty)

19 Are there any factors in the child and/or parents/carers' present situation, which could be considered protective or helpful (for example, extended family or community support).

20 Has any action been taken in response to the current concern or incident (details)

21 Are the child's parents/carers aware that this concern is being reported to the health board?

22 Is there a need for urgent protective action at this point?

23 Any other comments.

Signed: _____

Date: _____