

# Child Safeguarding

Policy and  
Standards

for the

Diocese of  
Ardagh & Clonmacnois



# Introduction

In his recent Letter to the Catholics of Ireland Pope Benedict urges parents to play their part “in ensuring the best possible care of children, both at home and in society as a whole, while the Church, for her part, continues to implement the measures adopted in recent years to protect young people”. I hope that we will be inspired by these words to continue to build on the good work we have done in providing safe systems for safeguarding children.

Jesus had a special love for those the Gospels calls ‘little ones’. This description applies to all those that society in His day treated as least important. Today we might describe these as vulnerable because they lack power and the ability to stand up for themselves. Children were in that category in Jesus’ time and they still are in many cases. In the Church the followers of Jesus must behave like He did in defending and caring for children and others who are vulnerable for some reason.

In Christ’s name and in the name of the Church I thank those who have taken responsibility for our safeguarding system. I thank our Diocesan Child Safeguarding Committee, our Child Safeguarding Trainers, the Diocesan Designated Officers and the Safeguarding Representatives in the parishes for what they do. In addition to the ‘frontline’ people I thank the great numbers of parents and volunteers who watch out for children and by their vigilance do all in their power to ensure that children are safe. May the Lord bless and reward them all.

+ *Colm O'Reilly*

+COLM O'REILLY

*Bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnois*



# Policy Statement

*Each child shall be cherished and affirmed as a gift from God with an inherent right to dignity of life and bodily integrity which shall be respected, nurtured and protected by all.*

**EVERYONE IN THE CHURCH HAS AN OBLIGATION TO ENSURE THAT THE FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS OF CHILDREN ARE RESPECTED**

*These guiding principles inform this policy. The Policy has been written to ensure that the Diocese of Ardagh and Clonmacnois takes every possible measure to prevent abuse. It aims to ensure that none of its personnel or volunteers engages in behaviour that could allow abuse to occur or actions that could be misinterpreted by children, their families or other adults as constituting, or leading to abuse.*

This document seeks to incorporate best practice as found in the civil document, 'Children First: National Guidelines for the protection and welfare of Children' (1999), as well as the Church document, 'Safeguarding Children: Standards and Guidance Document for the Catholic Church in Ireland' (2009).

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

*All children have a fundamental right to be respected, nurtured, cared for and protected. This right is embedded in Gospel values, best practice guidelines and international and domestic laws. In the light of the teaching of the Church, civil legislation and guidance, the Diocese of Ardagh and Clonmacnois is committed to taking the necessary steps to:*

- *demonstrate that the right of the child to protection from harm is paramount*
- *cherish and safeguard children and young people*
- *foster best practice*
- *demonstrate accountability through establishing effective structures*
- *support Church organisations and personnel in safeguarding children*
- *establish safe recruitment and vetting practices – aimed at preventing those who pose a risk to children from holding positions of trust*
- *maintain codes of behaviour – having clear guidelines that set out what is and is not acceptable behaviour as an essential part of keeping children safe*
- *operate safe activities for children – helping ensure they can play and learn in a safe environment*



*We recognise that the abuse of children, i.e. persons under 18 years, generally involves one or more of four main forms of abuse as follows:*

### ***Physical abuse***

*Physical abuse may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating, or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces illness in a child. Physical abuse, as well as being a result of an act of commission can also be caused through omission or the failure to act to protect.*

### ***Emotional abuse***

*Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional ill-treatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to children that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person. It may feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. These may include interactions that are beyond the child's developmental capability, as well as overprotection and limitation of exploration and learning, or preventing the child participating in normal social interaction. It may involve seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another. It may involve 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 ill-treatment of a child, though it may occur alone.*

### ***Sexual abuse***

*Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, including prostitution, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including penetrative (e.g. rape, buggery or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts (oral sex). They may include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, pornographic material or watching sexual activities, or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways. Boys and girls can be sexually abused by males and / or females, by adults and by other young people.*

### ***Neglect***

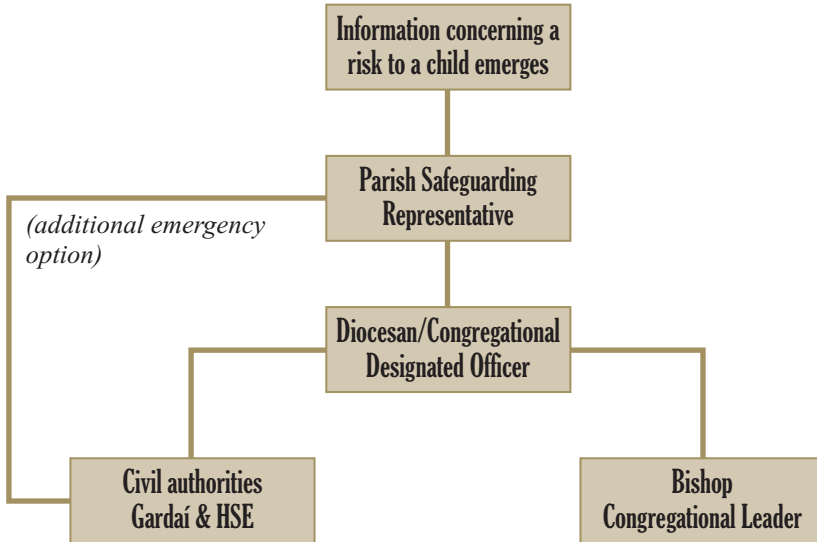
*Neglect can be defined in terms of an omission, where the child suffers significant harm or impairment of development by being deprived of food, clothing, warmth, hygiene, intellectual stimulation, supervision and safety, attachment to and affection from adults, and failure to access appropriate medical care or treatment.*

*Neglect generally becomes apparent in different ways over a period of time rather than at one specific point. It is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and / or psychological needs, such as the neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development.*



# Reporting Procedures

## Reporting Flow Chart



If a child protection concern arises about a child or a complaint is made about the behaviour of Church personnel or volunteer.

1. The information is passed to the diocesan or congregational designated officer.
  2. The Designated Officer informs the Bishop or Religious Superior and the civil authorities, without delay.
  3. If the diocesan or congregational designated officer is not available or the circumstances of the complaint indicate that this action is not appropriate the person (parish safeguarding representative) may need to contact the civil authorities directly. However, it is expected that they seek advice and support from the National Office for Safeguarding Children.
- n **The guiding principle is that the safety of the child is always the most important consideration.**
  - n **The Church has a responsibility to pass on child protection concerns about a child**



**to civil authorities even when it does not concern Church personnel directly.**

It is the Designated Officer's responsibility to receive information where it is alleged or suspected that a child(ren) has been or is being abused by any member of the Church including volunteers.

The Designated Officer is responsible for managing the allegation/disclosure or concern, from start to finish including:

- the preliminary internal enquiry
- referral to the Health and Social Services / An Garda Síochána
- any subsequent internal investigations.

He or she is also responsible for ensuring the person raising the concern/suspicion or making an allegation and the respondent or alleged perpetrator are regularly informed about how the inquiry into the matter is progressing.

**Guidance on how to respond to people making an allegation**

It is often very difficult for people to talk about abuse so it is important to make sure that you are patient, listen carefully and actively, and create a safe environment in which they feel able to tell you as much as they can remember. This will help those people whose responsibility it is to investigate the incident(s) do so as thoroughly as possible.

People may tell you about:

- abuse that's happened to them now – current
- abuse that happened to them some time ago – historical
- something they've been told by someone else and that they strongly believe is true
- seeing signs of abuse, such as physical injuries on a child
- something that they have witnessed, such as the behaviour of an adult to a child that made them feel uncomfortable.

**Where information is given in person, consider the following:**

- Listen carefully to that person, but do not ask intrusive or leading questions.
- Stay calm, take what the person raising the concern says seriously, and reassure them.



- Allow the person to continue at his/her own pace.
- Check with the person to make sure that you have understood what they actually said. Do not suggest words, but use theirs.
- Make no promises that cannot be kept, particularly in relation to secrecy, but listen carefully to what is being sought.
- Explain these procedures and the referral procedures to the person.
- Offer to accompany the person to the Support Person.
- Do not make any comments about the respondent, make assumptions or speculate.
- Be aware that a person's ability to recount his or her concern or allegation will depend on age, culture, nationality and upon any disability which may affect use of language and range of vocabulary.
- Adopt a listening style which is compassionate, calm and reassuring. If the information given to you shocks, disgusts or distresses you, do not allow these feelings to show. If you do, you may inadvertently dissuade the person from giving any further information.
- Avoid statements about your belief or otherwise, of the information given.
- Do not question beyond checking what has been said. It is the job of the Health and Social Services / An Garda Síochána. There must be no probing for detail beyond that which has been freely given.
- Listening does not mean telling a person to stop when they are freely recalling events; because some facts are only ever told once, the information given must be fully and accurately recorded.
- However, it is better that such detail is given directly to a professional from one of the Health and Social Services / An Garda Síochána to allow proper procedures to be observed and to avoid the distress of having to repeat the account more than once.

*A Priest must be clear about the status of such a conversation. Make sure there is*



# *Child Safeguarding Procedures*

The Diocese of Ardagh and Clonmacnois is committed to the following procedures:

- Signed parental consent for each young person taking part in Church activities.
- Appropriate supervision ratios of adults to young people while maintaining the practice of ensuring that no young person is left alone with an adult. This will apply to both parish based activities or away-trips, e.g. retreats/pilgrimages, etc.
- A duty roster of leaders to ensure adequate supervision of young people at all times.
- A code of conduct for all adult leaders working on behalf of the Church and a code of conduct for young people. Adults working on behalf of the church will sign a form of approval of the code of behaviour and parents will sign the form of approval on behalf of their child.
- Disciplinary procedures and appropriate sanctions for leaders should be agreed in consultation with adults working on behalf of the Church and with young people.
- Adequate record keeping processes including:
  - Participant forms
  - Incident/Accident Report forms
  - Volunteer Application form
  - Declaration forms for all adult leaders
  - Medical information and treatment permission as appropriate for all young people
  - Programme/attendance records
  - Training records
- Contact information for parents/guardians.
- Procedures for recruitment, management and overseeing adult leaders working with young people.
- A clearly communicated Accident/Emergency plan.
- For away trips a pre-check on accommodation and transport arrangements.





- Procedures concerning photography – ensuring parental consent is received prior to photograph being taken and also protecting the identity of child in the event of photographs being taken for programme purposes.
- Information sessions for all young people and their parents regarding activities, policy and Code of Behaviour.
- Appropriate selection and Recruitment procedures will be followed for staff and volunteers.
- Training for all adults working on behalf of the Church regarding policy, codes of behaviour and procedures.
- A clear complaints procedure for use by young people, parents/guardians, or adults working on behalf of the Church who are dissatisfied with any aspect of activities / services provided.
- The appointment of a Designated Person to whose immediate attention all concerns and / or complaints can be brought.
- These procedures will be reviewed periodically.

## *Code of Conduct*

**It is important for all employees and volunteers and others in contact with children to:**

- treat all persons with respect and courtesy
- provide an example of good conduct you wish others to follow
- operate within the Church principles and guidance and any specific procedures
- be visible to others when working with children whenever possible
- challenge and report potentially abusive behaviour
- develop a culture where children can talk about their contacts with staff and others openly
- respect each child's boundaries and help them to develop their own sense of their rights as well as helping them to know what they can do if they feel that there is a problem



**In general, it is inappropriate to:**

- spend excessive time alone with children away from others
- take children to your own home, especially where they will be alone with you

**Employees, volunteers and others must never:**

- hit or otherwise physically assault or physically abuse children
- develop sexual relationships with children
- develop relationships with children which could in any way be deemed exploitative or abusive
- act in ways that may be abusive or may place a child at risk of abuse
- engage in the inappropriate use of videos, DVDs, cameras, land line phones, mobile phones or internet while participating in Church activities

**Employees, volunteers and others must avoid actions or behaviour that could be construed as poor practice or potentially abusive. For example, they should never:**

- use language, make suggestions or offer advice which is inappropriate, offensive or abusive
- behave physically in a manner which is inappropriate or sexually provocative
- have a child / children with whom they are working to stay overnight at their home
- sleep in the same room or bed as a child with whom they are working
- do things for children of a personal nature that they can do for themselves
- condone, or participate in, behaviour of children which is illegal, unsafe or abusive
- act in ways intended to shame, humiliate, belittle or degrade any person
- discriminate against, show different treatment, or favour particular children to the exclusion of others

**This Code of Conduct will be reviewed periodically**



# *Confidentiality Statement*

The Diocese of Ardagh and Clonmacnois recognises the importance of ensuring people's rights to confidentiality and is committed to keeping confidential all personal information about children and their families.

The only exception to this is when child protection or welfare concerns arise in relation to a child or young person. In this case information will be shared on a need to know basis in the best interest of the child as follows:

- Information will be shared only on a 'need to know' basis in order to safeguard the child / young person.
- Giving information to appropriately designated persons and/or statutory authorities for the protection of a child is not a breach of confidentiality.
- Primary carers have the right to know if personal information is being shared and a report is being made to the HSE unless doing so could place the child at further risk.

## *Recruitment Procedures*

- All staff and volunteers must supply I.D., complete an application form with the names of two referees and complete a declaration form.
- Garda clearance will be required for all staff and volunteers. Applicants with convictions against children will be excluded from all positions.
- Appointees will undertake a probationary period.
- All information received during the selection process will be treated as confidential.
- Training in Child Safeguarding policy, procedures and Code of Conduct will be provided for all personnel.



# *Safety Statement*

Leaders/Helpers are obliged under the Health and Safety Act to –

1. Attend training provided.
2. Report in writing to the person in charge, and activity or hazard that may endanger the health and safety of themselves or others.
3. Report any defect in equipment that may endanger the health and safety of themselves or others.
4. Take reasonable care of their own safety, health and welfare and that of others.
5. Co-operate with the person in charge or any other person as appropriate.
6. Ensure that they are not under the influence of alcohol and /or any illegal substances.
7. They must not engage in anti-social behaviour, including bullying or harassment.
8. Leaders/helpers must not interfere with or misuse anything provided for securing their health, safety and welfare of themselves or others involved.
9. Use safety equipment provided for appropriate use, e.g. fire extinguishers.

# *Complaints Policy*

The approach to resolving conflict is one of open dialogue in a safe space, in a friendly and informal atmosphere.

Regular meetings are encouraged between leaders and groups to address issues of concern and to highlight the ethos of open communication.

Once a complaint is received, the leader will try to resolve the issue promptly and fairly.

Should the issue or concern impact on Child Safeguarding Policy the leader must contact the Designated Person who will deal with the matter urgently under 'Reporting Procedures'.



# Services and Contact Details

## Designated Persons

### Mr. Sean Leydon

The Elms, Cartrontroty, Athlone, Co. Westmeath.

090 6475229

087 7431649

### Fr. Liam Murray

St. Mary's Presbytery, Athlone, Co. Westmeath.

090 6472088

## Diocesan Representative for Concerns outside Safeguarding

### Mr. Liam Faughnan

087 1443831

## Towards Healing Helpline

1800 303416

## HSE Longford/Westmeath

### Social Work Department

Tivoli House, Longford

043 3350584

Athlone Health Centre

09064 75301

Child & Family Centre, Mullingar

044 9384450

### Child Care Manager's Office - Longford/Westmeath

Mullingar Health Centre

044 9395019/20

### Child Care Manager's Office – Laois/Offaly

057 9359591

### Child Care Manager's Office – Roscommon

0906 626732

### Child Care Manager's Office – Sligo, Leitrim & West Cavan

071 9822776

## Garda Síochána

Longford 043 3350570

Athlone 090 6498550

Carrick-on-Shannon 072 9650510

Mullingar 044 9384000

Birr 057 9169710

Cavan 049 4368800

Roscommon 090 6638300

Sligo 071 9157000

Tullamore 057 9327600

Boyle 071 9664620

## National Office for Safeguarding Children

01 5053124

Website: [www.safeguarding.ie](http://www.safeguarding.ie)

Diocesan Website: [www.ardaghdiocese.com](http://www.ardaghdiocese.com)

