

## **Child Protection Policy**

**We in Greenfields Childcare Centre and Montessori School are fully committed to safeguarding the wellbeing of all the children in our care and providing a safe environment in which they can play, learn and develop. We are committed to a child centred practice in our work and full compliance with Children First and Our Duty to Care.**

**Management, staff and volunteer/students in this service recognise that the welfare of children is paramount and our service will endeavour to safeguard children by:-**

- Having a reporting procedure to respond to concerns around children's welfare and safety.
- Having a confidentiality policy.
- Having a code of behaviour for management, staff and volunteers/students.
- Having a safe recruitment procedure.
- Having procedures for managing/supervising staff, students and volunteers.
- Having a procedure to respond to accidents.
- Having a procedure to respond to complaints.
- Having procedures to respond to allegations of abuse and neglect against staff members

**As part of the policy this service will:-**

- Appoint both a Designated Liaison Person for dealing with any child protection concerns and a Deputy Designated Liaison Person
- Provide induction training around the group's child protection policy to all staff, volunteers and students.
- Ensure that all staff attend child protection training as appropriate.
- Provide supervision and support for staff and volunteers in contact with children.
- Share information about the child protection policy and good practices with families and children.
- Review the group's child protection policy and practices on a regular basis. (minimum every 2 years) the manger is responsible for this

### **Responsibility of all Employees, Volunteer, Students and Board Members**

It is the responsibility of all staff, Students, Volunteers and board members to ensure the safety, protection and well-being of all the children in the care of the service. All above mentioned people are required to read, understand and sign off on the Child Protection Policy, and raise any questions that they might have, with the Designated Liaison person.

All personnel will be:

- Made aware of their responsibilities and obligations under Children First
- Made aware of their responsibilities for reporting concerns and /or incidents regarding the safety or well-being of children to the Designated Person.
- Obligated to attend child protection training.

This policy applies at all times even when outside the building on day trips, nature walks etc.

This policy must be observed by:-

- All staff
- Board of Management
- Students
- Volunteers
- Special Needs Assistants

### **Role of the Designated Liaison Person**

The Designated Liaison Person (DLP), is responsible for dealing with child protection and welfare concerns in accordance with Children First and Our Duty to Care.

The Deputy DLP will be appointed by the Manager of the service to undertake the duties below when the DLP is unavailable

The Designated Liaison Person for this service is Lisa O Neill (Manager)

The Deputy Designated Liaison Person is Ann Marie Feerick (Assistant Manager)

The role of the DLP is to:

- Provide information and advice on child protection and welfare concerns and issues to the staff
- Be accessible to the staff
- To be familiar with “Children First” National Guidelines for the protection and Welfare of Children and “Our Duty to Care”, the principles of good practice for the protection and welfare of children.
- Ensure that the Child Protection Policy is followed

- Be responsible for reporting any child protection concerns to TUSLA-Child and Family Agency or to An Garda Siochana
- Ensure that all appropriate information is included in the report to the Child and Family Agency
- Liaise with outside agencies as appropriate
- Keep relevant people within the service informed on a need to know basis
- To ensure that systems are in place for recording and retaining all relevant documentation in relation to child protection issues.
- Advise the Board of Management of child protection training needs
- Keep records of all child protection concerns in the service

### **Recognising, Responding and Reporting Concerns about a Child's welfare or possible Abuse**

#### **Recognising Concerns**

- Staff, Students or volunteers may at times be concerned about the general welfare of children they work with and they can discuss any concerns with their manager or DLP at any time.
- All staff and volunteers should be familiar with the definitions of abuse (see Appendix (ii)) and the signs and symptoms of abuse (see appendix (iii))

In accordance with Children First:

- Everyone must be alert to the possibility that children with whom they are in contact may be suffering from abuse or neglect.
- The children and Family Agency should always be informed when a person has reasonable grounds for concern that a child may have been, is being or is at risk of being abused or neglected. Child protection concerns should be supported by evidence that indicates the possibility of abuse or neglect.
- A concern about a potential risk to children posed by a specific person, even if the children are unidentifiable, should also be communicated to the Child and Family agency.
- The guiding principles in regard to reporting child abuse or neglect may be summarised as follows:
  - (i) the safety and well-being of the child must take priority
  - (ii) reports should be made without delay to the Child and Family Agency
- Any reasonable concern or suspicion of abuse or neglect must elicit a response. Ignoring the signals or failing to intervene may result in ongoing or further harm to the child.
- Section 176 of the Criminal Justice Act 2006 introduced the criminal charge of reckless endangerment of children. It states
  - “A person, having authority or control over a child or abuser, who intentionally or recklessly endangers a child by – (a) causing or permitting any child to be placed or left in a situation which creates

a substantial risk to the child of being a victim of serious harm or sexual abuse, or (b) failing to take reasonable steps to protect a child from such a risk while knowing that the child is in such a situation, is guilty of an offence”

The penalty for a person found guilty of this offence is a fine and or imprisonment for a term not exceeding 10 years.

**A concern could come to your attention in a number of ways:**

- A child tells you or indicates that he/she is being abused. This is called a disclosure(see appendix (iv) for guidance on responding to a disclosure from a child)
- An admission or indication from an alleged abuser
- A concern about a potential risk to children posed by a specific person, even if the children are unidentifiable
- Information from someone who saw a child abused
- Evidence of an injury or behaviour that is consistent with abuse and unlikely to be caused in any other way
- Consistent indication over a period of time that a child is suffering from emotional or physical neglect
- An injury or behaviour which is consistent with abuse, but an innocent explanation is given
- Concern about the behaviour or practice of a colleague

**Procedures for Responding to a Child Protection or Welfare Concern**

- Under no circumstances should a child be left in a situation that exposes him/her to harm or risk pending Child and Family Agency Intervention. In the event of an emergency and unavailability of a Duty Social Worker, the DLP will contact An Garda Siochana.
- If the child has made a disclosure, a written record will be made. If there are other grounds for concern that the has been abused or neglected, a written record will be made
- If there are reasonable ground for concern (see appendix (v)) the DLP will complete the Standard Report Form (see appendix (i)) without delay and send it to the Duty Social Work Team in the Child and Family Agency.

**Contact details for the Duty Social Worker are: - 0906637580 or 0906637505**

- If the concern is urgent and the child is in immediate danger, the report to the Child and Family Agency will be made by telephone and followed up by the completed Standard Report Form
- In the event of an emergency and the unavailability of a Duty Social Worker the DLP will contact An Garda Siochana

**Contact details for An Garda Siochana are 0906638300 or 0906638340**

- The DLP may use the process of informal consultation with the Duty Social Worker to discuss the response to a child protection & welfare concern and whether or not it warrants reasonable grounds for concern. Informal consultation is carried out without providing the name of the family or the child. If advised to do so, a report will be made.
- The DLP will record information about the concern, informal consultation (if carried out) and details regarding if and when the parents were informed. The only time a parent would not be informed of a disclosure, would be if it posed further risk to the child.
- The Chairperson of Lisnamult Residents Association is informed each time a referral or report is made, without identifying the individuals involved.

#### **Procedure when a referral is not made to the Child & Family Agency**

- Not all concerns will meet the reasonable grounds for concern. In this case, the concern and any informal consultation will be documented and kept confidentially and securely.
- The DLP will inform the member of staff, volunteer or student who has raised the concern that it is not being referred in writing, indicating the reasons. The DLP will advise the individual that they may make a report themselves or contact the Duty Social Work Team and that the provision of the *Protection for Persons reporting Child Abuse Act, 1998* will apply.

#### **Informing Parents about Child Protection and Welfare Concerns**

- Good communication with parents is very important in ensuring best outcomes for children and any concerns about the health and well-being of a child will always be discussed with parents from the outset.
- When a child protection concern is being reported to the Child & Family Agency, good practice indicated that parents should be informed about the report unless doing so may put the child at further risk. The DLP may seek advice from the Child and Family Agency Social Work Department in relation to this.

#### **Responding to a retrospective Disclosure by an Adult of abuse as a child**

- In relation to retrospective disclosures, it is imperative that all child protection concerns are examined and addressed
- An increasing number of adults are disclosing abuse that took place during their childhood. If a staff member becomes aware of a retrospective concern they should follow the reporting procedure and speak with the DLP. If any risk is deemed to exist to a child who may be in contact with an alleged abuser, the service should report the concern to the Children & Family Agency without delay.

#### **Confidentiality Statement**

- The effective protection of a child often depends on the willingness of the staff in statutory and voluntary organisations involved with children to share and exchange relevant information. It is therefore critical that there is a clear

- understanding of professional and legal responsibilities with regards to confidentiality and the exchange of information.
- All information regarding concern or assessment of child abuse or neglect should be shared on a “need to know” basis in the interests of the child with the relevant statutory authorities.
  - No undertakings regarding secrecy can be given. Those working with a child and family should make this clear to all parties involved, although they can be assured that all information will be handled taking full account of legal requirements.
  - Ethical and statutory codes concerned with confidentiality and data protection provide general guidance. They are not intended to limit or prevent the exchange of information between different professional staff with the responsibility for ensuring the protection and welfare of children. The provision of information to the statutory agencies for the protection of a child is not a breach of confidentiality or data protection.
  - It must be clearly understood that information gathered for one purpose must not be used for another without consulting the person who provided the information.

### **Allegations of Abuse or Neglect against Employees/students/Volunteers**

- Where an allegation of abuse is made against an employee/student/Volunteer of Greenfields, there are two procedures that Greenfield’s will put in place.
  1. The reporting procedure in respect of any child protection and welfare concern
  2. The procedure in respect to the allegation against the employee
- In the case of the allegation being made against an employee of Greenfields, the same person will not deal with both the young person and the alleged abuser. It will be the responsibility of a member of the committee to deal directly with a staff member against whom an allegation has been made. The DLP will be responsible for reporting the matter to the Child and Family Agency if the matter meets the reasonable grounds, as per this policy.
- If there is an allegation or suspicion in relation to the Childcare Manager, the Chairman of the Board of Management will deal with all aspects relating to the Childcare Manager.

### **If an allegation is made against an employee the following steps will be taken:**

- A member of the committee will deal with all aspects relating to the employee/student/volunteer.
- Where an employer becomes aware of an allegation of abuse by an employee, the employer will inform the employee of the following
  - (i) The fact that an allegation has been made against him/her
  - (ii) The nature of the allegation

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- The employee will be given the opportunity to respond; the response will be noted and passed onto the Child & Family Agency with a formal report, if one is being made
- The allegation will be assessed by the designated person to establish if there are reasonable grounds for concern and whether a formal report will be made to the statutory authorities at this point.
- Whether or not the matter is being reported to the Child & Family Agency, the Board of Management is always informed of an allegation of abuse or neglect against an employee.
- Confidentiality: it is important that at all times the matter is treated in the strictest confidence and that the identity of the employee is not disclosed, other than as required under the procedures of the policy.
- The safety of the child is the first priority of Greenfield's and all necessary measures will be taken to ensure that the child is safe. The measures taken will be proportionate to the level of risk.
- Greenfield's will ensure that no other children are at risk during this period and will inform other relevant agencies or parents/guardians as appropriate.
- Measures which can be taken to ensure the safety of children can include the following:
  1. Suspension of duties of the person accused.
  2. Working under increased supervision during the period of the investigation.
  3. Other measures as deemed appropriate.
  4. Greenfield's will ensure that the principles of natural justice, the presumption of innocence and fair procedures will be adhered to at all times.

It is important to note that protective measures are intended to be precautionary not disciplinary

- Further action will be guided by employment legislation, the contract of employment, the other policies and procedures of the service and the advice of the investigating agencies.

### **Parents and allegations of abuse or neglect against employees**

- Parents have the right to contact the Child & Family agency to report an allegation of abuse or neglect about an employee of the service
- Parents of children who are named in an allegation of abuse or neglect will be kept informed of actions planned and taken, having regard to the rights of others concerned.
- If there is any concern that a child may have been harmed their parents will be informed immediately.

### **Record Keeping**

If worrying changes are observed in a child's behaviour, physical condition or appearance, a specific and confidential record will be set up, separate to the records of children's progress and development. This record will include timed and dated observations, describing objectively the child's behaviour/appearance without comment or interpretation and, where possible, the exact words spoken by the child. The recorder will sign and date the observation. Such records will be kept in a separate file, in the manager's office and will not be accessible to people other than the designated person or other appropriate members of staff. These records will be shared with the Child and Family Agency as appropriate. All records are stored in compliance with 2006 Child Care Regulations and in line with our Data Protection Policy.

### **Safe Recruitment**

We will ensure that all staff and volunteers are carefully selected in line with our Recruitment Policy and the Child Care Regulations 2006. The following will be undertaken:

- Development of a robust job description
- Interviews will be conducted by more than one person
- All processes will be consistent and transparent, i.e. Short listing will be applied, interview questions will be the same and agreed in advance, score sheets used etc.
- Prior to commencement of position, proof of photo I.D. will be requested to keep on file
- All references are checked prior to the start date
- Prior to commencement of position satisfactory Garda Vetting will be in place for all staff and volunteers
- All new positions are subject to a probationary period
- All new employees are issued with an employee contract and an employee handbook

### **Personnel File**

An up-to date personnel file is kept for each staff member that includes the following records

- Proof of identity
- Proof of satisfactory Garda Vetting
- Two validated references
- Qualifications



## **Induction/Training/Support & Supervision**

### *Induction*

- As part of the induction process, all new management, staff, volunteers and students will be briefed on the elements of the Child Protection Policy including the Code of Behaviour, prior to their start date.
- All management, staff, volunteers and students will be required to commit to and abide by the Child Protection Policy. They are required to confirm that they have read and understand the Child Protection policy with their signature.

### *Training*

- The DLP and the deputy DLP will be released to attend any relevant Child Protection training.
- All management, staff, volunteers and students will be encouraged to attend child protection training and any other relevant training as identified.

### *Support & Supervision*

- Regular support & Supervision is available for staff and students, through one to one meetings
- Staff will be supported while dealing with a child protection concern and outside support will be sought if necessary, in line with our employee assistance policy

## **List of Appendices**

- Appendix (i)** Standard report form (see <http://www.tusla.ie/childrenfirst/publications-and-forms>)
- Appendix (ii)** Definitions of Abuse from *Children First* (pp. 8-11)
- Appendix (iii)** Signs and Symptoms of Abuse from *Children First* (pp. 70-74)
- Appendix (iv)** Guidance on responding to a disclosure from the *Child Protection and welfare practice handbook* (chapter 2; 2.5 pp. 32-33)
- Appendix (v)** Reasonable grounds for Reporting a Child Protection & Welfare concern from the *Child protection and Welfare Practice Handbook* (Chapter 2 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4 pp. 30-31)