

# Child Protection Policy

## Gaelscoil na gCeithre Maol

### Introduction

This school is committed to the provision of the highest standard of education to everyone regardless of the age, gender, creed or social class. The Board of Management recognises that child protection and welfare considerations permeate all aspects of school life and must be reflected in all of the school's policies, practices and activities. Accordingly, in accordance with the requirements of the Department of Education and Skills' Child Protection Procedures, the Board of Management of Gaelscoil na gCeithre Maol has agreed the following child protection policy:

- The Board of Management has adopted and will implement fully and without modification the Department's Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools as part of this overall child protection policy.
- The Designated Liaison Person (DLP) is Frances Ní Bhriain
- The Deputy Designated Liaison Person (Deputy DLP) is Nóirín Bhreathnach
- In its policies, practices and activities, Gaelscoil na gCeithre Maol will adhere to the following principles of best practice in child protection and welfare:
  - This policy has been made available to school personnel and the Parents' Association and is readily accessible to parents on request. A copy of this policy will be made available to the Department and the patron if requested.
  - The names of the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) and the Deputy Designated Liaison Person will be prominently displayed at the entrance to the school.

The school will:

1. Recognise that the protection and welfare of children is of paramount importance, regardless of all other considerations;
2. Fully co-operate with the relevant statutory authorities in relation to child protection and welfare matters
3. Adopt safe practices to minimise the possibility of harm or accidents happening to

children and protect workers from the necessity to take unnecessary risks that may leave themselves open to accusations of abuse or neglect;

4. Develop a practice of openness with parents and encourage parental involvement in the education of their children;

5. Fully respect confidentiality requirements in dealing with child protection matters.

6. Provide a copy of this policy to all staff as well as 'Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures 2017' (Dept. of Education and Science). All staff must become familiar with guidelines as well as 'Children First' (National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children, 2017)

## **Aims**

To create a secure, reliable, responsible and open environment.

To teach personal safety skills that focus specifically on preventing abuse for every child in school.

To develop an awareness of and responsibility for child protection in the whole school community.

To put in place procedures for best practice to protect our children and whole school community

To ensure that all school staff have knowledge of and understanding of the Guidelines 'Children First', and the procedures to follow if they have concerns or there is a disclosure of abuse.

To provide ongoing training to staff in these areas & in other areas.

## **Prevention**

- The Stay Safe program is the primary means to educate children in the prevention of abuse. This program is taught as part of SPHE curriculum under the strand Safety and Protection (Personal Safety).

- When a child's parent registers them they will be notified that the Stay Safe program is in use in the school and a copy of Guidelines for Parents to Stay Safe will be made available.

- Formal lessons of the Stay Safe programme will be taught every two years as set out in two-year cycle plan for SPHE.

### **Practice:**

The whole team in this school (teachers, special needs assistants, support staff, secretarial, caretaking etc.) will follow the recommendations for reporting concerns or disclosures as outlined in 'Children First' & the 'Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures'.

The schools Board of Management has appointed Frances Ní Bhriain (Acting Principal) as Designated Liaison Person (DLP) and Nóirín Bhreathnach (Vice Principal) as deputy Designated Liaison Person.

It is agreed by staff and school management:

All concerns / disclosure regarding child protection be reported to the DLP (or deputy DLP if appropriate) as soon as possible.

That all reports to the DLP be dated and signed by the person making the report.

Confidentiality must be maintained.

### **Procedures:**

The staff and board of management of the school recognise the following as areas of concern for child protection. After discussion the staff & board of management agreed on and adopted the following procedures:

#### **a) Physical contact:**

Any physical contact between school personnel and the child should only be in response to the needs of the child.

While physical contact can be used to comfort, reassure or help children these conditions should be followed and the appropriateness considered: -

1. Would it be acceptable to the child
2. Open and not confidential
3. Appropriate to the age and stage of the child's development

School personnel should avoid doing anything for the child that they should be able to do themselves.

b) Toileting/personal care needs:

Any specific toileting and care needs need to be discussed before registration and before the child starts school. This may involve Parents/guardians, classroom teachers, special needs assistant, principal and if appropriate, the student.) The purpose of the meeting is to determine the child's needs and to the best ways the school can meet those needs. A written record of this should be kept on the child's file.

While every effort will be made to have two staff members present when dealing with personal care/assisted toileting there will be times this does not happen. These instances will be recorded and the DLP and the parents/guardians will be notified.

c) Guests/Guest Speakers:

Visitors/speakers should never be left alone with children. The school principal is responsible for the identification and vetting of visitors/guest speakers.

d) Toilet Accidents:

Clean underwear and a change of clothes will be available to change into if necessary. If a child is unable to clean/change him/herself and the parents/guardians cannot be contacted a member of staff known to the child will assist them. In such cases there will always be two members of staff present. A record of such incidents will be kept & the principal and parents will be informed.

e) Teaching one to one:

School policy is that teaching one-to-one is often in the best interests of the child. Every effort will be made to ensure that teaching takes place in an open environment. Parents will be informed of one-to-one teaching and their agreement will be sought.

Our special needs assistants will work under the direction of the classroom teacher in an open environment.

f) Changing Clothes for Games/PE/Swimming:

It is expected that students will change their own clothes for games/PE/swimming. Where children need assistance it will take place in an open place and with parental permission.

Under no circumstance will staff members be permitted to change a child's clothing in private or in a cubicle. If privacy is requested, then the parent/guardian need to assist the child themselves.

g) Supervision:

There must be adequate supervision of the children at all times. There will always be two adults supervising the yard at lunch-times.

While every effort is made to comply with best practice, as agreed above, if in the case of an emergency it is neither possible nor practical to follow the agreed practice a full account of the incident will be recorded and communicated to the principal and parents.

When a staff member has to medically assist a child or administer first aid it shall be done in a public place.

No individual child shall travel alone with a member of staff. If a member of staff member has to take a single child somewhere alone he/she must have another adult present.

A child WILL not be released to anyone they do not recognise as a parent/guardian unless they are informed in advance.

h) Staff Recruitment and selection:

The Board of Management will closely follow the guidelines as set down by the Department of Education and Science for the appointed of staff. The Board of Management must ensure that they have all the candidates' details, details of work experience, qualifications, names of referees. Each employee must be Garda vetted as laid down in circulars 0031/2016 & 0016/2017.

All volunteers in the school must work under the guidance of the class teacher.

i) Safety on the Internet:

Children are not allowed to use the internet unless a teacher is present. Sites such as Facebook and Twitter have been blocked. The children are not allowed to use YouTube unsupervised and safe-tube is recommended and should be used in classroom and on google classroom platforms.

The children are not allowed mobile phones to school.

**Child Protection**

Everyone who is involved with the education of children has a responsibility to ensure that they are free from fear, worry and abuse. Therefore, it is important to be aware & knowledgeable of the signs of child abuse. Below there is a comprehensive list of the signs of the four types of abuse. It is important that all staff know these, so that if they see them they will recognise them and therefore take their concerns to the DLP.

The school management board and the school staff have certain responsibilities and these are outlines. Everyone must make be aware of their responsibilities and follow the proper procedures.

There are 4 types of child abuse. There are many signs associated with each type of abuse and there are many common signs also. There is no need to see all of the signs before reporting your concerns, and it may also be the case that just one sign may not indicate a problem.

Any concerns should be discussed with the DLP.

### **1. 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, medical care. If a child is being neglected in this manner it is usually over a period of time and not just a once off incident. If a child is not growing as is appropriate to their age they may be suffering from neglect due to inadequate nourishment. If a child is absent from school on a regular basis they may be suffering from neglect due to inadequate intellectual development. Regular absence or continuous may be seen as a sign of problems at home. Regular absenteeism can often be seen as a sign of neglect.

#### ***Signs of Neglect***

1. Being left alone without having an adult around
2. Inadequate supervision
3. Frequently having a lack of food, inadequate food or regular meals.
4. Lack of heating
5. Lack of suitable clothing i.e. wearing t-shirt in winter (without a jacket)

6. Regular absenteeism from school
7. Neglect of the child's health issues
8. Having to do work unsuitable in relation to their age
9. Child not thriving - not only due to lack of food but lack of emotional support
10. Inadequate support at home of the child's progress
11. Lack of protection from harm

## **2. Emotional Abuse**

Emotional Abuse is normally to be found in the relationship between caregiver and a child rather than in specific events or patterns of events. It occurs when a child's needs for affection, approval, consistency and security are not met. Unless other forms of abuse are present, it is rarely manifested in terms of physical signs or symptoms.

Usually there may be no physical signs visible, unless the child suffers from another form of abuse. That said, when there is another form of abuse psychological neglect also occurs.

### ***Signs of Emotional Abuse***

1. Rejection
  2. Lack of praise
  3. Lack of affection and attention
  4. Lack of adequate care of the child's needs
  5. Under the care of adults who are not interested in the good of the child
  6. Unsuitable or harsh punishment i.e. locked in a room for a long period of time,
  7. Violence or domestic conflict
- \* Every child who is abused physically, sexually or through neglect suffers from this.
8. The child may be looking forward to things unsuitable to their age i.e. to be out working at a young age.

## **3. Physical Abuse**

What's involved here is physical abuse or injuries of any kind that are not the result of an accident but due to the neglect of the protection of the child. The following can be included - shaking/being too rough/harm/Munchausens/dropping or creating an environment that is dangerous and where the child could get hurt.

## ***Signs of physical abuse***

### **Bruises**

General bruising: - generally these are to be seen in places that bruise easily where a bone is close to the skin i.e. chin/nose,forehead/elbow/knee. These bruises usually don't have a regular edge to them.

\* Be vigilant when there is bruising on the back of the shin/bum/thigh/back/base of the back/neck/mouth/genitalia.

Non accidental bruising - often see marks left when a child is hit i.e. by hand/stick/belt.

(d) Bruising around the neck is unlikely to be accidental

(e) Be alert to black eyes or ears. You cannot get a black eye from falling on the ground

(f) Bruising can be as a result of internal bleeding caused by shaking.

### **Burns**

General Burns - usually as a result of an accident with water or something else hot spilling on them or coming into contact with something hot i.e. saucepan.

Non accidental Burns - often there is a pattern there that does not correspond with the explanation given for the burn.

If the burn is as a result of a hot water burn against their will there is usually a line visible rather than a 'splash' burn. There may be a burn as a result of the child being held against something hot i.e. heater/cooker. In the case of cigarette burns there may be a clear mark.

If you have any worries you should go directly to the DLP who will take it from there.

\* Watch out for broken bones/swelling etc.

## **4. Sexual Abuse**

**Important note: As all sexual abuse falls within the category of seriously affecting a child's health welfare or development, all concerns about sexual abuse must be submitted as a mandated report to Tusla. There is one exception which deals with certain sexual activity between older teenagers which is outlined in section 4.7 of these procedures. (Child Protection Procedures 2017)**

Sexual abuse occurs when a child is used by another person for his/her gratification or sexual arousal. Sexual abuse also occurs when the child's sexuality is used as a means of



making money i.e. filming/pornography.

Often sexual abuse of a child takes place over a long period of time, but it may be the result of a once off incident. It often occurs within the home or with adults known to the child.

Often these cases come to light in the event of a disclosure

iv) Statement from the child him/herself/sister/brother/friend of the child

v) Worry from an adult

vi) Obvious physical signs

### **Signs of sexual abuse**

1) Bleeding from the genital area

2) Discomfort/pain going to the toilet

3) Change in the child's behaviour

4) Reports (discussing) of sexual activity

5) Inappropriate understanding of sexual terms/sex relative to their age

6) The child may be inappropriate with other children

7) Lack of involvement in activities that may involve taking off clothes i.e. swimming.

### **Signs generally associated with abuse**

A change in the child's self-image

Complaints of pain i.e. headache, pain in the tummy etc

Refusing to go to school

Nightmares

Isolation - Staying to themselves in class/yard

Lack of interest in food

Not comfortable in the company of people

### **Responsibilities of the School**

The whole school community is responsible for the wellbeing of every child in our care.

It is important that there be an open and clear procedure in place.

### **Responsibilities of the Board of Management**

i) Put in place clear guidelines and procedures to be followed by all staff.

- ii) Appoint the Designated Liaison Person. It is this person who will liaise with the Gardaí/HSE/Staff/Chairperson/Guardians, etc.
- iii) Monitor the progress of the child there are concerns about.

To that end, Frances Ní Bhriain has been appointed as DLP and Nóirín Bhreathnach as Deputy DLP in Gaelscoil na gCeithre Maol. All staff in the school was informed of the process & procedures put in place to deal with child abuse. (Appendix 1)

### Role of the Teacher

*Every registered teacher should note that as a mandated person the statutory obligation under the Children First Act 2015 to make a mandated report to Tusla rests with the individual teacher and this applies regardless of whether or not the DLP reports the concern in question. However a registered teacher who makes a mandated report to Tusla jointly with the DLP meets his or her statutory obligation to report to Tusla under the Children First Act 2015 (Child Protection Procedures 2017)*

- 1) If any member of the teaching staff has any concern about the abuse of any child, they should take it to the DLP
  - 2) If a child makes a disclosure about their abuse to any member of staff, they should listen carefully and without putting pressure on the child
  - 3) There will be no formal interview. Get and record as many details as possible.
  - 4) The child should be listened to.
  - 5) Put the child at their ease but don't promise anything e.g. that you can help with the situation or that you won't tell anyone else.
  - 6) Don't ask any leading questions and don't make suggestions.
  - 7) Don't stop the child from telling you what they remember about the abuse.
  - 8) Don't let the details get to you- stay detached
  - 9) Explain to them that you may have to look for help in dealing with the situation
  - 10) Record the conversation as soon as possible after the event and keep a record.
- \*Use the language that the child used.
- 11) Go to the DLP

12) If a member of staff has any worries about the abuse of any child they should keep a record of everything - even little cuts & bruises. All evidence will be needed if there is a case taken against the abuser. Make sure that the appropriate language is used in the records i.e direct quotes.

13) The teacher is only responsible for reporting - not investigating, dealing with or analysing of details.

14) Your report is only one part of a wider investigation. (Appendix 3)

### Role of the Designated Liaison Person

**Where the DLP has any doubt as to whether to inform a parent/carer that a report concerning his or her child, is being made to Tusla, the DLP shall seek the advice of Tusla (*Child Protection Procedures 2023*)**

If a member of staff comes to you with a reasonable concern it has to be reported to the Tusla immediately.

1) Tusla area manager is Heather Wilson and he should be contacted directly/on the phone (094 904030) or written to immediately.

2) The person who is making the report should be available to speak to the social worker.

3) In urgent cases and when the social worker cannot be contacted, the DLP should contact the Gardaí directly.

4) The standard reporting form (Appendix 2) should be adhered to if possible. The Board of Management's chairperson should be notified at this stage, but the report can be made without their knowledge.

5) At this stage a decision is made about the parents. The DLP should inform the parents if this does not put the child in danger or put them at greater risk. If this is the case make sure to keep a record of your decision.

6) If you are informing the parents about the abuse, don't make any inquiries - just send them a letter stating what has been done.

7) It is not up to you as DLP to make any decision. Speak/write to them directly stating the facts.

8) Explain the Guidelines and the responsibilities you have.

9) Keep a record of all communication.

\*There will be no liability in Civil law for anyone who makes a reasonable report of child abuse with good intentions.

10) If there is considerable doubt over the concerns of staff, the DLP must enquire with Tusla. At this point it may be an anonymous discussion and no personal details need to be given - just to look for advice.

11) If the DLP decides after discussing it with the Tusla that there is no need to follow up and make a report, the DLP needs to make a written report for the member of staff outlining the reasons for this decision (The DLP should also get these recommendations from Tusla in writing).

12) If you are called to a Child Protection Conference all records should be taken with you.

\*A substitute teacher can be employed if this conference takes place during school time - you just need a letter of proof.

### Allegations from Parents

(1) It is important for parents making allegations to speak directly to the DLP

(2) At this point it is important to clarify to him/her that you can't promise to take the allegation any further without being able to use their name.

(3) It is important also to explain to the parent that they may be responsible for the future outcome of the case if they don't take it to Tusla.

### Allegations or Concerns about a Member of Staff

The most important thing for the Board of Management is child protection. Consequently, children's safety and well-being is our primary concern. However, the Board of Management also has a duty of care to our staff also.

Therefore, it is important to seek legal advice in these cases.

NB: It is important that the DLP discusses these allegations with the Board. The chairperson will meet with the accused employee with the advice of the Board. The DLP should not be involved with both sides unless the allegation is made against the DLP.

The employee has rights and these should be respected. They should not be suspended until the entire investigation is concluded.

## Reporting Method

The person who makes the allegation must go to the DLP with it. The DLP must get a written account of the allegation from the person or parent/guardian making it. Tusla will be depending on this report. It should be accurate.

The chairperson should be kept informed.

If one staff member makes an allegation against another staff member, they must go to the DLP immediately. If there is a reasonable basis for it the DLP must make a report to Tusla and inform the chairperson.

## Role of the Chairperson

The chairperson should inform the alleged employee:

- (1) That an allegation has been made
- (2) The nature of the allegation
- (3) That the allegation has been reported to Tusla by the DLP

A written copy of the allegation should be given to the teacher. They may be asked to give a written response to the Board of Management within a specified time frame. Confidentiality is vital. No one not directly involved in the case should have any knowledge about it. Explain that the Board of Management must be in contact with Tusla.

It's vital that legal advice be sought. This should be sought before contacting the HSE. The Legal Department of INTO can be contacted or a local solicitor.

If, in the opinion of the chairperson the allegation is founded they may as head of the Board of Management ask the staff member to stay away from the school immediately. If the chairperson is unsure, they should seek advice from the Tusla or Gardaí.

If the above happens the employee is suspended with pay and without prejudice. It is not a sign of guilt. The Department of Education and Science must be informed:

- (1) Formal approval to suspend the employee
- (2) Permission to get a substitute

\*The chairperson of the Board of Management must be informed. An accurate report should be provided.

## Review & Monitoring

The Board of Management will monitor and review this policy annually and at other times if necessary.

This policy was reviewed and adopted on 9<sup>th</sup> October 2024.

Signed:

Chairperson of Board of Management

Signed:

Principal