



PATIENT SAFETY TOOL BOX TALKS ©

SAFE CARE & SUPPORT

CHILDREN FIRST WHAT TO DO IF CONCERNED ABOUT THE SAFETY AND/OR WELFARE OF A CHILD



v1.0

What is Children First?

'Children First' 2011 - is the HSE National Guidance which promotes the safety and well-being of all children. 'Children First' is intended to assist people in identifying and reporting child abuse and neglect and outlines how to deal effectively with concerns. It highlights the role and responsibilities of the H.S.E. and An Garda Síochána, the two agencies with the statutory responsibility for child protection. It offers guidance and outlines the roles and responsibilities of all agencies and organizations to protect children.

The HSE Child Protection & Welfare Practice Handbook 2011, is a companion to Children First and an aide to delivering accountable, consistent and deliverable practice.

What are your responsibilities?

HSE Staff Responsibility for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2010: This HSE Policy is effective from 24th May 2010 and applies to **all** HSE staff. There are different levels of responsibilities for **Designated Officers (full list on Appendix 10, Children First 2011)** and the wider staff group of **Non-designated Officers**.

Responsibilities of HSE Designated Officers

- To clarify with the person making the report that he/she is making a formal report
- To inform that person they are protected in law from civil liability if they report to you as a designated Officer reasonably and in good faith (See below, *Protection for Persons Reporting Child abuse Act 1998*)
- To establish if reasonable grounds for concern exist (see below)

Protections for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act 1998: This Act came into operation on 23 January 1999. The main provisions of the Act are:

'(i) the provision of immunity from civil liability to any person who reports child abuse 'reasonably and in good faith' to designated officers of the HSE or to any member of An Garda Síochána; (ii) the provision of significant protections for employees who report child abuse, and, (iii) the creation of a new offence of false reporting of child abuse'

Section 176 of the Criminal Justice Act 2006 : This act 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 (no upper limit) and/or imprisonment for a term not exceeding 10 years.



What to do if you have a concern/(s) about a child?

In the Children First: National Guidance, 'a child' means a person under the age of 18 years, excluding a person who is or has been married.

1. Do I Have reasonable Grounds for concern? (see below) **Record my concerns.**
2. Report to my line manager without delay and consult with the Child and Family Duty Social Work Service if needed at this point. (Remember to check all past presentations of the child, be aware of indicators of abuse; patterns over time may be significant to this current case). **Record outcomes and all decisions.**
3. Inform and consult with Parents (and Child where appropriate) as soon as possible unless doing so would endanger the child. **Record their responses**
4. If Reasonable grounds for concern exist, Report to HSE Child and Family Services Duty Social Worker without delay. **In an emergency contact the Gardaí. Record outcomes and keep copy of all Standard Reporting Forms (refer to your Hospital policies)**
5. Participate in assessment of concerns where appropriate.
6. At any stage of this process you can consult/report to the Duty Social Worker, HSE Child and Family Services even if your line manager has no further concerns about the children.

Guidelines for Recognition

There are three stages in the identification of child neglect or abuse:

1. Considering the possibility
2. Looking out for signs of neglect or abuse
3. Recording of information



What Constitutes Reasonable Grounds for a Child Protection or Welfare Concern?

- An injury or behaviour that is consistent both with abuse and an innocent explanation, but where there are corroborative indicators supporting the concern that it may be a case of abuse.
- Consistent indication over a period of time that a child is suffering from emotional or physical neglect.
- Admission or indication by someone of an alleged abuse.
- A specific indication from a child that he or she was abused.
- An account from a person who saw the child being abused.
- Evidence (e.g. injury or behaviour) that is consistent with abuse and unlikely to have been caused in any other way.

If in doubt, check it out and remember Always Children First!!!!

INSERT YOUR LOCAL CHILD AND FAMILY DUTY SOCIAL WORK DEPARTMENT HERE: _____

INSERT YOUR LOCAL GARDA STATION NUMBER HERE: _____



Acknowledgements: Mr. Seamus Deeney, Chair for Child Protection Conferencing, Cavan/Monaghan, Child and Family Services, Ms. Déirdre Horan Martin, Children First Information & Advice Officer, Cavan and Monaghan, Child and Family Services and Children First Information & Advice Officers Nationwide.