



Child Protection Policy

Swords Tidy Towns

2019

Introduction

Swords Tidy Towns is fully committed to safeguarding the well-being of participants by protecting them from physical, sexual and emotional harm and neglect. Swords Tidy Towns accepts that in all matters concerning child protection, the welfare and protection of the young person is paramount. This child protection policy and code of behaviour aims to protect volunteers who work with Swords Tidy Towns.

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 or in the future. This policy document should be read with the Child Safeguarding Statement and the Risk Assessment that has been put in place by Swords Tidy Towns.

Who does this Child Protection Policy apply to?

This child protection policy applies to all Committee members and anyone who volunteer with Swords Tidy Towns. Everyone to whom the policy applies is required to familiarise themselves with the policy before becoming involved with Swords Tidy Towns.

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 Health Service Executive, either directly or through the Designated Persons. 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 Designated Persons, Matt Cullen and Gerry Brennan the Health Service Executive or the Gardaí (*Children First, National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children 1999 p.37*).

Defining and Identifying Child Abuse

A 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. (*Children First, National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children 1999, p. 31.*)

2. Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is normally found in the relationship between a care-giver (an adult person who has responsibility for a child in the short or long term) and a child rather than in a specific event or pattern of events, it occurs when a child's needs for affection, approval, consistency and security are not met. It is rarely manifested in terms of physical symptoms. Children show signs of emotional abuse by their behaviour (for example excessive clinginess to or avoidance of the parent or carer), their emotional state (low self-esteem, unhappiness) or their development. The threshold of significant harm is reached when abusive interactions dominate and become typical of the relationship between the child and parent or carer. (*Children First, National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children 1999, p. 31-32.*)

3. Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is any form of non-accidental injury or any injury that results from wilful or neglectful failure to protect a child. Examples of physical injury include, shaking; use of excessive force in handling; deliberate poisoning; suffocation; allowing or creating a substantial risk of significant harm to a child. (*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 leaders, volunteers and participants. 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. (*Children First, National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children 1999, p. 33.*)

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 community centre setting. In the first instance, it

is the responsibility of the Committee to deal with bullying that may take place within the organisation. The more extreme forms of bullying behaviour would be regarded as physical or emotional abuse and are reportable to the statutory authorities.

Incidents should not be tolerated under any circumstances and should be dealt with immediately. For more information on bullying, "*Let's beat bullying*" is a complete anti-bullying resource for those working with young people in youth work settings and is available as a download on www.youthhealth.ie

Reporting Procedures

Swords Tidy Towns 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 volunteer 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.

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

Reporting Procedures

1. Use open-ended questions to clarify what is being said and try to avoid having them repeat what they have told you.
2. Do not promise to keep secrets.
3. Advise that you will offer support but that you must pass on the information.
4. Do not express any opinions about the alleged abuser to the person reporting to you.
5. Explain and make sure that the young person understands what will happen next.
6. Do not confront the alleged abuser.
7. 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.

8. Ensure that the information is restricted to those who need to know it.
9. Pass any allegations to the Designated Persons immediately.
10. Allegations should not be investigated by Swords Tidy Towns

What does a Swords Tidy Towns volunteer do if they suspect that a young person is being abused or neglected?

Try to ensure in so far as is possible that no situation arises that could cause any further risk to the individual. Record the facts as you know them. Include the young person's name, address, nature of the concern, allegation or disclosure and, where possible, information about a parent or guardian. Report the incident to the Secretary or any member of the Committee.

What happens if there are reasonable grounds for concern?

If reasonable grounds for concern exist, the Designated Person will provide a report to the Duty Social Worker of the Health Service Executive. 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, 1999, p. 38.*)

If there is an immediate risk to a young person, the volunteer should contact An Garda Síochána. The Designated Person 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.

The Designated Person will ensure they do the following or, in their absence, that another person in the organisation 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 Swords Tidy Towns volunteers about individual cases as appropriate.
- Advise on best practice and ensure that Swords Tidy Towns 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 Swords Tidy Towns policies and procedures are brought to the attention of to all Swords Tidy Towns volunteers.

All allegations or suspicions about a SWORDS TIDY TOWNS staff member or volunteer, no matter how insignificant, must be referred immediately and directly to:

The Designated persons

Code of Behaviour for staff members/volunteers

- Volunteers and leaders should be sensitive to the risks involved in taking part in some contact sports with young people. Volunteers and leaders should be sensitive to the implications of becoming too involved with or spending a lot of time with any one young person.
- Volunteers and leaders 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 volunteer has a concern about the nature of a particular relationship involving themselves or another leader, volunteer or young person, they should discuss it with a Committee member or experienced colleague.
- A volunteer or leader 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 volunteer provides transport for participants in the course of their involvement with Swords Tidy Towns, 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.
- Volunteers must never physically punish or be verbally abusive to a young person.
- The ratio of adult leaders 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 leaders, the type of activity being undertaken and the ability of the participants.

Guidelines on the Use of Technology

Mobile phones, camera phones, cameras and audio-visual equipment.

- A mobile phone can be a great communication method and a potential safety tool. Volunteers should carry mobile phones on all activities. However, it can happen if there is an emergency that the mobile phone may not work due to poor reception. Therefore, the reliance on a phone should never replace the skill and competencies required for such activities. (See GDPR Policy)

Policy on the Use of Cameras and Images

The following guidelines on the use of cameras and audio visual images will be used.

- Swords Tidy Towns will undertake as far as possible to get permission to use images of participants before using their images for publicity purposes.
- Swords Tidy Towns will seek parents' or guardians' permission for the use of photographs of participants under the age of 18 for any publicity purposes.
- Only images of participants in appropriate dress will be used.
- Inappropriate use of images of participants or volunteers will be brought to the attention of the Designated Person. (See GDPR Policy)

Dealing with Allegations Against staff members and Volunteers

When an allegation is made against a volunteer or leader, the following steps will be taken:

1. Any action will be guided by the agreed procedures, the applicable volunteer contract and the rules of natural justice. The priority will be to ensure that no child is exposed to unnecessary risk. (See Volunteer Handbook)
2. The Designated Person (unless the allegation is being made against them) will be informed as soon as possible.
3. The follow up on an allegation of abuse against a volunteer with Swords Tidy Towns will be made in consultation with the Health Service Executive and An Garda Síochána.
4. Swords Tidy Towns will ensure that actions taken do not undermine or frustrate any investigations being conducted by the Health Service Executive or An Garda Síochána.