

# Recognising child neglect or abuse

The assistance provided by our Designated Persons in the area of recognising and reporting alleged child abuse is outlined in detail on our policies

Child neglect or abuse can often be difficult to identify and may present in many forms. If a member, parent, coach or child has such concerns they may report such matter direct to the statutory authorities (e.g. HSE/Gardaí or Police/HSC Trusts NI) or may seek the assistance of their relevant Designated Person, who will assist them in making such reports. A list of indicators of child abuse is contained in Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children. No one indicator should be seen as conclusive in itself of abuse. It may indicate conditions other than child abuse. All signs and symptoms must be examined in the context of the child's situation and family circumstances.

## **GUIDELINES FOR RECOGNITION**

The ability to recognise child abuse can depend as much on a person's willingness to accept the possibility of its existence as it does on their knowledge and information. There are commonly three stages in the identification of child neglect or abuse:

- considering the possibility;
- looking out for signs of neglect or abuse;
- Recording of information.

## **STAGE 1: CONSIDERING THE POSSIBILITY**

The possibility of child abuse should be considered if a child appears to have suffered a suspicious injury for which no reasonable explanation can be offered. It should also be considered if the child seems distressed without obvious reason or displays persistent or new behavioural problems. The possibility of child abuse should also be considered if the child displays unusual or fearful responses to parents/carers or older children. A pattern of ongoing neglect should also be considered even when there are short periods of improvement.

## **STAGE 2: LOOKING OUT FOR SIGNS OF NEGLECT OR ABUSE**

Signs of neglect or abuse can be physical, behavioural or developmental. They can exist in the relationships between children and parents/carers or between children and other family members/other persons. A cluster or pattern of signs is more likely to be indicative of neglect or abuse. Children who are being abused may hint that they are being harmed and sometimes make direct disclosures. Disclosures should always be taken very seriously and should be acted upon, for example, by informing the HSE/Gardaí or Police/HSC Trusts NI) either directly or through the relevant Club/County Designated Person. No child should be interviewed in detail about alleged abuse without first consulting and seeking direction from the statutory authorities. Such contact with a child may be more appropriately carried out by the statutory authorities themselves.

### **SOME SIGNS ARE MORE INDICATIVE OF ABUSE THAN OTHERS. THESE INCLUDE:**

- Disclosure of abuse by a child or young person;
- Age-inappropriate or abnormal sexual play or knowledge;
- Specific injuries or patterns of injuries;
- absconding from home or a care situation;
- Attempted suicide: for the Protection and Welfare of Children
- Underage pregnancy or sexually transmitted disease;
- Signs in one or more categories at the same time. For example, signs of developmental delay, physical injury and behavioural signs may together indicate a pattern of abuse.

Many signs of abuse are non-specific and must be considered in the child's social and family context. It is important to be open to alternative explanations for physical or behavioural signs of abuse.

## **STAGE 3: RECORDING OF INFORMATION**

If neglect or abuse is suspected and acted upon, for example, by informing the HSE Children and Family Services, it is important to establish the grounds for concern by obtaining as much information as possible. Observations should be accurately recorded and should include dates, times, names, locations, context and any other information that may be relevant. Care should be taken as to how such information is stored and to whom it is made available. Advice on such issue may be obtained directly from statutory authorities or from the relevant Designated Person in our Associations.

## **CHILDREN WITH ADDITIONAL VULNERABILITIES**

Certain children are more vulnerable to abuse than others. Such children include those with disabilities, children who are homeless and those who, for one reason or another, are separated from their parents or other family members and who depend on others for their care and protection. The same categories of abuse – neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse – are applicable, but may take a slightly different form. For example, abuse may take the form of deprivation of basic rights, harsh disciplinary regimes or the inappropriate use of medications or physical restraints.

**Signed**

Chairman.....

Date .....