



**Child and Vulnerable Adults  
Protection Policy  
for  
Sisters Of Our Lady of the Missions  
In Ireland**

**June 2007**

## **POLICY**

*We the sisters of Our Lady of the Missions, recognise the personal dignity and rights of children and of vulnerable adults towards whom we have a special responsibility and duty of care. We undertake to do all in our power to create a safe environment for children, young people and vulnerable adults and to protect them from any form of abuse, neglect or bullying. We will liaise closely with Church and statutory agencies to ensure that any allegations of abuse are promptly and properly dealt with, victims supported and perpetrators held to account and assisted to live offence free lives.*

### **Our child protection policy will include:**

- a. Prevention
- b. Recruitment processes
- c. Disclosure checkout
- d. Safe environment
- e. Good practice

### **GUIDELINES FOR CHILD PROTECTION CO-ORDINATOR**

1. Upon receipt of an allegation, inform the Province Leader, or member of the Provincial team, and then, immediately refer to the statutory authorities. All allegations of abuse must be reported before the end of the day to Health Authorities, or Garda, without any process of filtering. All information should be passed on, all written records also, keeping a copy for the file.
2. A file is created for case and log of actions, events and information received. If there are any records made by any person in connection with the case these must be placed in a file. All files should be kept securely and confidentially in an identifiable and retrievable form in a system controlled by the CPC, separate from any personnel file.
3. When referral is made to CPC, contact is made with CPC for C.O.R.I. and with the DCP in which parties concerned reside or

work. Contact is also made with the Diocese in which the incident is alleged to have taken place. Contact is maintained until conclusion of case.

### **IN CASES OF SUSPECTED ABUSE BY A MEMBER OF OUR RELIGIOUS CONGREGATION**

- a. Inform Congregational Leader where the Religious resides and Bishop where incident is alleged to have taken place.
- b. Inform Child representative who will advise on relevant action for Religious in the new Church structures.
- c. Ensure that appropriate person informs insurance company that there has been an allegation.

### **IN CASES OF SUSPECTED ABUSE WITHIN THE FAMILY:**

- a. Inform Statutory Authorities, liaise with them and act according to their instructions, especially regarding contact with the parties involved – do not visit the family or contact family members without prior permission from investigators.
- b. It may be appropriate to appoint an independent support person for the child, adult or for the whole family.

### **RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE**

#### **Guiding Principles**

- a. *Listen*
- b. *Record*
- c. *Refer*

### **LISTEN**

Welcome the person. Reassure him/her. Tell them they have done the right thing in coming to report the allegation. Facilitate the person to state the case in his/her own words – act normally. Do not promise confidentiality or make promises about future events. Do not interrupt – allow silences for person to find words. Do not check – other than making sure you have understood. Never arrange to interview a child. If notified that a child may have information about abuse, refer the matter to the statutory authorities – they will conduct the interview.

## Persons who admit abusing a child

Inform the person that such information cannot be kept confidential. Be supportive, but do not seek further detail, you have a duty to pass on the information, others will carry out the investigation.

## **RECORD**

Consider making notes during the conversation – ask permission to do this, explain why. This initial recording will form the first entry in a file of information about the case and will be retained by the Child Protection Officer. Record time, date, location and persons present. Read the record back to the person making the allegation making whatever amendments they may suggest. Ask them to sign the final report. Use direct speech when possible with actual words used, include details. Commence log of action, record times, dates, names of persons spoken to and any advice/agreement reached. Include full details of referrals to Garda and/or Health authorities. Request a receipt from the civil authorities for information handed over. (When a Child Protection Director for Religious is appointed, he/she will look after this).

## **REFER**

If child is at risk of immediate harm, is injured, or states the abuse happened recently, contact Garda or Health Authorities at once, giving full information. Seek medical help where necessary. Where abuse within the child's household or family is suspected, refer immediately to Garda or Health Authorities. Await advice from them about whether to inform a member of the child's household or family or arrange for the child to return home. Where adult has given information, encourage them to share this with statutory authorities, offer support to do this.

*(In cases of emergency or where a child is in immediate risk? it is the moral duty of every citizen to inform the appropriate authorities so that the abuse may be stopped as quickly as possible. There is no mandatory reporting in the Republic of Ireland)*

If refused, explain that you will have to do this on their behalf. Ensure prompt referral to the statutory authorities. Under the new dispensation,

the designated Child Protection Director for Religious will fulfill this task.

Referral to Statutory Authorities – in all but emergency situations, this will be the responsibility of the CPC – should be carried out before the end of the day. Records to be passed to the CPC as soon as possible. Check with local health authorities as to what their policy is re neglect/emotional abuse etc. Do not alert alleged abuser-directly or indirectly.

### **Dealing with a Sister accused of Abuse**

A Sister should not be notified of an allegation made against her until the statutory authorities have been alerted and there must be communication with them before the Sister is notified where an allegation of abuse against a Sister has been made, it is generally necessary to remove her from her post while an investigation takes place. This does not imply guilt. The Sister will be informed of the allegation against her according to the advice of the statutory authorities with respect to timing. This may require a change of residence and the new residence will be chosen by the Provincial Team – a place that is away from direct contact with children and vulnerable adults. Out of courtesy the Bishop(s) of the diocese(s) will be informed.

Decisions must be communicated to the Sister in person and in writing by the Provincial Leader in the presence of the CPC or the Provincial Team. A copy of this communication should be given to the CPC for inclusion in the Child Protection File. The CPC will arrange for an independent support person to be made available to the Sister. This may be a colleague with appropriate skills but someone who is not connected to the case. Support will be offered re accommodation, financial provision and legal advice. A legal advisor to the Congregation must not be offered as legal advisor to the Sister but support should be offered in obtaining the services of a solicitor when required and a canon lawyer if required.

**No negotiations should be made or agreements reached with the Sister without the knowledge of the CPC**

## **RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION PROCESS**

Employment of workers and volunteers will mostly be to care for our elderly Sisters but the following requisites should be adhered to:

***Staff and Volunteers' Roles*** – Job/Role Description – Publicity – Application Form – Declaration Form – Interview/Meeting- Identification- References- Gardai Clearance. They should be informed of the Congregation's Child Protection/vulnerable adult policy and receive training in it.

Those Sisters working in parishes or with children will have Gardai clearance. In the case of Sisters returning from missions abroad, they will need to have a clearance from the Provincial Leader where they previously resided.