

Just ASK Child Safeguarding Policy & Procedures

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1. Responsibility for approval of policy: Board of Management
2. Responsibility for implementation: All Staff
3. Responsibility for ensuring review: Board of Management

Table of Contents

1. A: Introduction
2. B: Designated Liaison Person (DLP)
3. C: Recognising Child Protection and Welfare Concerns
4. D: Responding to and Reporting Concerns
5. E: Confidentiality and Record Keeping
6. F: Safe Recruitment, Selection & Training
7. G: Code of Behaviour
8. H: Breaches & Non-Compliance
9. I: Partnership Working
10. J: Implementation, Monitoring and Review

Section A: Introduction

Just ASK is a youth charity operating in Dublin's north-west inner city, working with children and young people aged 5–18 years. Our mission is to provide positive, safe, and developmental opportunities for young people. This policy outlines our commitment to child safeguarding and the specific procedures that support the implementation of the Just ASK Child Safeguarding Statement, in line with the Children First Act 2015 and Children First National Guidance 2017.

Statement of Commitment

Just ASK is committed to protecting the safety, dignity, and rights of all children and young people with whom we engage. We believe that all children have a right to be protected from harm, to have their voices heard, and to grow in a supportive environment. We adhere fully to the Children First Act 2015, the Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (2017), and relevant best practice.

Scope of this Policy

This policy applies to all staff members, volunteers, students on placement, and any adult acting in a leadership or supportive capacity within Just ASK. It sets out the expectations and standards of behaviour and engagement with children and outlines our safeguarding procedures.

Section B: Designated Liaison Person (DLP)

B1: DLP's Role and Responsibilities

The Designated Liaison Person (DLP) is the primary point of contact for all child protection concerns. The DLP must be familiar with child protection legislation and Just ASK's safeguarding responsibilities. The DLP shall:

- Ensure child protection and welfare concerns are referred promptly to Tusla and/or An Garda Síochána.
- Advise and support staff and volunteers on child protection matters.
- Liaise with outside agencies and attend child protection meetings as required.
- Record and maintain confidential records securely.
- Participate in Meitheal processes as appropriate.
- Ensure safeguarding training is completed and updated as required.
- Coordinate the review of the safeguarding risk assessment and child safeguarding statement.

B2: DLP Contact Details

Name of DLP: [Insert Name]

Phone: [Insert Contact Number]

Email: [Insert Email Address]

Position: [Insert Position]

If the DLP is unavailable, please contact the Deputy DLP:

Name of Deputy DLP: [Insert Name]

Phone: [Insert Contact Number]

Email: [Insert Email Address]

B3: Mandated Persons

Under the Children First Act 2015, certain staff are deemed 'Mandated Persons' with a legal obligation to report harm to children. A current list of Mandated Persons is maintained by the DLP and reviewed regularly.

Mandated Persons must:

- Report any belief, knowledge, or reasonable suspicion that a child has been, is being, or is at risk of being harmed.
- Report any disclosures of harm made to them by a child.
- Cooperate with Tusla in any assessment arising from a mandated report.

Section C: Recognising Child Protection and Welfare Concerns

All staff, volunteers, and students at Just ASK must be aware of the types of abuse and how they may be recognised. Child abuse is defined in the Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (2017) and includes neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse, and sexual abuse. A child may experience one or more types of abuse simultaneously.

C1: Vulnerability to Harm

Certain children may be more vulnerable to harm due to factors such as disability, communication difficulties, being in care, family dysfunction, or exposure to domestic violence or substance misuse.

C2: Peer Abuse

If child abuse is alleged to have been carried out by another child, safeguarding procedures must be applied to both the victim and the alleged abuser. Concerns must be taken seriously and referred to Tusla where appropriate. A child displaying abusive behaviour may require support and intervention.

C3: Bullying

Bullying includes repeated verbal, psychological, or physical aggression, including cyberbullying and identity-based bullying. Serious instances of bullying that constitute abuse will be referred to Tusla. Just ASK maintains a Code of Behaviour and anti-bullying policy.

C4: Reasonable Grounds for Concern

Reasonable grounds for concern include but are not limited to:

- Evidence of an injury or behaviour that is consistent with abuse and unlikely to be caused another way.
- A child disclosing abuse or giving an indication that they have been abused.
- A reliable third-party account of abuse.
- Consistent signs of neglect, emotional distress, or physical harm.
- A child's behaviour giving rise to concerns.
- An admission or disclosure by an adult or child of abuse they have committed.

C5: Threshold of Harm for Mandated Persons

Mandated persons must report where they know, believe or have reasonable grounds to suspect that a child has been, is being, or is at risk of being harmed. 'Harm' is defined under the Children First Act 2015 as assault, ill-treatment, neglect, or sexual abuse that seriously affects or is likely to seriously affect the child's health, development or welfare. Reports must be made as soon as practicable.

Section D: Responding to and Reporting Child Protection Concerns

D1: Dealing with a Disclosure

When a child discloses abuse:

- React calmly and listen carefully.
- Reassure the child that they did the right thing by speaking up.
- Do not promise confidentiality – explain that you must pass on the information.
- Avoid leading questions; use open, clarifying questions only.
- Write down what was said as soon as possible, using the child's own words.
- Do not express opinions or speculate about the alleged abuser.
- Explain what will happen next and ensure the child feels supported.

D2: Reporting Concerns

All concerns must be reported to the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) or Deputy DLP. If a child is in immediate danger, contact An Garda Síochána directly.

The DLP will assess whether the concern meets the threshold for reporting to Tusla and may consult a Duty Social Worker.

D3: Mandated Persons Reporting Procedure

Mandated Persons must report directly to Tusla if they believe a child is being harmed. They should also inform the DLP.

D4: Non-Reporting and Retrospective Disclosures

If the DLP decides not to report a concern, the person who raised it must be informed in writing. They are still entitled to report independently.

Disclosures by adults about abuse they suffered as children must be reported if others may be at risk.

D5: Allegations Against Staff or Young People

Any allegations against staff, volunteers, or young people will be treated seriously. Procedures will follow Children First and employment law, ensuring child protection while protecting the rights of the person accused.

Section E: Confidentiality and Record Keeping

- Information is shared only on a need-to-know basis.
- Children should be told who their information will be shared with and why.
- Records must be factual, detailed, and include actions taken.
- Records will be stored securely and accessed only by the DLP and relevant personnel.

Section F: Safe Recruitment, Selection and Training

- All staff and volunteers must be Garda vetted and provide references.
- All new staff must complete child protection training within three months.
- DLP and Deputy DLP receive specific training.
- Training records are maintained and reviewed regularly.

Section G: Code of Behaviour

All staff, volunteers, and students must abide by Just ASK's Code of Behaviour, which includes:

- Treating all children with dignity and respect.
- Ensuring appropriate adult-to-child ratios at all activities.
- Avoiding one-to-one situations unless previously agreed and appropriately supervised.
- Never engaging in physical or verbal abuse.
- Maintaining boundaries in online communication with young people.

Section H: Breaches & Non-Compliance

Breaches of the policy or Code of Behaviour may be subject to disciplinary procedures. Where a breach involves a child protection concern, safeguarding procedures will be followed.

Section I: Partnership Working

- Parents are informed of safeguarding policies and given access to key documents.
- Joint working arrangements with other agencies clearly define safeguarding responsibilities.
- Supervision arrangements are clear when using shared or partner premises.

Section J: Implementation, Monitoring and Review

- Child safeguarding is a standing agenda item at team and board meetings.
- The DLP provides anonymised safeguarding updates to the Board of Directors.
- The Child Safeguarding Statement, Risk Assessment, and this policy will be reviewed at least every 2 years or in light of legislative or service changes.