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STANDARD 2**Child Protection Procedures**

Procedures for responding to child protection, child safeguarding concerns and/or allegations

Introduction

Children and young people occupy a central place in the heart of the Christian community and have a right to be listened to and be heard. Their protection and welfare is the first and paramount consideration.

To create and maintain a safe environment, Dominicans must respond effectively to all allegations of abuse. The responsibility to report allegations of abuse to the statutory authorities is mandatory for all members of Dominican Order. (Guidance 12 pg 104).

The only exception to this is the receipt of any information by a priest under the sacramental seal of Confession (Guidance 13 pg 107)

It is important that anyone working on behalf of the Dominicans knows how to respond to allegations, including who to tell and how to record the information. This section provides guidance on these issues. Should any person be unsure of whether information they have received constitutes an allegation of abuse and/or if they want guidance on how they should manage a concern, they should contact the DLP without delay.

2.1 Recognition:

In order to recognise child abuse, it is necessary to know what is meant by it. Child abuse can be categorised into four different types:

1. Neglect
2. Emotional abuse
3. Physical abuse
4. Sexual abuse

(Guidance 14 pg 109)

2.2. Reasonable grounds for a child protection or welfare concern include

- Evidence, for example, an injury or behaviour that is consistent with abuse and is unlikely to have been caused in any other way

- Any concern about possible sexual abuse
- Consistent signs that a child is suffering from emotional or physical neglect
- A child saying, or indicating by another means, that he or she has been abused
- Admission or indication by an adult or a child or an alleged abuse they committed
- An account from a person who saw the child being abused.

2.3. Signs of abuse

Something such as the behaviour of an adult to a child or young person may make you or them feel uncomfortable.

A child or young person may be subjected to one or more forms of abuse at any given time. For example, the sexual abuse of a child or young person is also a form of emotional abuse, especially when it takes place in the context of a relationship of trust.

Abuse and neglect can take place within a family, in the community or in an institutional setting; and the abuser may be someone known to the child or young person or may be a stranger.

2.4. Responding:

It is best practice to inform a person wishing to discuss suspicion of abuse, of the requirement to report child protection concerns to the civil authorities before any disclosure is made. However, it is not always possible to know when a child or young person or adult is about to disclose child abuse, so, the opportunity to inform them may not arise.

However, where a person, whether child, young person or adult, asks to speak in confidence to a Dominican friar, or staff member, and/or volunteer, it is important to tell the person that if they disclose information concerning child protection or welfare concerns, this information will have to be reported to the statutory authorities, *i.e.*, Tusla/HSCT and An Garda Síochána/PSNI. This can help the child, young person or adult to make an informed decision whether to disclose abuse or not.

It is necessary to tell a person who admits an offence against a child or young person that such information cannot be kept confidential. If such an admission is made to you, even where the admission relates to something that happened a long time ago, you must refer the matter to the DLP or Deputy DLP as soon as possible. The DLP or Deputy DLP will follow the procedures for referral to Tusla/HSCT and An Garda Síochána/PSNI.

2.4.1 Responding to a person making an allegation of abuse

People may tell you about the following

- ◇ Abuse that happened to them
- ◇ Something they have been told by someone else and that they strongly believe is true
- ◇ Seeing signs of abuse, such as physical injuries on a child
- ◇ Something they have witnessed that makes them feel uncomfortable

Extra care needs to be taken if it is a child who is disclosing that they were abused. (Guidance 15 pg115)

2.4.2. Guidance on responding to children or young people disclosing abuse.

If a child or young person tells you directly about abuse happening to them, you should allow them to speak and you should listen attentively. However, it is not appropriate to set up a meeting with a child or young person for the purpose of receiving a disclosure or taking a statement. That is the role of the statutory services.

While it is assumed that it is difficult for all people to disclose abuse, the person receiving the allegation should be aware that a child or young person may feel very frightened and may need reassurance and support that they have done the right thing in disclosing the abuse.

The DLP will consult with Tusla/HSCT about informing the child/young person's parents/carers and/or guardians. It is best practice to inform parents/carers or guardians unless doing so would place the child/young person at further risk.

If the allegation is about Dominican personnel, explain to the child/young person and their parents/carers or guardians that the information will be reported to the statutory authorities and church authorities.

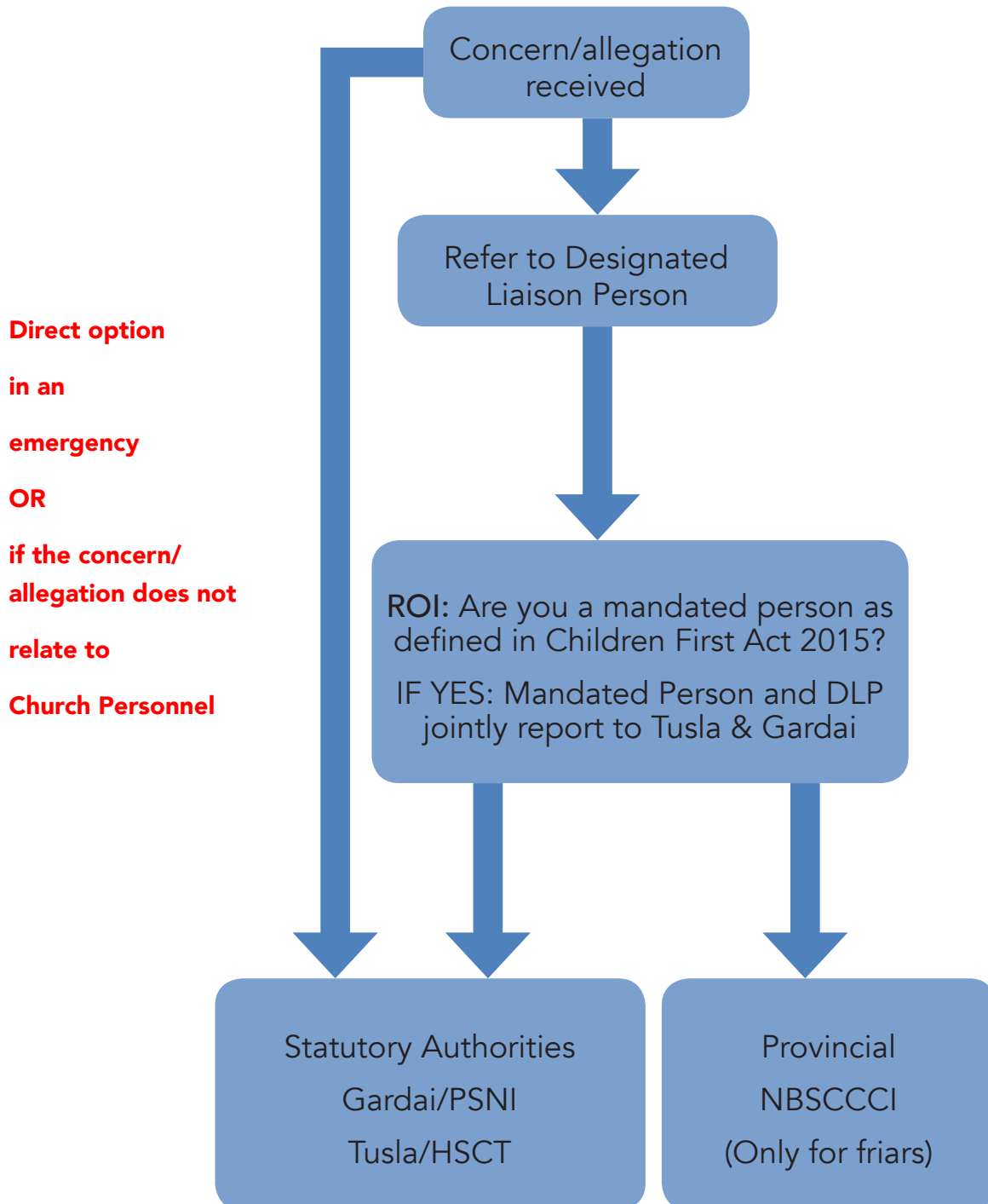
All offers of further support to the child/young person should be conveyed via the child/young person's parents/carers and/or guardians or an appropriate adult.

2.5 Reporting

When you have reasonable grounds for concern that a child/young person may have been, is being, or is at risk of being abused or neglected, contact the DLP or Deputy DLP without delay. The DLP or Deputy DLP will assist in ensuring the notification procedures are completed and can make a joint report to the statutory authorities with any other person.

In an emergency or if there is an immediate concern for the protection of a child/young person, a report should be made directly to An Garda Síochána/PSNI.

REPORTING FLOW CHART



The DLP will report the matter to the statutory authorities on behalf of the person making the report about the possible abuse of a child/young person or will make a joint report if the person is a mandated person making a mandated report. If the complaint concerns a member of the Dominican Order, the Provincial and the NBSCCCI are also informed. (Guidance 16 pg 117)

Where an allegation of abuse is made against a Dominican staff member there are two procedures that are put in place

- a) the reporting procedure in respect of the child/young person
- b) the reporting procedure for dealing with the employee.

Following receipt of an allegation, suspicion or concern, the following steps should be taken

1. Act immediately on receipt of a suspicion, concern, disclosure or allegation of abuse, and refer the matter to the DLP or Deputy DLP without delay.
2. In respect of all allegations, the DLP or Deputy DLP must refer the allegation to Tusla/HSCT, An Garda Síochána/PSNI.
3. If there is any uncertainty about whether the allegation or concern meets the threshold for reporting, the DLP or Deputy DLP will consult with the statutory authorities, who will advise on the requirements for notification.
4. Some allegations need to be referred to other authorities with a legitimate interest. If the DLP or Deputy DLP is unsure about whether information can be shared, advice will be sought from Tusla/HSCT, An Garda Síochána/PSNI.
5. Allegations against Dominican friars, staff and volunteers will also be notified to the Provincial.
6. The NBSCCCI is notified anonymously of allegations against Dominican friars
7. If a diocesan appointment was held, the relevant bishop is notified.

2.5.1 Guidance for receiving and recording an allegation

- ◇ Whenever possible and practical, take notes during the conversation.
- ◇ Always ask permission to do this and explain the importance of recording all information. Where it is not appropriate to take notes at the time, make a written record as soon as possible afterwards or before the end of the day.
- ◇ Record the time, date, location, persons present, and how the allegation was received, e.g., by telephone, face-to-face conversation, letter.

- ◇ This initial recorded information will be transferred to a child protection referral form and will become the first entry in a file of information about the case that will be retained by the DLP or Deputy DLP.
- ◇ Please always sign and date the record. The record would also normally include
 - Accurate identifying information of the complainant, as far as it is known. This should include the name, address, and age of the complainant when the alleged abuse occurred.
 - Where the person who has raised a concern or allegation is a child or young person, details of parents/carers or guardians should also be given.
 - Name of the individual against whom the concern or allegation is being raised, and any other identifying information.
 - Dates when the concern arose, or when the incident occurred.
 - The person's own words used to describe the event or incident. Do not make assumptions about the intended meaning of the words used.
 - Details of any action already taken about the incident or concern or allegation.
 - Do not be selective. Include details that to you may seem irrelevant. This may prove invaluable at a later stage in an investigation.
 - All original records, including rough notes, should be passed immediately to the DLP or Deputy DLP.
 - Copies of retained records should be kept secure and confidential.

Remember – it is not your role to investigate.

- ◇ In cases of emergency (and/or outside normal business hours), where a child or young person appears to be at immediate and serious risk, an urgent report must be made to Tusla/HSCT, as well as to the DLP. Where the appropriate Tusla/HSCT staff are not available, An Garda Síochána/PSNI must be contacted to ensure that under no circumstances is a child or young person left in a dangerous situation pending social services intervention (see direct option arrow in Reporting Flowchart).
- ◇ In all cases, consideration should be given as to whether an immediate referral is necessary in order to preserve and safeguard against the possibility of any loss, deterioration or destruction of forensic or other potential evidence (see direct option arrow in Reporting Flowchart).
- ◇ Explain to the person raising the concern what will happen next. You should inform the person making the suspicion, concern or allegation that their identity and the identity of the respondent and complainant will be shared with the statutory authorities.

- ◇ Provide contact details for the DLP or Deputy DLP if the referrer needs to ask questions later. The incident or concern should not be shared with anyone other than those who need to know, apart from the statutory authorities and appropriate church authorities detailed in these procedures.
- ◇ Written confirmation should be given to the person making the referral to the DLP or Deputy DLP that the information has been passed on to the statutory authorities. If this has not happened, an explanation should be recorded (this will not be possible when dealing with anonymous allegations).
- ◇ It is essential to respond appropriately to the complainant to ensure that they feel heard and taken seriously.

2.6 Guidance on responding to an anonymous allegation of abuse

Anonymous complaints are to be managed and responded to carefully. Anxiety and fear may persuade some people not to reveal their identity immediately. It is sometimes difficult to act on information under these circumstances, unless at some point the name of the person raising the concern or making an allegation becomes known. If you are unsure whether the information you have received reaches the threshold for reporting, consult with the DLP or Deputy DLP. An approach to the statutory authorities may be appropriate.

The person raising the concern should be informed that anonymity might restrict the ability of professionals to access information or to intervene to protect a child or young person. As much openness as possible should be encouraged. However, if you receive any identifiable information that relates to an allegation of abuse (current or past), you must pass this information on to the appropriate statutory authorities so that an investigation can be undertaken to assess child protection risks.