

PROCEDURES FOR REPORTING ALLEGATIONS/SUSPICIONS OF CHILD ABUSE

The Board of Management of An Mhodhscoil has carefully considered the *Children's First Guidelines* 1999 as issued by the Department of Health and the Guidelines issued by the Department of Education and Science.

Definition of Child Abuse:

Child Abuse can be categorised into four different types: neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse.

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, attachment to and affection from adults, medical care. Neglect generally becomes apparent in different ways over a period of time rather than at one specific moment.

Emotional Abuse: is normally to be found in the relationship between caregiver and a child rather than in a specific event or pattern of events. It occurs when a child's need for affection, approval, consistency and security are not met. Emotional abuse can be manifested in terms of the child's behavioural, cognitive, affective or physical functioning.

Physical Abuse: is any form of non-accidental injury or injury which results from wilful or neglectful failure to protect a child.

Sexual Abuse: occurs when a child is used by another person for his/her gratification or sexual arousal or for that of others.

Designated Liaison Person:

The Board of Management has appointed the Principal, Mac Uí Mhurchú as Designated Liaison Person (DLP). The role of the DLP is to liaise with all relevant agencies, whether in seeking advice, reporting or in follow up consultations.

Procedures in dealing with a disclosure/suspicion from a child/third party:

- Teachers who suspect child abuse should report their concerns to the DLP at the first instance and carefully record their observations over a period of time.
- Disclosures of Child Abuse from a third party will be reported to the DLP. If a third party starts to tell a teacher about an alleged child abuse incident the teacher will ask them to speak to the DLP. If the person does not inform the DLP the teacher will do so.
- Where a child discloses alleged abuse to a staff member, the person receiving that information should listen carefully and supportively. Great care must be taken not to abuse the child's trust.

This should not be a formal interview.

- Listen to the child
- Do not ask leading questions or make suggestions to the child
- Offer reassurance but do not make promises
- Do not stop a child recalling significant events
- Do not over-react
- Confidentiality should be assured – explain that further help may have to be sought.
- Record the discussion accurately noting:
 - What, where and when?
 - Descriptions and possible sketches of physical injuries
 - Explanations of injuries using direct quotations if appropriate
 - Sign and date the record
 - Retain the record securely

- Whether cases of abuse (neglect/emotional/physical/sexual) are suspected or confirmed, confidentiality will be respected. The information on individual cases will be restricted to the teacher(s) immediately involved with the child and will be on a *need to know* basis.
- The DLP will record the incident. It is not the function of the teacher or the DLP to investigate the issue.
- If the suspected abuser is the DLP then the suspicion and any records will be passed on to the Principal who will proceed as per guidelines.
- The Chairperson of the Board of Managements will be informed of the disclosure.
- Informal contact with the designated person in the HSE will be made, seeking advice as to whether a referral should be made. The DLP will be explicit that s/he is requesting advice and not making a report. It is not necessary at this stage for the DLP to disclose his/her name or the name of the school.
- The advice given by the Health Board must be acted upon.
- If the advice is not to refer, the DLP will record this advice as the reason for non-referral. The chairperson of the Board of Management will be informed.
- If the advice from the Health Board is to refer the case, the DLP will do so. However, prior to referring, the DLP will inform the parent of her intention to refer, unless this course of action is injurious to the child.
- Following referral and the completion of the standard form, the school will have no further part to play in the investigation.
- If a case conference is required, the DLP will be invited to attend.

All records will be held in a central, securely locked location.

Allegations against an employee:

- Procedures followed are similar to those of a disclosure
- Employee is made aware of the allegation against him/her
- Employee will be given the opportunity to respond to the allegation in writing and at a meeting of the Board of Management
- BOM meeting to review the allegation, giving due consideration to any advice given by Health Board and Gardaí
- The BOM will consider placing the employee on administrative leave, with full pay, pending the outcome of investigations by the Health Board and Gardaí.
- On conclusion of any investigation the BOM will then determine the employment status of the employee.

Organisational Implications

Supervision

School supervision policy and routines will be followed by all staff to ensure that there is comprehensive supervision of children at all breaks and before and after school.

Behaviour

Children are to be encouraged at all times to play co-operatively and inappropriate behaviour will be addressed under our Code of Behaviour. If an incident occurs which we consider to be of a sexualised nature we will notify the DLP who will record it and respond to it appropriately.

Visibility

CCTV is in operation throughout the school and may be referred to as the need arises.

Teachers will ensure that children are visible in the school yard. Children will not be allowed to spend time in classrooms, toilets or sheds where they would not be under adult supervision. They are not to leave the school yard or to engage with adults who are outside of the school yard. They are allowed to go to the toilet in the corridors only in pairs.