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Template for parish policy document

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Our Parish Safeguarding Children Policy and Procedures

Parish

Date

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1. Valuing our Young Parishioners

Children have a very important place in our parish. We celebrate their faith at Baptism, First Holy Communion and Confirmation; they are the life and focus of our parish schools; their energies and initiatives play a vital role in many of our parish activities. We are always eager to encourage their active participation in parish life. Towards this end, we are committed to doing everything we can to create a safe and welcoming environment for our young parishioners, where their welfare is paramount. It is our parish policy to ensure that our children will be protected and supported in all activities.

Our parish wants to assist the dedicated parents and volunteers who give generously of themselves by taking part in child-related parish ministry. Among these activities in our parish are the following (e.g. altar serving, youth choirs, folk choirs, adult choirs with children, gospel choirs, 'Do this in Memory' Programme, 'out of school' sacramental preparation, Baptism Team, childrens liturgy, Youth ministry activities, young readers, Youth Legion of Mary, Rainbows). (Delete as appropriate)

We realise that valuing young people means valuing volunteers as well; insisting on safe practices, eliminating the necessity for people to take risks and providing them with support will make for a healthier and safer gathering. This parish policy, addressed to parish clergy, lay employees and volunteers, covers all Church-related activities and circumstances involving people under the age of eighteen.

Activities involving our parish schools are governed by each school's child protection policy, ratified by the Board of Management.

It is important that, from the outset, we make and emphasise the following confidentiality statement in accordance with the guidelines of the civil authorities:

Where safeguarding children concerns arise, information must be shared on a 'need to know' basis in the best interest of the child. Sharing information in this regard is not a breach of confidentiality. It is best practice that parents and children are told if personal information is being shared, unless doing so could put the child at further risk.

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2. Our Parish Safeguarding Representatives

Some adults in our parish have undertaken the Keeping Safe child protection training, which was delivered at deanery level, in consultation with the Health Services Executive. Our parish is also committed to making provision for continuing support and future training for our volunteers in order to keep up to date on best practice in youth care and ministry.

The Parish Safeguarding Representatives can be contacted through the Parish Office. The Parish Safeguarding Representatives have been selected because they have good listening skills and sufficient knowledge about safeguarding children issues. They are familiar with parish activities and are available to our volunteers and parishioners to help us create an ever more child friendly spirit in our pastoral ministry.

The role of the Parish Safeguarding Representatives is as follows:

- To raise awareness of safeguarding children measures in the parish
- To circulate information on the national guidelines 'Safeguarding Children'¹ and other relevant updates
- To ensure that activities run within the parish provide for the safety and well being of the children and young people taking part
- To provide support, assistance and arrange training for parish volunteers working with children
- To ensure that the contact details for the Designated Person are widely circulated
- To report to the Designated Person any concerns, suspicions or allegations for onward referral to the relevant authorities (see Sections 5 and 6 below)
- To oversee the implementation of this policy, carrying out an annual review and reporting to the parish clergy.

The names of the Parish Safeguarding Representatives can be found on the Safeguarding Children notice in the church porch.

¹ *Safeguarding Children: Standards and Guidance Document for the Catholic Church in Ireland.* National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church. 2008.

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3. Good Practice for Working with Children

Our parish is fully committed to the guidelines outlined in 'Children First'² and 'Our Duty to Care'³ and all relevant Church policies on child protection. The Code of Behaviour at **Resource G** must be adhered to by all Church personnel.

4. Recruiting and Supporting our Parish Volunteers

When recruiting and selecting our parish volunteers, we will follow the checklist set out at **Resource B**. We will request completion of the Volunteer Application Form at **Resource C** and, where appropriate, will use the Volunteer Reference Form at **Resource D**.

We will ensure that the Declaration Form at **Resource E** is completed by the following people:

- parish representatives;
- sacristans;
- directors of children's choirs;
- all volunteers who work with children in Church related activities.

Training will be provided, not only for new recruits but for all volunteers, in order to maintain standards and good practice. Our Parish Representatives will play a role in facilitating this support.

After a recruit has been ratified, s/he will be informed of the dates of his/her probationary period.

If a grievance or disciplinary issue arises, we will follow the procedures at **Resource H**.

² *Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children*, Department of Health and Children. 1999.

³ *Our Duty to Care: The Principles of Good Practice for the Protection of Children and Young People*, Department of Health and Children. 2002.

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5. Developing Safe Practices for Involvement in Parish Activities

A guidance document is available for Church personnel on what to do to keep children safe before, during and after their involvement in Church related activities. The document is included at **Resource J** and covers the following areas:

- parental and child consent;
- risk assessment;
- vetting for events/activities;
- supervision;
- knowing the children and the personnel;
- ensuring other individuals do not get the opportunity to harm children;
- health and safety;
- use of IT equipment;
- records of attendance;
- incident reports.

The form used to obtain consent from parents or guardians prior to children participating in an activity or event is included as **Resource K**. This form includes the code of behaviour for children taking part in Church activities.

6. Responding to Safeguarding Children Concerns

When concerns are raised about the welfare of any child taking part in parish-related activities, whether suspected or disclosed, these will be brought to the attention of a Parish Safeguarding Representative or directly to the Designated Person who will report to the HSE. These concerns can be in four different categories: neglect, emotional, physical and sexual abuse. Guidance on how to recognise each is given in the document at **Resource L**. All parish clergy, staff and volunteers will be given copies of this guidance document.

If members of our parish disclose concerns to parish staff or volunteers, it is our aim that they will feel comfortable about voicing the matter in a safe, supportive, understanding and sensitive environment. The following point is very important: we cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality under any circumstances to a person who wishes to speak to us about a situation of abuse or suspected abuse.

We will ensure that the procedure at **Resource M** is followed in responding to concerns, suspicions, allegations or disclosures of abuse, and will use the Safeguarding Children Recording Form at **Resource O**.

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All Church personnel are expected to deal with concerns, suspicions, allegations or disclosures of abuse by bringing the information either to a Parish Safeguarding Representative, who will refer the matter to the Designated Person, or directly to the Designated Person. (This does not apply to situations involving the Sacramental Seal, which is inviolable).

7. Responding to Complaints against Parish Personnel

Any concerns or grievances about how this parish provides for child safety, supervision and protection will be taken very seriously by our parish and dealt with appropriately. It is paramount that precedence is given to the care of children above all other factors. Advice will be sought to ensure fair procedures. All efforts will be made to deal with these matters with justice for all and within an appropriate timescale.

Complaints made or a concern raised about a member of Church personnel will be brought to the Designated Person who will report the matter to the HSE (or to An Garda Síochána, out of office hours and in case of emergency). Any individual may report directly to the Health Services Executive (or to An Garda Síochána, out of office hours and in the case of an emergency). The Designated Person will also report the matter to the appropriate diocesan authority.

Further information on the handling of complaints is available from our Parish Safeguarding Representative.

8. Parish Record Keeping

Application forms, declaration forms, and all other documentation associated with recruitment and selection will be stored securely. Access will be restricted to the Parish Priest, and/or the Parish Representatives, and/or the Designated Person.

Each parish will be responsible for storing in a confidential way an accurate record of each activity involving children. This will include: parental consent, programme/activity details, attendance, incident records, necessary medical details etc. Data protection rules as outlined in the Data Protection Act 1988 and as amended by the Data Protection (Amendment) Act 2003 will be adhered to.

Written confidential records of all complaints will be safely and confidentially kept.

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9. Audits

We will carry out an annual self-audit of our safeguarding children policy and procedures. This is an important method of ensuring that a process of continuous improvement takes place, and of demonstrating accountability and transparency.

The self-audit will be carried out in accordance with the checklist at Resource S.