

Taking Care

Child Protection Guidelines

Creating a safe environment for children, young people and leaders within the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

- **Protecting Our Children and Leaders**
- **Caring About Standards**
- **Implementing Good Practice**



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Preface To The Third Edition

The first edition of the Child Protection Guidelines was approved by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland in June 1996. The Guidelines have been well received by congregations and have helped to provide a safe environment for our children and young people. Good practice guidelines also provide protection and affirmation for all who work with children and young people.

This is the third edition of the Guidelines. We have tried to change as little as possible of the section headings and basic text of the second edition to provide continuity and minimise confusion.

Nevertheless, we have introduced some additional material, especially in the light of changes in relation to media and health and safety issues. Also, recent developments have resulted in a review of vetting arrangements in Northern Ireland. The Board of Social Witness is continuing to lobby the appropriate government departments in the Republic of Ireland to introduce a vetting system for voluntary and church based organisations. This edition is also in a new format which we hope will make the Guidelines more accessible with all forms in Section 3 for ease of photocopying. The ring binder format will also facilitate the incorporation of additional material.

Our thanks are due as always to the members of the Child Protection Monitoring Committee for all their help and advice in the painstaking preparation of this manual.

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Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Children and young people attend organisations for enjoyment, social contact, and personal and spiritual development.

Adults selected and appointed to work with children and young people should enjoy providing this service, secure in the knowledge of clear guidelines. They should also have access to good support and advice.

This manual provides guidance to all youth leaders, Sunday School teachers and all who work with children, to help ensure that children and young people enjoy their activities with optimum physical safety and are free from the threat of personal abuse. It will also alert leaders to signs of distress and symptoms which may indicate that a child has been mistreated.

The protection and well-being of children is not only a Biblical imperative, it is a national and international requirement. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child upholds the best interests of children. It stipulates that “children have the right to be protected from all forms of violence. They must be kept safe from harm. They must be given proper care by those looking after them”.

The Five Key Principles of Child Care

The Children (NI) Order 1995 and the Child Care Act (RoI) 1991 emphasise the following key principles:

Paramountcy – It is a fundamental principle in child care law and practice that the welfare of the child must be the paramount consideration in decisions taken about him/her.

Parental Responsibility – Parents have a responsibility to children rather than rights over them. There may be situations where other significant adults share this responsibility with one or both parents.

Prevention – We should aim to prevent situations arising where children are separated from their families. The state should provide support and services to keep children within their families and communities, in order to promote their health and welfare.

Partnership – The most effective way of ensuring that a child’s needs are met is by working in partnership. The provision of services must therefore take into account the views of parents.

Protection – Children should be safe and should be protected by intervention if they are in danger.

Treating children and young people with dignity and respect and upholding their best interests is also in the best interest of the organisation or club. It is therefore important for parents to have information about the organisation their child attends, its aims and methods of operation, its policies and procedures, how to share comments, concerns and, if necessary, to make complaints.

Does Our Church Really Need Such Guidelines?

Our Church receives many thousands of children and young people through its doors every year. It is vital that we provide a safe environment for them, and that our leaders know what to do if a child alleges that they have been mistreated by someone outside or inside the church organisation.

No denomination is immune from the problem of trusted adults misusing their position. This requires a response which is both aimed at prevention and care for those who may have been mistreated.

By adopting and using these guidelines each congregation will be raising standards of care for those entrusted to them, no matter how brief the event or small the organisation they attend. Also leaders, teachers and helpers will be more assured of their own protection in the event of false accusations.

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland reaches out to children and young people throughout the island of Ireland and welcomes those from households where there is no Presbyterian or other denominational connection.

Accordingly, every congregation in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland should have adopted these guidelines and should be implementing them in all its organisations which work with children and young people.

Clarification Of Terms

For the purposes of these Guidelines, a leader/helper is anyone who is engaged in work or voluntary activity which involves regular contact with children or young persons.

Where either children or young people are mentioned in the Guidelines, both are intended. **A child/young person is a person under 18 years of age, unless married (RoI).**

Child Protection Policy

Every congregation in PCI should have in place a Child Protection Policy which is well publicised and regularly reviewed.

The Child Protection Policy should relate to all children and youth organisations within the Church. A sample policy is found in Section 3.

Additional Guidance on Dealing with Allegations

In June 2004 the General Assembly approved a *Policy and Procedures for Dealing with Complaints of Sexual Abuse*. This policy complements the Child Protection Guidelines (3rd Edition) and provides additional information on the handling of complaints against ministers and others in positions of prominent church leadership. The policy gives more advice for Kirk Sessions and Presbyteries on taking advice, referral to statutory authorities, pastoral care and suspension arrangements.

A copy of the policy can be obtained from the Board of Social Witness office.