

SECTION 1

CHILD ABUSE AND ITS PREVENTION

1.1 AIM

This section aims to make you aware of what child abuse is and what to do if you are concerned about a child.

It includes the following topics:

- Caring for Children: Who is responsible? What every child needs?
- What is Child Abuse?
- Why do adults abuse Children?
- Domestic Violence and Children
- Media and Children
- Key Principles to Help Keep Children Safe
- What to do if you are concerned about a child
- Suspected Abuse: The Referral Procedure
- Confidentiality: Who needs to know what?
- The Role of the Designated Person

1.2 Caring For Children

Who Is Responsible?

While the primary responsibility for the care of children rests with the parents or guardians, the community as a whole has a responsibility for the well-being of children and for protecting them. This means that all church members should remain alert to circumstances in which children may be harmed. When they have knowledge or a suspicion that a child is being mistreated, they should refer their concern to the Designated Person within their church, who will consider with the Minister what should be done. This may involve seeking advice from the Social Services/Health Boards, the Police/Gardaí, or the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC/ISPCC), or referring the matter to them for investigation/assessment.

What Every Child Needs

- Respect:** Children's ideas of what is important may be very different from yours. Try to remember this when a child wants to tell you something urgently, even if you are busy.
- Physical Care:** This includes warmth, adequate clothing, enough to eat and safety from hazards.
- Praise:** This will help children to grow up to be secure, confident adults.
- Attention:** Listen to children, not just to their words but to anything they might be trying to tell you by their behaviour.
- Trust:** Make sure that the children know that you trust them and that you will always take what they say seriously and seek to help them.
- Love:** This is the most vital need of all.

1.3 What Is Child Abuse?

There are four main kinds of child abuse. The following list includes some of the signs and symptoms:

Physical Abuse occurs when an adult or other young person hurts, kicks, beats or punches a child. Symptoms may include:

- Unexplained recurrent injuries or burns;
- Improbable excuses or refusal to explain injuries;
- Self-destructive tendencies;
- Fear of physical contact, a shrinking back if touched.

Neglect occurs when an adult leaves a child alone, does not give them enough to eat or does not take them to the doctor when they are ill. Symptoms may include:

- Constant hunger;
- Inadequate clothing;
- Constant tiredness;
- Poor personal hygiene.
- Wilful neglect.

Emotional Abuse may occur when the adult with responsibility for caring for the child says nasty things to them and does not have appropriate physical contact with them. Symptoms may include:

- Delays in physical, mental and emotional development;
- Continual belittling of oneself;
- Over-reaction to mistakes;
- Extreme fear of any new situation;
- Inappropriate response to pain;
- Neurotic behaviour.

Sexual Abuse occurs when an adult or other young person touches a child's private parts in a way which makes the child feel worried or unhappy. Some adults or other young people, who sexually abuse children, also ask the child to touch parts of their body or try to show them pornographic pictures or videos. Symptoms may include:

- Sexual knowledge, including drawing sexually explicit pictures, or use of language inappropriate for the child's age;
- Being over affectionate in a sexual way that is inappropriate to the child's age;
- Regression to younger behavioural patterns such as thumb sucking;
- Self-mutilation, suicide attempts, running away, overdosing, anorexia;
- Sudden loss of appetite or compulsive eating.

Why Do Adults Abuse Children?

There are different reasons – stress, problems, unhappy circumstances, the feeling of having no power in adult relationships, and perhaps having been abused as a child.

Some adults may convince themselves that there is nothing wrong with their behaviour, or that it is for the child's own good. Whatever the reason, abuse is always wrong, and *it is never the child's fault*.

It is not only adults who abuse children. Teenage abuse is a growing concern, this is when older children abuse younger children or their peers. It is very important that this is stopped as soon as it is discovered for the sake of both the victim and the abuser, for whom it could become a dangerous habit. The sooner you take action, the more likely it is that the abuse will stop and that the child will recover from his or her experiences.

Domestic Abuse and Children

Violence against women and men in the home is a serious crime, which causes enormous health and social problems and emotional and psychological damage, not only to the victims, but also to the children. Children are often witnesses and are necessarily affected by the anxiety and personal threat to themselves. Domestic violence is the most common form of interpersonal crime and also the least reported.

Leaders should be aware that children may not only overhear or observe violence in the home, but may become direct victims, either accidentally or deliberately.

The social pressures to remain within a violent home and the disincentives which parents perceive in relation to living in refuges or temporary accommodation as single parents should not be underestimated. It is important for leaders of church organisations to be aware that agencies such as Police/Gardaí and Social Services/Health Boards have developed policies to help in situations of domestic violence and that advice, support and help are available from the Women's Aid Federation (NI) & (RoI). Men experiencing domestic violence may also have to seek refuge, accommodation may be available in the Simon Community (NI) & (RoI).

The impact of domestic violence on children can lead to physical, psychological and behavioural disorders and may subsequently affect them when they become parents.

Substance Abuse

Young people attending church organisations are also at risk of being exposed to substance abuse. This can range from tobacco to experimenting with solvents and alcohol. It is important that leaders are aware of the danger signs and include awareness training in their programme planning for high risk groups.

Self Injury

Self injury or self harm is on the increase. Cutting can begin at a very young age and can range from scratching to deep cuts being self inflicted, often requiring medical treatment. Disclosure of any self injury should never be ignored, it is a clear sign that something serious is wrong and that self esteem is low. Care should always be taken in how this problem is managed and advice should be sought at all times.

Media and Children

In an increasingly complex world, the opportunities for child abuse are growing. Those who care for children need to be aware of the opportunities for abuse through the misuse of video, computer, internet, text messaging and other media. While good use of such media can be beneficial we must be vigilant and alert to the possibilities of misuse and consequent harm that can result to young people. So often in today's society the "Soaps" and celebrities are setting the agenda.

The Internet

Whilst the development of the internet has revolutionised communication systems throughout the world and if used in the right way is an excellent resource, care in its application needs to be exercised so that the safety of a child is not compromised. Children need to be aware of on-line safety in the same way they are taught road safety.

Do's and Don'ts

- When designing a website, make clear what is available for copying or downloading. Do not refer to other inappropriate sites.
- Parental permission must be obtained before using any picture of a child/group of children on the web site.
- Avoid using photos of individual children. In preference use a group photograph. However, do not use it if a child can be identified by their name or the location they are in. Names and addresses should not be given.
- Personal email or postal addresses, telephone or fax numbers must not be divulged.
- Youth workers are increasingly communicating with children/young people using email and text messaging. It is advisable that churches develop a protocol for this type of 'one-to-one' communication, detailing what is appropriate and what is not.
- If web access is being provided for children or young people e.g. youth project providing a cyber café, then consider using filtering software (e.g. Netnanny, Cyberpatrol or Surfwatch) to prevent access to inappropriate web sites. Your Internet Service Provider may also have filtering software.
- If you are providing web access e.g. cyber café ensure that parental permission has been obtained.

Photographs

Since the introduction of the Data Protection Act in 1998, churches must be very careful if they use photographs, videos and webcams of clearly identifiable people. There are several issues to be aware of:

- Permission (verbal or written) should be obtained of all the people (children and adults) who will appear in a photograph, video or webcam image before the photograph is taken or footage recorded.
- It should be made clear why that person's image is being used, what you will be using it for, and who might want to look at the pictures.
- Children and young people should not be identified by name or other personal details. These details include email or postal addresses, telephone or fax numbers.
- When using photographs of children and young people, it is preferable to use group pictures.
- Obtain a written and specific consent from parents or carers before using photographs on a website.
- Carefully consider the location and pose.
- Do not insist that the child participates.

Please note the sample consent form (TCF5/04) now contains a parental consent for use of images of children for general church purposes.

Mobile Telephones

With the increased use of mobile telephones leaders and young people need to be aware of appropriate and inappropriate use of telephones whilst attending organisations.

Kirk Session and leaders should also be aware of issues surrounding mobile phones that can take photographs, the use of camcorders etc., and they may wish to use the guidelines in connection with the internet and photographs when formulating policy.

Computers

Computers are now common in churches and are used extensively to communicate with young people and leaders. It is important that guidelines are drawn up and a policy agreed.

- Place restrictions on their use.
- Promote their proper use.
- Supervise and monitor the use of printers.
- Cautious use of email addresses.
- Supervise the use of the Internet.
- Be cautious at all times.

1.4 Key Principles To Help Keep Children Safe

There is a moral obligation on anyone accepting responsibility for children and young people to provide adequate care and to pass on information concerning suspected or actual abuse of a child. Any failure to do so may leave them legally liable.

In order to support and help children and their families, the organisation and its leaders/helpers need policies and procedures which protect both children and the organisation. In childcare law and practice the “welfare of the child is paramount”. Translating this legal principle into action means that each congregation and its organisations should ensure that they have:

1. **A Child Protection Policy.** This may help to minimise risks for children, leaders and the Kirk Session. It can act as a deterrent to potential abusers and will promote good standards of practice within your organisation.

A Child Protection Policy will:

- Include clear statements about why and how the Church has a role and responsibility to protect children.
- State clearly the standards that are expected.
- Apply to everyone within the Congregation – Clergy, Kirk Session, Committees, Leaders/Helpers, Young People and Parents.

Everyone involved in youth work in the Church should have a copy of the Policy. It should also be displayed in a prominent position in church premises e.g. notice board.

A sample Policy can be found in Section 3. This can be adapted to meet specific requirements. The Child Protection Policy should be reviewed at least every 3 years. (See Section 2.5 for more guidance on Review of Policy by Kirk Sessions);

2. **A Designated Person or Persons** (preferably not the Minister). Where possible there should be a male and female appointed by the Kirk Session who will receive child protection training and who will provide consultation and advice on contacting child protection agencies when necessary. (See Section 1.7 for more information on the position of the Designated Person and for information on dealing with concerns);
3. **A leader in charge** of each organisation who is fully conversant with the procedure to be used when concern is expressed about the welfare of a child. (See Section 1.5);
4. **A good team procedure** (see Section 2.2) **and a code of conduct** (see Section 2.3) for both leaders/helpers and members, which provides a means of preventing inappropriate discipline, avoids corporal punishment, counteracts bullying or scapegoating and lessens potential for abuse by adults or young people;

5. **A Recruitment Policy** which includes:
 - Completion of an Application Form (TCF2/04 NI; TCF3/04 RoI);
 - Informal interview with organisational leader and/or the Minister/Elder;
 - Two references;
 - Appraisal and confirmation of the appointment by Kirk Session at the end of six months;

6. **An annual review of work with children and young people.** This provides an opportunity to recognise and affirm what has been achieved and to identify any areas that require attention. Both children/young people should be involved in this process. Specific times should be set aside for this e.g. end of June for uniformed organisations or September for summer schemes, camps etc;

Kirk Sessions may wish to appoint an Elder to be responsible for each youth organisation. The Elder should report to Session at some time during the year. In larger congregations the formation of a Youth Council/Forum may assist this process.

7. **Access to training programmes** which help leaders/helpers develop best practices and be able to respond confidently to any expressions of concern about children's welfare. A Child Protection Trainer can be contacted via the Board of Social Witness office (028) 9041 7234.

8. **A regular health and safety inspection** of the church premises and procedures (see TCF11/04 in Section 3)

1.5 What To Do If You Are Concerned About A Child

Dealing With Accidents

Many incidents that are brought to the leaders attention involve accidents or more minor problems. It is important that leaders know how to handle problems, no matter how minor, and that they are able to respond to more serious concerns.

It is good practice for a youth organisation to have an Accident/Incident Report Book/Forms to record details of accidents/injuries/witnesses. This book/form should be used for the recording of accidents, injuries and any action taken. Each entry should be signed by the leader in charge. It is good practice to inform the parents/guardian in person or by telephone of the accident and any action taken as soon as possible.

See Section 3 for a sample Accident/Incident report form (TCF7/04). The accident report should be given a reference number. This in turn would be entered in an index book. These would be available for examination and inspection.

Dealing With General Complaints

If a young person or parent/carer has a general complaint about the running of an organisation, such complaints should be directed through the organisation leader to the Minister or the Kirk Session. The complainant should be assured that the matter will be dealt with in a prompt and appropriate manner. They should be informed as soon as possible of the decision and the action, if any, that will be taken.

Suspected Abuse: The Referral Procedure

In the event that the incident involves alleged or suspected child abuse it is not appropriate to include an entry in the Accident/Incident Book. In this event the procedure outlined below should be followed:

Responding to incidents of alleged or suspected child abuse must be based upon clearly defined procedures. Knowing what to do, who to contact and who needs to know will make you feel better about sharing any concerns.

If you are concerned that a child or young person may have been abused, or is at risk of abuse, there is one thing you must not do, that is NOTHING.

It is important that you take what the child says seriously and follow it up as soon as possible. The primary responsibility is to report any concern and ensure that the concern is taken seriously.

DO'S

- Stay calm
- Listen and hear
- Give time to the child to say what they want
- Reassure them that they have done the right thing in telling
- Write down what was said to you
- Tell the leader in charge of the organisation or the minister
- Keep a note of your report, giving the date, time, name of the individual who you have told and the course of action agreed
- The organisation leader will report to the Designated Person

DON'TS

- Do not panic
- Do not make a child repeat the story unnecessarily
- Do not promise to keep secrets
- Do not enquire into details of the abuse
- Under no circumstances should you attempt to deal with the problem alone

Procedure

1. The person who has the concern should tell the leader in charge;
2. The person who has the concern should complete the Report of Concern Form, which the Designated Person or the Leader will give you. (See Section 3);

Try to have available:

- The name and address of any child you are concerned about;
- The nature of any injury or complaint;
- The need for medical attention (if any);
- Your reason for suspicion of abuse;
- What you have done already;
- Any other information you may have, such as the name of the child's GP, school etc.

3. The organisation leader gives the completed Report of Concern Form to the Designated Person or the Minister;

Name of Designated Person/s

(1) Tel:

(2) Tel:

4. The Minister and Designated Person will consider all of the available information and decide what action to take (see Section 1.7 under general guidance on dealing with concerns).

Where there is any doubt or uncertainty about what to do it may be useful to contact the Church House Designated Person available through the Board of Social Witness office for further advice (Tel: (028) 9041 7234 or Direct Helpline (028) 9041 7235. If you still have concerns it is strongly recommended that you test out these concerns, in confidence, with either the Police/Gardaí or a child protection agency.

Remember that the task of deciding whether or not abuse has occurred rests with the professional agencies.

If for any reason it is not possible to speak to the Minister, the Designated Person should consult the Clerk of Presbytery. Where the Minister is implicated, the Designated Person should inform the Clerk of Presbytery as soon as possible. If an allegation concerns a minister or someone in prominent spiritual leadership please see the companion document *Policy and Procedures for Dealing with Complaints of Sexual Abuse*.

If there is disagreement on whether or not to refer a concern to a child protection agency, any individual, as a concerned citizen, can still make a referral.

5. The Minister or Designated Person will follow the advice given by the appropriate agency below.

Social Services (NI) and Health Boards (RoI) offices are normally open 9.00am – 5.00pm Monday to Friday. There is an emergency out of hours service for Northern Ireland which can be contacted at (028) 9056 5656:

Social Services (NI)/Health Board Community Care Office

There is no out of hours Social Work Service in the Irish Republic.

Office Hours Telephone Number

or

Police C.A.R.E (Child Abuse Rape Enquiry) Unit (NI)/Gardaí Síochána (RoI)

Telephone Number

or

NSPCC (NI)

Telephone Number

or

ISPCC (RoI)

Telephone Number

- 6. The Minister keeps a record of the decision whether or not to refer in a secure place, the reasons for it and who will be responsible for any action to be taken;
- 7. Consideration should be given by the minister to offering support to the leader or other person who made the initial report. Help and advice can be provided by the Board of Social Witness.

Contact Addresses and Telephone Numbers

Police Care Units

Anyone wishing to contact the police in Northern Ireland should telephone (028) 9065 0222. You should ask for the Police CARE Unit and give the name of the area from which you are telephoning. You will be transferred to the appropriate CARE Unit dealing with your area.

Health And Social Service Trusts

When contacting the Health and Social Services office for your area you should ask for the Duty Officer. The office is open between 9.00am and 5.00pm. In Northern Ireland the out of hours duty team telephone number is (028) 9056 5656.

The Board of Social Witness office holds information regarding police and Board/Trust contacts in the Republic of Ireland. Tel No: (028) 9041 7234.

1.6 Confidentiality

Who Needs To Know What?

Each organisation should have a clear statement about confidentiality and how this is to be respected. Everyone in your organisation, including children, must be aware that there are some situations in which confidentiality needs to be broken, specifically, if you are concerned that a person is in danger, either to themselves or from someone else, or you suspect that an offence may have been committed.

This will mean that where the Minister and Designated Person consider that a child is at risk of abuse, or that a criminal offence may have been committed, the following should be informed:

- A statutory child protection agency.
- The parents of the child (see below).
- The alleged perpetrator (see below).

Informing Parents

Informing the parents of the child about whom you are concerned will need to be dealt with in a sensitive way. The Minister or Designated Person will need to consult a statutory agency about whether to inform parents, what to say and who should inform them. In the Republic of Ireland there is a statutory obligation to inform parents.

Alleged Perpetrator

Any individual under suspicion, whether or not he or she is a leader/helper within your organisation, has a right to be notified that a complaint has been made against them. This is another matter which will need careful consideration and should **only** be undertaken after consultation with Social Service and the Police/Garda who will inform the Minister of what action should be taken.

Should a leader/helper or member of your congregation be accused of abuse they also should be shown appropriate Christian love and support. It is also important that the Minister or Designated Person liaises with the Child Protection Agency so that any action taken on behalf of the church does not impede the work of the statutory agencies. (Please see the document entitled *Policy and Procedures for Dealing with Complaints of Sexual Abuse* for more detailed guidance on handling pastoral care issues.)

Statutory Agencies

You will find that statutory child protection procedures are child centred. This means that in all investigations the welfare of the child is the paramount consideration. The official policy is that those receiving information should “disclose it only where the welfare of the child requires it and then only to those with a legitimate need to know”. The details you give will only be passed on to the relevant people within those agencies, whose task it is to decide what action to take.

Never be put off making the contact. You may even decide not to disclose your name. In such circumstances you may still contact any of the agencies for advice about how to deal with the situation.

If a referral is made to a child protection agency, church personnel may be interviewed in order to clarify the information they have reported. In some cases they may be asked to make a formal statement.

What Happens Next?

Abuse is wrong, against the law and must be stopped. When there is a referral or complaint about abuse, there will be an investigation and a risk assessment by a statutory authority to find out if anything has happened. When there is sufficient cause for concern Social Services/Health Board will hold a case conference, where the child and parents have the opportunity to participate. The need for a plan to protect the child is considered.

The Role of the Church Authorities

Kirk Session

Kirk Sessions need to be assured that the Minister, Designated Person and leaders of organisations have in place a Child Protection Policy that is genuinely helpful and affirming.

Usually it is not appropriate for the Kirk Session to have detailed information about disclosures of information about past abuse, or even about current allegations that are being investigated. The general principle that information should be disclosed only to those who need to know in the interests of protecting a child, should always be adhered to. Where, however, alleged abuse or a complaint within a church organisation is likely to become known publicly, the Minister/Clerk of Session may need to consult with the Clerk of Presbytery and the Kirk Session. (Please see the document entitled *Policy and Procedures for Dealing with Complaints of Sexual Abuse* for more detailed guidance on the Kirk Sessions role in dealing with allegations against those subject to their discipline.)

Ministers or Employees of the Church

Where there is an allegation against a minister or prominent leader in the church, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland has procedures in place for handling such cases. The Clerk of Presbytery should be informed as soon as possible and the church authorities will progress the complaint under well defined procedures, ensuring that the investigation / assessment by the statutory agencies will not be hindered. (Please see the document entitled *Policy and Procedures for Dealing with Complaints of Sexual Abuse*.)

Where there is a complaint of sexual abuse against a person who is centrally employed by PCI or employed by a local congregation (not ministers), those receiving such complaints must ensure that the relevant employment procedures and policies in place under the employee's contract are followed. The matter shall be reported through the appropriate line management procedures in the employment contract, ensuring that legal advice is taken and referral to the statutory authorities is carried out when necessary. When such complaints arise it is also necessary for the employer to inform the Clerk of the General Assembly.

1.7 The Designated Person

The following paragraphs provide information and guidance on the role of the Designated Person:

Function

The function of the Designated Person is primarily to provide consultation, advice and support to the Minister and organisation leaders and to act as a contact person with the statutory agencies. Designated Persons also have responsibility for holding a supply of blank Report of Concern Forms (TCF8/04) and storing these forms in a secure place.

Some congregations have widened the role of the Designated Person to include responsibilities such as facilitating training, storage of completed Application and Consent Forms and active involvement in recruitment, supervision and appraisal of leaders.

It is for the Kirk Session to decide whether a Designated Person should carry any responsibilities in addition to those suggested in the Guidelines. Some Designated Persons are able to do so, while others are not. It is important not to expect too much of the Designated Person. It would be entirely appropriate for a suitable elder (other than the Designated Person) to store completed Application Forms. This may ease the workload of the Minister or the Designated Person.

Suitability for Appointment

The people best suited for this task are those whose occupations, or lengthy voluntary experience, have brought them into contact with children. Those who have already participated in foundation training in child protection e.g. Nurses, Teachers, Social Workers, Probation Officers and Doctors may be particularly suitable.

The Kirk Session may want to appoint one male and one female Designated Person.

Difficulties in appointing a Designated Person

The Minister should avoid being the Designated Person.

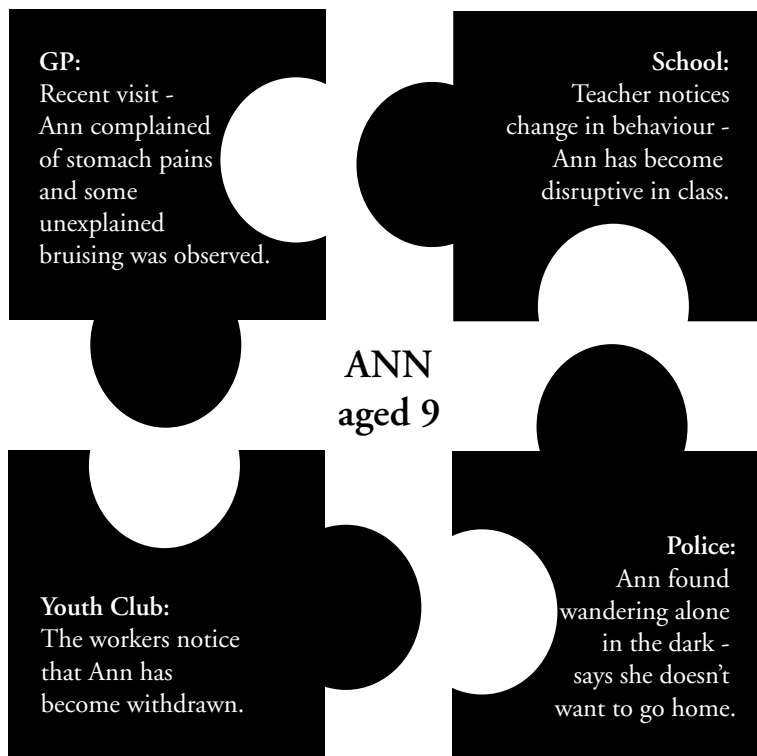
One Designated Person can represent a joint charge.

When a small congregation is unable to appoint a suitable person to the position of Designated Person, the assistance of a neighbouring church, or the Presbytery should be sought.

Reporting

Abuse of children often goes undetected because people who have pieces of information are reluctant to share them. Your organisation would benefit from developing links with other agencies and with parents, so that you are comfortable about taking action when you may have information which causes you concern. Sharing your information can help piece together the jigsaw.

EXAMPLE:



The leader of an organisation should report any suspicion or concern to the Designated Person on the Report of Concern Form (TCF8/04). The Designated Person will send an acknowledgement to the leader who made the initial report (TCF9/04). The Designated Person will then consult with the Minister (unless there is insufficient time, or where delay could be prejudicial to the interest of a child or other party).

It is essential that the nature of the concern, the discussion and the decision regarding referral are carefully recorded. Normally the Designated Person will prepare the record, though the Minister may do so. It is important, that if there is difficulty in making contact with the Designated Person or Minister, that any concern about the immediate safety of a child is referred directly to a child protection agency, i.e. Social Services/Health Board or the Police/Gardaí.

Accountability

Before appointment, the person selected as Designated Person must complete the Youth Leader's Application Form (and in due course must also attend training organised by the Presbyterian Church). The Minister or Clerk of Session must ensure that the name of the Designated Person is notified to the Clerk of Presbytery. The Presbytery must be notified of all subsequent changes.

Both the support and oversight of the Designated Person rests with the Kirk Session, to whom he/she is accountable. The Kirk Session should ensure that organisation leaders are informed of the name of the Designated Person(s).

Confidentiality

The Designated Person must maintain confidentiality at all times. Only those with a need to know, in the interests of protecting a child, or other vulnerable person, should be given any information.

In the first instance, only the person who initiated the concern, the Designated Person and the Minister should receive information. It is for this group to decide how the matter should be handled - in particular whether, and by whom, the child's parents should be contacted, or whether a child protection agency should be contacted. All records relating to child protection matters must be securely stored.

Communication

The Designated Person should be familiar with the contact numbers and establish personal contact with the Church House Designated Persons, representatives of Social Services and the CARE team of the PSNI. Those in the Republic of Ireland should establish liaison with the Health Board Community Care Office or the Gardaí.

Church House Designated Persons

Board of Social Witness office (028) 9032 2284 - Direct Helpline (028) 9041 7235

Contact Person 1

Contact Person 2

Social Services/Health Board Duty Social Worker

Tel: Contact Person

PSNI CARE Unit/Gardaí Síochána

Tel: Contact Person

If, in the process of following up a concern, questions or problems arise that are difficult to resolve, advice should be sought from the Church House Designated Person who can be contacted at the Board of Social Witness.

Handling of Reports by Designated Persons

Designated Persons may be concerned about the extent of their legal liability in the referral or non-referral or cases brought to their attention. It would be unlikely that a Designated Person acting in good faith would be legally liable for decisions taken.

Also, rarely will the Designated Person be making any decision on his/her own. It will usually be a joint decision with the Minister and the leader in charge, after having met with the person who reported the concern in the first instance. In the Republic of Ireland leaders/workers are protected by the Protection of Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act 1998.

An important safeguard is to make a full written record of what was reported, by whom and when, together with the reason for any subsequent action, e.g. whether or not to involve parents, or a child protection agency.

If a Designated Person is making a report of a concern to the statutory authorities in the Republic of Ireland he/she should complete the authorised form TCF9, a copy of which can be found in Section 3.

General Guidance on Dealing With Concerns Reported to a Designated Person

This information is provided to assist Designated Persons, Ministers and others, when they meet to consider an expression of concern about a child, or a complaint made by a child. Experience suggests that rarely will serious allegations of child abuse be voiced for the first time to church leaders. It is more likely that matters needing to be discussed will be of a less serious nature and that they will be resolved or clarified through discussion, often involving the child's own family.

It is, however, important that a brief written record is kept of any matter referred to the Designated Person and the Minister. This should include the decision reached and the reason for it.

The Minister and Designated Person should try and ensure that organisation leaders and the Kirk Session are aware who the Designated Person(s) is/are.

The following steps are for your guidance and may need to be adapted according to particular circumstances:

1. A meeting should be convened by the Designated Person as soon as practicable, unless a child is in imminent danger or at risk of abuse. In all events a meeting should take place within 72 hours of being informed of the concern.
2. Those invited to attend should include only those who need to know about the incident or concern. Confidentiality must be preserved. Those invited will include the Minister and the person who has passed the information to the Designated Person.
3. The purpose of the meeting is to consider the available information and decide what to do.
4. If the child is considered to be in any form of imminent danger, a child protection agency or the Police/Gardaí Station should be contacted immediately by the Designated Person or the Minister.

When there is any doubt or uncertainty about what to do, it is thoroughly recommended that you test out concerns, in confidence, with either the Police/Gardai or a Child Protection Agency. Help and advice can also be given by the Church House Designated Person located in the Board of Social Witness office.

5. A clear record should be made of the meeting and it may be helpful to use the following headings:
 - Names of those attending the meeting.
 - Details of the concern or complaint that has been expressed. Be very clear about what is fact and what is opinion.
 - Record as accurately as possible **what the child has said**, if a child has made the complaint.
 - Record the decision reached, and why. For example:
 - Take no further action.
 - why?
or
 - Talk to the child's parents.
 - why, and who should do it?
or
 - Arrange a preliminary discussion with the child protection agency.
 - why, and who should do it?
or
 - Make a formal report to the child protection agency or the Police/Gardai.
 - why, and who should do it?
6. The record of this meeting and the report that has been given to the Designated Person must be held together in a sealed envelope, in a secure place, perhaps in the church safe.
7. If it is decided to have a preliminary discussion with the child protection agency or the Police/Gardai, it is not necessary, at this stage, to give them any written report.
8. If it is decided to make a formal referral to either the child protection agency or the Police/Gardai, it will be helpful to make available to them a copy of the report, if any, that was given to the Designated Person, and the record of the meeting convened to discuss the matter. These should be sent under cover of a letter signed by the Designated Person or the Minister. In the Republic of Ireland if a Designated Person is making a formal referral to the Social Services the standard form TCF10/04 should be completed (see Section 3).
9. It is for Ministers to decide how much information about a particular incident is shared with their Kirk Session. Ministers will wish to be assured of the support of their Kirk Sessions in the handling of delicate matters, while at the same time treating sensitive information as confidential.

10. Designated Persons may need to refer immediately to a Clerk of Presbytery where a minister is unavailable or is implicated. The Designated Person should be aware of the address and telephone number of the Clerk of their Presbytery. If an allegation involves a minister or a person in prominent spiritual leadership the procedures outlined in *Policy and Procedures for Dealing with Complaints of Sexual Abuse* should be followed.

11. The purpose of this guidance is to promote good practice and to protect both church personnel and children. While it is true that people today are more prone to complain, sensible precautions and wise counsel will usually result in a satisfactory outcome for all concerned.