



STANDARD 2: RESPONDING

2.1A GUIDANCE ON REPORTING CHILD SAFEGUARDING SUSPICIONS, CONCERNS, KNOWLEDGE OR ALLEGATIONS

All information about a child and family should be handled in a confidential and sensitive manner. It is important to note that whilst church personnel will do their utmost to ensure the confidentiality of information, there are occasions where there are limits to confidentiality, and accordingly, it may be necessary to share personal information in certain situations. Where a child protection or welfare concern arises, information will be shared on a need-to-know basis in the best interest of a child with the relevant statutory authorities when necessary in line with safeguarding policy.

REASONABLE GROUNDS FOR CONCERN

There are many reasons church personnel may be concerned about the welfare or protection of a child. Gateway Team/Tusla should be informed if there are reasonable grounds for concern that a child:

- May have been;
- Is being; or
- Is at risk of being abused or neglected.

If potential symptoms of abuse are ignored, this could result in ongoing harm to the child. It is not necessary to prove that abuse has occurred in order to report a concern to Gateway Team/Tusla. If reasonable grounds for concern exist, it is the Gateway Team's/Tusla's role to assess concerns that are reported. They will carefully consider any information reported along with any other information available. A child protection assessment is then carried out by the relevant statutory authority, where sufficient risk is identified. Where the concern relates to conduct which potentially amounts to a criminal offence, PSNI/An Garda Síochána will also have a role in conducting a criminal investigation.

Reasonable grounds for a child protection or welfare concern include:

- Evidence, for example an injury or behaviour, that is consistent with abuse/harm 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 other means that he or she has been abused.
- Admission or indication by an adult or a child of an alleged abuse they committed.
- An account from a person who saw a child being abused.



Where a member of church personnel has a concern that meets one of the above reasonable grounds for concern, they must follow the reporting procedures set out below to ensure that it is reported to the statutory authorities. Church personnel working with children/young people should make it clear to them and their parents/carers, that they cannot give undertakings regarding secrecy. Parents/carers and children/young people should be informed if personal information is being shared with statutory authorities. Church personnel should work in partnership with parents/carers, and they should be consulted and involved in matters that concern their family. This means that any issues should be checked with the parents/carers when considering whether a concern exists. The only circumstances where this should not occur is, whereby doing so:

- The child will be placed at further risk; or
- Where the family's knowledge of the report could impair the Gateway Team's/Tusla's ability to carry out a risk assessment.
- Also, you do not need to inform the family if you reasonably believe that by doing so it may place you at risk of harm from the family.

It is also good practice to tell the family that a report is being made and the reasons for the decision, unless the above circumstances apply. The welfare of the child is of paramount importance and a report will still need to be made, where reasonable concerns exist.

CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH MAY MAKE CHILDREN MORE VULNERABLE TO HARM

Some children may be more vulnerable to abuse than others, and there may be particular times or circumstances when a child may be more vulnerable to abuse in their lives. The following are some of the complicating factors and circumstances, which may make children more vulnerable to harm:

- Age, gender, sexuality, disability, mental health issues, previous abuse, trauma, separated children seeking asylum, children who are carers, children in the criminal justice system, children in the care system, children subject to exploitation.
- Parent or carer factors such as drug and alcohol misuse, addiction, mental health issues, parental disability issues, domestic abuse.
- Environmental factors such as housing issues, poverty, bullying, internet and social media-related concerns.

It is important to remember that identifying additional vulnerability to risk of abuse does not mean that any specific child in those circumstances or settings is being abused.

REPORTING PROCESS

If a member of church personnel receives a child safeguarding allegation, suspicion, concern or knowledge, they have an obligation to report the matter to the statutory authorities; this is usually done via the RCB Safeguarding Casework Team.



Church personnel who are unsure as to how to proceed, or who require support in order to make a report, may:

- Seek advice from the Diocesan Safeguarding Panel or RCB Safeguarding Team.
- They may also contact the statutory authorities at any time for advice; this can be done without identifying information initially.

If consulting with the Diocesan Safeguarding Panel or RCB Safeguarding Team may put the child at further risk, then the person has a responsibility to go directly to the statutory authorities.

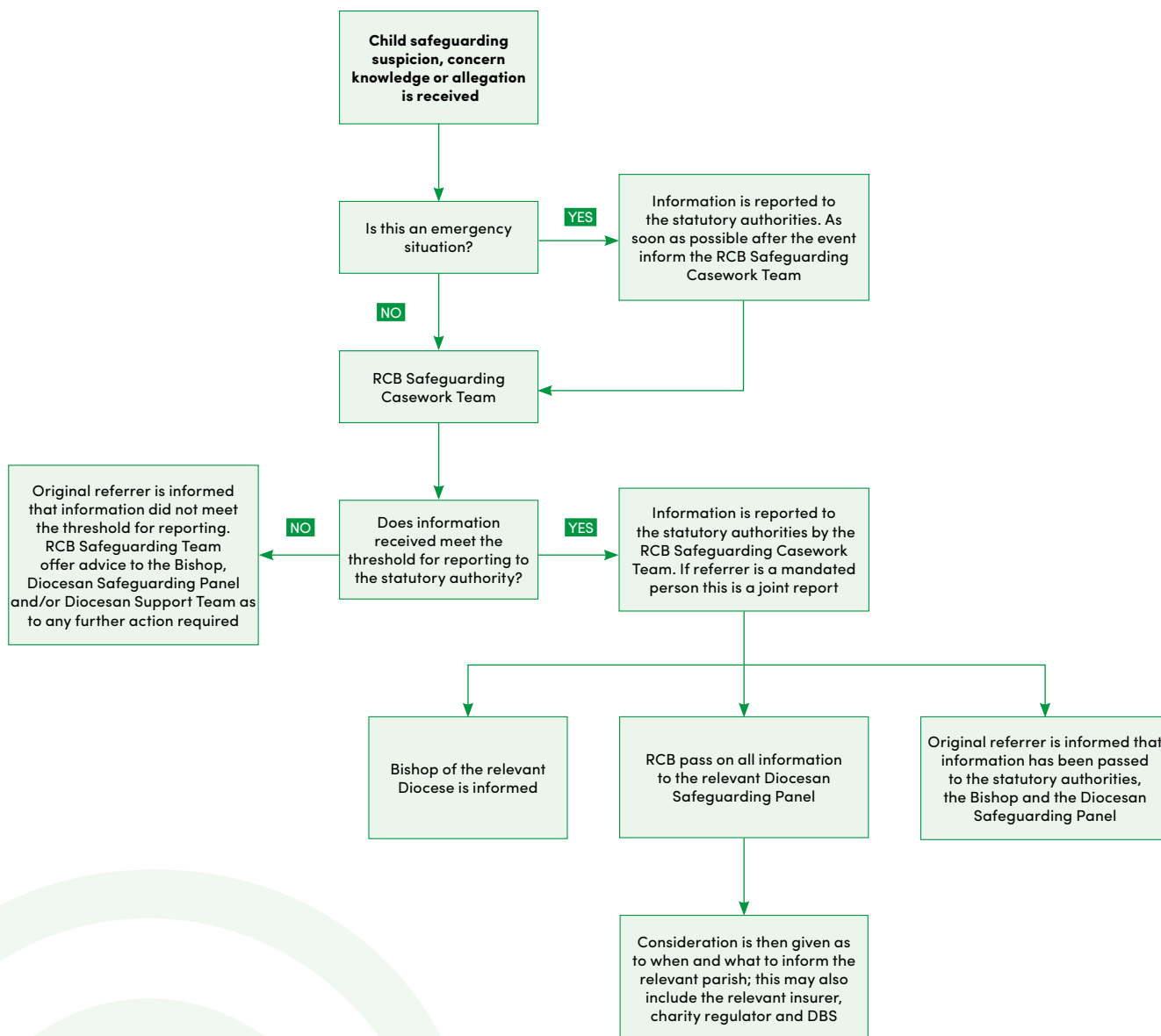
In the case of an emergency, where the child/young person is at immediate risk, a report will be made without delay to the statutory authorities (the Gateway Team/Tusla and/or PSNI/An Garda Síochána). The RCB Safeguarding Casework Team must be informed as soon as possible after the referral has been made.

If following the reporting procedure would result in a conflict of interest, the statutory authorities can be consulted for further advice.





The reporting process to be followed is outlined in the flowchart below:





1. When the suspicion, concern, knowledge or allegation is received, Church personnel should:
 - If the complainant is an adult or child in NI – complete sections 1 and 2 of **2.1A Template 1**.
 - If the allegation relates to a complainant who is an adult in ROI – complete the relevant sections of this form https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Retrospective_Abuse_Report_Form_FINAL.pdf.
 - If the allegation relates to a complainant who is a child in ROI– complete the relevant sections of this form https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Child_Protection_and_Welfare_Report_Form_FINAL.docx
2. If it is an emergency situation (immediate risk of harm) the suspicion, concern, knowledge or allegation should be reported to the statutory authorities using the information in **Appendix F**. Once a report has been made the RCB Safeguarding Casework team must be informed as soon as possible.
3. If it is not an emergency situation the person who received the suspicion, concern, knowledge or allegation should contact the RCB Safeguarding Casework Team and pass on the information they have received using **2.1A Template 1 or the forms outlined in point 1 above**.
4. The information will be assessed by the RCB Safeguarding Casework Team and if the suspicion, concern, knowledge or allegation meets the threshold for reporting they will make the initial referral (if it hasn't been made already) to the statutory authorities. If the referrer is a mandated person (**Guidance 2.1B**) the section in **the Tusla forms in point 1 outlined above** will be completed to function as a joint report.
5. Once the suspicion, concern, knowledge or allegation has been passed to the statutory authorities, the RCB Casework Team will pass the information to the Diocesan Safeguarding Panel and the Bishop including the relevant form received and section 3 of **Template 2.1A**. The person who made the original referral will also be informed. The Diocesan Panel will seek advice from the RCB Safeguarding Casework Team to manage the suspicion, concern, knowledge or allegation and any associated safeguarding risks. Decisions around sharing information with the respondent, parish, insurers, Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) and the relevant charity regulators or other relevant bodies will be made in consultation with the statutory authorities.
6. If the suspicion, concern, knowledge or allegation does not meet the threshold for reporting the original referrer will be informed in writing as to the reasons for that decision and the reporter will be advised that he/she may make a report directly to the statutory authorities. In the Republic of Ireland, persons are protected under the Protection for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act 1998, should they report independently and in Northern Ireland the common law defence and qualified privilege may provide similar protection. The RCB Casework Team will consult with the Bishop, Diocesan Safeguarding Panel and or Diocesan Support Team around any further steps to be taken.



2.1A TEMPLATE 1: CHILD SAFEGUARDING REPORTING FORM

This form is laid out in three sections.

1. A section that relates to the information that was received. Please remember you may not be able to complete all of the fields in this form and not all sections will be relevant to a particular concern (NI Only).
2. A section for the person who received the information to complete. This must be completed for each allegation (NI Only).
3. A section for the RCB Safeguarding Casework Team to Complete (NI and ROI).

SECTION 1 - DETAILS OF THE INFORMATION RECEIVED

Name of the complainant:

Age:

Date of Birth:

Address:

Postcode:

Tel:

Names of parents /carers:

Address if different from above:

What is the nature of the concern? (Include dates of incidents and descriptions of injuries if provided alongside any practical information you may have such as the name of the complainant's GP, school or other children in their household)



State the name of the person the complainant has spoken to with the date, time and place:

If a complainant has made an allegation of abuse, record what was said:

If an adult has expressed concern in relation to the safety of a child, record if he/she is expressing his/her own worries or passing on those from another adult. Record the concerns and ask him/her to confirm that the details as written are correct.

Have possible signs or indicators of harm been identified?

Yes:

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No:

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If yes, please outline below including any need for medical attention:

Record the name(s) of the person(s) alleged to have harmed the complainant:



SECTION 2 - TO BE COMPLETED BY THE PERSON WHO RECEIVED THE ALLEGATION FROM THE COMPLAINANT

Name of person who received the suspicion, concern, knowledge or allegation:

Role of the person in the Parish/Diocese:

Contact details of the person who received the suspicion, concern, knowledge or allegation:

Signed:

Date:

**SECTION 3 - TO BE COMPLETED BY THE RCB CASEWORK TEAM**

Have the PSNI/Gardai been contacted about the suspicion, concern, knowledge or allegation

Yes:

No:

Date:

Casework Team staff member who made contact:

Name of PSNI/Garda:

Tel:

Email:

Was a referral made?

Yes:

No:

Crime or Incident Number:

Have Gateway Team/Tusla been contacted about the suspicion, concern, knowledge or allegation

Yes:

No:

Date:

Casework Team staff member who made contact:

Name of Social Worker

Tel:

Email:

Was a referral made?

Yes:

No:

Referral Number:



Has the suspicion, concern, knowledge or allegation been given to the Bishop and Diocesan Safeguarding Panel?

Yes:

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No:

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Date:

Casework Team staff member who informed the Bishop and Diocesan Safeguarding Panel:

Contact details of Panel contact person:

Has the person who made the suspicion, concern, knowledge or allegation been notified of the referral process?

Yes:

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No:

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Date:

Name of person who notified the original referrer:

Any additional actions taken?