

## **CHILD-PROTECTION POLICY AND PROCEDURE**

At St. Bernard's Pre-school we have a primary responsibility for the care, welfare and safety of the pupils in our charge, and we will carry out this duty through pastoral care, which aims to provide a caring, supportive and safe environment, valuing individuals for their unique talents and abilities, in which all our young people can learn and develop to their full potential. One way in which we seek to protect our pupils is by helping them learn about the risks of possible abuse, helping them to recognise unwelcome behaviour in others and acquire the confidence and skills they need to keep themselves safe.

All the staff, volunteers and students have been subject to appropriate Access NI and Social Services vetting procedures. They have also adopted a Code of Practice for behaviour towards pupils **(See Staffing Policy)**.

The purpose of the following procedures on Child Protection is to protect our pupils by ensuring that everyone who works in the pre-school has clear guidance on the action which is required where abuse or neglect of a child is suspected. The overriding concern of all caring adults must be the care, welfare and safety of the child, and the welfare of each child is our paramount consideration. The problem of child abuse will not be ignored by anyone who works in our pre-school and we know that some forms of child abuse are also a criminal offence. Staff must also be aware there may be a need to treat some child protection issues as an 'incident'; therefore there is a need to record these using the incident forms. If referring the child to Gateway, we need to show there is a 'journey'. It is our Duty of Care to ensure that all staff record/evidence all concerns and factual details in relation to any area of Child Protection.

**Designated Child Protection Officer: - Kylie Scott (Pre School Leader)**

**Deputy Child Protection Officer: - Donna Mulhern (Pre School Manager)**

Role of a Designated Child Protection Officer -

Provides information and advice on child protection – responsible for staff training, recognising training needs, providing up to date information and ensuring clear lines of communication are maintained

Ensure that the child protection and relevant policies and procedures are implemented and followed

Ensures policies and procedures are kept up to date (regularly reviewed to reflect on amendments or changes to legislation) and ensure that staff/students/volunteers and

parents/carers sign off that they have understood

Maintains appropriate information and ensures records are documented and kept correctly

Ensures appropriate information is shared and referrals made in line with procedures

Will act upon and reported concerns, refer cases of suspected abuse or allegations made against a member of staff

### **Relevant Legislation in relation to our Child Protection Policy and Procedures: -**

The **Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995** (the Children Order) is the principal statute governing the care, upbringing and protection of children in Northern Ireland.

The **Human Rights Act (1998)** incorporates the **European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)** into UK legislation. State authorities must use their powers reasonably and proportionately to protect children and young people, and the ECHR holds them responsible for inhuman or degrading treatment inflicted within their jurisdiction.

The **Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (Northern Ireland) Order 2007** as amended by the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 provides the legislative framework for the establishment of a Disclosure and Barring Service and requirements relating to individuals who work with children and vulnerable adults.

The **Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015** places a requirement on individuals and organisations providing children's services to children to co-operate with each other to devise and implement cross cutting strategies.

The **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child** is an international human rights treaty setting out the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of the child.

The **Understanding the Needs of Children in the NI (UNOCINI)** is an assessment framework which is used to support professionals in assessment and planning to better meet the needs of children and their families by providing a process by which their circumstances can be considered.

**SBNI Regional Core Child Protection Policy and Procedures (2017)**, provides the overarching policy framework for safeguarding children and young people in the statutory, private, independent, community, voluntary and faith sectors. It outlines how communities, organisations and individuals must work both individually and in partnership to ensure children and young people are safeguarded as effectively as possible.<sup>1</sup>

### **What is child abuse?**

- **Neglect** is the persistent or significant neglect of a child, or the failure to protect a child from exposure to any kind of danger, including cold or starvation, or persistent failure to carry out important aspects of care, resulting in the significant impairment of the child's health or development, including non-organic failure to thrive.

#### **Concerning features or signs of neglect includes:**

Poor appearance or hygiene: - not suitably dressed, unwashed clothes, smelly or dirty.

Health or Medical problems: - poor dental hygiene, weight or growth issues, untreated injuries or skin conditions/sores etc. poor muscle tone and/or prominent joints.

Being in an unsuitable home environment (no heating etc.), being left alone in the house.

Behaviour changes: - clingy, aggressive, withdrawn, obsessive behaviours, poor concentration (refer to age and stage of development and/or additional needs), changes in eating habits.

- **Physical** injury to a child, whether deliberately inflicted or knowingly not prevented. It might take a variety of different forms including hitting, biting, punching, shaking, throwing, pinching, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning or suffocating a child.

#### **Concerning features or signs of abuse includes:**

Bruises that are seen away from bony prominences/ multiple bruises of uniform shape or/and in clusters, possibly to the face, back, abdomen, arms,

---

<sup>1</sup> Information derived from the document: *Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland* and website: [www.proceduresonline.com/sbni/contents](http://www.proceduresonline.com/sbni/contents)

buttocks, ears and hands, bruises that carry and imprint and bruises with petechiae (bruises must always be assessed in the context of the child's medical and social history, developmental stage and explanation given).

Parent/carer's or child's response isn't appropriate and failure to explain the injury (including an inconsistent or previous history of unusual injury).

Presence of other injuries.

- **Sexual** exploitation of a child or young person for an adult's (or another young person's) own sexual gratification; the involvement of children or young people in sexual activities of any kind (including exposure to pornography) which they do not understand, to which they are unable to give informed consent or that violate normal family roles.

**Concerning features or signs of abuse includes:**

Language or sexual behavior you wouldn't expect them to know (age and stage of development).

Having nightmares or bed-wetting and/or changes in eating habits or developing an eating problem.

Changes in their mood, feeling irritable and angry, or anything out of the ordinary.

Bleeding, discharge, pains or soreness in their genital or anal area.

Bruises (refer to *Physical abuse*).

- **Emotional** abuse is persistent *or* significant emotional ill-treatment or rejection, resulting in severe adverse effects on the emotional, physical and /or behavioural development of a child.

**Concerning features or signs of abuse includes:**

Appears unconfident, anxious and lacks self-assurance.

Is overly affectionate to people they do not know and/or aggressive to others.

Struggles to control their emotions (has extreme outbursts etc. refer to age and stage of development).

Lacks social skills and has difficulties in maintaining relationships (has few or no friends).

Appears isolated from parents/carers.

- **Exploitation** is the intentional ill-treatment, manipulation or abuse of power and control over a child; to take selfish or unfair advantage of a child or young person or situation, for personal gain. It may manifest itself in many forms such as child labour, slavery, servitude, engagement in criminal activity, begging, benefit or other financial fraud or child trafficking.

**Concerning features or signs of child exploitation include:**

Unhealthy or inappropriate sexual behaviour as well as use of slang words (inappropriate language for age and stage)

Being frightened of other people/situations/places

Being secretive

Physical signs of abuse – bruises and/or bleeding in their genital/anal area

Being aggressive and/or socially distant and withdrawn

See *Child Exploitation Policy*.

- **Domestic Abuse** Domestic abuse is any type of controlling, bullying, threatening or violent behaviour between people in a relationship. It can seriously harm children and young people and witnessing domestic abuse is child abuse.

**Concerning features or signs a child has witnessed domestic abuse includes:**

Aggression, bullying, tantrums and/or attention seeking behaviours

Being withdrawn, anxious

Constant or regular patterns of sickness such as colds, headaches etc.

Eating disorders<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Information in relation to signs of abuse derived from [www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse)

- **Complex Forms of Child Abuse: - Abuse within Communities** – when a child has been directly impacted or threatened by abuse or violence within their community (paramilitaries), **Female Genital Mutilation** - FGM involves procedures that include the partial or total removal of the external female genital organs for cultural or other non-therapeutic reasons. FGM is a criminal offence in Northern Ireland, **Forced Marriage** - A forced marriage is a marriage conducted without the valid consent of one or both parties and where duress is a factor. Forced marriage is a criminal offence in Northern Ireland, **Honour based Violence** - The term 'Honour based violence' is used to refer to a range of violent practices used to control behaviour within families or other social groups to sustain or promote perceived cultural and religious beliefs and/or honour. The punishment can include assault, abduction, restrictions of liberty, confinement, threats and murder. **Fabricated or Induced Illness** - Harm may be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces, illness in a child. Fabricated or induced illness by parents or carers can cause significant harm to children. **Abusive Images of Children** - The production of abusive images of children can involve contact sexual abuse of children and/or the manipulation of innocent images, including video, film or photographic data. Such images are often distributed for sexual gratification and sometimes for financial gain. **Risks of Misuse of Digital Technologies/Grooming** – risks involving the use of online technologies (games, social media etc.)<sup>3</sup>

**Bullying** is a highly distressing and damaging form of abuse and is not tolerated in our pre-school. Staff are vigilant at all times to the possibility of bullying occurring, and will take immediate steps to stop it happening, to protect and reassure the victim and to discipline the bully or potential bully. Parents of both victim and bully will be personally contacted immediately bullying behaviour is identified.

Any complaint by a parent that their child is, or may be, being bullied will be fully investigated by the designated person for child protection, and team action will be taken to protect the victim. This will usually include ensuring that another child or small group of children befriends and supports the child being bullied during the

---

<sup>3</sup> Information derived from the document: *Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland* and website: [www.proceduresonline.com/sbni/contents](http://www.proceduresonline.com/sbni/contents)

session. A parent making a complaint about bullying will have a personal response from the designated person within one week of making the complaint, indicating the investigation which has been carried out and the action being taken.

The sanctions taken against a pupil who bullies will depend on the seriousness of the case, but will include the loss of any privileges he/she hold. Their behaviour will be carefully monitored until staff are satisfied that the problem has stopped.

If a pupil's bullying behaviour persists, the second stage will be to instigate the child protection procedures described below.

## **Responding and Managing Concerns**

### **Helpful Questions if you have a concern regarding a child's change in behaviour:-**

*Is the Child's behaviour normal for their age?*

*Is there a change in behaviour and how long has this behaviour been observed?*

*How often does the behaviour occur and where does it occur?*

*Has something happened that could describe the behaviour?*

*Is the child showing any sign of distress/is the child suffering?*

*Does the behaviour restrict the child socially or intervene with their development?*

*Does it have an effect on others?*

*What are the child's parent's views or responses?<sup>4</sup>*

### **Procedure for reporting suspected (or disclosed) child abuse:-**

The designated person for child protection is Kylie Scott - Leader of St Bernard's Pre-School and Donna Mulhern - Manager, is designated deputy person for child protection. If a child makes a disclosure to a staff member which gives rise to concerns about possible abuse, or if a member of staff has concerns about a child, **the member of staff must act promptly and contact the designated person.**

### **If a child makes a disclosure Do's and Don'ts**

---

<sup>4</sup> Information derived from *Designated Officer Training- Safeguarding Children course through Kingsbridge Training Academy*

Policy Reviewed 03/08/2020

Policy Reviewed 05/08/2020

Policy Reviewed 26/02/2021

Policy updated 07/09/2021

Policy Reviewed 13/09/2022

Policy Reviewed 18/09/2023

Listen carefully to the child and go at the child's pace (don't interrupt or prompt) and don't push a child for more information than what they are giving you. If you're not sure what the child has said to you or you're not sure what they meant it is okay to ask them to repeat what they said or ask open ended questions such as 'What does that mean?' (Make sure that questions asked are only to clarify information or to make sure that the child is okay). Non-verbal children or children with limited verbal language may use gestures or demonstrate (record this). Ensure you stay calm, be aware of your non-verbal and body language

Reassure the child that it is not his/her fault

Let the child know that he/she has done the right thing by telling you

Discuss with the child what they would like to happen

Explain the to the child what you will do next/who you are going to speak to (don't make promises you can't keep)

Don't make assumptions or confront the alleged abuser/investigate

**Report what has been disclosed immediately to the designated person (see flow chart) and record clear, concise and factual information (child's own words, what the child did (body language/gestures etc.) and any questions asked. <sup>5</sup>**

### **Parental consultation/consent**

Concerns were practical will be discussed with the parents/carers unless this places the child at further risk. The Pre School will and when they can seek consent from parents/carers to share information and where consent has not been sought this decision must be noted within the referral, a reason given for not seeking consent and the parent informed. If staff are unsure whether they should seek consent they will contact the gateway team for advice.

Where it is clear that a Child Protection Referral is needed, the designated person will contact The Gateway Team. Where the designated person is not sure if it is a Child Protection issue, they will seek advice from the Gateway Team.

---

<sup>5</sup> Disclosure protocol derived from *Designated Officer Training- Safeguarding Children course through Kingsbridge Training Academy*

Policy Reviewed 03/08/2020  
Policy Reviewed 05/08/2020  
Policy Reviewed 26/02/2021  
Policy updated 07/09/2021  
Policy Reviewed 13/09/2022  
Policy Reviewed 18/09/2023



**If there are concerns that the child may be at risk, it is the Pre Schools Duty of Care to make a referral to the Gateway Team.**

**See corresponding flow chart.**

### **Safe Guarding Children Procedure Flow Chart**

**On discovery or suspicion of child abuse or neglect**



Inform your Designated Person for Safe Guarding Children



**Kylie Scott (Pre School Leader)**

**028 90 790702**

If the Designated Person is not available contact Deputy Designated Person



**Donna Mulhern (Pre School Manager)**

**028 90 790702**

Who should then take the following steps:



Where it is clear that a Child Protection Referral is needed contact (without delay)

**The Gateway Team**

**028 90 507 000**

**The Regional Emergency Social Work Service (out of hours)**

**028 950 499 99**



Where the Designated Person for Safe Guarding Children is not sure whether it is a Child Safe Guarding Issue

They may seek advice from **The Gateway Team**



Phone the **Early Years Team** to inform them on **028 95 042811**  
Our Key Social Worker is Nuala Lavery

**If a child is in immediate danger contact 999 and if the matter relates to a  
Non-emergency, contact the Police service on 101  
Remember always make and keep a written factual record of all events and action  
taken, date and sign each entry on this record.  
KEEP RECORDS CONFIDENTIAL AND SECURE  
IF IN DOUBT ACT NOW!!!!!!**