

## STANDARD 2

### PROCEDURES FOR RESPONDING TO CHILD PROTECTION SUSPICIONS, CONCERNs, KNOWLEDGE OR ALLEGATIONS GUIDANCE FOR INDICATOR 2.1

#### 2.1A Guidance on Reporting Allegations of Abuse

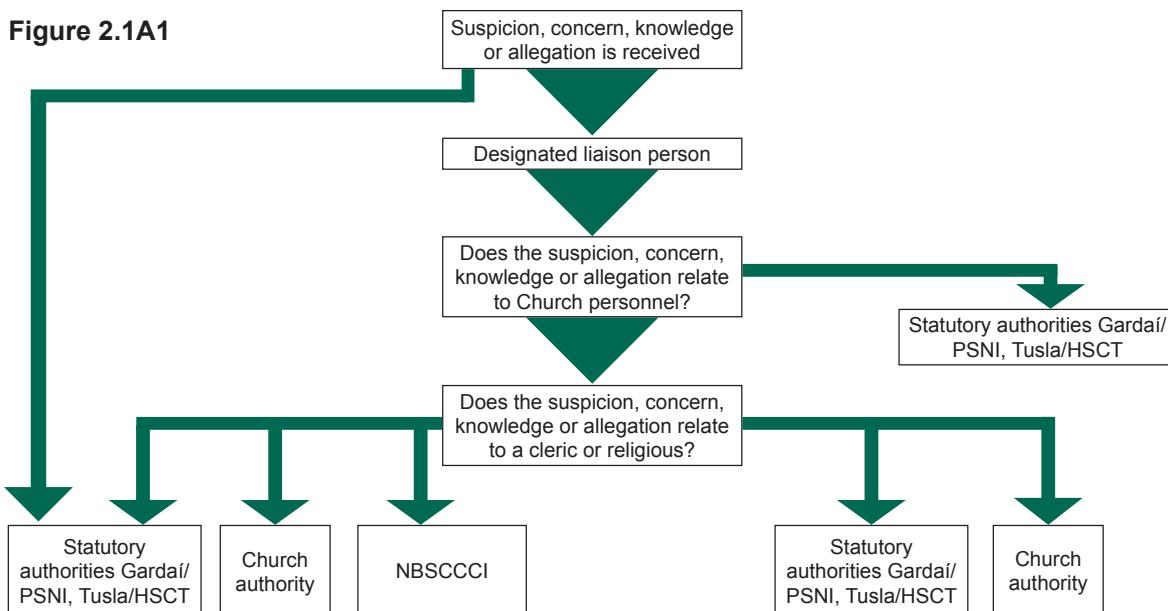
Children occupy a central place in the heart of the Christian community. They have a right to be listened to and heard.<sup>1</sup> The paramount consideration in all matters relating to children is their safety and protection from all forms of abuse. To create and maintain a safe environment, Church organisations must respond effectively and ensure all allegations and suspicions of abuse are reported, both within the Church and to statutory authorities. This responsibility to report is mandatory, and the only exception to this rule is the receipt of any information by a cleric under what is termed as the sacramental Seal of Confession (Guidance 2.1G).

All Church organisations must provide guidance and training on recognition of abuse, and clear procedures on what to do when a child protection concern arises, so that everyone knows how to respond appropriately. This involves knowing who to tell and how to record it. It is important that the local reporting procedures are fully consistent with statutory legislation, regulations and guidance.<sup>2</sup>

Reporting a concern can be a challenging responsibility. The procedure needs to ensure that everyone is clear what steps to take to ensure that the safety of children is the paramount consideration.

The reporting flow chart below refers to any child protection concern, *including* where the concern is about a situation or person involved in the Church. It is the responsibility of everyone in the Church to ensure that children who may need help and protection are not left at risk of abuse.

**Figure 2.1A1**



1 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989, Article 12.

2 Criminal Law Act (Northern Ireland) 1967; Criminal Justice Act 2006; Criminal Justice (Withholding of Information on Offences against Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012; Protection for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act 1998; and National Policy (*Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children; Our Duty to Care; and Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland*).

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Following receipt of an allegation, suspicion or concern, the following steps should be taken.

1. Act immediately on receipt of a suspicion, concern, disclosure or allegation of abuse, and refer the matter to the DLP without delay.

If the allegation does not relate to Church personnel, the DLP will refer the allegation to:

- The HSCT/Tusla
- An Garda Síochána/PSNI

If the allegation relates to Church personnel who are not clerics or religious, the DLP will refer the allegation to:

- The HSCT/Tusla
- An Garda Síochána/PSNI
- The Church authority

If the allegation relates to Church personnel who are clerics or religious, the DLP will refer the allegation to:

- The HSCT/Tusla
- An Garda Síochána/PSNI
- The Church authority
- The NBSCCCI

If there is any uncertainty about whether the allegation/concern meets the threshold for reporting, a consultation should take place by the DLP with the statutory authorities, who will advise on the requirements for notification.

**Remember – it is not your role to investigate.**

2. Whenever possible and practical, take notes during the conversation. Always ask permission to do this and explain the importance of recording all information. Where it is not appropriate to take notes at the time, make a written record as soon as possible afterwards or before the end of the day. Record the time, date, location, persons present and how the allegation was received, e.g. by telephone, face-to-face conversation, letter, etc. This initial recorded information will be transferred to a child protection referral form (2.1A Template 1) and will become the first entry in a file of information about the case that will be retained by the DLP. Please always sign and date the record.
3. The record would also normally include:
  - Accurate identifying information of the complainant, as far as it is known. This should include the name, address and age of the complainant when the alleged abuse occurred;
  - Where the person who has raised a concern/allegation is a child, details of parents/guardians should also be given;
  - Name of the individual against whom the concern/allegation is being raised, and any other identifying information;

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- Dates when the concern arose, or when the incident occurred;
- The person's own words they used to describe the event or incident. Do not make assumptions about the intended meaning of the words used;
- Details of any action already taken about the incident/concern/allegation;
- Do not be selective. Include details that to you may seem irrelevant. This may prove invaluable at a later stage in an investigation. All original records, including rough notes, should be passed immediately to the relevant DLP. Any copies of retained records should be kept secure and confidential.

In cases of emergency (and/or outside normal business hours), where a child appears to be at immediate and serious risk, an urgent report must be made to Tusla/HSCT, as well as to the DLP. Where the appropriate Tusla/HSCT staff are not available, An Garda Síochána/PSNI must be contacted to ensure that **under no circumstances a child is left in a dangerous situation pending Tusla/Health and Social Services intervention** (see direct option in Figure 2.1A1).

4. In all cases, consideration should also be given as to whether an immediate referral is necessary in order to preserve and safeguard against the possibility of any loss, deterioration or destruction of forensic or other potential evidence (see direct option arrow in Figure 2.1A1).
5. Explain to the person raising the concern what will happen next. You should inform the person making the suspicion, concern or allegation that their identity and the identity of the respondent and complainant will be shared with the statutory authorities. Leave contact details of the DLP if the referrer needs to ask questions later. The incident/concern should not be shared with anyone other than those who need to know, apart from the statutory authorities and appropriate Church authorities detailed in these procedures.
6. Written confirmation should be given to the person making the referral to the DLP that the information has been passed on to the statutory authorities. If this has not happened, an explanation should be recorded (this will not be possible when dealing with anonymous allegations).

The appropriateness of the response given to a complainant is vital to ensure that they feel heard and taken seriously.

Further guidance is provided below for:

- An adult making an allegation (Guidance 2.1B);
- A child making an allegation (Guidance 2.1C);
- An anonymous allegation (Guidance 2.1D);
- Someone who admits abusing a child (Guidance 2.1E);
- Someone who makes an allegation that does not relate to Church personnel (Guidance 2.1F).