

Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults policy

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Purpose

BITCI is fully committed to safeguarding the wellbeing of all children, young people and vulnerable adults with whom we work. This policy is in accordance with

- [Safeguarding Vulnerable Persons at Risk of Abuse \(2014\) National Policy & Procedures](#), produced by the HSE Social Care division and
- [Children First National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017](#), produced by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs

This policy will be reviewed regularly by our Senior Leadership Team.

Scope

This policy applies to all staff, Board members and volunteers involved in any BITCI programme or event with children or vulnerable adults.

Policy

1. Guiding principles the following principles are critical to the safeguarding of children and vulnerable persons from abuse:

- Human Rights** - all persons have a fundamental right to dignity and respect.
- Person Centredness** - the individual is at the heart of any exchange concerning the provision or delivery of a service.
- Culture** – an open culture underpinned by a **zero-tolerance** policy towards abuse and neglect.
- Advocacy and Empowerment** - Enabling people to inform themselves, make their wishes and views known to others and make decisions for themselves. The emphasis needs to be on optimising the capacity of the person to keep him or herself safe.
- Confidentiality** - All concerns or allegations should be shared on a *'need to know'* basis with the relevant statutory authorities. No promises regarding secrecy can be given. It is possible

to share confidential information with the appropriate authorities without breaching data protection laws. The Criminal Justice (Withholding of Information on Offences against Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012 states it is an offence to withhold any information relating to the commission of a serious offence, including a sexual offence, against a person under 18 years or a vulnerable person.

- f. **Collaboration** - Good interagency collaboration is essential to safeguarding and involves joint working and development of information sharing processes.

2. Definitions

A Child: The Child Care Act 1991 defines a child as someone under 18 years of age who is not married or has never been married. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as someone under 18 years of age. **VA Vulnerable Person**, as stated in the HSE's National Policy, is an adult who may be restricted in capacity to guard himself /herself against harm or exploitation or to report such harm or exploitation. The restriction of capacity may arise because of physical or intellectual impairment. Vulnerability to abuse is influenced by both context (e.g. social or personal circumstances) and individual circumstances.

Types of abuse include physical; sexual; psychological; financial or material; neglect and acts of omission; discriminatory abuse and institutional abuse. More detailed definitions can be found at the end of this policy.

Anyone who has contact with a child or vulnerable person may be abusive, including a member of their family or community or a friend, teacher, informal carer, healthcare/ social care or other worker.

Abuse of a child or vulnerable person may be a single act or repeated over a period. It may comprise one form or multiple forms of abuse. Lack of appropriate action can also be a form of abuse.

3. BITCI's potential contact with children and vulnerable adults

BITCI's Education programmes match volunteers with children from the age of 8 to 18 in settings including primary schools and secondary schools. BITCI is responsible for ensuring that all volunteers receive appropriate child safeguarding training and are provided with the name and contact details of the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) in the relevant school.

Volunteers have been trained to immediately report the disclosure or any concerns to the DLP in each school. If the school's DLP is not available, then they should report it to BITCI DLP and if they are not available to the Tusla Duty Social Worker. [Tusla](#) is the Child and Family Agency and the dedicated State agency responsible for improving wellbeing and outcomes for children.

BITCI's Employment Programmes work with diverse jobseekers including asylum seekers and refugees, people with disabilities and health issues, vulnerable women and Travellers. These target groups may have a higher vulnerability to emotional and psychological abuse.

The Employment team, and infrequently some members of other teams within BITCI, engages in one-to-one contact with participants. These relationships are based on the dynamic of helper/skilled professional/ advisor and as such the team have positions of significant responsibility.

Potential issues arising for participants include physical vulnerability due to injury or ill health, intrusive or suicidal thoughts, impaired cognitive function or abusive relationships with landlords, support workers, family members, or work colleagues. There is a fine line between abusive relationships and those that are merely difficult or problematic, but all disclosures or suspicions where a service user has suffered or is suffering should be assessed.

4. The Designated Liaison Person (DLP)

The Designated Liaison Person is responsible for

- being familiar with the principles of good practice for the protection of children and vulnerable adults and for the implementation and monitoring of this policy.
- co-ordinating action within the organisation when a concern arises and reporting any suspicion or disclosure of abuse to the appropriate services.
- recording and retaining securely all relevant documentation in relation to protection issues that arise.

The Designated Liaison Persons should receive appropriate Child/ Vulnerable Adult Protection training and support for their roles as required.

If there is an allegation or suspicion in relation to the Designated Liaison Person, the CEO and Chair of the BITCI Board will deal with all aspects of the case, including the reporting procedure.

BITCI's Designated Liaison Persons

For child protection concerns: Melanie Flynn (Education Team), 086 0238328, mflynn@bitc.ie

For vulnerable adults: Asma Labidi (Employment Team), 086 0412803, alabidi@bitc.ie

5. Procedures

Disclosures/ Suspicions

A disclosure is defined as a specific allegation of abuse made against a named individual. **A suspicion** is when concern is expressed about abuse that may have taken place or concern that abuse may take place.

Allegations or concerns of abuse of a child or vulnerable person may come to light in one of several ways: direct observation of an incident of abuse; disclosure by a child or vulnerable person; disclosure by a relative/friend of the child/ vulnerable person; observation of signs or symptoms of abuse; reported anonymously. All concerns or allegations must be assessed, regardless of the source or date of occurrence.

Responsibilities and Actions for any Staff member or Volunteer

Anyone who has a concern in relation to the abuse or neglect of a child or vulnerable adult must address the following responsibilities on the **same day** as the alert is raised.

- **Immediate Protection** Take any immediate actions to safeguard anyone at immediate risk of harm including seeking, e.g. medical assistance or the assistance of An Garda Síochána, as appropriate.
- **Listen, Reassure and Support** If the child or vulnerable adult has made a direct disclosure of abuse or is distressed about an abusive incident, listen to what they say. Do not:
 - appear shocked
 - display negative emotions
 - press the individual for details
 - make judgments,
 - promise to keep secrets
 - give sweeping reassurances.
- **Record and Preserve Evidence**

Preserve evidence through recording and take steps to preserve any physical evidence (if appropriate). As soon as possible on the same day, make a detailed written record of what you have seen, been told or have concerns about and who you reported it to. Try to make sure anyone else who saw or heard anything relating to the concern of abuse also makes a written report.
- **Report & inform.**

In normal circumstances, observing the principle of confidentiality will mean that information is only communicated to others with the consent of the person involved. However, all children and vulnerable persons need to be made aware that the operation of safeguarding procedures will, on occasion, require the sharing of information with relevant professionals and statutory agencies.

Unless it puts the person at risk, it is best practice to inform the participant before breaking confidentiality and explain your reasons for doing so.

Report to the appropriate Designated Liaison Person as soon as possible. This must be reported on the same day as the concern is raised. Reports can be made in person, by phone or by email. In situations where both of BITCI's Designated Liaison Persons are unavailable within a reasonable period the next Designated Person is the HR Manager.

In emergency cases where none of the above persons are available the concerned person should contact the child's school, if the concern is about a child connected to our Education Programmes, the Tusla Duty Social Worker or the HSE Safeguarding and Protection Team and advise the DLP of his/her concerns as soon as possible thereafter.

Responsibilities of the Designated Liaison Person

- The DLP's first priority is to support the child or vulnerable adult in keeping him/herself safe.
- For concerns related to children involved with BITCI's Education Programmes the DLP should notify the child's school liaison. For concerns regarding children connected to BITCI's Employment Programmes participants, contact Tusla directly.

- For vulnerable adults, the DLP should seek advice from an appropriate specialist service in the community and encourage the person to access support from that service. Below are some key support services:
 - [HSE Safeguarding and Protection Teams](#) For vulnerable old adults/ above 65 years of age and any adult with disabilities.
 - [Women's Aid](#) A national, feminist organisation working to prevent and address the impact of domestic abuse.
 - [Men's Aid](#) Provides a confidential service aimed at ensuring all male victims of Domestic Abuse / Coercive Control receive the required support to be safe.
 - [DVAS](#) A Domestic Violence Advocacy service for Sligo, Leitrim & West Cavan.
 - [Safe Ireland](#) Creating safety for women and children who have experienced domestic abuse.
 - [Sonas Services](#) Frontline services to women and children experiencing domestic abuse in the greater Dublin region.
 - [MyMind](#) Easy access to counselling and psychotherapy face to face and online.
 - [Aware](#) Free support, education and information services to people impacted by anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder and related mood conditions.
 - [Pieta](#) Crisis intervention support to anyone experiencing suicidal thoughts or engaging in self-harm and supports those bereaved through suicide.
- Call An Garda Síochána/Emergency Services on 999 or 112 for concerns related to Human Trafficking or other criminal behaviour and for medical emergencies.
- A response should happen within **three working days** after the DLP has been informed of the concern.
- Once Tusla, the local Safeguarding and Protection Team or an Garda Síochána accept a referral, they oversee actions taken in relation to the child or vulnerable adult protection concern. However, staff members must record and communicate any ongoing concerns to their DLP.

Allegations against staff

In making a report on suspected or actual abuse by a staff member the priority is always for the safety and welfare of the child or vulnerable adult.

Reporting procedures are: the staff member should report to the Designated Liaison Person.

The DLP will look after the child or vulnerable adult's rights and interests, and a senior manager will liaise with the employee against whom the allegation is made. Support should be offered to the staff member via the Line Manager and/or CEO and counselling offered if necessary. At all times employees will be afforded their rights by the BITCI.

The measures should be proportionate to the level of risk. All decisions are ultimately the responsibility of CEO. Possible responses include:

- Ensuring the employee and the person who has made the allegation do not have any interaction.
- Suspending the employee with pay while an investigation into the allegation takes place, as per BITCI disciplinary policy.

The organisation may deal with the allegation under their own disciplinary guidelines, but care must be taken not to undermine or frustrate any investigation being conducted by the Health Service Executive or An Garda Síochána.

The DLP may not make a formal report to the authorities but keep a record of the concerns on file. The reasons for not reporting the allegation will be clearly recorded. The staff member or client who raised the initial concern will be informed and it is open to him/her to make a formal report themselves, directly to the relevant authority.

Where, following an initial investigation, the employee is not reported to the authorities but is found to have been engaged in poor practice (e.g. shouting at a participant), the employee should be warned about the poor practice, and it may constitute grounds for termination of the relationship. This will be decided by the Senior Leadership Team in consultation with the Board.

6. Further Information and Resources

Types of Abuse

- **Physical Abuse** includes slapping, hitting, pushing, kicking, misuse of medication, restraint or inappropriate sanctions.
- **Sexual Abuse** includes rape and sexual assault, or sexual acts to which a person has not consented, or could not consent, or into which he or she was compelled to consent.
- **Psychological Abuse** includes emotional abuse, threats of harm or abandonment, deprivation of contact, humiliation, blaming, controlling, intimidation, coercion, harassment, verbal abuse, isolation, or withdrawal from services or supportive networks.
- **Financial or Material Abuse** includes theft, fraud, exploitation; pressure in connection with wills, property, inheritance or financial transactions; or the misuse or misappropriation of property, possessions or benefits.
- **Institutional Abuse** may occur within residential care and/or acute settings including nursing homes, acute hospitals, and any other in-patient settings and may involve, for example, poor standards of care, rigid routines or inadequate responses to complex needs.
- **Neglect and Acts of Omission** include ignoring medical or physical care needs, failure to provide access to appropriate health, social or educational services, the withholding of the necessities of life such as medication, adequate nutrition and/or heating.
- **Discriminatory Abuse** includes ageism, racism, sexism, based on a person's disability and other forms of harassment, slurs or similar treatment.
- **Institutional abuse** may occur within residential care and acute settings including nursing homes, acute hospitals and any other inpatient settings, and may involve poor standards of care, rigid routines and inadequate responses to complex needs.

Designated Liaison Persons in BITCI

- Melanie Flynn 086 0238328, mflynn@bitc.ie for concerns regarding children
- Asma Labidi 086 0412803, alabidi@bitc.ie for concerns regarding vulnerable adults

Referral Forms

- [Child Protection and Welfare Report Form Tusla](#)
- [Safeguarding Vulnerable Persons Community Referral Forms - HSE.ie](#)

National Safeguarding Teams

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/socialcare/safeguardingvulnerableadults/safeguarprotectteams.html>

Relevant Legislation and Resources

- [Children First Act 2015](#)
- Safeguarding Ireland: <https://safeguardingireland.org/reporting/>
- HSE : <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/socialcare/safeguardingvulnerableadults/>