

# Child Protection Policy

## Introduction

The staff, parents and Board of Management of Scoil Iosaif Naofa developed and agreed the following child protection policy in line with current recommendations and guidelines relating to child abuse prevention and child protection based on “*Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*” (Department of Education and Science (DES), 2011) and “*Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children*” (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2011). These documents can be accessed on the Department’s website at [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie)>[Child Protection](#) and on the website of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs at [www.dcyia.ie](http://www.dcyia.ie)

While the school recognises the normality of diversity in child rearing practices across different nationalities and cultures, the safety and well-being of each individual child will take precedence over any custom, practice or belief. Accordingly, child rearing practices which the Board of Management feels puts the safety and well-being of a child at risk will be dealt with in accordance with the above recommendations and guidelines and the school’s child protection policy.

This policy addresses the responsibilities of the school in the following areas:

- Prevention – curriculum provision
- Practice – best practice in child protection
- Procedures – procedures for dealing with concerns/disclosures

The term “child abuse” as used in the policy should be taken to include **neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse**. A copy of this policy will be made available to all school personnel and the Parents’ Association, and will be readily accessible in the school office to all parents on request. An abbreviated version of the policy will be included in the School Information Booklet.

## Relationship to Characteristic Spirit of the School

Scoil Iosaif Naofa seeks to help the children in the school grow and develop into healthy, confident, mature adults, capable of realising their full potential as human beings. We aim to create a happy and safe environment for the children where they feel secure in the knowledge that if they have concerns, they will be listened to with understanding and respect and have these concerns addressed appropriately.

Child protection and welfare considerations permeate all aspects of school life. Therefore, our school’s policies, practices and activities will adhere to the following principles of best practice in child protection and welfare by:

- recognising that the protection and welfare of children is of paramount importance, regardless of all other considerations;
- co-operating fully with the relevant statutory authorities in relation to child protection and welfare matters;

- adopting safe practices to minimise the possibility of harm or accidents happening to children, and ensuring that school personnel do not take unnecessary risks that may leave them open to accusations of abuse;
- developing a practice of openness with parents, and encouraging parental involvement in the education of their children; and
- respecting fully confidentiality requirements in dealing with child protection matters.

## **Aims**

Our Child Protection Policy aims:

- to develop awareness and responsibility in the area of child protection amongst the whole school community.
- to put in place clear procedures for all school personnel dealing with suspicions and allegations of child abuse.
- to create a safe, trusting, responsive and caring environment.
- to provide a personal safety skills education which specifically addresses abuse prevention for all children in the school.
- to identify curricular content and resources that contribute to the prevention of child abuse and to enable children to properly deal with abuse should it occur.
- to ensure that all staff members are aware of and familiar with the Children First and DES guidelines and procedures in relation to reporting concerns and/or disclosures of child abuse.
- to identify other policy areas which need to be amended.

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

### **Board of Management**

All staff have a general duty of care to ensure that procedures are in place to protect children from harm, and that they adhere to these procedures. The **Board of Management** has primary responsibility for the care and welfare of the children and staff of the school. In exercising this responsibility, the Board will:

- appoint a Designated Liaison Person (DLP) and deputy DLP with specific responsibility for child protection.
- have clear procedures for dealing with allegations or suspicions of child abuse.
- monitor the progress of children at risk.
- ensure that curricular provision is in place for the prevention of child abuse.
- investigate and respond to allegations of child abuse against a school employee.
- decide on teachers' attendance at child protection meetings/case conferences and advise teachers before attending such meetings/conferences.
- undertake an annual review of its child protection policy and its implementation by the school, and develop/implement an action plan to address any areas for improvement identified by the review.

- notify the Parents' Association that the review has been undertaken, and provide the patron and/or the Department with a record of the review and its outcome upon request.

### **Designated Liaison Person**

The Board of Management of Scoil Iosaif Naofa has appointed **Mr. Dominic Gallagher (Principal) and Ms Aine McGrath (Deputy Principal) as Designated Liaison Person (DLP) and deputy DLP** respectively. Their names and respective titles are displayed inside the main entrance door to the school.

The DLP has specific responsibility for child protection and will represent the school in all dealings with the Health Board, An Garda Síochána and other agencies and bodies in relation to child protection issues. In addition, he will

- inform all school personnel of the availability of “*Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*” and “*Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children*”.
- photocopy/circulate to school personnel, Parents' Association etc. the school's
- child protection policy and advise on good practice.
- be available to staff for consultation regarding suspicions or disclosures of abuse,
- keep records of consultations, and seek advice from the HSE etc. where appropriate.
- report suspicions and allegations of child abuse to the HSE or/and An Garda Síochána
- 
- inform the Board of Management of those cases where a report involving a child
- in the school has been submitted to the HSE, and cases where he has sought advice from the HSE and as a result of this advice no report was made. At each Board of Management meeting the principal's report will include the number of all such cases and this will be recorded in the minutes of the Board meeting. In the interest of protecting the anonymity of the child, no details of individual cases or reports will be disclosed to the Board of Management unless there are issues which need to be addressed directly by the Board.
- maintain proper records confidentially in a secure setting.
- keep up- to-date on current developments regarding child protection.

### **Prevention of Child Abuse**

1. The **Stay Safe** programme is the primary resource used in Scoil Iosaif Naofa to provide education for children on abuse prevention. The programme is taught as part of the school's SPHE curriculum under the strand unit Safety and Protection (Personal Safety). The formal lessons of the programme are taught in their entirety every second year in accordance with the SPHE two-year cycle plan. Staff will ensure that the messages of the programme are reinforced whenever possible, through formal and informal work and activities. In the case of children with special educational needs

(SEN), the class teacher will differentiate the Stay Safe programme at class level and liaise with the resource teachers with a view to differentiating individual lessons as appropriate, if necessary, using where appropriate “*Personal Safety Skills For Children With Learning Difficulties*” (Lawlor & MacIntyre, 1996). In the case of children who have a poor understanding of English, the class teacher will differentiate the Stay Safe programme at class level and liaise with the EAL teachers with a view to differentiating individual lessons, if necessary.

2. The Board of Management will ensure compliance with the Department’s circulars and any other legal requirements in relation to Garda vetting of school personnel and other persons who have unsupervised access to the children in our school. Where a person is being considered for employment in the school, the Board will check the person’s suitability to work with children and ensure compliance with the Department’s requirements in relation to the provision of a child protection related statutory declaration and associated form of undertaking by the prospective appointee.
3. Effective child protection depends on the skills, knowledge and values of personnel working with the children and their families. The Board of Management recognises the value of relevant training and education as an important means of achieving this, and will make every effort to ensure that all school personnel and Board members are familiar with best child protection practices and procedures. It is envisaged that this will be achieved by the school developing a culture of awareness and knowledge of these procedures amongst all school personnel and, where possible, ensuring that external training is undertaken.

### **Identification of Child Abuse**

All staff (teachers, special need assistants and ancillary staff) in Scoil an Chroí Ró Naofa Íosa will follow the recommendations for reporting concerns or disclosures as outlined in Children First and the DES guidelines. All signs and symptoms will be examined in the total context of the child's situation and family circumstances. There are commonly three stages in the identification of child abuse. These are:

- Considering the possibility
- Looking out for signs of abuse
- Recording of information

**Appendix 3: Signs and Symptoms of Child Abuse** (*Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-primary Schools, p.41- 48*) provides a good reference or starting point in the identification process.

### **Responding to an Allegation or Disclosure of Child Abuse**

1. If a member of staff receives an allegation or has a suspicion that a child may have been abused or is being abused or is at risk of abuses/hemust, without delay, report the matter to the DLP.

2. In the case of disclosure by a child to a member of staffs/he must, without delay, report the matter to the DLP. S/he will need to act with sensitivity in responding to the disclosure. S/he will need to reassure the child, and retain his/her trust, while explaining the need for action and the possible consequences, which will necessarily involve other adults being informed. It is important to tell the child that everything possible will be done to protect and support him/her but not to make promises that cannot be kept, e.g. promising not to tell anyone else. The welfare of the child is regarded as the first and paramount consideration. In so far as is practicable, due consideration will be given, having regard to age and understanding, to the wishes of the child. In all cases, the staff member to whom the disclosure has been made should:
  - Remain calm.
  - Listen to the child with sensitivity and openness.
  - Take all disclosures seriously.
  - Do not ask leading questions or make suggestions to the child.
  - Offer reassurance but do not make promises.
  - Do not stop a child recalling significant events.
  - Do not over react.
  - Explain that further help may have to be sought.
  - Record the discussion accurately and retain a record of dates, times, names, locations, context and factual details of conversation.
3. Any comment by the child concerned to a member of staff, or by any other person must be recorded, preferably quoting words actually used, as soon as possible after the comment has been made. The record of the comment or any discussion must be signed, dated and given to the DLP for retention. Any observations, e.g. bruising, body marks etc. should be noted carefully and dated. Signs of physical injury must be described in detail and, if appropriate, sketched.

### **Reporting**

The guiding principles in regard to reporting child abuse may be summarised as follows:

- a. the safety and well-being of the child must take priority
- b. reports should be made without delay to the Children and Family Services of the HSE.

If the DLP decides that the concerns of the member of staff should not be reported to the HSE, the member of staff will be given a clear statement as to the reasons why action is not being taken. The member of staff will be advised that, if s/he remains concerned about the situation, s/he is free to consult with or report to the HSE.

If the DLP is satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for the suspicion/allegation, the Chairperson of the Board of Management will be informed before the DLP makes contact with the relevant authorities, unless the situation demands that more immediate action be taken for the safety of the child, in which case the Chairperson will be informed as soon as possible after the report has been submitted. In all cases, the DLP will retain a record of the consultation with the HSE, which will note the date, the name of the HSE official and the advice given.

The school will inform parents/carers that a report is being submitted to the Health Board or An Garda Síochána and record the information communicated to the parent/carer, unless doing so is likely to endanger the child. A decision not to inform a parent/carer should be briefly recorded together with the reasons for not doing so. In cases of emergency, where a child appears to be at immediate and serious risk, and a Duty Social Worker is unavailable, an Garda Síochána will be contacted. Under no circumstances should a child be left in a dangerous situation pending Health Board intervention.

### **Allegations Against School Employees**

The most important consideration for the Board of Management of the school is the safety and protection of the children in its care. However, employees also have a right to protection against claims which are false or malicious. As employers, the Board of Management will seek legal advice as the circumstances can vary from one case to another. All allegations against school employees will involve:

- a. The reporting procedure.
- b. The procedure for dealing with the employee.

The DLP has responsibility for reporting allegations or disclosures of child abuse to the Board of Management and the Health Board. The Chairperson of the Board has responsibility, acting in consultation with his/her Board, for addressing the employment issues.

### **Reporting Procedure**

Once a disclosure is made by a child, a written record of the disclosure will be made as soon as possible by the person receiving it. Where an allegation of abuse is made by an adult, a written statement will be sought from this person. The DLP has responsibility for reporting allegations or disclosures of child abuse to the Board of Management and the Health Board. If the allegation is against the DLP, the deputy DLP or Chairperson of the Board of Management will assume responsibility for reporting the matter. A written statement of the allegation will be sought from the person/agency making the allegation. School employees, other than the DLP, who receive allegations against another school employee or who have concerns regarding the conduct or actions of a colleague, must immediately report the matter to the DLP. In all cases, the reporting procedure must be in accordance with the procedures outlined in Children First and the DES guidelines.

### **Procedure for Dealing with the Employee**

The Chairperson of the Board of Management and the DLP will make the employee aware privately:

- a that an allegation has been made against him/her.
- b the nature of the allegation.

- c whether or not the Health Board or Gardaí have been/will be/must be/should be informed.

The employee will be given a copy of the written allegation and any other relevant documentation while ensuring that appropriate measures are in place to protect the child. Once the matter has been reported to the HSE the employee will be requested to respond to the allegation in writing to the Board of Management within a specified period and told that this may be passed onto the Gardaí, Health Board and legal advisers.

The priority in all cases is that no child be exposed to unnecessary risk. Therefore, as a matter of urgency, the Chairperson will take any necessary protective measures, having first consulted with the HSE and/or An Garda Síochána for advice as to the action those authorities would consider necessary. These measures will be proportionate to the level of risk and will not unreasonably penalise the employee in any way unless to protect the child.

If the nature of the allegations warrant immediate action in the Chairperson's opinion, the Board of Management will be convened to consider the matter. The Board will consider feedback, if any has been received, from the Health Board, Gardaí or other relevant source. This may result in the Board directing that the employee absent him/herself from the school forthwith while the matter is being investigated. Should the Board of Management direct that the employee absent him/herself as above, such absence of the employee would be regarded as administrative leave of absence with pay and not suspension and would not imply any degree of guilt. In such cases, the DES will be immediately informed.

### **Best Practice in Child Protection**

The staff and Board of Management of Scoil Iosaif Naofa have identified a number of areas requiring particular attention in relation to child protection and agreed the following practices within the school:

1. **Confidentiality** – All information regarding concerns of possible child abuse and/or neglect should be shared only on a “need to know” basis in the interests of the child. The assurance of confidentiality should not be given to a third party who imparts information. The DLP will inform a parent/carer that a report is being submitted to the HSE or An Garda Síochána unless doing so is likely to endanger the child or place the child at further risk. A record will be made of the information communicated to the parent/carer. A decision not to inform a parent/carer will be briefly recorded together with the reason(s) for not doing so.
2. **Investigation** – It is not the responsibility of school personnel to assess or investigate or to make enquiries of parents/carers. It is a matter for the HSE to assess and investigate suspected abuse and/or neglect and determine what action to take.
3. **Emergency** – In cases of emergency, where a child appears to be at immediate and serious risk, and it is not possible to make contact with the HSE, An Garda Síochána at Gort Garda Station (Ph. 636400) should be contacted immediately.
4. **Physical Contact** – Teachers and children alike should respect each other's personal space. Personal space should not be invaded. While friendly gestures such as a handshake or patting a child on the shoulder are considered normal and healthy, there should be a minimum of physical contact with children. Emotional support, when it is

needed, should in the main be given verbally and with supportive gestures and facial expressions.

5. **Accidents** – While every precaution will be taken under our Health and Safety Statement to ensure the safety of children, we realise that accidents will happen. Accidents will be noted in our Incident Book and will be addressed under our accident policy as part of Health and Safety.
6. **Attendance** – School attendance will be monitored on a regular basis paying particular attention to trends in non-attendance. We will also monitor non-attendance in relation to signs of neglect/physical/emotional abuse.
7. **Transport** – School staff will not carry children alone in their cars at any time.
8. **Communication** – Every effort will be made to enhance child-teacher communication. If children have concerns they will be listened to sympathetically. The SPHE/Oral Language/RE programmes will be used to facilitate child-teacher communication.
9. **One to One Contact** – Preferably, teachers should not be alone with a child in any setting. If teachers have to communicate with children on a one-to-one basis, they should leave the door of the room open at all times
10. **Guests/Visitors** – All guests and visitors to the school must report to the secretary's office upon arrival. A teacher must always be present during the visit of a guest speaker etc. to a classroom as the class teacher (or other designated teacher acting on his/her behalf) has ultimate responsibility for the children in his/her class.
11. **Work Experience Programmes** – The school accepts students, i.e. student teachers, teachers on post-graduate courses as well as secondary school students and adults on work experience programmes with the permission of the Board of Management and the agreement of individual staff members on the basis that they have been vetted and are covered by insurance held by their own college or school. The students will work under the direction of the teachers. All information given to students will be on a need to know basis. However, no student will have access to confidential or sensitive information on children. If and when the class teacher needs to leave their classroom during teaching practice (TP), s/he will: let a colleague know that they are leaving the room and where they can be located; leave the doors open between classrooms; tell the student(s) where to find them in case of an emergency and give them directions regarding who they should contact if they are unable to locate the class teacher.
12. **One to One Teaching** – In the context of one to one teaching in the Resource Unit, the resource teacher's door will be left ajar during lessons if it is not possible to observe the teacher and child through a classroom window or glass door panel.
13. **Children with Specific Toileting/Intimate Care Needs** – In all situations where a child needs assistance with toileting/intimate care a meeting will be convened after enrolment before the child starts school. Parent(s)/guardian(s), principal, class teacher, SNA and if appropriate, the child, will attend this meeting. The specific care needs of the child will be clarified. At all times the safety, dignity and privacy of the child will be paramount in addressing his/her intimate care needs. Two members of staff should be present when dealing with intimate care needs. In situations where it is not possible or practical to have a second member of staff present, then the teacher or SNA attending the child must ensure that they can be clearly observed by a colleague at all times. Staff will wear protective gloves. Any changes in routine and/or procedures will be discussed beforehand with the parent/guardian and the child.
14. **Toileting Accidents** – At the Junior Infant Induction Meetings, the school procedures will be outlined to parent(s)/guardian(s). Fresh clothing such as tracksuit bottoms, socks and underwear will be stored by the class teacher. In the event of a toileting

accident the child will change themselves under the supervision of the class teacher. In some circumstances a parent/guardian may have to be called. If they are not contactable, a member of staff will tend to him/her. In situations where it is not possible or practical to have a second member of staff present, then the teacher or SNA attending the child must ensure that they can be clearly observed by a colleague at all times. Parents/carers will be notified of the incident and a record kept by the class teacher.

15. **After School Activities** – The supervision and care of the children attending after school activities is the responsibility of the teacher/instructor present. This includes the supervision and care of the children before, during and after the activity. It is very important that arrangements are in place for the supervision and care of the children before commencement of the activity, particularly if the teacher/instructor is unable to be present prior to the designated starting time. Children are not allowed into the school/room/hall unsupervised. They must be supervised at all times. All activities must at all times be in accordance with the school's After School Activities Policy.
16. **Swimming** – Staff members enter the dressing rooms to supervise the children. Male staff only enter the male dressing room. Staff do not assist in drying or dressing the children after swimming lessons. In the context of a member of staff having to attend to a child on a one-to-one basis, e.g. accompanying a child to the toilet or waiting for a child to get dressed, at no time should the child be on his/her own with a member of staff in a toilet, dressing room or any other setting that could place the child or adult in a vulnerable position. Similarly, at no time should a child be on his/her own with another child in a setting that could place the child in a vulnerable position. Parents/carers are not allowed into dressing rooms and are not encouraged to attend the swimming lessons at all.
17. **Early Collection of Children from School** – Children will not be allowed leave the school, except under the supervision of a recognised parent, carer/guardian or agent of same. Children should not be allowed by any teacher on supervision duty, other than his/her class teacher, leave the school at Break times. Class teachers who are aware of custody issues in relation to a child in their class should inform the Principal, Deputy Principal, school secretary and teacher(s) assigned to dividing the class when the class teacher is absent from school. Furthermore, the class teacher should leave clear instructions for a substitute teacher in relation to such children.
18. **Supervision Duties** – The organisation of supervision duties for mid morning and lunchtime breaks will be in accordance with Circular 29/03 (DES). The teacher on duty at break times will:
  - monitor the designated area carefully, observing optimum concentration, i.e. refrain from entering lengthy conversation with colleague or child alike.
  - follow the rules and guidelines as laid out in the Discipline Policy regarding the behaviour of the children and use of a Playground Book and Blue Notebook to record incidents of good behaviour as well as poor behaviour.
  - not permit a child to leave the playground at Break times without first notifying his/her class teacher.
  - remain on supervision duty until the class teacher (or the teacher of the class next door) returns to assume responsibility.
19. **First Aid** – The children play in the playground at Small Break, 10. 45 a.m. to 11. 00 a.m., and at Lunch Break, 12. 35 p.m. to 1 p.m., weather permitting. If a staff member feels that a child needs attention for an injury they received on yard, they should send them to the First Aid Room where two staff members are on duty. Gloves must be worn by those administering First Aid. Wounds should be washed with tap water or

cleaned with an antiseptic wipe. Gloves, wipes etc. should be disposed of immediately after use. The use of cotton wool is not recommended by medical personnel. Plasters should only be applied if the skin is broken. A record of children attending the First Aid is kept for information purposes. Each child attending First Aid is given a note to bring home to his/her parent(s)/carer(s). The class teacher should reinforce the concept that this note should be given and read at home so as to avoid any confusion that could arise and to inform parents/carers that their child had reason to attend First Aid that day.

20. ***Information and Communication Technology*** – The school will employ the following strategies in order to reduce risks associated with computer use:

Internet sessions will always be supervised by a teacher. Websites will be previewed and/or evaluated using the NCTE's website evaluation model, before being integrated into lessons. Access will be allowed only to a listed range of approved sites.

Filtering software and/or integrated management systems will be used to minimise the risk of exposure to inappropriate material. Uploading and downloading of non-approved software will not be permitted.

The school will regularly monitor and archive pupils' internet usage by checking user files, temporary internet files, and history files.

Staff and children will not visit internet sites that contain obscene, illegal, hateful or otherwise objectionable materials.

The children will:

report any material of the above nature to the ICT teacher, Principal or Deputy Principal.

not disclose or publicise personal or confidential information, e.g. home addresses, telephone numbers, name and location of the school.

not examine, change or use another person's files, user name, or passwords, without permission.

be aware that any usage, including distributing or receiving of any information, school-related or personal, may be monitored for unusual activity, security, and/or network management reasons.

The children will only have access to moderated chat rooms or discussion forums such as those found on the ScoilNet website. Moderated chat rooms, discussion forums and newsgroups will only be used for educational purposes and their use will always be supervised. User names will be used to avoid disclosure of identity. Disclosure of information and/or face to face meetings with a person, organised via internet chat, are not allowed under any circumstances.

The children will:

- use approved class e-mail accounts under supervision or with the permission of a teacher.
- not send or receive any material that is illegal, obscene, defamatory, or that is intended to annoy or intimidate another person

- refrain from forwarding messages without the permission of the sender.
- not reveal their own or other people's personal details, such as addresses or telephone numbers or pictures.
- not arrange to meet someone outside school via school e-mail.
- note that sending and receiving e-mail attachments is subject to permission from their teacher.

### **Links to Other Policy / Planning Areas**

Our school's policy on child protection has links to a number of other policies within the school in the areas of Prevention, Procedures and Practice. These include:

**Prevention:** SPHE curriculum – S t r a n d Unit on “Safety and Protection”, Discipline and Code of Behaviour Policy.

**Procedures:** *Anti-Bullying Policy, Adult Bullying and Sexual Harassment Policy, Health and Safety Policy.*

**Practice:** Swimming Policy Statement, Supervision Policy, School Excursion Policy, ICT Acceptable Use Policy, Teaching Practice and Work Experience Policy.

### **Review and Monitoring**

This policy will be monitored and reviewed by the Board of Management on an annual basis. Staff will be requested to review school practices and procedures and every effort will be made to ensure that this policy document is brought to the attention of all new staff members. The Board of Management will endeavour to provide training and support to staff subject to the availability of resources.

***Policy adopted by the Board of Management of Scoil Iosaif Naofa  
On 20<sup>th</sup> September 2016.***

**Signed: Patrick Burke**

**Pat Burke Chairperson Board of Management**