



Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy

Policy and Procedures for Staff and Volunteers

This policy is implemented in line with the Fighting Words equal opportunities policy

Foreword

This document sets out the requirements for working with children and vulnerable adults at Fighting Words in accordance with the Children First Act 2015, the Children First National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children and Safeguarding Vulnerable Persons at Risk of Abuse. It is distributed as part of the information pack for all volunteers, interns and staff. This document will also be made available to teachers, parents/guardians and other responsible adults working with children and vulnerable adults on Fighting Words projects and programmes. It is also published in PDF format on the Fighting Words website, www.fightingwords.ie.

This document makes reference to two other documents that are also available in either hard copy or electronic copy:

- Health and Safety Policy
- Volunteer Supervision Policy
- Staff Terms and Conditions

It is hoped that this policy will prove a practical and useful addition to best practice in working with children and young people and to help the staff, volunteers, interns, writers and artists who work with Fighting Words.

Fighting Words welcomes feedback on this document – please send comments and suggestions to Sara Bennett, Manager, at sara@fightingwords.ie.

Seán Love
Executive Director

Sara Bennett
General Manager

Section 1: POLICY

Introduction

We at Fighting Words are committed to safeguarding the well-being of children and vulnerable adults who are participating in events run at our centres and at off-site locations.

Our aim is to create a safe, creative and enjoyable environment where children and vulnerable adults of all abilities can engage in storytelling and creative writing and where their protection and welfare is paramount. To this end, we adhere to the Children First Act 2015 and all associated guidelines, as well as Safeguarding Vulnerable Persons at Risk of Abuse: National Policy and Procedures, published by the Health Service Executive.

Everyone working with children and vulnerable adults has a responsibility for their well-being and protection, including those working as staff members or volunteers at Fighting Words through the organisation's educational programmes and activities. We have a collective responsibility to ensure that the children and vulnerable adults we work with are encouraged and helped in their creative work and that this should take place in a safe and protected environment.

This document contains the Fighting Words' policy and guidelines for child and vulnerable adult protection and promotes codes of behaviour so that everyone is aware of the standards of behaviour of both children and adults. All staff and volunteers are required to adhere to this code.

All staff and volunteers at Fighting Words will be made aware of the policy and procedure and child/vulnerable adult protection will be covered in detail as part of the induction and training programme.

As part of their terms of employment, all staff will be required to report any concerns over behaviour or other evidence that may potentially indicate the presence of child or vulnerable adult abuse.

Policy Statement

Fighting Words' child and vulnerable adult protection policy stems from the following principles:

- The welfare of the child and vulnerable adult is paramount. This is the guiding principle underpinning all our work with children and vulnerable adults.
- Per the Child Care Act 1991, a child is defined as a person under the age of 18 years, excluding a person who is or has been married. This definition includes the term young people.

- A vulnerable person is defined as 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 as a result of physical or intellectual impairment. Vulnerability to abuse is influenced by both context (e.g. social or personal circumstances) and individual circumstances.¹
- All children and vulnerable adults, regardless of age, any disability they may have, gender, race², family status, marital status, religious belief, sexual orientation, membership of the Traveller community, geographical location, or socio-economic status³ have a right to protection from abuse.
- The need to comply with current statutory requirements and guidance on the protection of children and vulnerable adults.

The primary functions of this policy are the promotion of a safe environment for children and vulnerable adults, the prevention of abuse and the protection of staff and volunteers through the application of a Code of Behaviour.

- **Safe and protected environment:** The safety and welfare of children and vulnerable adults is paramount. The most important function of this policy is to create a safe and protected environment for children and vulnerable adults to enjoy storytelling and creative writing.
- **Prevention and education:** This policy also aims to prevent abuse from occurring and to educate staff and volunteers on the subject and to build their capacity to pre-empt abuse.

Scope

This policy is applicable to all staff employed by Fighting Words and also applies to all **volunteers, including writers and artists**, as well as at both centre-based programmes and external Fighting Words-sponsored events and activities.

It is the responsibility of the General Manager to ensure that every **new** staff member and volunteer:

1. Receives a copy of the Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy⁴
2. Understands and signs the Code of Behaviour
3. Receives training on the subject matter

All staff members and volunteers will:

1. Be provided with an adequate level of supervision, support and review of work practice
2. Be provided with child protection training at induction

¹ *Safeguarding Vulnerable Persons at Risk of Abuse: National Policy and Procedures, FAQ*, December 2014, p.1

² While the term 'race' is used here as it appears in Ireland's equality legislation, Fighting Words recognises that it denotes a biological or scientific difference in human beings, a theory long discredited and to which the organisation does not subscribe.

³ These are the nine protected grounds outlined in the Fighting Words Equal Opportunities Policy and in line with the Equal Opportunities Act 1998 and 2008 and the Equal Status Act 2000-2004.

⁴ Copies of the policy will be sent out with the offer of employment or volunteer information pack (as applicable), which must be signed and returned with the contract of employment or volunteer agreement.

3. Writers, artists and volunteers doing one-off or sessional work will be issued with an information pack and required to sign a copy of the child and vulnerable adult protection policy
4. **All volunteers, including visiting writers and artists, will agree to abide by the Fighting Words Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy**

Fighting Words has implemented policies and procedures covering the following with regard to child and vulnerable adult protection:

1. Code of behaviour for all staff and volunteers
2. Reporting of suspected or disclosed abuse
3. Confidentiality
4. Recruitment and selection of staff
5. Management and supervision of staff and volunteers
6. Involvement of parents/carers
7. Staff allegations
8. Complaints and comments
9. Accidents

Child Safeguarding Statement: Relevant Service and Relevant Person

The Children First Act 2015 defines a 'provider' as "a person—

- (a) who provides a relevant service, and
- (b) who, in respect of the provision of such relevant service—
 - (i) employs (whether under contract of employment or otherwise) one or more than one other person to undertake any work or activity that constitutes a relevant service,
 - (ii) enters into a contract for services with one or more than one other person for the provision by the person of a relevant service, or
 - (iii) permits one or more than one other person (whether or not for commercial or other consideration and whether or not as part of a course of education or training, including an internship scheme) to undertake any work or activity, on behalf of the person, that constitutes a relevant service".

Under the Children First Act 2015, Fighting Words is a relevant service providing creative writing programmes to children and young people. As such, we will ensure, as far as practicable, that all children are safe from harm while availing of our services.

Per the Children First Act 2015, Fighting Words has:

- Performed **assessment of any potential for harm** to a child while availing of our services;
- Prepared a written **child safeguarding statement** specifying the service being provided and the principles and procedures to be observed to ensure as far as practicable, that a child, while availing of the service, is safe from harm for use at all Fighting Words locations;
- Appointed a relevant person
- **Display the child safeguarding statement** in a prominent place where the relevant service concerned relates or is provided, or both, as may be appropriate.

Relevant Person

The relevant person is the first point of contact in relation to the Child Safeguarding Statement; their name and contact details should be included in the Child Safeguarding Statement. **The Relevant Person is Sara Bennett, General Manager.**

Section 2: CODE OF BEHAVIOUR – STANDARDS OF BEHAVIOUR

We expect everyone working with children and vulnerable adults in a paid or voluntary capacity for Fighting Words to take every possible precaution to avoid situations that could be misinterpreted and/or a breach of the either the Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy or Health and Safety Policy. By setting out appropriate and inappropriate behaviour, this code will not only help to protect children, but also staff, interns and volunteers at Fighting Words.

Our two guiding principles are **creativity** and **respect**. In other words, **respect for everyone's creativity**.

Do	Treat all children and vulnerable adults equally
Do	Listen and hear – and give time to the child or vulnerable adult to say what s/he wants to say. Thoughts and words are important and they deserve respect.
Do	Promote the atmosphere of creativity, openness, acceptance and fun in the centre. Be friendly and approachable.
Do	Respect a child or vulnerable adult's right to personal privacy and personal space.
Do	Be aware of situations that present risks and manage these risks appropriately – always ask a member of staff if you are unsure.
Do	Safeguard the best interests and welfare of vulnerable adults where it is recognised that they are unable to make their own decisions and/or protect themselves, their assets or their bodily integrity and ensure appropriate and accountable protection for them.
Do	Use only appropriate language in working with children and vulnerable adults – no cursing or swearing.
Do	Ensure that an appropriate ratio of adults to children is in place. For primary school workshops, the ratio should be not more than 4:1. For secondary school workshops, the ratio should be not more than 6:1.
Do	Always treat children and vulnerable adults with respect - don't embarrass them. Do not ridicule, insult or make little of anyone during an activity.
Do	Recognise that caution is required, particularly sensitive moments such as dealing with a child or vulnerable adult who becomes upset. Always seek support from another team member, staff or a teacher/carer if required.
Do	Ensure, in so far as possible, that the building and/or facilities used for activities with children and vulnerable adults are safe and secure for the people

	in it. All occupied parts of the building should be monitored and parts not in use should be isolated or secured, e.g. the door to the office should be shut.
Do	Plan activities so that they involve more than one person being present or at least in sight or hearing of others. A minimum of two adults should be present at all times.
Do	Carry identification when attending a school or other location on behalf of Fighting Words.
Do	Make sure that a responsible adult, e.g. a teacher, is always present for group programmes, both at the Fighting Words centre, when visiting a school or conducting programmes in outside venues on behalf of Fighting Words.

Avoid	Doing things of a personal nature that children and vulnerable adults can do for themselves. Staff members and volunteers are not responsible for the personal hygiene needs of children and vulnerable adults. Notify the Manager if a child or vulnerable adult needs assistance.
Avoid	Allowing yourself to be drawn into inappropriate attention-seeking behaviours. Do your best to always remain calm.

Do not	Physically punish or be in any way verbally abusive to a child or vulnerable adult.
Do not	Give a child or vulnerable adult your personal contact details, e.g. telephone number, social media contact information or email address.
Do not	Use alcohol, tobacco or drugs in the company of children or vulnerable adults. Staff and volunteers must not attend any Fighting Words programmes under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
Do not	Arrange external meetings or contact children or vulnerable adults outside the group or project. Do not offer lifts to children in your car.
Do not	Do not take photographs of children or vulnerable adults unless you have prior school, carer or parental consent to do so.
Do not	Permit abusive peer activities such as bullying. Bullying behaviour can be defined as repeated aggression, be it verbal, psychological or physical, which is conducted by an individual or group against others. Report any incidents or suspected incidents of bullying behaviour to the Designated Liaison Person ⁵

⁵ At Fighting Words, the Designated Liaison Person is the General Manager, Sara Bennett (087 274 6621 or sara@fightingwords.ie). In the event that the General Manager is unavailable, e.g. due to illness or holiday, the deputy designated liaison person is the Education Co-ordinator, Jean Hanney (087 280 4883 or jean@fightingwords.ie).

	immediately. Bullying will be addressed in accordance with the Fighting Words anti-bullying policy, found in Appendix B.
Do not	Allow or engage in suggestive remarks, gestures or touching of a kind which could be misunderstood. If you have to touch a child or vulnerable adult, ask their permission where possible, e.g. helping them to hold glue during a summer camp. In some cases, you may not have time to ask permission, for example, preventing fingers from being caught in a door. In these cases, always explain your actions after the event.
Do not	Allow any physically rough or sexually provocative games, or inappropriate talking or touching, by anyone in any group for which you have responsibility.
Do not	Allow conversations with children or vulnerable adults that encourage personal comments or show favouritism.
Do not	Allow unsupervised access to the Fighting Words wireless internet (wifi) connection and/or computer network.
Do not	Allow children or vulnerable adults to use dangerous equipment without supervision, e.g. scissors. Do not share your personal items.
Do not	Allow use of mobile phones during workshops unless absolutely necessary.
Do not	Under any circumstances attempt to deal with any problems or challenging behaviour alone. If an activity – the event itself or peer activities between children – is getting out of hand or unsafe, notify the group leader or a member of staff immediately.

Physical Contact

Physical touch should only occur when it is appropriate to the age/development of the child and in response to particular needs of the child. There will be instances when physical contact is unavoidable and in fact necessary.

Appropriate:

- Context-dependent touch within a controlled and supervised environment (e.g. demonstration of dance, positioning, supporting a lift, demonstrating a breathing technique)
- Preventing injury (e.g. catching a falling child, appropriate restraint)
- Handshake and “high fives”
- Fitting safety equipment (e.g. harness, safety restraint)

Inappropriate:

- Touch which is unnecessary, unexplained, out of context, without consent
- Any touch to breast, groin or buttocks areas
- Kissing or hugging
- Slapping/hitting (even in jest)
- Holding hands
- Sitting in lap

Young children particularly will often demonstrate affection. Staff and volunteer training and induction will include best practices and methods of how to best respond when a child tries to hug, wants to hold hands, etc.

Breaches of the Code of Behaviour by Staff and Volunteers

Any breaches of the Code of Practice will be raised with the individual concerned. In the case of staff, serious breaches of the code or policy will be dealt with under the disciplinary procedure and could result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.

In the case of volunteers, serious breaches of the code or policy will be dealt with under the Complaints Against Volunteers procedure in the Volunteer Policy and could result in disciplinary action up to and including a termination of the volunteering relationship.

If you have a concern or complaint that is related to Code of Behaviour you can speak to the **primary designated contact, the Designated Liaison Person⁶**. The Designated Liaison Person will liaise with the Executive Director and assess the situation and conduct an investigation if necessary.

Any allegation will be investigated confidentially in order to safeguard the rights of the person against whom allegations have been made. Investigations will be carried out quickly to see whether a prima facie case is established. All investigations will be conducted in accordance with the principles of natural justice:

- The right to a fair hearing
- The rule against bias

If so, the issue will be handled according to the Complaints Against Volunteers procedure or, in the case of staff, the disciplinary procedure in the Staff Terms and Conditions.

⁶ At Fighting Words, the Designated Liaison Person is the General Manager, Sara Bennett (087 274 6621 or sara@fightingwords.ie). In the event that the General Manager is unavailable, e.g. due to illness or holiday, the deputy designated liaison person is the Education Co-ordinator, Jean Hanney (087 280 4883 or jean@fightingwords.ie).

If not, the complainant will be told the outcome of the investigation and that the matter will not be taken any further. The individual will retain the right to pursue the matter under the complaints procedure, or grievance procedure as appropriate.

Following a complaint, the handling of the complaint will be subject to a review by an independent, external third party to ensure that all complaints are dealt with in line with best possible practice. During the course of such a review, all names and identifying details will be removed.

Section 3: REPORTING PROCEDURES - WHAT TO DO IF YOU THINK A CHILD MAY BE BEING ABUSED

THE ONE THING YOU MUST NOT DO IS NOTHING

All staff and volunteers (including students on placement or work experience) have a responsibility to safeguard children and young people and to report any concerns they may have for the protection or welfare of a child/young person.

Designated Liaison Person

Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children refers to the role of the **Designated Liaison Person (DLP)** and **Deputy DLP**. Best practice in child safeguarding indicates that organisations working with children/young people or their families should appoint a DLP to be the resource person to any staff member or volunteer who has child protection concerns and to liaise with outside agencies. The role of the DLP is to receive child protection and welfare concerns from workers/volunteers and to report concerns which meet the threshold of 'reasonable grounds for concern' to Tusla.

At Fighting Words, the **Designated Liaison Person** is Sara Bennett, the General Manager. The **Deputy Designated Liaison Person** is Jean Hanney, Education Co-ordinator

Mandated Persons

Under the Children First Act 2015, **mandated persons** have a statutory obligation to report concerns which reach or exceed a legally defined threshold (see section 14 of the Children First Act 2015) and to cooperate with Tusla in the assessment of mandated reports, where requested to do so.

Sara Bennett, the General Manager, is a **mandated person** under the Children First Act 2015.⁷

The term 'harm' is used as defined in the Children First Act 2015: "'harm' means, in relation to a child—:

- (a) assault, ill-treatment or neglect of the child in a manner that seriously affects or is likely to seriously affect the child's health, development or welfare, or
 - (b) sexual abuse of the child,
- whether caused by a single act, omission or circumstance or a series or combination of acts, omissions or circumstances, or otherwise".

⁷ The mandated person at Fighting Words is determined per Appendix 5 – Schedule of Mandated Persons under the Children First Act 2015 – Tusla Child Safeguarding: Guidelines for Policy, Procedure and Practice 2018

Under the Children First Act 2015, certain classes of professionals are designated as mandated persons

Section 14(1) of the Children First Act 2015 states:

"...where a Mandated Persons knows, believes or has reasonable grounds to suspect, on the basis of information that he or she has received, acquired or becomes aware of in the course

of his or her employment or profession as such a mandated person, that a child—

(a) has been harmed,

(b) is being harmed, or

(c) is at risk of being harmed,

he or she shall, as soon as practicable, report that knowledge, belief or suspicion, as the case

may be, to [Tusla]."

Also, Section 14(2) of the Children First Act 2015 places obligations on mandated persons to report any disclosures made by a child:

"Where a child believes that he or she—

(a) has been harmed,

(b) is being harmed, or

(c) is at risk of being harmed,

and discloses this belief to a mandated person in the course of a mandated person's employment or profession as such a person, the mandated person shall, ... as soon as practicable, report that disclosure to [Tusla]."

Reporting A Child Protection Complaint or Concern

Regardless of how a concern comes to a worker/volunteer's attention, it must be reported to the Designated Liaison Person.

The Designated Liaison Person, in consultation with the person who raised the concern, will decide if reasonable grounds for concern exist. If reasonable grounds for concern exist, the Designated Liaison Person will report to the Tusla duty social worker. If the DLP decides not to make a report, the worker/volunteer with the reasonable concern is still entitled to make a report to Tusla under *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children*, should they wish to do so. The individual worker has protections under the Protection for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act 1998, should they report independently.

The Tusla, the Children and Family Agency should always be informed when a person has **reasonable grounds for concern** that a child may have been, is being or is at risk of being abused and neglected. Child protection concerns should be supported by evidence that indicates the possibility of abuse or neglect. A concern about a *potential risk* to children posed by a specific person, even if the children are unidentifiable, should also be communicated to Tusla.

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

1. The safety and well-being of the child must take priority
2. Reports should be made without delay to the Tusla, the Child and Family Agency

There are four recognised forms of child abuse: **neglect, physical abuse, emotional abuse and sexual abuse**⁸ It's not your responsibility to decide whether a child is being abused or neglected, but you *must* act on your concerns.

We do understand that it may be very difficult for you to take this step **but** Fighting Words will support anyone who raises a legitimate concern in good faith. The protection and welfare of the child must always be the paramount concern.

At all stages of this procedure, the matter will be dealt with confidentially as far as possible in relation to:

- a) The identity of the complainant
- b) The identity of the person(s) against whom the complaint is being made
- c) The nature of the complaint

This information will not be disclosed to anyone inside or outside Fighting Words who is not directly involved in the situation or does not have a legitimate interest in it, e.g. the child's parent(s)/guardian(s) if appropriate, Fighting Words management and/or Tusla, the Tusla, the Child and Family Agency and/or An Garda Síochána if relevant in order to investigate the allegation.

Please note that the Protection for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act, 1998 provides immunity from civil liability to persons to report child abuse "reasonably and in good faith."

Identifying Reasonable Grounds for Concern

There are many reasons a staff member or volunteer may be concerned about the welfare or protection of a child or young person. *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* states that "Tusla should always be informed when a person has **reasonable grounds for concern** that a child may have been, is being, or is at risk of being abused or neglected".

Children/young people are sometimes abused by members of their own family, by peers or by others outside the family environment such as strangers, workers or trusted adults. *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* lists the following as reasonable grounds for concern:

- Evidence, for example an injury or behaviour, that is consistent with abuse 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.

⁸ See Appendix A of this document for full definitions of the four types of child abuse.

Wherever appropriate, any issues should be checked with the parents/guardians when considering whether a concern exists, unless doing so may further endanger the child or the person considering making the report.

Abuse is not always committed through personal contact with a child or young person, sometimes it is perpetrated through social media or the use of information and communication technology.

Questions That May Help When Staff or Volunteers are Concerned About A Child's Welfare⁹

- Is the child behaving normally for his or her age and stage of development?
- Is what the child has written/drawn appropriate to his or her age?
- Has something happened that could explain the child's behaviour?
- Is the child showing signs of distress? If so, describe (e.g. behavioural, emotional, physical signs).
- Is the child suffering?
- Does the behaviour restrict the child socially?
- What effect, if any, does it have on others (e.g. other children)?
- What are the child's parent(s)' views, if known?

If a child tells you that he or she is being abused¹⁰

A child or young person may disclose to a staff member or volunteer that they have been or are being harmed or abused. Children/young people will often have different ways of communicating that they are being abused. If a child or young person hints at or tells a staff member or volunteer that he or she is being harmed by someone, be it a parent/carer, another adult or by another child/young person (peer abuse), it should be treated in a sensitive way.

Remember, a child may disclose abuse to you as a trusted adult at any time during your work with them. It is important that you are aware and prepared for this.

- Be as calm and natural as possible.
- Remember that you have been approached because you are trusted and possibly liked. Do not panic.
- Be aware that disclosures can be very difficult for the child.
- Remember, the child may initially be testing your reactions and may only fully open up over a period of time.
- Listen to what the child has to say. Give them time and opportunity to tell as much as they are able and wish to tell.
- Do not pressurise the child. Allow him or her to disclose at their own pace and in their own language.
- Conceal any signs of disgust, anger or disbelief.
- It is important to differentiate between the person who carried out the abuse and the act of abuse itself. The child/young person quite possibly may love or strongly like the alleged abuser while also disliking what was done to them. It is therefore important to avoid expressing any judgement on, or anger towards, the alleged perpetrator while talking to the child/young person.
- It may be necessary to reassure the child that your feelings toward him or her have not been affected in a negative way as a result of what they have disclosed.

When Asking Questions

- Questions should be supportive and for the purposes of clarification only.

⁹ Source: Based on Barnardos (2010) Barnardo's Ireland Child Protection Information Pack

¹⁰ HSE Child Protection and Welfare Handbook, 2011

- Avoid asking leading questions, such as asking whether a specific person carried out the abuse. Also, avoid asking about intimate details or suggesting that something else may have happened other than what you have been told. Such questions or suggestions could complicate the official investigation.

Confidentiality – Do Not Promise to Keep Secrets

At the earliest opportunity, tell the child that:

- You acknowledge that they have come to you because they trust you.
- You will be sharing this information only with people who understand this area and who can help. There are secrets which are not helpful and should not be kept because they make matters worse. Such secrets hide things that need to be known if people are to be helped and protected from further ongoing hurt. By refusing to make a commitment to secrecy to the child, you do run the risk that they may not tell you everything (or indeed, anything) there and then. It is better, however, to do this than to tell a lie and ruin the child’s confidence in yet another adult. By being honest, it is more likely that the child will return to you at another time.

Think Before You Promise Anything – do not make promises that you cannot keep

At the earliest possible opportunity:

- Record in writing, in a factual manner, what the child has said, including as far as possible the exact words used by the child.
- Inform the supervisor/manager immediately and agree measures to protect the child, i.e. report the matter directly to the Tusla, the Child and Family Agency.
- Maintain appropriate confidentiality.

Responding To A Disclosure

Things To Say	Things Not To Say
I want to listen to what you have to say	Wait until I get my manager so you can tell him/her too
I am going to do my best to help you	I can’t do anything
You did the right thing by telling me, this is what I am going to do next	I can’t believe it, I’m shocked
You are not to blame	This is your fault
Is there anything else you want to share?	Don’t tell me anymore

Ongoing Support

Following a disclosure by a child, it is important that the staff member or volunteer continues in a supportive relationship with the child. Disclosure is a huge step for a child.

Staff members or volunteers should continue to offer support, particularly through:

- Maintaining a positive relationship with the child
- Keeping lines of communication open by listening carefully to the child
- Continuing to include the child in the usual activities

Any further disclosure should be treated as a first disclosure and responded to as indicated above. Where necessary, immediate action should be taken to ensure the child’s safety.

If in doubt, check it out!

If you really are uncertain whether your concerns are well founded, or what to do for the best, you can get advice from a Tusla, the Child and Family Agency duty social worker.

The Tusla Duty Social Work Team for the North Inner-City area can be contacted on **01 856 6856**, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.

UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES SHOULD A CHILD BE LEFT IN A SITUATION THAT EXPOSES HER OR HIM TO HARM.

In out-of-hours or emergency cases, if you think a child is in immediate danger and you cannot reach a duty social worker, you should contact the Gardaí on 999/112.

Procedure for Making A Formal Referral to the Tusla, the Child and Family Agency

If you identify a child as being at risk of harm – you must act. Paragraph 3.7.3 of *Children First: National Guidance* (2011) states that “it is the responsibility of all agencies working with children and for the public to recognise child protection concerns and share those with the agencies responsible for assessing or investigating them, not to determine whether the child protection concerns are evidenced or not.”

In the first instance, if possible, make telephone contact with the Duty Social Worker, or if out-of-hours or in an emergency, with the Gardaí.

The following procedures should be followed:

- The Designated Liaison Person should make a referral to the Tusla, the Child and Family Agency by using the **Standard Report Form**.
- The Standard Report Form can be accessed directly from the Tusla, the Child and Family Agency at <http://www.tusla.ie/children-first/publications-and-forms>

If you believe the concern is urgent and that there is imminent risk to a child, make the report by telephone and then follow it up with the completed form. The quality of the information you provide will influence the ability of the Tusla, the Child and Family Agency to respond.

The completed Standard Reporting Form must contain as much of the following as possible:

Accurate identifying information – including all known full names and surnames, addresses, date of birth, age, name of the child’s school, disability if applicable, ethnicity, first language (need for interpreter, if known) of the child(ren) and all the known members of his or her family and other adults living in the household. In cases of suspected abuse and neglect, family members should not be used as interpreters.

The report should also include:

- Names and addresses of the parents/carers of the child

- The relationship to the child of the person making the report
- The name, address and details of the person allegedly causing concern in relation to the child or children
- The names and addresses of other personnel or agencies involved with the child or children, e.g. GP, social worker, public health nurse, Gardaí, etc.

Details of the concern, allegation or incident – outline the exact nature of the concern: include dates, times and names of persons present. It is important to describe any observed injuries or behaviours that may be linked to the incident. In cases where neglect or abuse is indicated over time, the reporter should be encouraged to provide a chronology of the evidence or symptoms in the child that gave rise to the concern. The report should include the name and contact details of the person reporting the concerns and whether that person is a professional, a person working with children or a member of the public.

- Views of the parent/carer and views of the child (where age appropriate) – the reporter must provide any accounts of the parents' or child's views about the concern that are known to them.
- Any other relevant information
- A copy will be kept for Fighting Words' records and the original sent to the Tusla, the Child and Family Agency.

Cases Not Reported to Tusla or An Garda Síochana

In those cases where Fighting Words decides not to report concerns to Tusla or An Garda Síochana, the individual staff members or volunteer who raised the concern will be given a clear written statement of the reasons why the organisation is not taking such action. The staff member or volunteer will be advised that if they remain concerned about the situation, they are free as individuals to consult with, or report to, Tusla or An Garda Síochana. The provisions of the Protections for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act 1998 apply once they communicate "reasonably and in good faith." (see Paragraph 3.10.1)

Allegations Against a Staff Member or Volunteer

If an allegation is made against a staff member or volunteer, there are two procedures that Fighting Words will put in place:

- The reporting procedure in respect of the child/young person
- The procedure for dealing with the staff member/volunteer

These procedures, according to *Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children* should be followed in the event of suspicion or disclosure of abuse against a staff member or volunteer. In this situation, Fighting Words must have due regard for the rights and interest of the child on one hand and those of the person against whom the allegation is made on the other hand.

The Executive Director of Fighting Words (currently Seán Love) will deal with the staff member/volunteer in question, while the Designated Liaison Person will have the responsibility of dealing with reporting the issue and supporting the child. Staff members and volunteers may be subjected to erroneous or malicious allegations, therefore any allegation of abuse should be dealt with sensitively and support provided

for staff as well as the child, including counselling where necessary. The primary goal, however, is to protect the child while taking care to treat the staff member/volunteer fairly.

When the Executive Director of Fighting Words becomes aware of an allegation of abuse of a child or children by a staff member or volunteer, he will inform that person of the following:

- The fact that an allegation has been made against him/her
- The nature of the allegation

The staff member/volunteer will be afforded the opportunity to respond. The Executive Director will note the response and pass on the information if and when a formal report is made to the Tusla, the Child and Family Agency.

It is important to note that The Protection for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act, 1998 applies equally to organisations provided they report the matter "reasonably and in good faith."

Fighting Words accepts the possibility that a number of factors may have a bearing on the organisation and will need to be considered:

- Possible reactions of other members of staff/volunteers, including anger, disbelief, doubt, fear, shock, guilt, anxiety and confusion.
- The effects on the alleged abuser of the internal disciplinary proceedings, the child protection investigation and the criminal investigation.
- The reactions of other staff/volunteers and other children/young people towards the child/young person who has been abused or whose allegation is being investigated.
- The reaction of parents/carers and other family members of the child/young person.

NOTE: Should an allegation be made against the Executive Director of Fighting Words, the Chair of the Board will deal all aspects of the situation.

If an allegation is made against a staff member or volunteer, the following steps will be taken:

- The Executive Director of Fighting Words will deal with all aspects of the case relating to the staff member/volunteer. It may be necessary for the Executive Director to seek legal advice for any action following an allegation against a staff member/volunteer. A meeting may need to be arranged with the Tusla or the Gardaí to discuss the allegation.
- The allegation will be assessed by the Designated Liaison Person to establish if there are reasonable grounds for concern and whether a formal report will be made to the statutory authorities at that point. The Designated Liaison Person may wish to contact the Tusla, the Child and Family Agency for advice on the issue.
- The safety of the child/young person is the first priority of Fighting Words and all necessary measures will be taken to ensure that the child/young person is safe. The measures taken will be proportionate to the level of risk.

- Fighting Words will ensure that no other children/young people are at risk during this period and will inform other relevant agencies or parents/carers as appropriate.
- Pending the outcome of the investigation by the Tusla, the Child and Family Agency and/or the Gardaí, the measures which can be taken to ensure the safety of children and young people can include the following: suspension of duties of the person accused (with pay in the case of a staff member), re-assignment of duties where the accused will not have contact with children/young people, working under increased supervision during the period of the investigation or other measures as deemed appropriate.
- Fighting Words will notify the staff member/volunteer that an allegation has been made and what the nature of the allegation is. The staff member/volunteer has a right to respond to this and the response should be documented and retained.
- Fighting Words will ensure that the principle of 'natural justice' will apply whereby a person is considered innocent until proven otherwise.
- Fighting Words will work in co-operation with An Garda Síochána and the Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, and any decisions taken on action in regard to the staff member/volunteer will be taken in consultation with these agencies.
- The person against whom the allegation is made will need support during this period and Fighting Words will provide advice on how to access the relevant support services.
- Parents/guardians of the child will be informed of the allegation, concern or disclosure unless doing so is likely to endanger the child.

And lastly

If you would like to discuss any of the issues raised in this child protection policy and procedures document or obtain further information, please refer to the list of useful contacts contained in Appendix D.

Section 4: CHILD PROTECTION AND FIGHTING WORDS ACTIVITIES

1. Visits to Outside Organisations

Most of Fighting Words' activities take place at the Fighting Words centre in Dublin or at designated regular locations where established Fighting Words teams operate. We do, however, send staff and volunteers to schools, cultural institutions and other education centres from time to time. Schools must apply for a Fighting Words school visit using the appropriate form.

If staff members and volunteers visit a school or other location, the organisation will be asked to send an accompanying letter on headed paper, signed by the principal or other member of the senior manager or member of staff, confirming the school's/organisation's own child protection policy, per the relevant legislation requiring them to do so. Outside organisations may also be required to provide proof of public liability insurance.

2. Events: Both at Fighting Words and External Venues

Staff and volunteers organising events that include children and young people *must* abide by this policy to ensure the safe participation of children and young people in Fighting Words activities.

Event organisers for one-off events should contact the Designated Liaison Person when planning events and consider whether it is necessary to have a disclaimer saying Fighting Words expects parents/primary carers, guardians, teachers and/or carers to keep responsibility for their children while taking part in Fighting Words activities.

The parents of children and young people attending Fighting Words summer camps and other ongoing programmes will be issued with the Positive Behaviour Policy, which sets out the standards of behaviour expected of participants.

Staff and volunteers should keep records in certain circumstances at events and workshops involving children and young people¹¹:

- Any allegations a child makes against you or other staff/volunteers, e.g. "you're always picking on me," "don't touch me," etc. Take a note of the date and time and report to the Designated Liaison Person.
- If a child touches you or talks to you in an inappropriate way, record what happened and tell another adult. Ignoring this or allowing it to go on may place you in a very difficult position.
- In the case of a child speaking to you or behaving inappropriately, that you advised the child in question directly that s/he was speaking or behaving inappropriately.
- In the event of an injury, ensure that it is recorded in the Fighting Words Health and Safety Log and that the record is witnessed by another adult.

¹¹ See Appendix C of this document for a sample form. Forms are available from the General Manager.

3. Guidelines for Young People in Photography and Film

Inviting young people to Fighting Words events is part of getting them involved in the creative writing process. It is important, however, when we use children and young people in photo shoots and/or take pictures of them in the centre's activities that we consider how the images are used.¹²

When selecting a range of images for use in Fighting Words promotional material (either print-based or web-based) for each photograph consider the following:

- **Is the image clear?** Does the image convey a message that can be clearly understood by the child? Is the photograph of sufficient quality and clarity?
- **Is the image dignified?** Are the subjects of the image presented in a manner in which they would wish themselves to be portrayed? Are vulnerable people presented sensitively?
- **Is the image authentic?** Is the photograph authentic or do you think it has been cropped or edited in a way that distorts the actual facts?
- **Is the image balanced?** Do the images used present a balance of ethnicities and role models, as appropriate to the setting? Do the images show the diverse realities of everyday life and challenge prevailing expectations?

Parental and School Consent

Parental/primary carer and/or school consent for the use of images of children/young people in group shots will be required before photographs are used for promotional material and/or the website.

Parental/primary carer consent will be required for the use of an image of an individual child or young person in which the child/young person is named.

General Guidelines

- Under-18s should be asked if they mind before pictures are taken or filming takes place. This is good practice for adults as well.
- A letter will be made available from the Manager to parents/teachers/other responsible adults advising what will happen to the pictures/film and what they/it will be used for during and after an event.
- If pictures are taken or filming takes place informally at Fighting Words or other event, then this needs to be covered in the general parental/primary carer permission letter issued (as above).
- If a parental/primary carer letter has not been issued for the event or it is informal, then any photographer taking photos likely to be made available to or used by Fighting Words will need to issue a consent form.
- It is sometimes acceptable to obtain consent after pictures have been taken or filming has taken place, but this must be before their publication or use.

¹² Please refer to the Dóchas Code of Conduct on the Use of Images for more information: www.dochas.ie

Section 5: Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults

Per the Health Service Executive's *Safeguarding Vulnerable Persons at Risk of Abuse: National Policy and Procedures*, a vulnerable person is defined as

"an adult who is restricted in capacity to guard himself/herself against harm or exploitation or to report such harm or exploitation. This may arise as a result of physical or intellectual impairment and risk of abuse may be influenced by both context and individual circumstances."¹³

Abuse of vulnerable adults can constitute the physical, psychological, emotional, financial or sexual maltreatment or neglect of a vulnerable adult by another person. The abuse may be a single act or repeated over a period of time and it may take one form or a multiple of forms. The lack of appropriate action can also be a form of abuse.

Key Principles in Vulnerable Adult Protection and Welfare

- **Citizenship** confers a status on an individual whereby their fundamental right to dignity and respect and other basic human rights as well as their rights to participation in society are upheld and supported by the Constitution, by Ireland's human rights treaty commitments and by the laws of the State.
- **Person-centredness** is that principle which places the person as an individual at the heart and centre of any exchange requiring the provision or delivery of a service. Services are organised around what is important to the person from her/his perspective.
- **Empowerment** is that principle which recognises the right of the individual to lead as independent a life as possible and that supports the individual in every practical way to realise that right.
- **Self-directedness** recognises the right of the individual to self-determination to the greatest extent possible, including where this entails risk. Abiding by this principle means ensuring that risks are recognised, understood and minimised as far as possible, while supporting the person to pursue their goals and preferences.
- In accordance with the principles set out in this policy, it is recognised that **adults have the right to self-determination and to make decisions**, even if this means that they remain at risk. Where there are concerns regarding diminished capacity, consideration should be given to requesting a specialist assessment of the person's decision-making capacity in the context of the abuse allegations and the risk posed to the person.
- Equity should be applied in relation to transactions with and services to vulnerable adults. Resources and services should be provided to vulnerable people on the basis of need, using the principle of proportionality.
- **Safeguarding best interest** recognises the vulnerability of individuals where they are unable to make their own decisions and/or protect themselves, their assets or their bodily integrity and ensures appropriate and accountable protection for them.

¹³ *Safeguarding Vulnerable Persons at Risk of Abuse: National Policy and Procedures*, Health Service Executive, 2014, p. 5

Responding to and Reporting Vulnerable Adult Protection Concerns

If you are concerned about the protection or welfare of a vulnerable adult, contact the Designated Liaison Person.

When the Designated Liaison Person receives a report about suspected or actual abuse, s/he will consider the wishes of the vulnerable adult and if there are reasonable grounds for reporting to the statutory authorities. This will mean:

- Clarifying or getting more information about the matter
- Consulting with the vulnerable adult to her/his wishes, etc.
- Where there is any doubt or uncertainty, consulting the statutory authorities to obtain their advice about the situation
- Where there are concerns about the diminished capacity of the vulnerable adult, considering assessment of decision-making capacity in the context of the abuse allegations and the risk posed to the person
- Making a formal referral to the statutory authorities

A suspicion that is not supported by any objective indication of abuse or neglect would not constitute a reasonable suspicion or reasonable grounds for concern. These suspicions, however, will be recorded or noted internally by the Designated Liaison Person as future suspicions may lead to the decision to make a report and earlier suspicions may provide important information for the statutory authorities. A full written record of all decisions will be maintained by the Designated Liaison Person.

In an emergency, where a person is at immediate risk, you should contact An Garda Síochana (the police) or the Emergency Services on 112 or 999.

Confidentiality

All information concerned with the identification and reporting of vulnerable adult abuse is subject to best practice guidance on confidentiality. Where a vulnerable adult has capacity, their consent should be sought prior to disclosing information to other parties or the statutory authorities.

Mandatory Reporting

All citizens should be aware that it is a legal requirement throughout Ireland for any person who knows or believes that a serious offence has been committed, including an offence relating to rape, sexual assault or false imprisonment, to report such information to An Garda Síochana and it is an offence not to do so where that failure cannot be reasonably excused.

Consent

The consent of the vulnerable adult should be sought prior to reporting any matter to the statutory authorities and on to family and care service providers. Sometimes adults do not want civil authorities to take action to investigate or protect them from harm. If upon receipt of the concern, where the vulnerable adult does not give consent to reporting, and it is not clear that a criminal act has taken place, and where the Designated Liaison Person believes that others may also be at risk of harm, consultation should take place with civil authorities as to the best course of action in the absence of consent.

In considering the capacity of the vulnerable adult to give consent, the following factors should be taken into account:

- The adult has capacity to understand what is being asked of him or her
- Sufficient information is given, in a way that the person understands, to enable him/her to make an informed decision
- Consent is not received through any form of coercion

If the vulnerable adult is unable to give informed consent, discussions should take place with their carer/guardian/close family member about reporting concerns/allegations and, where appropriate, discussions should also take place with any medical or social work personnel. There may need to be a determination as to who can give consent on behalf of the vulnerable adult. In some cases there may already be provision in place; consultation may be required with legal advisers and statutory authorities.

Please note that the Designated Liaison Person should not make determinations around capacity to give consent without consultation with appropriately trained and skilled personnel.

Section 6: RECRUITMENT OF STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

Fighting Words will seek to check very thoroughly the background and suitability of all staff and volunteers. The procedure will involve a number of checks and safeguards, and no provisional offer of employment will be confirmed, nor employment or volunteering will commence, until all checks have been satisfied. No candidate who is deemed to be a risk to children or vulnerable adults will be employed or confirmed as a volunteer following the completion of the recruitment procedures.

It is important therefore to ensure that this recruitment process is thorough and no stage is omitted without agreement of the General Manager and/or Executive Director.

1. Recruitment Processes for Paid Staff and Volunteers

Applicants will be informed, via the details sent out and/or advertised as part of the recruitment process (e.g. on the application form), that Fighting Words will require personal disclosure that nothing in an applicant's background may preclude her or him from working with children and vulnerable adults so that applicants can make an informed choice as to whether to apply for the post. The details will also cover what checks will take place if they choose to apply. These checks will include:

Application Form

Applicants for paid positions will be asked to give a full account of their employment history alongside any voluntary experience on their application form, giving details of posts, names, addresses and contact numbers and reasons for leaving. Applicants for voluntary positions will be asked to give an account of relevant experience. The form must be marked and dated confirming that the information is true, that the candidate gives permission for Fighting Words to approach previous employers, and that there is nothing in the applicant's personal or professional background that would preclude her or him from working with children and vulnerable adults. While electronic applications

are accepted by the organisation, candidates must be able to produce signed copies at interview.

Disclosure of Criminal Convictions/Prosecutions

Applicants will be asked to declare all convictions/prosecutions whether spent or otherwise in the application form. Any disclosures should be treated in strict confidence. The information disclosed will not necessarily disqualify the application. The General Manager will make a decision as to whether the information disclosed is relevant to the post.

Applicants will have the opportunity to speak to the Executive Director, in confidence, about this aspect of the recruitment process should they wish to do so.

Interview

Selected candidates for paid roles will be interviewed by a panel in accordance with the usual recruitment procedures. Selected candidates for voluntary roles will be interviewed by the General Manager. Applicants will be asked to account for any gaps on their application forms and to give details of what they were doing if not in employment or volunteering.

Garda Vetting¹⁴

All staff members and volunteers at Fighting Words are legally required to be Garda vetted as the organisation provides assistance including the coaching, mentoring, counselling, teaching or training of children and vulnerable persons.

Newly appointed staff are subject to Garda vetting in line with Fighting Words' probation policy. See the Staff Terms and Conditions for full details of the organisation's six-month probation period.

All volunteers at Fighting Words are subject to Garda vetting¹⁵. The volunteer must complete the requisite form for processing by the Garda Vetting Unit (Form NVB1) and supply two forms of identification, one confirming proof of address, to be held on file at Fighting Words. Once the volunteer/staff member's information has been submitted to the Garda Vetting Unit, s/he will receive an email with the online vetting form, which should be completed within 30 days of receipt.

At time of writing, the processing time for vetting forms once the vetting subject has returned the form is approximately 2-10 working days.

A processed Garda Vetting Form application will indicate one or more of the following:

- No previous convictions against the applicant
- Convictions against the applicant
- Prosecutions pending involving the applicant

Every applicant will be treated with care, respect and ultimately confidentiality in line with the Fighting Words Data Protection Policy. Fighting Words may accept and/or employ applicants who return convictions or prosecutions that are not considered to be

¹⁴ Fighting Words staff, interns and volunteers are vetted via the National Youth Council of Ireland as part of the consortium of youth-involving organisations in Ireland.

related to child protection or violence and abuse of adults, vulnerable or otherwise. Each disclosure shall be dealt with on its own merit(s).

Verification of Identity

Applicants must be able to produce two documents at interview that can confirm his/her full name, date of birth, proof of address and signature. These documents are also required for Garda vetting. Candidates for paid roles also need to be able to produce a document that confirms their right to work in Ireland as part of our normal recruitment checks.

References

When a provisional offer of employment or a volunteer role is made, references will be taken up, at least one of which must be the applicant's present or last employer.

NB: Recruitment of volunteers

Volunteers will go through all the same background checking procedures as paid staff.

Volunteers will be told when interviewed that the volunteer position being recruited for will involve work with children and the checks in Fighting Words' Child Protection and Vulnerable Policy will be followed.

Referees for volunteers may be colleagues, past employers, family friends – anyone who is not a relative and can confirm the volunteer's good character.

2. Responsibility for the Policy: The Designated Liaison Person

Fighting Words' Designated Liaison Person, is Sara Bennett, General Manager. The primary responsibilities of the Designated Liaison Person are:

- Ensuring that the standard reporting procedure is followed so that suspected cases of child neglect and abuse and vulnerable adult neglect and abuse are referred promptly to the designated person in the Tusla, the Child and Family Agency or, in the event of an emergency and the unavailability of the Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, to An Garda Síochána.
- Ensuring that they are knowledgeable about child protection and undertake any training considered necessary to keep themselves updated on new developments.

3. Role of the Designated Liaison Person:

- To be the first internal point of contact in the case of a report about the Code of Practice being breached. The Designated Liaison Person then has an obligation to report breaches to the Executive Director.
- To make arrangements for the conduct of inquiries when there has been a breach of the Code of Behaviour.
- Record keeping. Records should be kept in compliance with the Data Protection Act requirements.

- Report suspicions and allegations of child abuse to the statutory authorities, e.g. Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, or An Garda Síochána.
- Liaise between Fighting Words staff, children and the statutory authorities where necessary.
- Create and maintain links with the statutory authorities and other relevant agencies and resources groups.
- Facilitate the provision of support to any victim, volunteer, or employee making a referral and provide support also to the person against whom the allegation has been made.
- Advise the organisation, members, or staff on individual cases as necessary and appropriate.
- Advise on good practice.
- Organise and/or facilitate training and workshops on guidelines in child protection.
- Keep up-to-date on current developments regarding provision, practice, support services, legal obligations/requirements and policy.

Section 6 – STAFF AND VOLUNTEER PROTECTION PROCEDURE

The Code of Behaviour

As part of the policy on child and vulnerable adult protection, Fighting Words has developed a Code of Behaviour. We believe that by following it, children and vulnerable adults will be protected from abuse. It will also protect staff, volunteers and those involved with Fighting Words from their actions being misinterpreted.

Alleged breaches of the Code of Behaviour regarding a staff member or volunteer should be made under the procedure outlined above. If a breach of Code of Behaviour is founded following an investigation, action will be taken under the organisation's disciplinary procedure or volunteer policy, as appropriate.

Members of staff and volunteers are protected in making allegations of breaches of the Code of Behaviour against another staff member provided the allegations are made reasonably and in good faith. If an allegation of a breach of the Code of Behaviour is found to be made unreasonably and not in good faith, the staff member or volunteer whom the allegation was made against may make a complaint under the Fighting Words grievance procedure. If such a complaint is upheld, action may be taken against the complainant under the organisation's disciplinary procedures or volunteer supervision policy, as appropriate.

In the case of staff members, the normal application of the rules of suspension as outlined under Fighting Words' discipline and grievance procedures will apply if required in order to carry out an investigation of a breach of the Code of Behaviour.

Provision of Support

If an alleged incident of abuse takes place in connection with Fighting Words activities, the organisation undertakes to provide support for the alleged victims and the person against whom the allegation has been made while any investigation, either by the statutory authorities or internally, Fighting Words will seek to ensure that any continuing support needed after a situation has been resolved is made available.

Training and Support

- Fighting Words will in the first instance ensure that all staff are aware of the Child Protection Policy and have signed the Code of Behaviour.
- Fighting Words requires all staff and volunteers to follow the Code of Behaviour.
- All managers have the responsibility to ensure that the staff for which they are responsible have access to, are aware of and have signed the Code of Behaviour.
- All staff members have a responsibility to ensure that any events they have planned will include a provision of the need for consideration of child/vulnerable adult protection issues.
- Training will be provided for those in designated jobs on how to maintain exemplary standards in safeguarding children and vulnerable adults as required.

Section 7: CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT

At Fighting Words, we are committed to ensuring everyone's right to confidentiality. The effective protection of a child often depends of the willingness of staff in statutory and voluntary organisations involved with children to share and exchange relevant information. It is therefore critical that there is a clear understanding of professional and legal responsibilities with regard to confidentiality and the exchange of information.

In relation to child protection and welfare, however, we undertake that:

- Information will only be given on a "need to know" basis in order to safeguard the child or vulnerable adult.
- Giving such information to others for the protection of a child or vulnerable adult is not a breach of confidentiality or data protection.
- We cannot guarantee total confidentiality where the best interests of the child or vulnerable adult are at risk.
- Information gathered for one purpose will not be used for another purpose without consulting the person who provided that information.
- Parents/carers/responsible adults, as well as children and vulnerable adults, have a right to know if personal information is being shared and/or a report to the Tusla, the Child and Family Agency (or other statutory authority) is being made, unless doing so could put the child or vulnerable adult at risk.
- Images of children will not be used for any reason without the consent of the parent/carer (we cannot, however, guarantee that cameras/videos will not be used at public sessions).
- Procedures are in place on the use of images of children.
- Procedures are in place for the safe and confidential storage of personal information and records in line with our confidentiality policy and Data Protection Act obligations.
- Personnel records for staff and volunteers are stored in a locked filing cabinet and in an encrypted SSL-protected database. Sara Bennett, Manager, has

access to staff records. Sara Bennett and Jean Hanney, Education Co-ordinator, have access to volunteer records.

Section 9: COMPLAINTS AND COMMENTS PROCEDURE

For issues in relation to children, primary carers and staff:

- Written complaints and comments will be acknowledged as soon as possible and responded to in writing within three weeks of receipt.
- Verbal complaints will be logged and responded to in writing within three weeks of receipt.
- The Designated Liaison Person, i.e. the General Manager, will have responsibility for directing complaints and comments to the appropriate person. **The Designated Liaison Person is Sara Bennett – 087 274 6621 or sara@fightingwords.ie**
- The Designated Liaison Person will investigate complaints as necessary and respond and respond within the timeframe outlined above.

Section 9: ACCIDENTS PROCEDURE

- The First Aid box is available, clearly labelled and regularly re-stocked at the Fighting Words centre. It is located in the office, by the coffee maker.
- Incident books are clearly labelled and easily available and all incidents recorded.
- Fighting Words staff trained in Occupational First Aid are Sara Bennett, General Manager and Emmy Lugoye, IT Administrator.
- Availability of first aid will be in accordance with health and safety legislation at the Fighting Words centre. Where volunteers and staff are involved in a FW programme or event offsite, e.g. at a school/library/other organisation, we endeavour to ensure that availability of first aid will be in accordance with health and safety legislation.
- Fighting Words has public liability insurance in place to cover accidents on the premises.
- Children and young people will be advised of risks of any dangerous materials.
- Details of risky equipment used will be recorded and steps taken to minimise risk.
- Outside organisations hosting Fighting Words events will be required to provide proof that they have public liability insurance.
- **No running in the centre by anyone at any time.**

Section 10 – INVOLVEMENT OF PRIMARY CARERS

Fighting Words is committed to being open with all primary carers, i.e parents and guardians.

We undertake to:

- Advise primary carers of our child and vulnerable adult protection policy
- Inform primary carers and schools of all activities or potential activities during Fighting Words programmes
- Issue contact/consent forms where relevant
- Comply with health and safety practices
- Operate child-centred and person-centred policies in accordance with best practice
- Adhere to our recruitment guidelines for volunteers and staff
- Ensure as far as possible that activities are age appropriate
- Facilitate the involvement of parent(s), carer(s) or responsible adult(s), where appropriate

If we have concerns about the welfare of a child or vulnerable adult, we will:

- Respond to the needs of the child or vulnerable adult
- Inform the primary carers on an ongoing basis unless this action puts the child or vulnerable adult at further risk
- Where there are child protection and welfare concerns, we are obliged to pass these on to the Duty Social Worker and, in an emergency, the Gardaí
- In the event of a complaint against a staff member or volunteer, we will take such steps as are necessary to ensure the safety of the child or vulnerable adult and inform primary carers as appropriate

As a child-centred and person-centred organisation, Fighting Words is committed to putting the interest of the child and vulnerable adult first. To that end, we will:

- Contact the Tusla, the Child and Family Agency/Gardaí where there is a child protection concern or the relevant statutory authorities in the case of a vulnerable adult protection concern
- Encourage primary carers to work in partnership with us under the guidelines set out by our organisation to ensure the safety of children and vulnerable adults
- Have a designated contacted person available for consultation with primary carers in the case of any concern about a child or vulnerable adult's welfare. At present, this person is Sara Bennett, Designated Liaison Person.

Section 11 - POLICY REVIEW

The policy will be reviewed quarterly and/or as necessary. The next review is due in June 2018.

Appendix A – Definitions of Child Abuse¹⁶

What is child abuse?

It is generally acknowledged that there are four types of abuse:

Physical abuse of a child is that which results in actual or potential physical harm from an interaction, or lack of interaction, which is reasonably within the control of a parent or person in a position of responsibility, power or trust. There may be single or repeated incidents.

Physical abuse can involve:

- Severe physical punishment
- Beating, slapping, hitting or kicking
- Pushing, shaking or throwing
- Pinching, biting, choking or hair-pulling
- Terrorising with threats
- Observing violence
- Use of excessive force in handling
- Deliberate poisoning
- Suffocation
- Fabricated/induced illness
- Allowing or creating a substantial risk of significant harm to a child

Emotional Abuse is normally to be found in the relationship between a parent/carer and a child rather than in a specific event or pattern of events. It occurs when a child's needs for affection, approval, consistency and security are not met. Unless other forms of abuse are present, it is rarely manifested in terms of physical symptoms.

Examples of emotional abuse can include:

- The imposition of negative attributes on a child, expressed by persistent criticism, sarcasm, hostility or blaming
 - Conditional parenting in which the level of care shown to a child is made contingent on his or her behaviours or actions
 - Emotional unavailability of the child's parent/carer
 - Unresponsiveness of the parent/carer and/or inconsistent or inappropriate expectations of the child
 - Premature imposition of responsibility on the child
 - Unrealistic or inappropriate expectations of the child's capacity to understand something or to behave and control himself or herself in a certain way
 - Under- or over-protection of the child
 - Failure to show interest in, or provide age-appropriate opportunities for, the child's cognitive and emotional development
 - Use of unreasonable or over-harsh disciplinary measures
 - Exposure to domestic violence
 - Exposure to inappropriate or abusive material through new technology
- Emotional abuse can be manifested in terms of the child's behavioural, cognitive, affective or physical functioning. Examples of these include insecure attachment, unhappiness, low self-esteem, educational and developmental under-achievement and oppositional behaviour. The *threshold of significant harm* is reached when abusive interactions dominate and become *typical* of the relationship between the child and the parent/carer.

¹⁶ For more information, see *Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children*.

Sexual Abuse occurs when a child is used by another person for his/her gratification or sexual arousal, or for that of others, for example:

- Exposure of the sexual organs or any sexual act intentionally performed in the presence of a child
- Intentional touching or molesting of the body of a child whether by a person or object for the purpose of sexual arousal or gratification
- Masturbation in the presence of a child or involvement of the child in the act of masturbation
- Sexual intercourse with a child, whether oral, vaginal or anal
- Sexual exploitation of a child, which includes inciting, encouraging, propositioning, requiring or permitting a child to solicit for, or to engage in, prostitution or other sexual acts. Sexual exploitation also occurs when a child is involved in the exhibition, modelling or posing for the purpose of sexual arousal, gratification or sexual act, including its recording (on film, videotape or other media) or the manipulation, for those purposes, of the image by computer or other means. It may also include showing sexually explicit material to children, which is often a feature of the "grooming" process by perpetrators of abuse.

Consensual sexual activity involving an adult and an underage person. In relation to child sexual abuse, it should be noted that, for the purposes of the criminal law, the age of consent to sexual intercourse is 17 years for both boys and girls. An Garda Síochána will deal with the criminal aspects of the case under the relevant legislation.

It should be noted that the definition of child sexual abuse presented here is not a legal definition and is not intended to be a description of the criminal offence of sexual assault.

Neglect can normally be defined in terms of an omission, where a child suffers significant harm or impairment of development by being deprived of food, clothing, warmth, hygiene, intellectual stimulation, supervision and safety, attachment to and affection from adults, or medical care. Harm can be defined as the ill treatment or the impairment of the health or development of a child. Whether it is *significant* is determined by his/her health and development as compared to that which could reasonably be expected of a child of a similar age.

Neglect generally becomes apparent in different ways over a period of time rather than at one specific point. For example, a child who suffers a series of minor injuries may not be having his or her needs met in terms of necessary supervision and safety. A child whose height and weight is significantly below average may be being deprived of adequate nutrition. A child who consistently misses school may be being deprived of intellectual stimulation.

The *threshold of significant harm* is reached when the child's needs are neglected to the extent that his or her well-being and/or development are several affected.

Recognising Child Neglect or Abuse

Child neglect or abuse can be difficult to identify and may present in many forms. A list of indicators is contained in the *Children First* guidelines. No one indicator should be seen as conclusive in itself of abuse. It may indicate conditions other than child abuse. All signs and symptoms must be examined in the context of the child's situation and family circumstances.

Guidelines for Recognition

The ability to recognise child abuse can depend as much on a person's unwillingness to accept the possibility of its existence as it does on their knowledge and information. There are commonly three stages in the identification of child neglect or abuse:

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

Further information about each of these stages is available in the *Children First* guidelines.

It is not your responsibility to identify abuse, but it is your responsibility to report your concerns.

APPENDIX B – Definitions of Abuse of Vulnerable Adults

For the purposes of this policy, vulnerable adult abuse is any mistreatment that violates a person's human and civil rights. The abuse can vary from treating someone with disrespect in a way which significantly affects the person's quality of life, to causing actual physical suffering.

A vulnerable adult may be subjected to more than one form of abuse at any given time.

Physical abuse such as hitting, pushing, pinching, shaking, misusing medication, scalding, restraint, hair pulling

Sexual abuse such as rape, sexual assault or sexual acts to which the vulnerable adult has not or could not have consented, or two which they were pressurised into consenting.

Psychological or emotional abuse such as threats of harm or abandonment, being deprived of social or any other form of contact, humiliation, blaming, controlling, intimidation, coercion, harassment, verbal abuse, being prevented from receiving services or support.

Financial or material abuse such as theft, fraud, or exploitation, pressure in connection with wills, property or inheritance, possessions or benefits.

Neglect such as ignoring medical or physical care needs and preventing access to health, social care or education services or withholding the necessities of life such as food, drink and heating.

Discriminatory abuse such as that based on race, sexuality, a person's ability and other forms of harassment or slurs.

Domestic abuse refers to the use of physical or emotional force or threat of physical force, including sexual violence in close adult relationships. It includes violence perpetrated by a spouse, partner, son or daughter or any other person who has a close or blood relationship with the victim. The term "domestic violence" goes beyond actual physical violence. It can also involve emotional abuse, the destruction of property, isolation from friends, family and other potential sources of support, threats to others including children, stalking, and control over access to money, personal items, food, transportation and the telephone.

Elder abuse occurs with persons over the age of 65 years. Concerns in relation to elder abuse should be reported to the relevant Public Health Nurse or to the HSE Senior Case Worker for the Protection of Older People.

APPENDIX C – Anti-Bullying Policy

Definition of Bullying

The Health and Safety Authority's definition of bullying is that it is:

"Repeated inappropriate behaviour, direct or indirect, whether verbal, physical or otherwise, conducted by one or more persons against another or others, at the place of work and/or in the course of employment, which could reasonably be regarded as undermining the individual's right to dignity..."

Bullying can be defined as repeated aggression, be it verbal, psychological, or physical, which is conducted by an individual or group against others.

Types of Bullying¹⁷

Bullying can take many forms. Some types are listed below:

- **Verbal Bullying:** can leave children and young people feeling angry, frightened and powerless. If they are unable to share their feelings with someone else, verbal bullying can leave them emotionally bruised and physically exhausted. Their powers of concentration can suffer, adversely affecting their capacity for learning. Verbal attacks can be of a highly personal and sexual nature. They can be directed at the child's or young person's family, culture, race or religion. Malicious rumours are particularly insidious form of verbal bullying.
- **Physical Bullying:** often dismissed as "horseplay," "pretending" or "just a game" when challenged. While children can and do play roughly, in the case of bullying, be aware that these "games" can be a precursor to physical assaults. Both boys and girls indulge in physical bullying.
- **Gesture Bullying:** there are many different forms of non-verbal threatening gestures which can convey intimidating and frightening messages – for example, gesturing a gun to the head.
- **Exclusion Bullying:** this is particularly hurtful because it isolates the child or young person from his/her peer group and it is very hard for the child or young person to combat it, as this type of bullying directly attacks their self-confidence and self-image.
- **Extortion Bullying:** younger children are particularly vulnerable to extortion and bullying. Demands for money, possessions, equipment, etc. may be made, often accompanied by threats. Children or young people may also be dared or forced to steal from others, leaving them at the mercy of the bully and open to further intimidation.
- **Online Bullying:** this type of bullying uses social media websites, email and text messages to abuse, intimidate and attack others, either directly or indirectly (e.g. rumour-mongering)

¹⁷ Taken from *Bullying at School: Key Facts*, Trinity College Dublin Anti-Bullying Centre, 2001

Policy Statement

All staff and volunteers at Fighting Words are committed to ensuring a safe and protected environment for children and young people. Bullying in any form at Fighting Words is completely unacceptable.

Aim of Policy

The aim of this policy is to ensure that all children and young people are protected from bullying behaviour. It is hoped that the policy will reduce the number of children and young people who experience bullying. The policy aims to ensure that incidents of bullying will be dealt with consistently and in a fair manner by setting out the procedures for dealing with such instances.

Objectives of Policy

- To raise awareness of bullying as a form of unacceptable behaviour with staff, volunteers, children and young people and parents/guardians.
- To develop an ethos which encourages children and young people to report incidents of bullying.
- To develop systems of recording and reporting incidents of bullying behaviour.
- To develop clear procedures for investigating and dealing with incidents of bullying behaviour.
- To ensure comprehensive supervision and monitoring measures are employed for all activities with children and young people.

Procedures for Dealing with Bullying

- In any incident of bullying, a staff member should speak separately to the children or young people involved to get both sides, with due regard to the rights of each person involved.
- All reports of bullying will be recorded, investigated and dealt with by the Manager or other staff member as appropriate.
- The Manager (or other staff member as appropriate) will interview all involved in a calm manner and will seek answers to what, where, when, who and why.
- The child or young person should be praised for their courage in coming forward to report the bullying incident or behaviour.
- Reassure the child or young person that being bullied is the responsibility of bullies and they are not to blame themselves.
- Reassure the child or young person of the support of staff and volunteers at Fighting Words in ensuring the bullying does not happen again.
- If the Manager (or other staff member) dealing with the complaint concludes that bullying has taken place, then the perpetrator will be met and the incident dealt with in line with the Fighting Words Positive Behaviour Policy.
- Staff members will at all times be sensitive to the needs of the child or young person, who may not wish it to be made known that they reported an incident of bullying.
- Parents will be informed of the incident of bullying and the outcome of any investigation.
- For less serious incidents of bullying (e.g. name calling, gestures, etc), the child or young person will be asked to apologise to the victim and asked not to engage in any further bullying behaviour. Staff will then closely monitor the behaviour of the child or young person.
- For serious incidents of bullying (e.g. assaults or threats of assault, exclusion, racist or homophobic remarks), the perpetrator will be suspended or excluded

from the programme/activity in line with the Positive Behaviour Policy. All serious incidents of bullying should be reported to the Designated Liaison Person.

- The examples given here are not exhaustive and this policy will be reviewed annually or as necessary. The next review is scheduled for January 2018.

Appendix C - Fighting Words Standard Notification Form

Date:	Time:
Place:	

Type of incident, e.g. disturbance, theft, accident:

Staff and/or volunteer involved:

Persons involved in the incident:

Description of incident – include the time, those involved, clearly and logically:

Name and addresses of witnesses:

Action taken:

Prepared by:	Date:
Signature:	

Appendix D – Useful Contacts and Publications

Organisations

Tusla - Child and Family Agency

Dublin North City
Ballymun Healthcare Facility
Ballymun Civic Centre
Dublin 9
Telephone: 01 846 7129
Email: linda.creamer@tusla.ie

The Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, operates an out of hours Crisis Intervention Service in the Dublin area, which can be accessed by emergency services like hospitals and the Garda Síochána outside of office hours.

The Tusla Duty Social Work Team for the North Inner City area can be contacted on **01 856 6856**, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.

HSE Information Line – 1850 24 1850 or www.hse.ie

Outside office hours all child and vulnerable adult protection concerns should be referred to the Gardaí. The Garda station closest to Fighting Words is located on the North Circular Road.

An Garda Síochána

Mountjoy Station
399 North Circular Road, Dublin 7
Tel: 01 666 8600
Website: www.garda.ie

Publications

Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2011. Published by the Department of Health and Children. Available in the Government Publications Office or online at <http://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/Publications/ChildrenFirst.pdf>

Child Protection and Welfare Practice Handbook 2011. Published by the Health Service Executive. Available in the Government Publications Office or online at http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/CF_WelfarePracticehandbook.pdf

Our Duty to Care: The Principles of Good Practice for the Protection of Children and Young People. Published by the Department of Health and Children. Available in the Government Publications Office or online at <http://www.dohc.ie/publications/pdf/ourduty.pdf?direct=1>

Code of Good Practice: Child Protection for the Youth Work Sector. Published by the Department of Education and Science. Available in the Government Publications Office or online at http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobServlet/youth_cpyws.pdf

Safeguarding Vulnerable Persons at Risk of Abuse: National Policy and Procedures. Published by the HSE Social Care Division. <http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/publications/corporate/personsatriskofabuse.pdf>

Fighting Words Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy

I, _____, hereby declare and warrant that there is no reason known to me and there are no convictions, claims or complaints (past or pending) against me relating to children and vulnerable adults that would deem me to be unsuitable to work with children and vulnerable adults and carry out my role within this organisation.

I understand that my making a false declaration would be grounds for dismissal or the termination of my contract on any project on which I was engaged.

I have read and understood the Fighting Words Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy contained herein.

I also give my permission to contact An Garda Síochána for vetting purposes.

Signed: _____

Date: _____