



## **Child Protection Policy Statement**

The Young Christian Workers Movement is an international youth movement, which values the dignity and worth of each young person. It enables its member to challenge social exclusion and take action to bring about change in their home, workplace and social life.

The YCW of Ireland is fully committed to safeguarding the well being of its members and those who work with them. Staff, volunteers, including Chaplains/Animators and members should conduct themselves in a manner that reflects the principles of the YCW respecting the dignity, welfare, rights and well being of all involved in the movement.

**Definition of Child:** The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as anyone who is under 18 years of age. In Ireland, the Child Care Act 1991 defines a child as any person under the age of 18 years, excluding a person who is or who has been married.

***The YCW is committed to Action, which promotes the dignity and meaning of young people's lives regardless of their faith, social background or colour.***

***While this document deals specifically with those under the age of 18 years, i.e. children, it also mentions young people (18 years and over) as these guidelines include what we believe to be good practice for dealing with both.***

***These Guidelines have been designed specifically for those working (paid/non paid) with the YCW Movement and should be used in conjunction with the Code of Good Practice, Child Protection for the Youth Work Sector, Department of Education, September 2002.***

## **A Duty to Care**

The rights of children have been clearly outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, an international agreement that was adopted by the UN in 1989 and ratified by Ireland in 1992. The Convention represents a set of minimum standards in protecting children's rights. It is a binding international treaty and as a signatory, Ireland is obliged to implement its contents.

Children's rights can be summarised under the following headings:

**Provision:** Rights to minimum standards of health, education, social security, physical care, family life, play, recreation, culture and leisure and adequate standards of living.

**Protection:** Rights of children to be safe from discrimination, physical abuse, exploitation, substance abuse, injustice and conflict.

**Participation:** Rights of children to a name and identity, to be consulted and taken account of, access to information, freedom of speech and opinion and to challenge decisions made on their behalf.

*(Taken from National Youth Work Advisory Committee, Child Protection sub-committee, child protection policy, Draft2, 4<sup>th</sup> July 2000)*

All members of YCW working with children (and young people) should adhere to this philosophy in the practical delivery of the service they provide in keeping with the development of the aims and guiding principles of the Movement.

Those working with children and young people in a voluntary or paid capacity have a duty of care to protect them from all forms of harm and provide them with the highest quality of care.

This duty includes an obligation to respond with due care, speed and competence to a disclosure on the part of a child relating to abuse whether the allegation is within the Movement or in the child's life outside it.

**Definitions of Abuse:** Children and young people can suffer from many forms of abuse. The abuse can come from a parent, sibling or other relative, a youth leader or carer, an acquaintance, friend or stranger. This abuse may take a number of forms including:

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

The safety and welfare of the child must always be the paramount consideration for those working with them. We have a duty to ensure that all the children in our care are not put at risk during their meetings, actions or activities. During events away (day/overnight, weekends etc.), it is the duty of those in positions of responsibility, (i.e. Chaplains/Animators, Committee members, training leaders etc.) to ensure:

- That the children and young people in their care are properly housed and fed.
- That the activities, including meetings are set up and supervised to the highest standard.
- That there is always an adequate amount of trained instructors and leaders present.
- That appropriate sleeping arrangements are in operation to protect personal and sexual boundaries.

**Physical Abuse** – Actual or likely perpetrated physical injury to a child or young person, or failure to prevent physical injury or suffering to them.

We have a duty to prevent situations arising where our children and young people would be at risk from ill treatment and injury of any kind. We as adults (Chaplains/Animators, members etc.) working with them undertake the responsibility to safeguard the children and young people from any physical danger while in our care. The principle is that they should be safe and should be protected by intervention if they are in danger.

**Sexual Abuse** – Actual or likely sexual exploitation of a child or adolescent. Child sexual abuse is an abuse of the power that adults have over children.

Every child and young person has a basic right to be cared for and protected at all times. In order to maintain good practice, certain guidelines should be followed:

1. Do not engage in sexually provocative games.
2. Do not engage in inappropriate touching of any form.
3. Never make sexually suggestive comments, even in fun.
4. Do not organise Social activities or events such as swimming or other such activities which require children to undress.

In all situations it is important that those working with children and young people are sensitive to their needs.

**Emotional Abuse** – Occurs when an individual suffers harm as a result of being intimidated, being exposed to constant degradation or verbal attacks.

**Verbal Abuse** – This is the least recognised form of harm done to children and young people, yet the long term psychological effects may be traumatic to the individual.

**Bullying** – Even if no actual physical harm or injury is suffered, is classed as emotional abuse. Such cases should always be dealt with immediately and not tolerated under any circumstances. Chaplains/Animators or members working with groups should be aware of members who become quiet, withdrawn or who wish to leave the group. (This may become apparent through Committee meetings).

We as adults, or those with responsibility for working with children and young people, need to be constantly aware of any physical, behavioural or indirect signs which may be an indication of some of the above abuses, resulting in emotional change in any of the children and young people with whom we work.

### **In conclusion**

Good Child Protection Practice protects both the child and the adults working with them. That means IMPACT! members (16-18 years), YCW members, Chaplains/Animators, Volunteers, paid staff and those with responsibility for working with the members of our Movement.

As Chaplains/Animators or YCW members working with IMPACT! groups you will be required to meet with those responsible for leading the enquiry of the week. As these groups consist of members legally classified as children there are some specific guidelines that should be followed in relation to enquiry preparation:

- You should meet with at least two members to prepare the enquiry. (President and Enquiry Leader). You should avoid situations where you are left alone with one of the members. It is always a good idea to have two adults present, one male and one female.
- Avoid any form of physical contact.
- Do not engage in sexually explicit language (for example in the preparation of enquiries around relationships etc.)
- Whilst participating in any activity with IMPACT! and YCW the law of the land should be strictly adhered to and never broken.
- As a member of Staff, a Chaplain/Animator or as a volunteer you may well be looked up to by the members of your group (and other members of the Movement) and treated as a role model. It is vital that you respect this position and pay due regard to setting a good example. You should not engage or condone any form of racism, sexual discrimination or discrimination of

any kind. In other words you should remain true to the Principles of Respect and Dignity of the YCW Movement.

- As a person in a position of “authority” you should avoid at all times the development of inappropriate relationships with members that are not wholly professional.

### **Recommended Procedures**

Responding to incidents of alleged or suspected child abuse must be based upon clearly defined procedures. Knowing what to do, who to contact and who needs to be informed will make you feel better about sharing any concerns.

If a child informs you of any form of abuse it is important that you take what the child tells you seriously and follow it up with action straight away. The sooner you take action the more likely it is that the abuse will stop and the child will recover from the experience.

If you know someone whom you think may be abusing a child, or a child’s words or behaviour indicate to you that it is likely that they are being abused, report it to the YCW Child Protection officer who is \_\_\_\_\_. (You can contact the Child Protection Officer through the National Office or through your Regional Development Worker. The Child Protection Officer will contact the Health Board. The Health Board will then inform the Garda Síochána)

### **Don’t just do nothing.**

#### **Remember:**

#### **Do**

Be observant.

Be aware of your responsibilities as a Chaplain/Animator or volunteer working with the group.

Keep an incident/accident book.

Ensure adequate supervision at all times.

Listen and believe.

Follow the reporting procedure.

#### **Do not**

Promise to keep it a secret.

Permit bullying.

Allow inappropriate physical contact.

It is the policy of YCW to meet with and provide training, including child protection, to those involved in working with groups. If you have any questions or queries consult a member of the Development Team.

## **Reporting Procedure**

There is a great obligation on anyone accepting responsibility for children and young people to provide adequate care or to pass on information concerning suspected or actual abuse of a child. Any failure to do so may leave them legally liable. All discussions will be treated as strictly confidential and will only be passed on, on a need to know basis. It is essential that all cases of known sexual abuse or cases of well-founded concern are reported.

**Members:** If you are experiencing any form of abuse or suspect a member of your group is being subjected to abuse, you should inform your Chaplain/Animator who in turn will notify the YCW Child Protection Officer. Alternatively you may contact the YCW Child Protection Officer yourself. The Child Protection Officer is \_\_\_\_\_ and can be contacted through the National Office or through your Regional Development Worker.

**Chaplains:** If you suspect a member of your group is being subjected to any form of abuse you may contact the YCW Child Protection Officer directly. The Child Protection Officer is \_\_\_\_\_ and can be contacted through the National Office or through your Regional Development Worker.

In short if you have received a complaint or suggest any form of abuse you should contact the YCW Child Protection Officer through the National Office or through your Regional Development Worker. They will contact the Health Board who in turn will then inform the Garda Síochána

### **Emergency situations:**

In a small number of instances, if it is clear that the child/young person is in real or immediate danger of serious assault, it may be necessary to report the matter to Social Services or the Garda Síochána /Police immediately with a view to ensuring that some protection can be obtained for the child/young person as a matter of urgency.

Where there is any doubt or uncertainty, it is strongly recommended that you test out your concerns with the Health Board/Social Service Staff/NSPCC or Garda Síochána /Police.

Remember the important safeguard that the task of deciding whether or not abuse has occurred rests with the professional agencies.

When information is passed on verbally, it is important to follow up in writing. You should always seek acknowledgement of this correspondence.

## **Confidentiality**

### ***Who needs to know?***

The legal principle that “the welfare of the child is paramount” means that considerations of confidentiality should not be allowed to override the right of children to be protected from harm.

Everyone in the Movement, including children, must be aware that there are some situations in which confidentiality needs to be broken; specifically if you are concerned that a person is a danger, either to themselves or to someone else, or that suspected abuse has occurred and an offence may have been committed.

### **This will mean at the very least informing:**

The group Chaplain/Animator  
The Child Protection Officer  
A statutory child protection agency  
The parents of the child (see below)  
The alleged perpetrator (see below)

Informing the parents of the child about whom you are concerned will need to be handled in a very sensitive way and should only be undertaken in consultation with the statutory agency.

Any individual under suspicion, whether or not he or she is an Animator/Chaplain, member or Volunteer within the Movement, a friend or relative of the child/young person has a right to be notified of the cause of concern. This will need careful consideration and should only be undertaken in consultation with the statutory agency who will inform you of the action to be taken.

Statutory child protection procedures are child centred i.e. in all investigations the welfare of the child is the paramount consideration. For this reason, the statutory child protection agencies give an undertaking that any information you provide will remain confidential.

The official policy is that those receiving such information should “only disclose it where the welfare of the child requires it and then only to those with a legitimate need to know”. The details you give will only be passed on to the relevant people within those agencies whose task it is to decide what action to take.

## **Procedures for the recruitment and vetting of potential Development Workers, Animators / Chaplains and Volunteers**

It is necessary to vet all those intending to work with children and young people in order to provide a safe environment for everyone. A proper selection procedure is one of the most sensible and effective ways of assessing a person's suitability to work with children and young people and may in itself act as a deterrent to potential abusers, as well as help in choosing people who are suitable for working with them.

Having a good standard of practice in YCW means that people are more likely to wish to become involved in our Movement. Care, therefore, needs to be taken to ensure that anyone who may be unsuited to working in such an environment is not selected. Furthermore, it is important to ensure that everyone participates in a selection procedure even though they are recognised as people of good standing. The following steps are therefore considered necessary to ensure good practice:

**Defining Role:** This involves thinking through what exactly the role of the Development Worker, Animator or Chaplain entails and what skills will be required in order to enable them to perform effectively.

**Application Forms:** for both paid and non-paid positions should be completed and returned to the relevant Development Worker or to National Office. (See Appendix 1)

**Declaration:** All potential staff and Volunteers (i.e. those mentioned above) will be asked to declare any past criminal convictions or pending cases. (This is included in the Application form. See Appendix 1)

**Paid Staff:** The Management Committee, which consists of members of the Board of YCW Ireland, will interview Applicants for paid employment with the YCW Movement.

**Potential Animators/Chaplains and other Volunteers** will be interviewed by the relevant Development Worker. The Movements Child Protection Policy and Code of Good Behaviour will be outlined during such interviews.

**References:** The names of two people who are willing to submit character references must be supplied by all those wishing to work with the YCW Movement both on a paid or voluntary basis.

**Training:** Animators/Chaplains and those wishing to work with IMPACT! and YCW groups will be required to attend necessary training provided by the Movement.

All volunteers and staff will be required to sign up to the YCW Movements Child Protection guidelines and undergo training.

## **Support and Supervision**

Support and supervision will be provided to all paid staff, volunteers, Chaplain and Animators involved in working with young people within YCW.

**Paid Staff:** Following the initial Induction Programme ongoing supervision and support will be provided by the National Co-ordinator on a weekly basis, initially and on a monthly basis thereafter.

**Volunteers/Chaplains/Animators:** Following initial training in the use of YCW programmes, the YCW's code of Good Practice and Child Protection ongoing support will be provided to those volunteering within the Movement through regular meetings, phone calls and further training opportunities.

For those based at the National Office, support will be provided by the National Co-ordinator on a weekly basis for the first three months and monthly thereafter.

Those working with groups outside of the Office will be met by the appropriate Development Worker who will offer support and further training if necessary. Regular contact will be maintained by phone and follow up meetings (to be agreed by both parties) to ensure all parties are happy and confident in their role and to deal with any issues arising.

## **The YCW Movements response to allegations of abuse by a Volunteer or staff member**

If a child/young person alleges that s/he is being abused by an adult working within the Movement, the same procedures for reporting outlined earlier should be adhered to. This requires that Health and Social Services are informed immediately. In addition it will be necessary to deal with the alleged offender and remove him/her from direct contact with the child/young person until the matter is investigated.

The adult in question should be informed that the Movements Child Protection Procedures are being implemented and their further involvement in the Movement will cease until such time as the situation is investigated.

### **Steps to be taken:**

- Inform the person involved that allegations have been made against them and give them the opportunity to respond to them.
- Keep written records of any statements made by them.
- Outline the steps that are being taken to investigate the situation.

- Request that the person involved suspends further involvement with the group/Movement pending the outcome of the investigation. If the person is in employment s/he should be suspended on full pay pending the outcome of the investigation.
- Offer support to them while the case is being investigated.
- Only those in the direct management line (i.e. the YCW Board) should be informed of the reason for any suspension.
- Assist the adult involved to gain access to counselling.

**You should remember:**

**If you suspect or receive an allegation of abuse you should contact the YCW Child Protection Officer. They will then inform the Health Board who in turn will contact the Garda Síochána.**

**Policy Statement:**

**The YCW of Ireland is fully committed to safeguarding the well being of its members and those who work with them. Volunteers, including Chaplains/Animators and members should conduct themselves in a manner that reflects the principles of the YCW respecting the dignity, welfare, rights and well being of all involved in the movement.**

**Having been accepted to work as a Volunteer/Paid worker/Animator/Chaplain with the YCW Movement and having undergone the Movements Child Protection Training, I hereby declare that I shall conduct myself according to the Principles of the YCW Movement and adhere to the Child Protection Guidelines of the Movement and those of the Department of Education.**

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_

*On behalf of the YCW Movement)*

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_