



PCI Counselling Service

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Child Protection Policy

Revision v1.0

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1.0	First issue	JL	2021
2.0	Annual review	JL/GK	20/12/22

1. Introduction and Scope

1.1 Purpose of the Policy

This policy is informed and guided by Children First, The National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (2017). This Guidance is a primary reference for all citizens to report concerns and includes the new legislative obligations. It clarifies the legislation and the existing non-statutory obligations that will continue to operate for all sectors of society.

PCI Counselling Service has adopted this policy to ensure best practice in Child Protection within the College and related teaching and placement venues. The policy also aims to inform Employees, Trainee Counsellors and Pre-accredited therapists who have contact with children or who come across information that meets a certain threshold of risk to the welfare of children of their obligations to recognise Child Protection and Welfare concerns and to respond appropriately.

This policy is intended to ensure compliance with the Children First Act 2015 and is based on Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017. Trainee Counsellors and Pre-accredited therapists may encounter information (current or historical) that meets the threshold for mandated reporting, and this policy is intended to provide Guidance for those situations, where appropriate.

1.2 General Principles Governing this Policy

- A child is a person under the age of 18, excluding a person who is or has been married.
- The protection of children is of paramount importance, regardless of all other considerations.
- Children should be protected, treated with respect, listened to, and have their own views taken into consideration.
- Employees, Trainee Counsellors, and Pre-accredited Therapists of PCI Counselling Service have a duty to raise concerns about the behaviour of others which may be harmful to children.
- Tusla should be informed without delay when there are reasonable grounds for concern that a child may have been, is being, or is at risk of being abused or neglected.
- Best practices should be adopted to minimise the possibility of harm or accidents happening to children.
- This policy is not intended to replace the existing structures or policies within the PCI Counselling Service but rather to complement them.

2. Responsibilities

2.1 General

It is the responsibility of PCI Counselling Service to implement this policy, appoint a Designated Liaison Person and generally ensure the promotion of the protection of children within PCI Counselling Service.

2.2 Training and Informing Employees, Trainee Counsellor, and Pre-accredited therapists

This Child Protection Policy will be available to all Employees, Trainee Counsellors, and Pre-accredited Therapists via the PCI College Website. They must confirm they have read and understood the policy upon employment/placement. Employees, Trainee Counsellors, and Pre-accredited Therapists will be required to verify that they have read the policy when starting their placement/employment within the Counselling Service.

The Designated Liaison Person will be required to attend specialised training in the area and keep up to date.

2.3 Duty to Report

PCI Counselling Service is available to clients who are aged 18 years and older, however, Employees, Trainee Counsellors, and Pre-accredited Therapists must be alert to the possibility that clients with whom they work with could be victims of historical abuse.

In the case of a client who gives an account of historical abuse, the Employees, Trainee Counsellors, and Pre-accredited Therapists must inquire whether the abuse has been reported to the authorities. The client should be made aware of the responsibility of the Employees, Trainee Counsellors, and Pre-accredited Therapists to report when there are reasonable grounds for concern that a child may have been, is being or is at risk of being abused or neglected.

Reasonable grounds for a child protection or welfare concern include:

- 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 the child being abused
- An account from an adult survivor (in this case an adult client) of childhood abuse where the offender is at large with access to minors.

All Employees, Trainee Counsellors, and Pre-accredited Therapists must discuss any concerns with the Designated Liaison Person. If the Designated Liaison Person or their Deputy is unavailable, Employees, Trainee Counsellors, and Pre-accredited Therapists should report reasonable concerns directly to Tusla, or if the child is in immediate danger, to An Garda Síochána.

3. Reporting Framework

3.1 Making a Report to the Designated Liaison Person

Any Employees, Trainee Counsellors, and Pre-accredited Therapists who suspect Child Abuse or have come across information about historic abuse through their placement in PCI Counselling Service should report this to the Designated Liaison Person.

Such a report should contain the following:

1. Details of the child and the suspected abuse.
2. Enough information to establish the basis of the concerns.
3. An accurate record of their observations and/or the conversation with the adult client, child, or other person (if any). The Designated Liaison Person will receive and assess all such reports. The role of the Designated Liaison Person is not to investigate or interview relevant parties but to assess whether the information available demonstrates a reasonable concern of abuse or neglect. Once the Designated Liaison Person is satisfied that a report meets the required threshold, they will report it to Tusla without delay. In those cases where the Designated Liaison Person decides not to report concerns to Tusla or An Garda Síochána, the employee or therapist who raised the concerns should be given a clear written statement of why the Designated Liaison Person is not taking such action.

The Employees, Trainee Counsellors, and Pre-accredited Therapists should 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 Síochána.

The Designated Liaison Person should record the full details of all concerns or allegations of child abuse brought to his or her attention and the actions taken in relation to a concern or allegation of child abuse.

3.2 Making a Report to Tusla

3.2.1 When a report should be made

The Designated Liaison Person must report to Tusla as soon as possible if they know, believe, or have reasonable grounds to suspect, based on information they have received, acquired, or become aware of in the course of their employment, that a child has been, is being or is likely to be harmed. A report must also be made where a child has disclosed to the Designated Liaison Person that the child believes they have been, is being or is likely to be harmed. Harm is defined here as follows:

1. 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

2. Sexual abuse of the child.

A Designated Liaison Person should also report to Tusla if he or she has a reasonable concern that a child may have been, is being or is at risk of being abused or neglected.

Where the Designated Liaison Person remains uncertain, they should contact Tusla for informal advice relating to the allegation, concern, or disclosure.

3.2.2 Making a Report

All reports made by the Designated Liaison Person to Tusla should be on the Child Protection and Welfare Form ([Child Protection and Welfare Report Form FINAL.pdf \(tusla.ie\)](#)) or in the case of historic abuse, on a Retrospective Abuse form ([Retrospective Abuse Report Form FINAL.pdf \(tusla.ie\)](#)) and contain all necessary information, unless the risk is immediate requiring the report to be made without delay.

In making a report on suspected actual child abuse, the Designated Liaison Person must ensure that the priority is always for the safety and welfare of the child and that no child is ever left in a situation that could place the child/young person in immediate danger. If there is a serious and imminent risk to the child and it is not possible to contact Tusla, the Designated Liaison Person should report it to An Garda Síochána.

3.2.3 Other Obligations when Making a Report

Where the Designated Liaison Person is making a report to Tusla, they should, where appropriate, also inform the child's family regarding the concern and the report. This is not appropriate where doing so would place the child at further risk, where the family's knowledge could impair Tusla's ability to carry out a risk assessment or if it is reasonably believed that this might put the person making the report at risk of harm from the family. It is not the role of the Designated Liaison Person to investigate whether the allegations or complaints are valid. This investigation is the responsibility of Tusla and An Garda Síochána.

3.2.4 Allegations of Child Abuse against an Employee, Trainee Counsellor, Pre-accredited therapist

When an allegation of child abuse arises in relation to an Employee, Trainee Counsellor, Pre-accredited Therapist, PCI Counselling Service holds a dual responsibility in its duty of care in:

3.2.5 Safeguarding children: This must always take priority. PCI Counselling Service will ensure that all appropriate steps, as outlined in the above section 3, are followed in relation to reporting suspected child abuse to the civil and (as necessary) criminal authorities and do what is within its power to ensure that no child continues to be exposed to the risk of being abused.

3.2.6 Dealing with the person accused: In case of any allegation of child abuse made against an Employee, Trainee Counsellor, or pre-Accredited therapist, the reporting framework procedures outlined above must first be followed, and the Designated Liaison Person must be informed immediately. Any necessary protective measure should be taken.

PCI Counselling Service must ensure that proper procedures are followed in relation to the person against whom the complaint has been made, in line with fair procedures, natural justice and a presumption of innocence until the contrary is proven.

3.2.7 Retrospective Disclosure of Child Abuse by an Adult

If an adult makes a disclosure to a PCI Counselling Service Employee, Trainee Counsellor or Pre-accredited therapist of abuse suffered during their childhood, and it is believed there may be a current risk to any child who may be in contact with the alleged abuser, the Designated Liaison Person should be informed.

If a risk is deemed to exist, then the Designated Liaison Person must inform Tusla and/or An Garda Síochána.

In addition to the reporting requirement, if a PCI Counselling Service Employees, Trainee Counsellor, and Pre-accredited therapist makes a disclosure of abuse suffered during their childhood, the Designated Liaison Person should ensure they are provided with the contact information for relevant support service.

3.2.8 Disclosure of Child Abuse to Employee, Trainee Counsellor, Pre-accredited Therapist

3.2.8 (1) Disclosure by a Child

The Counselling Service is available for those aged over 18, however in the unlikely event that a child makes a disclosure of abuse to an Employee, Trainee Counsellor, or Pre-accredited Therapist, a report must be made to the Designated Liaison Person as soon as possible

The best practice for dealing with these disclosures is to:

- React calmly
- Listen carefully and attentively
- Take the child seriously
- Reassure the child that they have taken the right action in talking to you
- Do not promise to keep anything secret
- Ask questions for clarification only. Do not ask leading questions
- Check back with the child that what you have heard is correct and understood
- Do not express any opinions about the alleged abuser
- Ensure that the child understands the procedures that will follow
- Make a written record of the conversation as soon as possible, in as much detail as possible
- Treat the information confidentially, subject to the requirements of this Guidance and legislation

3.2.8 (2) Disclosure from Another Person

If a disclosure is made to an Employee, Trainee Counsellor, or Pre-accredited Therapist from another person to the effect that there is reasonable suspicion that abuse is alleged to have taken place against a child, the person receiving the disclosure must make a report to the DLP. In advance of making the report you are required to:

- Request the complainant to make a written statement.
- Tell the complainant that there is a procedure in place for dealing with such allegations and that the person responsible will be in contact with them as soon as possible.
- Ensure the information is reported as soon as possible to the Designated Liaison Person.
- Once the information is provided to the Designated Liaison Person, they are then responsible for ensuring that the suspicions or allegations are managed in accordance with the reporting framework.

3.2.9 Persons Reporting Possible Child Abuse

The provisions of the Protections for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act 1998 provide immunity from civil liability to persons who make reports reasonably and in good faith to the HSE or An Garda Síochána.

It is a criminal offence to withhold information about a serious offence against a person under 18 years or a vulnerable person under the Criminal Justice (Withholding of Information on Offences against Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012.

4. Designated Liaison Person Role and Appointment

The Designated Liaison Person will have responsibility for the promotion and implementation of this policy.

This role is described in this section and shall be the Designated Liaison Person for the purposes of the Children First Act 2015.

There will also be a Deputy Designated Liaison Person appointed for times when the Designated Liaison Person is not available.

The role of the Designated Liaison Person is to liaise with outside agencies and to be a resource person for any employee, Trainee Counsellor or Pre-accredited Therapist who has child protection concerns.

The Designated Liaison Person is responsible for ensuring that reporting procedures within PCI Counselling Service are followed so that Child Welfare concerns are referred promptly to Tusla.

The Designated Liaison Person and Deputy Designated Liaison Person will be appointed by the Academic Director. The Designated Liaison Person should be accessible to all employees, Trainee Counsellors, and Pre-accredited therapists of the service.

4.1 Responsibilities

The responsibilities of the Designated Liaison Person are:

- To undertake relevant training and keep up to date on child protection policy and practice.
- To provide support and information to employees, Trainee Counsellors, and Pre-accredited therapists who are dealing with/have dealt with a child protection concern or disclosure.
- To receive reports of alleged or suspected or actual child abuse, process these without delay and decide on the appropriate action, in line with the Guidance in previous sections.

- To report suspected child abuse to Tusla in appropriate cases.
- To build a working relationship with the Child and Family Agency Tusla, An Garda Síochána and other agencies, as appropriate.
- To assist Tusla in assessing a concern, where requested.
- To ensure that supports are put in place for the child, employee, or student in case of allegations being made.
- To liaise with the Academic Director, All Programme Leaders, Clinical Manager as appropriate.
- To ensure that systems are in place for recording and retaining all relevant documentation in relation to Child Protection issues safely and appropriately in line with the Counselling Service's GDPR policy.
- To ensure the circulation of this Child Protection Policy among all Employees, Trainee Counsellors, and Pre-Accredited therapists of the Counselling Service, existing and new, and ensure further training is recommended and provided where appropriate.
- To be consulted if any new services or activities involving children are developed and to ensure relevant training and procedures are in place.
- To review the PCI Counselling Service's Policy and Procedure on Child Protection every two years and ensure their continued relevance and appropriateness.

5. Confidentiality

5.1 No Guarantee of Secrecy in Matters of Child Abuse

An Employee, Trainee Counsellor, and Pre-accredited Therapist should never promise to keep secret any information that is divulged. It should be explained to the child or disclosing adult that this information cannot be kept secret but that only those who need to know to safeguard any child/ren will be told.

5.2 Confidentiality of Information and Data Protection

It is essential in the reporting of any case of alleged or suspected abuse that the principle of confidentiality applies.

The information should only be shared with persons who have a need to know to safeguard a child and the number of people that need to be informed should be kept to a minimum.

It must be noted that the provision of information to the statutory agencies for the protection of a child is not a breach of confidentiality or data protection.

All data in relation to child protection records must comply with Data Protection legislation and must be stored in a safe and confidential manner.

6. Useful Contacts

PCI College Designated Liaison Person (DLP) Georgina Kennedy: email gkennedy@pcicollege.ie or phone +353 1 464 2268 | +44 0 289 099 7852

PCI College Deputy Designated Liaison Person: Louise Brennan: email lbrennan@pcicollege.ie or phone +353 1 464 2268 | **M:** +353 087 7930577

Details for all **Social Work Teams** can be found here:

[Contact a Social Worker Tusla - Child and Family Agency](#)

Local **Garda Stations** listed here:

[Station Directory - Garda](#)

Emergency: 999/112