

OMBUDSMAN FOR CHILDREN'S OFFICE
CHILD PROTECTION POLICY AND PROCEDURES

JUNE 2008

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Ombudsman for Children's Office is an independent statutory body established under the Ombudsman for Children Act, 2002. The role of the Ombudsman for Children is to safeguard and promote the rights and interests of children and young people under the age of eighteen.

The functions of the Ombudsman for Children are:

- to conduct investigations of complaints regarding actions by public bodies;
- to promote children's rights, including through participation and communication activities, and
- to provide research and policy advice.

Children and young people are an integral part of our work in the Ombudsman for Children's Office (OCO). Already, the OCO has involved children and young people extensively in the work of the Office. This has included:

- The establishment of the Youth Advisory Panel
- Development of the OCO Participation Space
- Design of the OCO website
- Media work relating to the OCO
- Recruitment of OCO staff
- Transition year student placements in the OCO
- Targeted consultations with children and young people
- Use of the Participation Space by outside groups for projects and activities/events
- Visits to schools and youth projects

Children and young people will continue to be centrally involved in of our work, including through:

- working in the office;
- visiting the office;
- going to meetings in the office and around the country;
- going to conferences;
- staying at residential events;
- being involved in research projects and consultations;
- bringing complaints directly to the OCO;
- phoning;
- writing;
- e-mailing, using MSN, texting etc.

Children and young people, and the adults who care for them, need to be confident that the OCO can provide a safe environment. This document sets out how we intend to do that. This is a first edition of our policy and procedures. They will be reviewed regularly by staff, children and young people and those associated with them so we can keep making them better.

At the OCO, we aim to provide as safe an environment as it is possible to do while giving young people exciting opportunities and challenges. We need to follow laws and guidelines and what is seen as “best practice.” However, because our job is to keep an eye on whether laws and practices truly respect children and young people’s rights, we will always be asking ourselves and others whether the rules that are meant to be protecting children are really doing that job. We always seek to exceed minimum standards for child protection set down in the national guidelines.

We welcome comments and suggestions from children and young people, parents and others about our child protection policy and will keep our policy under review to ensure that it is the best it can be.

Commitment to review this policy and conduct training for staff

The OCO will keep its child protection policy and procedures under continuous review. We will also conduct comprehensive periodic reviews of our child protection policies and procedures. The first such review will be undertaken in April 2008.

It is the responsibility of all members of staff to contribute to the continuous and periodic reviews of the OCO’s child protection policy and procedures.

We are committed to conducting ongoing training for staff in relation to our child protection policy and procedures.

2. POLICY STATEMENT

In fulfilling our statutory responsibility to promote the rights of children and young people, we use the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) as our guide.

The general principles of the Convention are: the right to freedom from discrimination (Article 2), the best interests rule which provides that the best interests of the child shall be the primary consideration in all matters affecting them (Article 3) and the right of the child to express their views freely (Article 12). The CRC also sets out the right children to protection from abuse (Article 19).

The policy set out in this document is guided by the CRC and based on the official guidelines for the protection of children adopted by the State.

These are set out in the following documents:

1. Department of Health and Children, *Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children*; ¹
2. Department of Health and Children, *Our Duty to Care: Principles of Good Practice for the Protection of Children and Young People*;

Our policy statement on child protection is:

The OCO is committed to providing a safe environment for children and young people with whom we work, one in which they are treated with dignity and respect and protected from all forms of harm and abuse, including exploitation. The best interests of children will be paramount at all times. All staff who come into contact with children and young people in their work have a duty to safeguard and promote the rights of children. Child protection is everyone's business. In the event that we become aware of or suspect that abuse has taken place, we undertake to report the matter without delay to the appropriate authorities.

The OCO will provide training and support in relation to our child protection policy and procedures to all staff.

¹ Department of Health and Children, *Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children*, Dublin: Stationery Office, 1999 and 2004; Department of Health and Children, *Our Duty to Care: The Principles of Good Practice for the Protection of Children and Young People*, Dublin: Stationery Office, 2001.

3 DEFINITIONS

Child Abuse

The principal types of child abuse are set out in “Children First: the National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children”. These are reproduced below.

It is important that all staff understand these different types of abuse as they are central to the statutory child protection system. Any action taken by the Health Service Executive (HSE), for example, will be based on these definitions. Child abuse can be categorised into four different types: neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse. A child may be subjected to one or more forms of abuse at any given time.

Neglect

Neglect can be defined in terms of an *omission*, where the 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 similar age.

Neglect generally becomes apparent in different ways *over a period of time* rather than at one specific point. For instance, a child who suffers a series of minor injuries is not having his or her needs met for supervision and safety. A child whose ongoing failure to gain weight or whose height 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 severely affected.

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is normally to be found in the *relationship* between a care-giver and a child rather than in a specific event or pattern of events. It occurs when a child's need for affection, approval, consistency and security are not met. Unless other forms of abuse are present, it is rarely manifested in terms of physical signs or symptoms. Examples of emotional abuse of children include:

- (i) the imposition of negative attributes on children, expressed by persistent criticism, sarcasm, hostility or blaming;
- (ii) conditional parenting in which the level of care shown to a child is made contingent on his or her behaviours or actions;
- (iii) emotional unavailability by the child's parent/carer;
- (iv) unresponsiveness, inconsistent, or inappropriate expectations of the child;
- (v) premature imposition of responsibility on the child;
- (vi) unrealistic or inappropriate expectations of the child's capacity to understand something or to behave and control himself in a certain way;
- (vii) Under or over-protection of the child;

- (viii) Failure to show interest in, or provide age-appropriate opportunities for, the child's cognitive and emotional development;
- (ix) use of unreasonable or over-harsh disciplinary measures;
- (x) exposure to domestic violence.

Emotional abuse can be manifested in terms of the child's behavioural, cognitive, affective or physical functioning. Examples of these include: 'anxious' attachment, nonorganic failure to thrive, unhappiness, low self-esteem, educational and developmental underachievement, 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.

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is any form of non-accidental injury or injury which results from wilful or neglectful failure to protect a child. Examples of physical injury include the following:

- (i) shaking
- (ii) use of excessive force in handling
- (iii) deliberate poisoning
- (iv) suffocation
- (v) Munchausen's Syndrome by Proxy where an adult may fabricate stories of illness about a child so as to cause physical signs of illness
- (vi) allowing or creating a substantial risk of significant harm to a child.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse occurs when a child is used by another person for his or her gratification or sexual arousal or for that of others. Examples of child sexual abuse include the following:

- (i) exposure of the sexual organs or any sexual act intentionally performed in the presence of the child;
- (ii) intentional touching or molesting of the body of a child whether by a person or object for the purpose of sexual arousal or gratification;
- (iii) masturbation in the presence of the child or the involvement of the child in an act of masturbation;
- (iv) sexual intercourse with the child whether oral, vaginal, or anal;
- (v) Sexual exploitation of a child 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, video tape 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.

It should be noted that the definition of child sexual abuse presented in this section is not a legal definition and is not intended to be a description of the criminal offences of sexual assault.

Consensual sexual activity involving an under-age person.

The age of consent to sexual relations for both girls and boys is 17 years. This means that sexual relations involving any young person or child under the age of 17 is illegal. It is illegal for someone over the age of consent to engage in sexual relations with a young person under 17 years of age. It is also illegal for two young people both under the age of consent to engage in sexual relations.

Matters falling outside of the ambit of the Children First Guidelines

When the OCO receives information which does not fall within the definitions set out above but which nonetheless raises a concern for the OCO about the welfare, safety, health or well-being of a child, the OCO will raise this concern with the appropriate authorities/agencies.

Child/Young person

Our child protection policies and procedures apply to all children and young people under the age of 18 years with whom we are in contact.

Staff

For the purpose of this policy, staff are defined as:

- Those employed by the OCO on a full or part time basis;
- Individuals with whom the organisation contracts for services on a sessional basis;
- Placements with OCO;
- Volunteers with OCO;
- Internships;
- Agency Staff.

Youth Advisory Panel members are not designated as staff but will be encouraged to discuss any child protection concerns with the Participation Staff.

4. RECOGNITION OF CHILD ABUSE

This information is based on that set out in “Children First; the National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children”.

The ability to recognise child abuse depends as much on a person’s willingness to accept the possibility of its existence as it does on their knowledge and information. The possibility of child abuse should be considered if:

- a child appears to have suffered a suspicious injury for which no reasonable explanation can be offered.
- a child seems distressed without obvious reason or displays persistent or new behavioural problems.
- a child displays unusual or fearful responses to an adult who is responsible for their care at any particular time.

It is important to remember that many signs of child abuse are non-specific, and that alternative explanations for indicators should always be considered.

Indicators of Concern/Possible Abuse that Require Attention

Young people will sometimes, though not always, disclose that they are being physically or sexually abused, and are less likely to disclose emotional abuse or neglect. It is possible that staff will become concerned because of a young person’s behaviour, or because of something that is reported by another person. The following examples would constitute reasonable grounds for concern and should be reported to the designated liaison person:

- disclosures of abuse by a young person
- age-inappropriate or abnormal sexual play or knowledge
- specific injuries or patterns of injuries
- signs of injury for which there is no explanation, or which is consistent with abuse and is unlikely to be caused in any other way
- absconding from home
- attempted suicide
- under-age pregnancy or sexually transmitted disease
- someone else (a parent, friend, co-worker) may disclose that a young person has told them they are being abused, or may have witnessed the abuse themselves
- a young person’s behaviour may raise concerns
- there may be consistent indication, over a period of time, that a young person is suffering from emotional or physical neglect
- signs in one or more of the above categories at any one time.

5. PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

In the OCO we aim to create an environment in which children are listened to, given a sense of belonging, and kept safe; parents are supported and encouraged; and staff who work with children and young people are supported and protected. We will endeavour to do this by:

- Following and the National Child Protection Guidelines (copies given to each staff member and available in the library)
- Following the OCO's code of conduct for staff, as set out in section () of this document;
- Ensuring that the best interest of children are always treated as the paramount consideration, regardless of all other considerations;
- Having a number of designated liaison persons who have received appropriate training and support for this role;
- Ensuring all staff understand their responsibilities in being alert to the signs of abuse
- All staff must understand their responsibilities to refer any concerns to the designated liaison person. For further details see reporting procedure.
- Sharing information on the protection of children should be on a need to know basis, with reference to the OCO's confidentiality statement below.
- Ensuring that any documentation relating to children and young people is filed appropriately in line with the OCO's confidentiality statement
- Ensuring safe recruitment and selection procedures are practised for staff employed by the OCO. Refer to Policy and Procedures on Recruitment and Selection;
- Providing effective management for staff through supervision, support and training. Refer to management and supervision procedures.
- Providing procedures for responding to accidents and complaints
- Ensuring children and young people are aware of the responsibilities placed on OCO staff to report allegations of abuse;
- Ensuring Parents/carers are aware of the responsibility on the OCO staff to report allegations of abuse;
- Maintaining written records of concern expressed by or about children/young people; See Appendix B
- Following the procedure where an allegation is made against a member of staff.
- Ensuring that outside agencies who have substantial unsupervised contact with children and young people, who are commissioned to undertake work on behalf of OCO have read, understood and agreed to comply with the OCO's child protection policy (we can build this into our tenders/contracts as well)
- Adopting the safest possible practices to minimise the possibility of harm or accidents happening to children and protect workers from the necessity to take risks and leave themselves open to accusations of abuse or neglect;
- Acknowledging that early intervention with children who are vulnerable or at risk may prevent serious harm from happening to them at a later stage
- Acknowledging that a child's age, gender and background affect they way they experience and understand what is happening to them
- Providing child protection training for members of staff. This will clarify the responsibilities of both the OCO and individuals, and clearly show the procedures to be followed if child abuse is suspected

- Developing a policy of openness with parents that involves consulting them about everything that concerns their children, and encouraging them to get involved with the organisation wherever possible;
- Co-operating with any other child care and protection agencies and professionals by sharing information when necessary and working together towards the best possible outcome for the children concerned;
- Making links with other relevant organisations in order to promote child protection and welfare policies and practices

6. PROCEDURE TO BE FOLLOWED FOR DISCLOSURES, SUSPICIONS OR REPORTS OF ABUSE

6.1 General reporting procedure

If a member of staff receives a report or has a suspicion that a child may have been abused, or is being abused, or is at risk of abuse, the following steps must be taken.

- 1) A staff member who receives a disclosure will explain to the informant that the nature of the information disclosed means that it cannot be kept **confidential** and that they have a duty to report it to the Designated Liaison Person / HSE
- 2) The matter must be reported to the one of the DLPs without delay
- 3) A member of staff who suspects that a child or young person may be experiencing abuse must bring this to the attention of one of the DLPs without delay
- 4) The details of the disclosure/suspicion must be recorded in writing by the staff member to the whom disclosure is made or who has a suspicion immediately. A written report should confine itself to a factual description of the disclosure/suspicion and must be given to the DLP.
- 5) If the DLP is satisfied that there are **reasonable grounds** (see section 7.2) for the suspicion or allegation, he/she should make a report to the HSE immediately in person, by phone or in writing. See appendix for HSE contact details.
- 6) In the event of an emergency, or the non availability of HSE staff, the report should be made to An Garda Síochána.
- 7) All written reports must be placed in a secure location by the DLP. The need for confidentiality, as referred to in Section 7 below should be respected.

See Appendix 1 for Guidelines for written reports.

6.2 Reporting procedure in relation to allegations of abuse against a member of staff

If allegations of abuse of a child or young person are made against a staff member the following procedure must be followed.

- 1) All staff members have a duty to report abuse of a child or young person by another member of OCO staff, which they witnessed or have been advised of to one of the DLPs.
- 2) The DLP will inform the Ombudsman for Children of the report without delay.
- 3) The protection of the child must be considered as a priority and any member of staff about whom allegations have been made, must be removed from having direct contact with children, with immediate effect. This decision will be taken by the Ombudsman for Children.
- 4) The Ombudsman for Children and the DLP shall review the information received. If they are satisfied that there are **reasonable grounds** (see section 7.2) for the

- suspicion or allegation, they should make a report to the HSE immediately in person, by phone or in writing. See appendix for HSE contact details.
- 5) The Ombudsman shall inform the member of staff of the fact that an allegation has been made against him/her and the nature of the allegation. The employee will be afforded an opportunity to respond. Where a report has been/will be made to the HSE, the employees response will also be forwarded to the HSE.
 - 6) Internal disciplinary matters will be dealt with by the Ombudsman for Children in accordance with the employees contract of employment and other relevant internal disciplinary rules. An employee may be suspended pending investigation of the allegation. This is not to pre-empt the findings of the investigation but to facilitate the investigation.
 - 7) If an allegation is made against one of the DLPs, the other DLP and Ombudsman will deal with the matter.
 - 8) If an allegation is made against the Ombudsman for Children, the allegation will be referred to an external entity for consideration as to the reasonableness of the allegation as per the Children First Guidelines. If the external entity makes a referral to the HSE, it shall notify the HSE of Section 4(3) of the Ombudsman for Children Act, 2002.
 - 9) There will be situations in which suspicions or allegations may turn out to be unfounded. It is very important that everyone in the organisation knows that if they raise a concern which, through the process of investigation, is not validated, they have not in any way been wrong in their initial action.
 - 10) Responsible action should be encouraged and those who report concerns enabled to feel confident of support.

7. Information on key words set out in the reporting procedures

7.1 Confidentiality

The purpose of this section is to give guidance on issues concerning confidentiality and the exchange of information. The effective protection of a child often depends on the willingness of staff involved with children to share and exchange relevant information; it is critical that there is a clear understanding of professional and legal responsibilities in regard to confidentiality and the exchange of information

All information regarding concern or assessment of child abuse should be shared on "a need to know" basis, in the best interest of the child. No undertakings regarding secrecy can be given. Those working with a child and family should make this clear to all parties involved.

Ethical and statutory codes concerned with confidentiality and data protection provide general guidance. They are not intended to limit or prevent the exchange of information between different professional staff who have a responsibility for ensuring the protection of children. **Giving information to others for the protection of a child is not a breach of confidentiality.**

It must be clearly understood that information which is gathered for one purpose must not be used for another without consulting the person who provided that information. The issue of confidentiality will be part of the training necessary for members of staff who work in the area of child protection and the general training of staff which work with children in the OCO.

Exchange of Information

Arrangements for child protection can only be successful if staff works in partnership and share relevant information, in particular with the HSE and An Garda Síochána.

Anyone who receives information from colleagues about possible or actual child abuse must treat it as having been given in confidence.

7.2 REASONABLE GROUNDS (FROM CHILDREN FIRST)

The following examples would constitute reasonable grounds for concern:

- (i) specific indication from the child that (s)he was abused;
- (ii) an account by a person who saw the child being abused;
- (iii) evidence, *such as an injury or behaviour* which is consistent with abuse and unlikely to be caused another way;
- (iv) an injury or behaviour which is consistent both with abuse and with an innocent explanation but where there are corroborative indicators supporting the concern that it may be

a case of abuse. An example of this would be a pattern of injuries, an implausible explanation, other indications of abuse, dysfunctional behaviour;

(v) consistent indication, over a period of time, that a child is suffering from emotional or physical neglect.

A suspicion which is not supported by any objective indication of abuse or neglect would not generally constitute a reasonable suspicion or reasonable grounds for concern. However, information which raises concern may be passed on to the HSE, in the absence of any objective indications, at the determination of one of the DLPs having regard to the reasonable grounds set out in para 7.2. (i) – (v).

It is important that persons reporting suspected child abuse to the HSE should establish the basis for their concerns. At the same time, they should not interview the child or the child's parents/carers in any detail about the alleged abuse without first consulting the HSE; this may be more appropriately carried out by the HSE social worker or An Garda Síochána.

8. Responsibility of Staff

8.1 Reporting

The identification and confirmation of alleged and actual abuse must be left to the appropriate professionals and agencies. Staff who have concerns about a child or young person who is in contact with the OCO must report their concerns to one of the designated liaison persons. The process by which this happens is detailed below, and the information which must be recorded is outlined in Appendix 1

In a case where a child or young person makes allegations, it is the responsibility of staff to whom allegations are disclosed to:

- listen to the child or young person rather than questioning them;
- allow the child or young person to freely record events;
- explain to the child or young person what you have to do and who you have to tell;
- record the discussion accurately and in writing as soon as possible after the event;
- report the matter orally and in writing to the DLP
- or, in their absence to the second DLP or in their absence to the Ombudsman.
- **If none of the above is available, pass the information directly to HSE or An Garda Síochána. If in doubt refer.**
- If a member of staff assesses that the child is in immediate danger, contact the Garda Síochána and advise the DLP as soon as possible

Staff must **never attempt to investigate allegations further**. This may impede any later investigations by the authorities.

8.2 Meeting children and young people

The following points shall be observed when members of the OCO staff meet with children and young people:

- There should be at least 2 adults present at all OCO organised events and activities for children and young people.
- The buildings and facilities used for events and activities should be suitable, safe and secure. In particular, fire and evacuation procedures should be in place and a first aid kit should be readily available.
- Alcohol, tobacco and drugs shall never be given or used in the OCO's work with children and young people.
- A record of children and young people participating in an OCO activity shall be kept which should include a copy of the signed parental/guardian consent form or letter.

- A written record of OCO staff in attendance at events shall also be kept and an Incident Report Form shall be completed by OCO staff in the event of an accident or incident relating to a child or young person occurring during any OCO activity or event.
- A written record of any instances where an OCO staff member has been alone in a private space with a child is to be kept. In situations where it is unavoidable that a member of staff will meet alone with a child or young person - such a request from a child or young person to speak confidentially - the meeting will take place in one of our meeting rooms with transparent walls where both the child or young person and the staff member are visible to others.
- Children and young people should not be permitted to work or remain in the OCO office unless there are at least two staff members present.
- OCO staff members will not undertake any car or minibus journey alone with a child or young person. If in certain circumstances only one staff member is available, there should be a minimum of two children or young people present for the entire journey. In the event of an emergency where it is necessary to make a journey alone with a child, we will make a record of this and inform the child's parents or guardians as soon as possible.

8.3 Intimate care needs

Intimate care needs are those personal needs which people usually take care of themselves but are unable to due to their age, development or to a disability. Children with certain types of needs might require assistance with eating, drinking or taking medication, and with aspects of personal care such as washing, dressing and toileting.

As staff members may not have the expertise or resources required to meet a child's needs in every situation, the OCO will discuss those needs with the child/young person in question and their parents or guardians to agree on the most appropriate way of meeting them. It may be that the OCO will ask a nominated and trained individual who is not a member of staff - such as a parent or carer - to assist at the event in question.

The OCO shall itself agree to meet the intimate care needs of children and young people only if a member of staff is properly trained to do so.

9 ROLE OF THE DESIGNATED LIAISON PERSON

The Designated Liaison Person will be responsible for dealing with complaints or concerns regarding child abuse. The name and contact details of the designated person will be made known to everyone involved in the organisation and its activities (workers, children and young people, parents and guardians). The OCO will designate staff members to fulfil this role.

The role of the designated person is:

- to act as a resource for any person involved in the OCO (staff member, child or young person, parent or guardian) who has concerns about any aspect of child protection during the course of our participation work with children and young people
- to act as a liaison person, where necessary, with the statutory agencies responsible for receiving and handling complaints of child abuse i.e. the HSE and An Garda Síochána

In the context of the participation work of the OCO, it will be the responsibility of the designated person to:

- hear concerns regarding child abuse
- receive complaints of child abuse
- report suspicions or allegations of child abuse to the relevant statutory authorities
- maintain ongoing contact with the statutory authorities
- ensure that a complete written record is kept in relation to the complaint or concern, including subsequent action taken by the OCO, all communications with the statutory authorities, and the outcome of the referral.

10. SAFE RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION PROCEDURES

In accordance with section 21 of the Ombudsman for Children Act 2002, the staff of the Ombudsman for Children's office are considered to be civil servants in the Civil Service of the State.

Staff appointed to the Office are recruited in one of three ways:

- through the existing civil service personnel section of the Department of Health & Children;
- through the Public Appointments Commission;
- directly by the Ombudsman for Children's Office from an agency or on a consultancy basis.

The Ombudsman for Children's Office follows a rigorous recruitment and selection process for all job applicants. This involves:

1. The preparation of a job description which outlines the responsibilities of the job and the person specification indicating the skills and competencies required to perform the job.
2. The job description will make explicit reference to the Ombudsman for Children's Office policy on duty of all employees to report any concerns regarding the safeguarding the welfare of all children who come into contact with the staff of the Office of the Ombudsman for Children.
3. Being interviewed by a panel that will involve children when appropriate, to elicit the ability of an individual who will be working directly with children in the Office.
4. All information provided by applicants will be validated and verified. Any information gaps will be questioned and validated.
5. Applicants will be asked to confirm their identity by providing photographic i.d. together with their signature.
6. Offers of employment will be made subject to satisfactory references, which will include a reference from the current or most recent employer. A minimum of two references will be sought.
7. Offers of employment are subject to Garda vetting. Third parties contracted to conduct work with children and young people will also be subject to Garda vetting.
8. Successful applicants are required to sign a declaration form which obliges them to disclose any information that may affect their suitability for employment in the Office of the Ombudsman for Children. Any information about their suitability withheld during the recruitment process may result in the termination of the person's employment.

9. Where practicable recruitment procedures should be consistent for all staff employed by the OCO, whether filled on a temporary basis or permanent basis.

This process will apply to employees or volunteers working with the Office of the Ombudsman for Children.

11. RESIDENTIAL EVENTS

Residential events are those organised by the OCO which involve overnight accommodation for children and young people. For information regarding car/bus journeys with children and young people, see section 8.2.

The roles and responsibilities of staff members and other adults participating in residential events should be outlined clearly to children and young people as well as parents/guardians. While all adults who have a support or supervisory role at such events have a duty of care, an OCO staff member should act as the nominated leader. The leader shall be required to act in loco parentis and to have overall responsibility for the children and young people's well being and sleeping arrangements.

In organising residential events, OCO staff shall have regard to the following:

- If children and young people are sharing rooms, they should be with those of the same age group and sex.
- Children and young people should at all times know where the responsible adults can be found.
- Adequate adult to child ratios should be observed.
- Adults should not sleep in the same room as children or young people (with the exception of parents or carers who have accompanied children with support needs). Where the presence of an adult is needed, there should more than one child in the room with the adult.

Appendix 1

Recording allegations or suspicions of abuse

Checklist of details to record where allegations have been made

Name of child or young person

Age

Any special factors

Name of parent/guardian

Home address

Home telephone number

Nature of allegation

Date of allegation

Is the person making the report expressing their own concerns or passing on those of somebody else?

What has prompted the concerns? Include dates, times and details of any specific incidences

Any physical signs? Behavioural signs? Indirect signs?

Has the child or young person been spoken to? If so, what was said?

Have the parents been contacted? If so, what was said?

Has anybody been alleged to be the abuser? If so, record details.

Has anyone else been consulted? If so, record details.

Who information is passed to and date when passed

Follow-up action