

Diocese of Down and Connor Safeguarding Guidance for Parishes



Safeguarding Guidance for Parishes Contents

Guidance on Safe Recruitment	4
Guidance on Code of Behaviour for Adults Working with Children and Young People	6
Guidance on Creating a Code of Behaviour with Children and Young People	8
Guidance on Dealing with Breaches of Codes of Behaviour	9
Guidance on Anti-Bullying	10
Guidance on Maintaining Adequate Supervision Ratios	11
Guidance on One-to-One Contact with Children and Young People	12
Guidance on the Participation of Children and Young People with Specific Needs	13
Guidance on Trips Away with Children and Young People	14
Guidance on Risk Assessment of Activities with Children and Young People	16
Guidance on Use of Technology	18
Guidance on Use of Photography	20
Guidance on Use of Internet	22
Guidance on Use of Texting and Email	23

Guidance on Use of Webcams and CCTV	25
Guidance on Conducting Online Ministry with Children and Young People using a Digital Platform	26
Guidance on Use of Church Property by External Groups	31
Guidance on Visiting Clergy, Religious and Seminarians Protocols	38
Guidance for Associations of the Faithful Ministering in the Diocese of Down and Connor	40
Guidance on Reporting Allegations of Abuse	43
Guidance on Whistleblowing	46
Guidance on Complaints Procedure for Safeguarding Concerns that are Not Allegations of Abuse	51
Guidance on Diocesan Safeguarding Data Protection/ Privacy Guidelines	53
Glossary of Terms	55

Guidance on Safe Recruitment

This guidance ensures that all individuals involved in Church activities are suitable for their roles and recruited safely in accordance with the Diocese of Down and Connor policies and procedures.

This guidance applies to all Church personnel, volunteers, and clergy engaged in Church activities, particularly those involving children, young people.

*** In relation to the appointment procedure for all staff, both paid Diocesan staff and clergy, a safe recruitment process is managed centrally by the Diocese, who comply with best practice and legal requirements in relation to safe recruitment and vetting.**

All Church personnel and volunteers must be subject to the appropriate recruitment procedures regardless of their position as a volunteer or employee, including clergy or religious.

General Principles of Safe Recruitment

Safe recruitment involves following best practices in interview and selection processes, and conducting Enhanced Disclosure Checks for roles deemed as Regulated Activities.

The Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (Northern Ireland) Order 2007 sets out the regulated activities and work which a person who has been barred by the Disclosure and Barring Service must not do. These activities include providing teaching, training, care, supervision, advice or guidance to children (under 18) or providing specific health or social care services to adults.

Roles & Responsibilities

Parish Priest (PP) and Group Leaders:

Define roles, advertise, and conduct interviews.

Safeguarding Committee:

Oversees vetting, references, and induction.

Northern Dioceses Vetting Office:

Conducts vetting checks.

Recruitment & Vetting Process

Step One: Define the Role

Clarify responsibilities and required skills.

Undertaken by: PP and Group Leader/Deputy.

Step Two: Volunteer Specification

Identify key qualities and qualifications.

Undertaken by: PP and Group Leader/Deputy.

Step Three: Advertise the Role

Use parish bulletins or announcements.

Undertaken by: PP and Group Leader/Deputy.

Step Four: Invitation & Application

Provide forms and outline the process.

*Undertaken by: Safeguarding Committee
Chairperson/Deputy.*

Step Five: Interview/Meeting

Assess suitability and explain safeguarding.

*Undertaken by: PP, Group Leader/Deputy,
Safeguarding Committee.*

Step Six: References

Obtain and verify two non-family references.

Undertaken by: Safeguarding Committee.

Step Seven: Vetting

Enhanced Disclosure if the role is regulated.

Undertaken by: Northern Diocese Vetting Office.

Step Eight: Appointment

Only after receiving a 'Free to Appoint' letter.

***Undertaken by: Safeguarding Committee
Chairperson and Vetting Office.***

Step Nine: Induction

**Includes safeguarding training, safeguarding policy,
codes of behaviour and agreement signing.**

Undertaken by: Group Leader.

Additional Guidance

Break in Role

A break of three months or more requires re-vetting.

Additional Roles

Sometimes a volunteer is asked to take on a role, in addition to the one they were originally vetted for. An additional role could be in their own parish, or a neighbouring parish.

Before allowing the volunteer to take up the role, the Safeguarding Committee must consult the **Northern Dioceses Vetting Office** to establish whether the volunteer has ever been vetted and what they have been vetted for.

The vetting office has drawn up a Vetting Confirmation Request Form and associated guidance for this purpose.

Relevant Forms

SO1, SO2, SO3, SO4 & SO5

USEFUL RESOURCES

- **The Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (Northern Ireland) Order 2007**
- **D&C Safeguarding – Safe Recruitment Forms:**
<https://downandconnorsafeguarding.com/volunteer-recruitment-forms/>
- **Safeguarding Policy Poster**
- **Codes of Behaviour**
- **Northern Dioceses Vetting Office:** <https://downandconnorsafeguarding.com/vetting>

Guidance on Code of Behaviour for Adults Working with Children and Young People

This guidance outlines the expected standards of behaviour for adults working with children and young people in Church settings. It aims to ensure safe, respectful, and appropriate conduct, forming a key part of the Church's safeguarding procedures.

This guidance applies to all Church personnel and volunteers involved in ministry with children and young people. It must be signed by all individuals to confirm their understanding and commitment to follow the code from the commencement of their work.

Principles

The policy is guided by the following principles:

- Respect and dignity for all children and young people.
- Clear understanding of acceptable and unacceptable behaviours.
- Involvement of children, young people, and parents/carers in shaping the code.
- Emphasis on the impact of adult behaviour over intent.
- Creation of a safe environment for children to express concerns.

Sample Code of Behaviour for Adults

All adults should:

- Treat all children with respect, dignity, and equality.
- Model positive, appropriate behaviour.
- Be aware of and follow the Church's safeguarding policies.

- Challenge and report abusive behaviour.
- Promote openness, honesty, and safety.
- Respect boundaries and support children's understanding of their rights.
- Work in open environments.
- Help children understand how to seek help.
- Report concerns to the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) or statutory services.

Adults Must Never:

- Physically assault or abuse children.
- Develop sexual or exploitative relationships with children.
- Share inappropriate content with children.
- Engage in abusive, offensive, or exploitative behaviour.
- Perform personal tasks for children that they can do themselves.
- Supervise undressing (e.g., swimming).
- Condone illegal, unsafe, or abusive behaviour.
- Intimidate, shame, humiliate, or degrade children.
- Use discriminatory language or behaviour.
- Consume alcohol, tobacco, or drugs around children.

Generally Inappropriate:

- Taking children to your home alone.
- One-to-one contact without supervision.

One-to-One Contact Guidance (Reactive Situations)

Exceptions may apply in urgent or reactive situations, such as when a child requests a one-to-one meeting or needs to be removed from a group. Church personnel and volunteers must follow the guidance outlined below and document appropriately.

In reactive situations requiring one-to-one contact:

- Prefer open environments or rooms with visual access.
- Inform another adult and keep a record of the meeting.
- Avoid being alone with a child in a building.
- Ensure meetings are documented with names, dates, times, location, reason, and outcome.

Guidance on Creating a Code of Behaviour with Children and Young People

This guidance outlines the approach for developing a Code of Behaviour with children and young people participating in Church-related activities. It ensures that children and young people are actively involved in shaping the standards of conduct within their groups, promoting respect, safety, and inclusion. This guidance applies to all Church personnel, volunteers, and children involved in Church activities where children are present.

Principles

- Children are central to the process and should be empowered to contribute meaningfully.
- Adults facilitate the process using age-appropriate methods.
- The code should promote positive behaviours and outline clear consequences for breaches.

Responsibilities

- Group leaders should facilitate a review of the codes regularly, this should be done at least annually.
- Children should be encouraged to participate in discussions and uphold the agreed code.
- Parents/carers should be informed and encouraged to support the code at home.

Example Workshop on Creating a Code of Behaviour with Children

1. Preparation

- Select appropriate materials (flip chart, pens, soft ball, Blu-Tack).

- Ensure the adult facilitator has relevant skills in child engagement.

2. Workshop Facilitation (Ages 6-10)

- Children sit in a circle and use a soft ball to manage turn-taking.
- Discuss group values and behaviours that promote teamwork and respect.
- Collaboratively choose a group name and write it on the chart.
- Develop rules together, covering:
 - Respect for people and property
 - Punctuality and attendance
 - Safeguarding and confidentiality
 - Consequences for breaking rules
 - All participants sign the code and display it during group sessions.

3. Very Young Children

- Use simple language and visual aids.
- Discuss basic principles: listening, kindness, sharing, and safety.
- Children sign or use handprints.
- Send a copy home to parents/carers.
- Repeat the activity annually.

Review and Monitoring

- The code should be reviewed at the start of each year.
- Group leaders must ensure adherence and address breaches appropriately.
- Feedback from children should be encouraged and incorporated.

USEFUL RESOURCES

- [Safeguarding Policy Poster](#)

Guidance on Dealing with Breaches of Codes of Behaviour

If a child, young person or an adult breaches the code of behaviour, efforts should be made to resolve the issue by:

- Discussion with and support for the adult or the child, young person.
- A child, young person or adult may be asked to apologise for their behaviour.
- In the case of a child or young person, involving their parents/carers.
- Agreeing on sanctions.

Sanctions may include:

- Time out of group activity.
- For children and young people, a parent/carer may be asked to attend group activities with their child for a period of time.
- For adults, retraining in leadership skills, code of behaviour, etc. may be required.
- For children and young people, the code of behaviour should be revisited and agreed upon.
- Monitoring behaviour and support on an ongoing basis.
- In serious cases, suspension or even exclusion from the group should be considered.
- Formal reporting to statutory authorities.

Guidance on Anti-Bullying

The Diocese of Down and Connor promote values which reject bullying. This guidance aims to create safe and nurturing environments where children and young people can grow and develop.

What is Bullying?

Bullying is intentional, repeated, and aggressive behaviour (physical, verbal, or psychological) directed by an individual or group against others. It can occur at any age and in any setting and may be perpetrated by both adults and peers. Isolated incidents are not bullying unless they are systematic and ongoing. Bullying causes physical and/or emotional harm and can result in significant problems of low self-esteem, social isolation, anxiety and depression for the children and young people subjected to it.

Types of Bullying

Bullying can be:

- **Emotional/Psychological:** tormenting, excluding, extorting, intimidating.
- **Physical:** hitting, kicking, damaging property.
- **Racist:** insults based on race, nationality, religion, or ethnicity.
- **Sexual:** harassment, abusive comments, or unwanted contact.
- **Verbal:** name-calling, teasing, spreading rumours.
- **Online and Cyber bullying:** misuse of digital platforms and devices.

- **Subtle:** repeated unwelcome gestures or expressions.
- **Perpetrated by Adults:** may constitute abuse and should be treated accordingly.

Prevention

To help prevent bullying, the following strategies are suggested:

- Discuss bullying openly with children and young people.
- Encourage reporting of incidents.
- Review guidance with children, parents, and parish groups.
- Promote social responsibility, tolerance, and understanding.

Addressing Bullying

- Report all incidents to the leader or person in charge.
- Record incidents in writing.
- Involve the Parish Priest for guidance.
- Inform and meet with parents.
- Investigate and stop bullying promptly.
- Support both the victim and perpetrator.
- Contact the Designated Liaison Person for the Diocese (DLP) or the statutory services if needed.

USEFUL RESOURCES

- **SBNI Online Safety Hub**
- <https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/aba-our-work>
- <https://youthworkalliance.com/index.html>
- **NSPCC/dealing with bullying**

Guidance on Maintaining Adequate Supervision Ratios

In planning a trip or activity, it is critically important to consider how many adults are needed to supervise children and young people in a safe manner. It is recommended that a certain number of adults be available to supervise a certain number of children and young people; however, this is also dependent on whether the children and young people have specific needs or requirements, and on the duration of the activity.

At a minimum, two adults are required for each activity.

In addition, the minimum following ratios should be applied, depending on the number of children:

Children aged under 2 Years
one adult to three children

Children aged 2-3 Years
one adult to four children

Children aged 4-8 Years
one adult to six children

Children aged 9-12 Years
one adult to eight children

Children aged 13-18 Years
one adult to ten children

If it is an overnight activity, additional staff should be considered. If the group is mixed, a gender balance should be maintained.

Depending on the needs and abilities of the children and the nature of the activity, you may need to have more adults than the minimum recommended.

Relevant Forms

SO6, SO7, SO8, SO9, SO10 & SO11

Guidance on One-to-One Contact with Children and Young People

Church activities should not involve one-to-one contact and should be supervised by at least two adults.

If you need to talk to a child or young person alone, try to do so in an open environment, in view of others.

If this is not possible, try to meet in rooms with visual access, or with the door open, or in a room/area where other people are nearby.

You should advise another adult that such a meeting is taking place and the reason for it.

A written record should be kept of these meetings, including names, dates, times, location, reason for the meeting and outcome. These records should be stored appropriately and securely.

Avoid meetings with individual children or young people where they are on their own in a building.

Relevant Forms

SO6, SO7, SO8, SO9, SO10 & SO11

Guidance on the Participation of Children and Young People with Specific Needs

This guidance outlines the principles and practices for including children and young people with specific needs in parish activities. It aims to ensure that all children and young people are treated with dignity, respect, and provided with equal opportunities to participate.

This guidance applies to all Church personnel, volunteers, and leaders involved in activities with children and young people, particularly those with specific needs.

Children and young people with specific needs have the same rights as any other child or young person. Inclusion should be promoted through positive attitudes and environmental adaptations. Key considerations include:

- Work in partnership with the child, young person, parents/carers and professionals to support inclusion, and agree the participation.
- Making reasonable adjustments to accommodate the child, young person.
- Building rapport and showing interest in the child, young person.
- Learning key communication methods if the child, young person has impairments.
- Some specific training may be useful or required (e.g., autism, epilepsy).
- Conducting risk assessments and ensuring appropriate supervision ratios.
- Listening carefully to children, young people and respecting their concerns.

Intimate and Personal Care

Church personnel and volunteers are generally not expected to provide intimate care. If necessary, care should be provided by identified and trained individuals with prior agreement from all parties.

Guidelines include:

- Respecting the child's, young person's dignity and privacy.
- Involving the child, young person in their own care as much as possible.
- Ensuring consistency in caregivers.
- Reporting any concerns or distress to parents/carers and safeguarding officers.

Toileting Assistance

Children and young people who can toilet themselves should be allowed to do so independently. If assistance is required:

- One volunteer may assist with another nearby.
- Consent from parents/carers is required.
- For complex needs, two volunteers may assist with prior agreement.
- Hygiene and safety procedures must be followed.

Relevant Forms

SO6, SO7, SO8, SO9, SO10 & SO11

USEFUL RESOURCES

- **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child**
- **NSPCC Safeguarding Guidelines**
- **Volunteer Now Training Programs**

Guidance on Trips Away with Children and Young People

This guidance outlines the procedures and considerations for planning and conducting trips away involving children and young people. It aims to ensure the safety, wellbeing, and safeguarding of all participants through structured planning and responsible supervision.

This guidance applies to all parish-organised trips involving children and young people, including day trips and overnight stays. It is intended for use by group leaders, volunteers, parents, carers, and safeguarding personnel.

Considerations for Planning Trips Away

Have you:

- Identified the aim and outcomes of the programme?
- Followed the Diocese of Down and Connor Child Safeguarding Policy and Procedures?
- Carried out a **Specific Risk Assessment** for this activity? ([LinkTBC](#))
- Selected and safely recruited volunteers who are appropriately trained and vetted for this activity?
- Selected a key Individual who has overall responsibility for the trip?
- Nominated a volunteer who is responsible for first aid?
- Ensured that you have adequate and gender-based **Supervision Ratios**? ([LinkTBC](#))
- Ensured that particular needs of children and young people have been taken into account for this activity?
- Appointed a contact person at home who has access to all information and contact details?

- Checked your own insurance and ensured that you have coverage for all activities?
- Checked that the transport has appropriate insurance, qualified drivers and seatbelts?
- Carried out an equipment safety check?
- Checked the first aid kit?
- Ensured there is a contingency plan?
- Made provisions for returning home early?
- Allocated a budget and contingency fund?
- Checked out the locations and accommodation of the trip away to ensure they have:
 - Appropriate safeguarding policy, practices and procedures in place?
 - Insurance cover?
 - Appropriately trained and qualified volunteers?
 - Changing areas for boys and girls (if required)?
 - Disability access (if required)?

Have Children and Young People:

- Been involved as much as possible in the planning of the trip?
- Agreed a **Code of Behaviour**? ([LinkTBC](#))
- Agreed boundaries around unstructured time?
- Been given information on appropriate clothing, and contact details for leaders?
- Consented to the trip away?

Have Parents/Carers:

- Met with leaders and been informed of the programme?
- Been given a copy of the Diocese of Down and Connor Church Child Safeguarding Policy and Procedures?
- Consented in writing?

- Given contact details, medical details including allergies, illnesses, medications and dietary requirements?
- Been given contact details of the leaders and accommodation?
- Been given details for pick up and drop off of children, young people and participants?

Have Volunteers:

- Been trained on the codes of behaviour (adult and child) and child safeguarding policy, on how to deal with a disclosure, and on dealing with code of behaviour breaches?
- Attended appropriate safeguarding training?
- Been assigned responsibilities and scheduled for breaks?
- Been made aware of how to handle an emergency, and who to contact in an emergency?
- Worked with young people to evaluate the success of the activity?

Consent and Communication

Written consent must be obtained from parents/carers for all trips. Parents should be informed of the programme, contact details, medical and dietary requirements, and logistics for drop-off and pick-up. [Consent Forms \(LinkTBC\)](#)

Overnight Stays

Additional considerations for overnight trips include:

- If there is 24/7 access to leaders/ staff?
- If there are appropriate sleeping arrangements for children and young people, i.e. separate provision for boys and girls, and separate provision for leaders (within ear shot of the children and young people)?
- If the accommodation has supervision and security?

Relevant Forms

SO6, SO7, SO8, SO9, SO10 & SO11

USEFUL RESOURCES

- **Risk Assessment Guidance**
- **Supervision Ratios**
- **Consent Forms and Medical Information**
- **Codes of Behaviour and Breaches of Codes of Behaviour**

Guidance on Risk Assessment of Activities with Children and Young People

Risk assessment is an important part of working with children and young people. It assists with managing both health and safety issues, and the welfare of those involved in the activity.

The core component of this statement is risk assessment. This should focus on any risks of harm to a child and young person, that could occur while availing of, or in attendance in your service, or at the activity you are organising.

As adults we assess risks throughout our lives, but when working with children and young people, it is important to consider potential hazards that may lead to risk to children and young people and to the adults who work with them.

Consideration of how to control or manage risks is critical. It is important to identify acceptable levels of risk, as it may not be possible to eliminate all risk, however every effort must be made to mitigate against its adverse effects. If you do not feel equipped to identify or address a risk locally, consult with your Safeguarding Committee.

Whilst this guidance is concerned primarily with risks associated with failure to follow effective safeguarding practice, it must be understood alongside the health and safety regulation and policy of the Diocese.

Whilst the focus on risk assessment should be on groups of children and young people with whom you are working, as opposed to the physical venue, if a problem with the venue is discovered during the course of the assessment, (e.g. broken glass, electrical cabling) this needs to be raised with the appropriate authority in charge of health and safety for the parish/Diocese.

What does the term 'risk' mean?

A risk is a potential source of harm or adverse health effect on a person or persons. In Northern Ireland, **Co-Operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in NI** takes its definition from the **Children (NI) Order 1995** which defines 'harm' as ill-treatment or the impairment of health or development. It states that 'ill-treatment' includes sexual abuse, forms of ill-treatment which are physical and forms of ill-treatment which are not physical; 'health' means physical and / or mental health; and 'development' means physical, intellectual, emotional, social or behavioural development.

How do I undertake a risk assessment

- 1) **Recognise** who is at risk of being harmed (for example children, volunteers, parents).
- 2) **Identify** the actual risk (e.g. injury).
- 3) **Detail** how to reduce likelihood of harm occurring.
- 4) **Record** the controls measures.
- 5) **Review** your assessment and update if necessary.

These should be documented in the risk assessment template.

This guidance and template form, sits alongside any other Health & Safety regulations and guidance.

Focus of the risk assessment should remain on the children and young people and those associated with the activity.

It may be helpful to consider the risks in stages of the activity, for example, what are the risks in advance of the activity, on arrival, during or after the activity.

Take responsibility for ensuring safe premises and procedures within the premises.

Please inform the Parish Priest or person in charge where there is a fault or issue with anything broken or damaged that could cause personal injury.

“Positive experience not an unsafe environment”

Relevant Forms

SO12 & SO13

USEFUL RESOURCES

- **Dept of Health – Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland**
- **Dept of Health – Children (NI) Order**

Guidance on Use of Technology

Church Authorities need to assess the benefits of technology and how this can be used safely and effectively, in line with rules that respect the dignity and rights of all users, particularly children and young people.

Detailed policies and procedures should be provided on the use of technology, including digital and online systems such as:

- Conducting Ministry with children using digital media.
- Photography.
- Use of Internet, texting and emailing.
- Webcams and CCTV.

The majority of occasions when people use mobile phones, computers or take photographs of children and young people do not provide any cause for concern. However, there are occasions when this is not the case.

At the outset it is important to identify the risks associated with the use of technology, and then to minimise the risks by putting in place measures outlined below. [The SBNI Online Safety Hub](#) may assist with this.

Consent

The consent of parents, carers, children and young people should always be sought prior to engaging in any activity that involves the use of IT equipment, such as those outlined above.

A parish or Diocesan group may seek overall **Consent** ([LinkTBC](#)) from its members/group leaders or it may ask for permission for set occasions.

When seeking consent for the use of images or videos for Church purposes such as First Communion

or Confirmation, the following should be considered:

- The issue of consent for photography/videoing for Church purposes should be addressed with parents, carers, children and young people prior to the sacramental day, and the policy should be explained to all families who will be attending.
- In seeking consent for photography/videos, children, young people and families should be reminded about the rights to privacy and data protection of other children, young people their families and the wider community.
- Those organising an event for Church purposes, and who are seeking consent for photography/video usage, should be sensitive to the fact that many parents/carers are reluctant to allow the general viewing of their children and young people or of children in their care, on sites such as YouTube, Facebook, etc.
- Close liaison on the issue of consent should be maintained with relevant authorities to agree mechanisms for securing consent, some schools establish consent at the year start.

Purpose

Guidelines should be clear as to the reason and purpose of the use of the particular form of technology:

- Provide a clear brief about what is considered appropriate in terms of content and behaviour and use of equipment.
- Provide guidance on acceptable language.
- Provide guidance on storage of information.
- Provide guidance on use of photography: if using an external photographer/videographer, seek confirmation about any publications that will be made by them after the event, and ensure that they have been vetted (if appropriate), have

identification and do not have any unsupervised access to the children and young people or one-to-one photo sessions with them at the event.

- Images of children and young people should never be taken that capture them in what are commonly understood as 'non-public' activities. Children and young people should be fully and appropriately dressed and related images should always be about the activity and not focused on any individual child and young person.
- Images should not allow the identification of a child and young person or their whereabouts. The full name of a child or young person should not be used.
- Children and young people in vulnerable circumstances (e.g. those in care or victims of any type of abuse) should not be photographed without the consent of those who hold parental responsibility.
- Provide guidance on the use of mobile phones, and especially on the use of mobile phone cameras, which can be easily used for offensive actions without the subject being aware of their use.
- Ensure all relevant guidance and information is communicated with parents/carers, children and young people.

Relevant Forms

SO14

USEFUL RESOURCES

- [SBNI Online Safety Hub](#)
- [Consent for an activity or event](#)

Guidance on Use of Photography

This guidance aims to protect children and young people from the inappropriate use of their images in Church-related activities, publications, and online platforms. It provides guidance to ensure safe and respectful photography practices within the Church context.

The Church only has responsibility for safeguarding and the use of photography if it plans to use the photographs for Church purposes. Photographs taken at events organised by families or schools—such as First Holy Communions and Confirmations (including where the photographer is engaged by the family or the school)—are not the responsibility of the Church, unless the photographs are taken specifically for Church purposes.

This guidance applies to all Church personnel, volunteers, group leaders, and professional photographers/videographers involved in Church activities where photography or videography may occur.

Risks to children and young people

- Images may be misused or shared inappropriately.
- Potential for grooming or abuse.

Easy Rules to Remember

- Avoid publishing full names or personal details with images.
- Use images showing appropriate dress and group activities.
- Obtain informed consent and allow for withdrawal.

- Avoid personal IT equipment and social media posting by group leaders.
- Children and young people aged thirteen or over, should give their own permission.

Use of Professional Photographers/Videographers

- Vetting may be required.
- Provide clear briefs and identification.
- No unsupervised or off-site sessions.
- Inform and obtain consent from parents/carers.
- Clarify ownership, usage, and storage of images.
- Report concerns to event organisers or authorities.

Parish Events

- Recommended wording for photography notice to be displayed prominently in the Church:

"In line with child safeguarding best practice the Diocese of Down and Connor require that the organisers of this event, ensure that any person wishing to engage in any photography, video, zoom or close-range photography should register their details with the Parish Priest/Church personnel/volunteers before carrying out any such photography. If parents have any particular concern about their children being photographed or filmed they should notify the Parish Priest/Church personnel/volunteer in charge. The parish reserves the right to decline entry to any person unable to meet or abide by the parish's conditions. If you are concerned about any photography taking place at this event, please contact the event organiser, who will be pleased to discuss this matter with you."

Responding to Concerns

- Children, young people and parents/carers should be informed that if they have any concerns regarding inappropriate or intrusive photography, these should be reported to the Diocese to ensure that any reported concerns are dealt with in the same way as any other child protection safeguarding issue.

Relevant Forms

SO6, SO7 & SO14

Guidance on Use of Internet

This guidance is to ensure safe, responsible, and appropriate use of the internet in Church activities involving children and young people.

This guidance applies to all Church personnel, volunteers, and group leaders who use the internet as part of Church activities, especially those involving children and young people.

Unacceptable Behaviours

- Visiting internet sites that contain offensive, obscene, pornographic or illegal material.
- Using a computer to perpetrate any form of fraud or piracy.
- Sending offensive and harassing material via internet or email.
- Using obscene or racist language in computer-assisted communications.
- Publishing defamatory or false material through social networking.
- Introducing malicious software into the network.
- Intentionally damaging ICT equipment.
- Using another user's password or sharing passwords with third parties.

Responsibilities and Best Practices

- All Church personnel, volunteers, and group leaders must be informed of their responsibilities and sign a **Code of Behaviour**. ([LinkTBC](#))
- Safeguarding children and young people is a primary responsibility.
- Each user of a shared computer must have a unique password.
- Training in responsible internet and computer use is essential.

Relevant Forms

SO14

USEFUL RESOURCES

- **Codes of Behaviour**
- **SBNI Online Safety Hub**

Guidance on Use of Texting and Email

Texting and email are very quick and effective methods of communication for those involved in Church activities. Usually this does not include Church personnel and volunteers contacting young people directly, as contact is usually made via their parents/carers. However, there are certain circumstances where contacting children and young people directly may be necessary (e.g. in an emergency or on a trip away); any members of Church personnel and volunteers using this method of communication with children and young people should ensure appropriate safeguards are in place, as there are certain risks associated with the safe and appropriate use of texting and email, which must be managed.

The risks of text and email messaging for children and young people are:

- Inappropriate access to, use of, or sharing of personal details (names, numbers, email addresses).
- Unwanted contact with children and young people from adults, text bullying by peers, etc.
- Being sent offensive or otherwise inappropriate materials.
- Grooming for sexual abuse.
- Direct contact and actual abuse.

The risks for adults include:

- Misinterpretation of their communication with children and young people.
- Potential investigation (internal or by statutory authorities).
- Potential disciplinary action.

Using bulk (or bundled) text and email messaging

A way to minimise the risks above is to use bulk text messages. This is where the same text or email message is sent to several children and young people involved with a particular activity or group. The advantage of this approach is that it presents fewer opportunities for misuse and abuse than personal, one-to-one texting or emailing arrangements between Church personnel, volunteers and children and young people. Therefore, one-to-one texting or emailing should be strongly discouraged and should only occur in exceptional circumstances. The same applies to emailing young people.

The following guidance is provided to minimise risk to all:

- Consent must be obtained from children and young people and their parents/carers prior to sending the children and young people text or email messages. Parents/carers should be copied in on texts and emails that their child will be sent.
- The children and young people's mobile phone numbers or email addresses should be stored safely and securely, with access only available to the specific, identified members of Church personnel or volunteers. The numbers or details should not be shared with anyone else, and should only be used for the purposes of the text and email messaging system regarding the Church activity.
- All text and email messages must be sent via a bundle to a group of children and young people, i.e. the same standard text message is sent to every member of the group. The text and email messaging system should never be used to send text or email messages on an individual basis (i.e. to just one person).

- All text and email messages sent must make it clear to the children and young people receiving them who has sent the message.
- Children and young people should not be given the opportunity to text or email back to the system. It should only be used as a one-way communication channel.
- The text and email messages that are sent must never contain any offensive, abusive or inappropriate language or language or images that could be misinterpreted.
- When this guidance is being provided in relation to Church-related activities, all of the text or email messages sent, must be directly related to Church activities. The text or email. messaging system and mobile phone numbers must never be used for any other reason or in any other way.
- All of the text and email messages sent should include a sentence at the bottom that provides young people with the opportunity to unsubscribe from receiving further text and email messages.

Relevant Forms

SO14

USEFUL RESOURCES

- [SBNI Online Safety Hub](#)
- [Online Safety Trust Trap](#)

Guidance on Use of Webcams and CCTV

This guidance outlines the principles and procedures for the appropriate use of webcams and CCTV systems within the parishes in the Diocese of Down and Connor. It aims to ensure compliance with data protection laws and to safeguard the privacy of individuals.

This guidance applies to all Church personnel and volunteers involved in the operation, management, and oversight of webcam and CCTV systems within Church premises.

Webcam Broadcasting

- Consent must be obtained from individuals before recording and broadcasting their images online.
- Camera shots should be wide-angle to minimize the identification of individuals.
- Signage must be placed at all entrances and prominent locations to inform visitors of webcam usage.
- Parish bulletins must include a permanent notice about webcam broadcasts.
- For children and young people, written consent from both the child, young person and their parent/carer is required.
- For events such as baptisms, weddings, or funerals, families must confirm webcam usage and parents must be informed if children and young people will be visible.
- Live broadcasts must be controllable and capable of immediate termination. If the Priest cannot access the control panel, a designated person must be assigned to stop the transmission if necessary.

CCTV

- As CCTV infringes the privacy of persons captured in the images, there must be a genuine reason for installing such a system.
- If CCTV cameras are in place, it is important to have prominent signage to inform everyone of CCTV usage.
- Access to CCTV footage is strictly regulated to protect privacy and ensure compliance with data protection laws.

Contact Information

For further guidance on the use of CCTV & webcam, contact:

Down and Connor Diocesan Curia,
75 Somerton Road, Belfast, BT15 4DE
Tel: +44 (0) 28 9077 6185
Email: dcoffice@downandconnor.org

Relevant Forms

SO14

Guidance on Conducting Online Ministry with Children and Young People using a Digital Platform

Parishes may want to consider engaging with children and young people using virtual platforms. Keeping everyone safe from a safeguarding perspective whilst using these platforms is essential. It is important to understand how to implement some simple steps that can contribute towards keeping children and young people safe online. The message should be clear and concise: 'think real world, think virtual world'.

We must apply the same rigorous levels of safeguarding to online as we do in person and there are some additional safeguarding measures that must be put in place to minimise specific online risk.

Deciding if ministry with children and young people online is in fact the best way forward or could this activity be better delivered by parents/carers with support materials to share: 'think will this ministry online meet children and young people's needs and provide real opportunities for them?'

Working safely in the online world demands the same level of diligence and preparation as working face to face (e.g. undertaking a risk assessment, preparing codes of behaviour, gaining consent etc.). Guidance on these already exist in the [Parish Guidance Pack](#). [\(LinkTBC\)](#)

Is everyone involved aware of the potential risks of working online and have they discussed the procedures that should be in place to mitigate against these risks: "think danger, think solutions?"

Any parish group which wishes to engage in online ministry with children and young people should formally discuss this option with the chair of the Safeguarding Committee.

A preapproval checklist that the parish group leader in conjunction with the Safeguarding Committee

Chairperson should consider as a method of systematically ensuring that they have covered all the necessary steps before planning online ministry with children and young people.

Only on completion of the preapproval checklist, if it is decided that online ministry with children and young people is appropriate to take place, should the following then be considered.

Top Tips for Keeping Everyone Safe Online

Here is some advice and best practice on working safely with children and young people online. This should be read in conjunction with the Diocesan [Guidance on the Use of Technology](#). [\(LinkTBC\)](#)

Risk Assessment

Before an activity takes place, an appropriate risk assessment should be undertaken prior to engaging in any activity online. The online world is not an easier option and should not be regarded as such. Preparation for the success of an online session is crucial. The risk assessment should follow the Diocesan policy and procedures in relation to safeguarding and data protection. [\(See Risk Assessment Guidance and Data Privacy Notices\)](#). [\(LinkTBC\)](#)

Recruitment/Vetting

'Normal' volunteer rules apply whilst working online, such as recruitment and safeguarding processes – i.e. you need at least two safely recruited volunteers present who would normally have 'real time' contact with this group. Make sure both leaders are present online before children and young people arrive. Ideally use the same time slot of an existing group meeting.

Recording

Do not record the sessions. Most video conferencing software allows for the session to be recorded. Online sessions should never be recorded, as this could be a breach of data protection so avoid doing this, as you would need separate permission for data capture and there are all sorts of issues around storage, GDPR etc.

Approval for the Online Activity

You must have approval from the Safeguarding Committee/Parish Priest. Approval must be made in writing such as being documented in the minutes of the meeting.

Consent for the Online Activity

Consent from children or young people and parents/carers are prerequisites before any online activity takes place. If you do not get consent the child and young person will not be able to join the call.

In preparation for the activity, set up an email which explains what you are doing, the date and time of the online activity, which leaders are participating and provide some information as to what you will be doing, you need to explain what the consent is for.

Send out an [Online Ministry Consent Form \(LinkTBC\)](#) for completion by the child or young person and parent/carers which they can return using the email address provided.

Use a generic parish email address rather than personal email addresses. The proposed contract of work needs to be forwarded to parents/carers. For those who are over 16, what you do in the real world should apply, such as if you contact the young person directly and copied to parents/carers.

Email Addresses

Use parents/carers email addresses to send the meeting invite to, unless the young person is over 16.

When you send to the child and young person directly, copy the parents/carer's into the communication, as this ensures parents/carers are aware that it is happening and can set up the child and young person to access the session appropriately with any oversight if they want.

New Members

If new members want to join the group, they should have 'normal' group consent forms filled in as well. You will want them to come to the real group anyway when it meets face to face. Whatever steps you undertake in the 'real world' to verify the identity of participants needs to be applied in the online world. This needs to be explained to the participants.

If you are recruiting new leaders for this group, the [Safe Recruitment Process \(LinkTBC\)](#) must be followed before they can participate.

Codes of Behaviour

Appropriate behaviour for leaders in real time equally apply to online work with children and young people and should be in place and followed as you would expect in face to face activities e.g. appropriate use of language, behaviour, appropriate boundaries etc.

It might be worth a discussion with the leaders around this before the meeting happens. It might also be helpful to consult your existing [Codes of Behaviour \(LinkTBC\)](#) and check appropriateness for use online.

Contract/Rules

A contract of work/code/rules of behaviour needs to be discussed and agreed by participants, e.g., how participants are expected to behave, no recording of sessions, what the session will involve, no bullying during or after the activity, how people should respond, how to challenge aspects of the work if necessary, the use of mobile phones during the session, what to do if someone needs to be removed from the activity and future contact following the session. The rules governing each session should be discussed and agreed with the participants at the first session.

Other Considerations

Start Time

The online activity should not take place after 9:00pm.

Equipment

Avoid the use of personal IT equipment.

Supervision Ratios

Supervision ratios of adult to child and young person are the same regardless of the mechanism used, i.e. direct or online. For any online activity with children and young people at least two safely recruited volunteers need to be present.

Age of Participants

It is important to consider the age of your children and young people, both in terms of the age requirements of the service you are using, together with their ability to participate.

Different platforms have different restrictions in relation to age so ensure you take account of age restrictions within the terms and conditions of use of your chosen platform.

For children under 13 it is best practice for a parent/carer to be in the room when they are taking part in an online activity.

Social Media Platforms

Avoid the use of Skype/Facetime. These are social media platforms and as such, share contact details with all users. You may therefore inadvertently connect children and young people up with other people as an unintended consequence. There are a range of video conferencing platforms (such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams). When using these platforms, ensure you use the most up-to-date guidance for security.

Group Size, Location and Environment

Larger groups of children and young people may be more challenging to manage during an interactive online activity and so more presentational/educational approaches may be more suitable.

For live video and audio being used, there should be careful consideration of the location that everyone uses. Children and young people should be in more public places i.e. it is not appropriate for bedrooms/bathrooms to be used. Leaders should ensure that the background being used by them is

appropriate and that there is an appropriate dress code.

Data Usage

Be careful that children and young people do not incur surprising costs, e.g. mobile data access charges - (video uses significant amounts of data).

IT Security

Online Platforms, which allow for password access, only use password/passcode-protected meetings, create a new password for every meeting, and send details securely to participants (do not, for example, share details on social media). Passwords should only be sent to parents/carers of children and young people and not directly to the child and young person unless over 16. Joining details should only be shared with participants.

Inclusivity

Be inclusive. Are there children and young people who would benefit from being involved in the activity unable to do so due to adversity? for example poverty, disability, ethnicity? If so, consider how these could be addressed to assist with their involvement. Are there any children and young people from your group who would struggle to participate in the online activity and what extra support(s) can be put in place for them? If you have any child and young person involved who are not comfortable with technology try to help them get set up beforehand, by phoning them on a phone number supplied by a parent/carer and talking them through the steps. This will help make sure no-one is excluded.

Screen Shots

Screen shots of the virtual activity should not be taken without the expressed consent of parents/carer and the child and young person. Specific written permission must be sought from children, young people, and their parents/carers if photographs are to be published in any forum i.e. print or online.

IT language

Avoid the use of IT language such as Emojis as they can often be misinterpreted.

Videos

If videos are being used in the activity, be careful to check the content beforehand.

Other Devices

Consider what other devices are open during the ministry online by all participants and ensure these do not present a risk, e.g. Googlehome, Alexa.

Before the Activity Takes Places

- Do not advertise the meeting ID and password on publicly accessible forums. Instead, try to send direct email invites using parent/carer emails.
- Be aware of and sensitive to technical difficulties. There can be issues with speakers and microphones. The chances are children and young people will be familiar with technology and have no difficulties, leaders may have issues. Use the software with leaders first to try and sort out any issues and become familiar with the tool you are going to use.
- Do a trial run with a few people before the activity, so you can make this tool easy to use for everyone.
- Send instructions and any user guides (links above) to parents/carers.
- It may be useful to have a session with parent/carers first, to explain and answer questions and agree how online ministry will work.

During the Activity

- Welcome your group as people log in. It may take a little while for everybody to get online, so do not start until you think everyone is on.
- Have a welcome message at the front and any disclaimers e.g. 'Meeting in Progress'.
- Lock the meeting once all are joined.
- Disable private screen sharing. (If available).
- Disable options for private chat (if available) between participants. If participants need to

contact leaders, for example, if they are worried or have a concern, explain that they can do so using the email address used for the online activity.

- Remember to pause, give people time to speak, people are a little slower to respond online, than they are face-to-face. It may be helpful to ask individuals their thoughts on a question, so other people know somebody is going to speak.

Controlling the Meeting

Know what options you have available to control the meeting. For example:

Waiting Room feature

This allows the organiser to put participants into a 'Waiting Room'. This allows you to control when people join your meeting.

Putting someone on hold

If this happens to someone it is important that you contact them and explain the reason why. You should give them a time frame for when they will be added back into the group and discuss the guidelines/rules for engaging in the activity.

Disable Someone's Video

Organisers can turn someone's video off. This will allow hosts to block unwanted, distracting, or inappropriate gestures on video. Please write this up as an incident report.

Muting Participants

Hosts can mute/unmute individual participants or all of them at once. Hosts can block unwanted, distracting, or inappropriate noise from other participants.

Removing Someone from the Activity

If someone is removed it is important that you contact them after you have removed them and explain the reason why they have been removed. Once someone is removed, they cannot re-join. Please write this up as an incident report.

External Participants

If someone external to the group joins the activity, leaders should pause the session and address the issue.

Ending the Meeting

Make sure everyone knows that you are ending your time together, let them know to leave the online platform and then stop the meeting. Both leaders should remain online until all of the children and young people have logged off. Ensure that the platform used has been closed down.

After the Activity

- Thank everyone for joining with you.
- Encourage everyone to contact the activity leaders if needed via the agreed email address.

- Make sure everyone knows how you will be meeting again and where to find instructions for the next activity session.
- Always make a note/record of the activity, including the date, timing and who participated, including those that arrived/departed early or late.
- Delete the account details for the specific platform used for the activity.

REMEMBER: If anything of a safeguarding nature arises during the session, appropriate reporting procedures should apply.

Relevant Forms

SO15, SO16, SO17 & SO18

USEFUL RESOURCES

- **SBNI Online Safety Hub**
- **NSPCC Online Safety Advice**
- **INEQE - Online Safety**

Guidance on Use of Church Property by External Groups

General Terms of Use

It is a requirement that all groups using facilities owned by the Diocese are insured and that they have a Child Safeguarding Policy and an Adult Safeguarding Policy.

The obligation to comply with requirements relating to insurance and safeguarding rests with the group using the Church property and not the Diocese.

1 Intent

- The Diocese of Down and Connor (“the Diocese”) is a registered charity whose principal object is the advancement of the Roman Catholic religion. The premises are primarily to be used by Diocesan/Parish groups for the hosting and promoting of Church activities. A secondary function of the premises is to be a resource to the parish community and the inhabitants of the parish, to external groups and the wider Church, through Church activities, Church sponsored activities and suitable community activities which help to build bridges between the Church and the local community and which are compatible with the above-mentioned principal object.

2 Letting Restrictions

- We will seek to encourage appropriate organisations to use the premises for meetings and activities, where such meetings are complementary to the Church’s regular activities. The parish may request references from a new user before agreeing a booking.
- The parish reserves the right to refuse requests to hire for a use that, in the opinion of the Parish Priest, is contrary to the purposes, teachings and beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church, and/or where the Parish Priest considers that such use or activities may cause offence, to a significant number of Catholics on grounds of their religion or

belief, and/or to avoid conflict with their strongly held religious convictions. No formal acts of worship, other than Christian worship, are permitted on the premises.

- Lettings will not interfere unduly with Church life.
- Lettings will not be allowed to any political party or any organisation affiliated with a political party or used to advance the agenda of a political party.
- It is a requirement that all external groups using facilities owned by the Church are appropriately insured.
- It is a requirement that all external groups make clear in any advertisements, notice or other forms of promotion that they are independent of the Diocese/parish and that all issues/queries arising out of the use should be addressed to that external group and not the Diocese/parish.

3 Charges

- We will normally charge for the use of the premises by external organisations.
- Neither the sole nor the main purpose of letting the premises is commercial. Charges are therefore not set at a commercial rate. Charges will be moderate and consistent with covering costs and providing a modest contribution to maintenance costs. We will review our charges from time to time.
- **Regulations as to Use**
This Licence is subject to the Regulations as to Use set out in full in this agreement and which may be amended by us at our discretion from time to time.
- **Renewal of Licence**
The Licence is only valid for the period granted. A new Licence will be required for any additional period. The maximum period a Licence will be granted for is 12 months.

Bookings by individuals for one-off, private events

Safeguarding

For bookings of one-off, private events (for example a child's birthday party), Safeguarding arrangements are the sole responsibility of the parents/carers of those Children/Young People, Adults at Risk of Harm or Adults in Need of Protection attending. A one-off, private event would be a single booking, where there is no on-going and repeated contact with Children/Young People, Adults at Risk of Harm or Adults in Need of Protection, and is regarded as a private arrangement between the organiser and the parents/carers of those attending the event, such as would exist if the event was to take place in the organiser's own house.

Insurance

The parish is insured to cover one-off, private events. It is the sole responsibility of the parents/carers to organise and supervise all attending. The organiser of the one-off, private event, however, will be liable for any claims for injury or damage arising out of their negligence, e.g. accidents caused by lack of supervision and will only be indemnified subject to the limits of the Parish insurance.

Safeguarding

This Section applies to all users working directly with any member of 'Vulnerable Groups'¹, i.e. Children/Young People²; Adults at Risk of Harm³; Adults in Need of Protection⁴ EXCEPT the organisers of one-off, private events.

As a parish that provides the use of facilities and services to individuals and groups who work with Children/Young People, Adults at Risk of Harm and Adults in Need of Protection, it is our responsibility to ensure that all reasonable steps are taken to safeguard such vulnerable groups. The Diocese has clear policies and procedures in relation to safeguarding these vulnerable groups. Any parish based group or organisation must comply with the Diocesan Safeguarding Policies and any parish Codes of Conduct. Any external group must work to their own named Safeguarding Policy.

We therefore require detailed information in respect of your application to ensure that the safety and well-being of Children/Young People, Adults at Risk of Harm, and Adults in Need of Protection with whom you work are maintained by your group/organisation. If any of the information provided in this section changes during the period of the Licence granted the parish office should be notified in writing immediately.

- 1 In this licence the term Vulnerable Groups means: Children/Young People; Adults at Risk of Harm; Adults in Need of Protection.
- 2 The term 'Children / Young People' refers to those under the age of 18 as defined by the Children (NI) Order 1995.
- 3 An 'Adult at Risk of Harm' is a person, aged 18 or over, whose exposure to harm through abuse, exploitation or neglect may be increased by their personal characteristics and/or life circumstances. Personal characteristics may include, but are not limited to, age, disability, special educational needs, illness, mental or physical frailty or impairment of, or disturbance in, the functioning of the mind or brain. Life circumstances may include, but are not limited to, isolation, socio economic factors and environmental living conditions.
- 4 An 'Adult in Need of Protection' is a person aged 18 or over, whose exposure to harm through abuse, exploitation or neglect may be increased by their: A. personal characteristics and/or B. life circumstances AND C) who is unable to protect their own wellbeing, property, assets, rights or other interests; AND D) where the action or inaction of another person or persons is causing, or is likely to cause him/her to be harmed. In order to meet the definition of an "Adult in Need of Protection" either (A) or (B) must be present in addition to both elements of (C) and (D).

Regulations as to Use

1 Administration

- Bookings of the premises will be administered by the Parish Priest or his delegate (e.g. the Hall Committee, a Hall Manager or a Parish Hall Representative. This includes the acceptance and declining of bookings in consultation with the Parish Priest and members of the Parish Finance Committee (PFC) if necessary. The Parish Priest will act as final arbiter if required.
- The charges are set out in the [Schedule of Charges](#).
- If a Hirer wishes to cancel a booking, the Parish Priest/PFC may, at his/its absolute discretion, refund any fees paid, but shall be under no obligation to do so. The Parish Priest reserves the right to cancel the booking if exceptional unforeseen circumstances arise and without a reason being stated. In the event of the Parish Priest/PFC cancelling the booking, all fees/deposits paid by the Hirer shall be refunded.

2 Access and Security

- The Hirer is responsible for all setting up and putting away of any equipment used.
- Any use of the premises will require a key- holder representing the parish to be present at the beginning and end of every period of use to check that the facilities are in order. The premises must not be left unattended during the period of the booking.
- If a key is provided to the Hirer/Group Leader, then this must be kept safe at all times and returned to the Parish Hall Representative at the end of the period of use, or if otherwise agreed, as soon as is reasonably possible. The keys shall not be copied nor given or lent to any third party. If keys are provided, it is the Hirer's responsibility to ensure that all fire doors and windows are closed, all doors are locked and all lights are switched off (including in the toilets) at the end of the period of use.
- The right is reserved for a representative of the PFC, or their appointed officer, to enter any part of the building at any time.

3 Health and Safety

- Whilst the parish will take steps to ensure the premises are safe to use, it is the responsibility of the Hirer to ensure the safe conduct of their activity during the period of use, including the presence of a suitably qualified First Aider if necessary. Any accident involving personal injury must be reported to the Parish Hall Representative to be recorded in the Accident Book located in the parish office/hall office or designated place.
- All entrances and exits must be kept clear and, where relevant, external gates and doors must be kept unlocked at all times during the period of use. The number of people attending must be declared at the time of booking to ensure that this does not exceed the maximum number allowed for the premises. The Hirer will be responsible for ensuring that security, fire and health and safety requirements are met.
- Any portable electrical appliance or device brought in from elsewhere and used on the premises must have an up-to-date test certificate which must be made available for inspection upon request.
- The Hirer is not permitted to bring in supplementary heating appliances.
- Bouncy Castles
The use of bouncy castles or similar inflatable equipment is not permitted.

4 General

- Out of respect to other users and our neighbours surrounding the premises, we expect all users to conduct themselves in a reasonable and courteous manner whilst on the premises, and when leaving the premises. Lettings will not normally be taken for events likely to create noise or other nuisance to neighbours, e.g. where a live band is involved.
- All events are to finish by the stated finish time. The premises will not be available to the Hirer before the beginning of the booking time, and must be vacated at the end of the booking period'

- A strict **No Smoking Policy** applies to all rooms (including toilets) in all the premises. The premises are fitted with smoke alarms, which will be activated by all forms of smoke.
- (NB Each parish should amend this regulation as appropriate) Alcohol can/cannot be sold in the building. The Hirer is/is not permitted to apply for Occasional Licences for the sale of intoxicating liquor in the building.
- Any proposed advertising material must be submitted to the Parish Hall Representative for approval by the Parish Priest and, if needed, the PFC before commencing advertising. All such material must clearly display the name of the person or organisation responsible for the event. It is a requirement that all external groups clearly state in any advertisements, notice or other forms of promotion that they are independent of the Diocese or parish and that all issues/queries arising out of the use should be addressed to that external group and not the Diocese or parish.
- No animals are permitted in the building except for guide dogs.
- No adhesive or fixing material may be used which may damage the fabric of the premises.
- Chewing gum is not allowed on the premises.
- All rubbish must be taken from the premises by the Hirer and must not be deposited in the outside refuse bins without the prior consent of the parish. No food or drink must be deposited on the ground outside the premises or in the car park.

5 Car Parking, if Applicable

- If applicable, the use of the Church hall or car park is available to Hirers, but is not part of the **Licence Agreement** and Hirers must be ready to vacate in case of emergency Church needs.

6 Responsibilities

- The parish gives no warranty as to the fitness of any of the premises used for the detailed activities. The Hirer enters and uses the premises for the activities detailed above entirely at their own risk. The parish shall have no liability to Hirers whatsoever for any loss or damage which may be

sustained by you or any other person as a result of the activities undertaken.

- A Hirer agrees to indemnify the parish against any personal injury, loss or damage sustained by any member of the parish staff, by you, or by any other person, through use of the premises for your activities, whether such personal injury, loss or damage is caused by you or any other person as result of the activities.
- The Hirer will be responsible for ensuring that all users are aware of the procedures for safe and correct use of equipment and facilities, and shall report any deficiencies on the occasion of each use. The Hirer must have the appropriate licence/certificates for any equipment they bring on to the premises. No equipment or gas cylinders/cans of any nature can be stored on the premises for any period of time and must be removed from the premises at the end of each individual session of use.
- The Hirer shall ensure that there is a responsible adult or adults present and able to supervise at all times during the period of use. During the period of hire, the Hirer is responsible for the orderly behaviour of his/her/their guests/members on the premises.
- The Hirer must leave the premises in a clean and tidy condition. Losses, breakages and damage must be reported, and be paid for in full. Hirers may re-arrange tables and chairs in the premises, but must restore them to their original places immediately at the end of the period of use. The PFC reserves the right to make an additional charge for cleaning if it is considered that an excessive amount of mess has resulted from the hiring of the premises or facility.

7 Kitchen Use/Refreshments (if applicable)

- Applications for the use of the kitchens in the premises must be indicated on the form and will be subject to separate approval. Kitchens may be used for the preparation of tea/coffee and refreshments by approved personnel and with the prior agreement of the Parish Hall Representative. It will be the responsibility of the Hirer to provide

the refreshment materials, unless agreed otherwise in this Licence. It is the responsibility of any external Hirer to ensure that any persons using the kitchens are aware of the requirements of the relevant **Food Hygiene Regulations and Food Safety Act Codes of Practice**. Particular attention should be paid to the cleanliness of the kitchen, kitchen utensils and crockery at the end of the period of use. Any breakages must be reported immediately in writing, and will be subject to an additional charge.

8 Insurance

- It is the responsibility of Hirers to effect whatever insurance is required in accordance with this **Licence Agreement**. The Parish/Priest/PFC/Diocese accept no liability for any accidents, injuries, damage and/or loss of personal property as a consequence of the use of the premises.

9 Legal Requirements

- The Hirer must comply with any legal requirement concerning music, singing and dancing licences, theatre licences and copyright. The Hirer shall be fully responsible for obtaining any such licences or any other permission required, always providing that no such application shall be made without the approval of the Parish Priest/PFC.
- Hirers will comply with all statutory requirements and Diocesan policies for the Safeguarding of Children/Young People, Adults at Risk of Harm and Adults in Need of Protection, in accordance with this **Licence Agreement**.
- The Hirer shall not use the premises for any other purpose than that specified in the **Licence Agreement**, and is specifically forbidden to use, or allow the use of, the premises or its surrounding grounds for any illegal or immoral purpose.

10 Compliance

- Failure by the Hirer to comply with any or all of the terms in the entirety of this **Licence Agreement** where applicable, whether intentionally or not, may be deemed by the Parish Priest/PFC to be just cause for immediate cancellation of any

letting or series of lettings, and may result in forfeiture of the entire security deposit.

Questions and Answers, Use of Parish Property by External Groups

What is an external group?

In determining what an external group is it is best to look at the Diocese's Insurance Policy. The Policy defines a parish related activity as:

"any Parish activity which is carried out with the full knowledge and authority of and under the control of the clergy or any other person specifically authorised by them".

This means that although the Parish Priest does not need to be on the Committee or attending the activity, he will have authorised an individual to control the activity on his behalf and the Parish Priest can, at his discretion, withdraw his authority and the activity would then be deemed "external".

What about groups carrying on Parish related activities?

Such groups will not need formal licences to use parish premises. They would however, be subject to the oversight of Parish Safeguarding Committees.

How do we avoid confusion between a Parish Event and a Non-Parish Event?

It is not unusual for third parties to pitch their event as if it is a Parish Group Event. For that reason, the following clause has been added to the Licence;

"It is a requirement that all external groups make clear in any advertisements, notice or other forms of promotion that they are independent of the Diocese/Parish and that all issues/queries arising out of the use should be addressed to that external group and not the Diocese/Parish".

These are essentially what would be recommended as best practice. They cannot cover all types of external premises e.g. car parks within the Diocese. parishes may amend and add to these as they see fit.

Should the Safeguarding Committees have sight of the external group's Safeguarding Policy?

The parish should at no stage, assist any external group in developing a child safeguarding policy or an adult safeguarding policy.

The parish should have confirmation in writing from the external group that they have a child safeguarding policy and an adult safeguarding policy. It is not the role of the parish to validate the adequacy of the policy.

If the external group does not have a child safeguarding policy and adult safeguarding policy, then it is up to the Bishop or designated person to decide whether to let the external group use the property. If the Bishop or designated person thinks it is appropriate, they should issue a letter to the leader of the external group stating that while on their property, full responsibility and liability for ensuring the safety of the children and young people rests with the leader.

The parish should have confirmation in writing from the external group that they have appropriate insurance in place, which should include;

- The name of their Insurers
- The Policy number
- The period of cover
- The limit of Indemnity

Can we ask for the name of the Designated Person for Safeguarding in the external group?

Yes.

Please note that if the Diocese/parish is seen not to act in accordance with directions of its insurers then there would be a realistic chance that the insurers may refuse to indemnify the parish in the event of a claim being made in such circumstances.

Can you define a one-off, private event?

A one-off, private event would be a single booking, where there is no on-going and repeated contact with Children and Young People, Adults at Risk of Harm or Adults in Need of Protection, and is

regarded as a private arrangement between the organiser and the parents/carers of those attending the event, such as would exist if the event was to take place in the organiser's own house.

Can you provide examples of a one-off, private event?

These would include:

- Children's birthday parties
- Retirement parties
- Anniversary parties
- Christening parties

Do events associated with funerals require a licence application to be made?

No – a licence application is not required for an event associated with funerals that have taken place in the parish or in another parish in the Diocese.

Are schools required to provide insurance details?

No – as far as parish schools are concerned. We are aware of the insurance arrangements for CCMS schools i.e. parish schools.

Yes – as far as all other schools are concerned. They should complete the insurance details in the **Licence Agreement Form**.

Should a copy of the Regulations as to Use be given to the external group?

Yes – a copy should be given to them every time an application is made.

Can a parish change the terms in the Regulations as to Use?

Yes – as indicated above parish halls and centres come in all different shapes and sizes within our Diocese and it is appropriate that the regulations be tailored to suit individual circumstances. However they cannot be amended in a manner that might contradict or negate any of the provisions within the licence Application.

Can external groups leave their equipment in the Parish premises either in advance of or subsequent to an event?

No – the external group must bring their equipment

on to parish premises at the agreed start time and must remove their equipment at the agreed cessation time.

What if an external group (including a one-off, private event organiser) wishes to use a bouncy castle?

The use of bouncy castles is inherently dangerous and we recommend that they should not be permitted.

Some parishes indicated that this would be a great disappointment to hirers catering for birthday parties for young parishioners. If the latter is the case, the Diocese's insurance adviser would be prepared to check the operator's insurance cover. If this is suitable, then the event may be authorised subject to the following conditions.

If these conditions are not followed, then there will be no cover for claims made. These conditions are the same as those which would apply if a parish was intending to use a bouncy castle for a parish event.

The conditions are:

- 1. The equipment is hired from a reputable hire company.**
- 2. It is set up and dismantled by the hire company.**
- 3. All sides including the entrance and exit points and the back of the inflatable are constantly marshalled.**
- 4. No shoes are worn by anyone using the inflatable.**
- 5. If placed outside the inflatable is not positioned within 30 metres of passing traffic.**
- 6. No more than one child per 1.5 square metres of bouncing space is allowed.**
- 7. The inflatable is securely tied down.**

If 1 to 7 are not complied with no claims will be paid by the Insurer.

Cover is subject to the Terms Definitions Exclusions Conditions and Limitations of the Parish Policy.

Relevant Form

SO19

Guidance on Visiting Clergy, Religious and Seminarians Protocols

The safeguarding policy of the Catholic Church makes it a requirement that all those who engage in public ministry require confirmation that they are fit for that sacred task. Whilst volunteers and lay ministers are subject to safe recruitment procedures, all clergy (secular or religious, Bishop, priest or deacon) who seek to minister in the Catholic Church in Ireland must be incardinated. This means that they must belong to a Diocese (or its equivalent in Canon Law), a personal prelature (such as Opus Dei), an institute of religious life (such as the Franciscans) or a society that has this faculty (such as the Society of African Missions).

Incardination has three main purposes:

- It is pastoral; a cleric is ordained for the service of a particular Church to which he belongs.
- It is an effective structure for maintaining discipline, creating a bond between the cleric and his competent superior.
- It provides an individual cleric with a guarantee that his rights are being respected.

Celebret

A celebret is issued by a Bishop or Religious Superior, authorising a priest to celebrate Mass in a Diocese other than his own. It serves as proof that the priest is in good standing.

To assist with an understanding of these range of protocols the guidance will be explained under the following subheadings.

Visiting clergy from outside the Diocese wishing to minister for a one off event.

If a visiting cleric wishes to minister at a funeral, baptism, wedding or any other unique sacramental event, advance notice should be given to the Parish Priest/Diocese (visiting@downandconnor.org). The visiting cleric ministering at the event to declare his presence on a particular time and date, must sign the sacristy register. Furthermore, he must provide his celebret for inspection by the Parish Priest or delegated person, and this should be noted beside the visitor's signature in the sacristy register.

If this one-off ministry is deemed a "regulated activity", the vetting process under AccessNI should be undertaken. See section on [Safe Recruiting and Vetting](#). ([LinkTBC](#))

Clergy incardinated into the Diocese of Down and Connor

- Those clergy incardinated into the Diocese of Down and Connor do not need to provide their celebret when ministering in any parish or location within the Diocese. In addition, those clergy or religious who have an appointment within the Diocese and are living in the Diocese do not need to provide their celebret when ministering in other locations in the Diocese. The cleric must sign the sacristy register.

Visiting clergy from outside Ireland wishing to minister on a short-term basis

When clergy from outside the Diocese visit with the intention of being involved in short-term ministry, evidence should be provided that confirms they are

priests in good standing and that they are fit for ministry.

Prior to visiting the Diocese where it is the intention to engage in public ministry, all visiting priests must write seeking permission from the Bishop, giving details about:

- The duration of the ministry.
- The type of ministry.
- The location of the ministry being considered.
- The contact details of the Bishop or Religious Superior of the visiting priest must be provided in advance.

On receipt of a request from a visiting priest to carry out ministry, the Bishop must acknowledge the same and then make a request in writing to the visitor for a certificate or confirmation of good standing signed by their Bishop or Religious Superior.

In addition, if the ministry is deemed to be a “regulated activity”, then guidance in relation to **Vetting** ([LinkTBC](#)) must be followed.

Appropriate notice should be given by the visiting priest to allow the vetting process to take place. The ministry cannot commence until vetting has been completed.

Seminarians and pastoral students undertaking pastoral placements as part of their formation.

Prior to the placement visit where there is an intention to engage in public ministry, all seminarians and students must commit to following **“A Safe and Welcoming Church, Safeguarding Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland”**

Where the ministry or placement meets the criteria of “regulated activity” the seminarian or student must be vetted by the Diocese.

Any concerns relating to the seminarian or student of a safeguarding nature whilst on placement must be

shared with the rector/president and processed in line with the Church’s **Reporting Procedures**.

([LinkTBC](#))

What is the Role of the Safeguarding Committee?

The local Safeguarding Committee should be aware of this guidance.

They do not have a role in the process of how a visiting priest(s) comes to the Diocese to minister on a short-term basis.

However, in every situation where any cleric incardinated into the Diocese or not, seminarian or pastoral student comes to a parish in Down and Connor to minister for the first time, the local Chairperson of the Safeguarding Committee should be informed, preferably in advance by the existing Parish Priest or priest in charge.

The Safeguarding Committee Chairperson will contact the Northern Diocese Vetting Office and confirm that an Enhanced Vetting Check has been completed.

Guidance for Associations of the Faithful Ministering in the Diocese of Down and Connor

The Diocese of Down and Connor welcome other organisations/groups/ who seek to minister with children and young people and promote good child safeguarding practice within the Catholic Church in Ireland. We need to be assured that all reasonable steps have been taken to safeguard children and young people. The responsibility for complying with good safeguarding practice (including safe recruitment and vetting) rests with the Association of the Faithful and not with the Church body.

The **Diocese of Down and Connor** as a member of the NBSCCCI adheres to the Safeguarding policy “**A Safe and Welcoming Church Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2024**”. Any group operating under the name or auspices of the Church body must comply with these requirements.

It is a requirement that all groups working with children and young people in the Church body and/or using facilities owned by the Church body are insured, and that they have a child safeguarding policy in place.

The general principle is that the obligation to comply with requirements relating to insurance and child safeguarding rests with the Association of the Faithful and not with the Church Body.

It is the responsibility of the Association of the Faithful to ensure that they comply with all applicable child safeguarding and protection legislation and guidelines.

As an Association of the Faithful, you must have your own child safeguarding policy and procedures. You are also responsible for liaising with HSCT (Health and Social Care Trust), or another reputable body ie NSPCC or Volunteer Now to ensure that the policy and procedures meet the statutory requirements.

As an Association of the Faithful, you must have appropriate insurance for the ministry you are engaged in.

The Church body must have confirmation in writing from you that you have a child safeguarding policy in place. It is not the role of the Church body to validate the adequacy of the policy; that is the responsibility of HSCT or other reputable body.

The Diocese of Down and Connor requires confirmation in writing that you have appropriate insurance in place, which includes the following:

- The name of your insurers.
- The policy number.
- The period of cover of the policy.
- The limit of indemnity.

We would ask that you complete the Agreement Form. If any response is not applicable (N/A), please provide details of why this does not apply to your organisation.

If you feel your application requires further information, please attach on an additional page. Please indicate when additional information is provided in support of your application.

Adult Safeguarding

The Diocese of Down and Connor works to an adult safeguarding policy in all aspects of its pastoral interaction. This policy sets out how the Diocese expects those who work in its parishes whether as clerics, religious, or volunteers, to behave in their dealings with those adults they encounter in the course of their work for, or on behalf of the parishes of the Diocese.

The Diocesan policy is underpinned by the requirements of international law, domestic law, statutory policy and procedures (primarily **Adult Safeguarding: Prevention and Protection in Partnership Policy, DHSS&PS 2015**). Embedded in these requirements is the recognition that all clergy, religious and laity have a fundamental right to be respected, nurtured, cared for and protected from harm, this includes all those providing ministry as part of the Association of the Faithful.

There is an expectation that all agencies who engage with the Dioceses work to the ethos and principles of adult safeguarding.

Management of Allegations, suspicions, concerns and knowledge for Associations of the Faithful with their own safeguarding policy and procedures

An Association of the Faithful ministers with the permission of the Church authority.

In order for everyone to be satisfied that child safeguarding remains a priority, there are obligations on the Association to inform the Church authority of allegations of abuse and of how it is addressing these.

From a governance perspective, the Bishop of a Diocese must be advised of allegations against Church personnel ministering within the Diocese. The following situations must be governed by written agreements, which set out the legal basis for sharing information.

In line with data protection legislation, there should be a written agreement between the Association lead and the Diocese, which confirms what information can be shared when an allegation is made.

The following sets out the types of ministry within

which an allegation can be made and how these may be dealt with:

a) Allegations made against an Association of the Faithful Missionary who is ministering on behalf of a Diocese

In these situations, the Association Missionary is accountable to the Diocese as well as the Association.

- The DLP of the Association should therefore make a joint report to the statutory authorities with the DLP of the Diocese.
- The Bishop, who has overall responsibility for pastoral ministry in the Diocese, must be consulted by the Association of the Faithful Lead (through the Diocesan Safeguarding Director/DLP) and a joint decision reached about whether the respondent should be withdrawn from ministry.
- An agreement should be reached between the Bishop and the Association of the Faithful Lead about safeguarding action that needs to be taken in the short, medium and long term (through the Diocesan Safeguarding Director/DLP).
- The Association of the Faithful Lead should confirm in writing to the Bishop (through the Director of Safeguarding/DLP) the restrictions on the Lay Faithful Ministry Missionary that have been applied, and the disciplinary action that has been taken.
- The Association of the Faithful Lead should advise the Bishop (through the Director of Safeguarding/DLP) of the details of care offered to the complainant.
- Any return to ministry by the respondent can only take place with the agreement of the Bishop.

b) Management of Knowledge Allegations Suspicions or Concerns

In situations where the Association's Missionaries become aware of child safeguarding suspicions, concerns, knowledge or allegations, these should be

reported immediately to the Association's DLP and at the same time notified to the Diocesan DLP.

- The Association's DLP should make a joint report to the statutory authorities with the DLP of the Diocese.

Relevant Forms

SO20

USEFUL RESOURCES

- **A Safe and Welcoming Church Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2024**
- **Adult Safeguarding: Prevention and Protection in Partnership Policy, DHSS&PS 2015**

Guidance on Reporting Allegations of Abuse

Children and young people occupy a central place in the heart of the Christian community. They have a right to be listened to and heard. The paramount consideration in all matters relating to children and young people is their safety and protection from all forms of abuse.

It is a requirement of Northern Ireland legislation and Church policy that all allegations, suspicions, and knowledge of abuse are passed to the statutory authorities.

All volunteers who work with children, young people or families - in whatever capacity - have a responsibility to safeguard and protect children and young people as outlined in [Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland \(updated October 2024\)](#).

All staff in statutory/voluntary and community organisations have a responsibility to refer a child and young person to the statutory safeguarding services if they believe or suspect that the child and young person has suffered, or is likely to suffer significant harm ([Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland, Regional Core Child Protection Policy and Procedures](#)).

Church personnel and volunteers must be alert to signs and indicators of harm and know how to respond when concerns are identified. The term safeguarding is intended to be used in its widest sense, encompassing the full range of promotion, prevention and protection activity. A core responsibility of the Diocese of Down and Connor is to create and maintain a safe environment for children and young people across all its parishes and institutions.

Church organisations must respond effectively and ensure all allegations and suspicions of abuse are reported, both within the Church and to statutory

authorities. This responsibility to report is mandatory, and the only exception to this rule is the receipt of any information by a cleric under what is termed as the sacramental Seal of Confession.

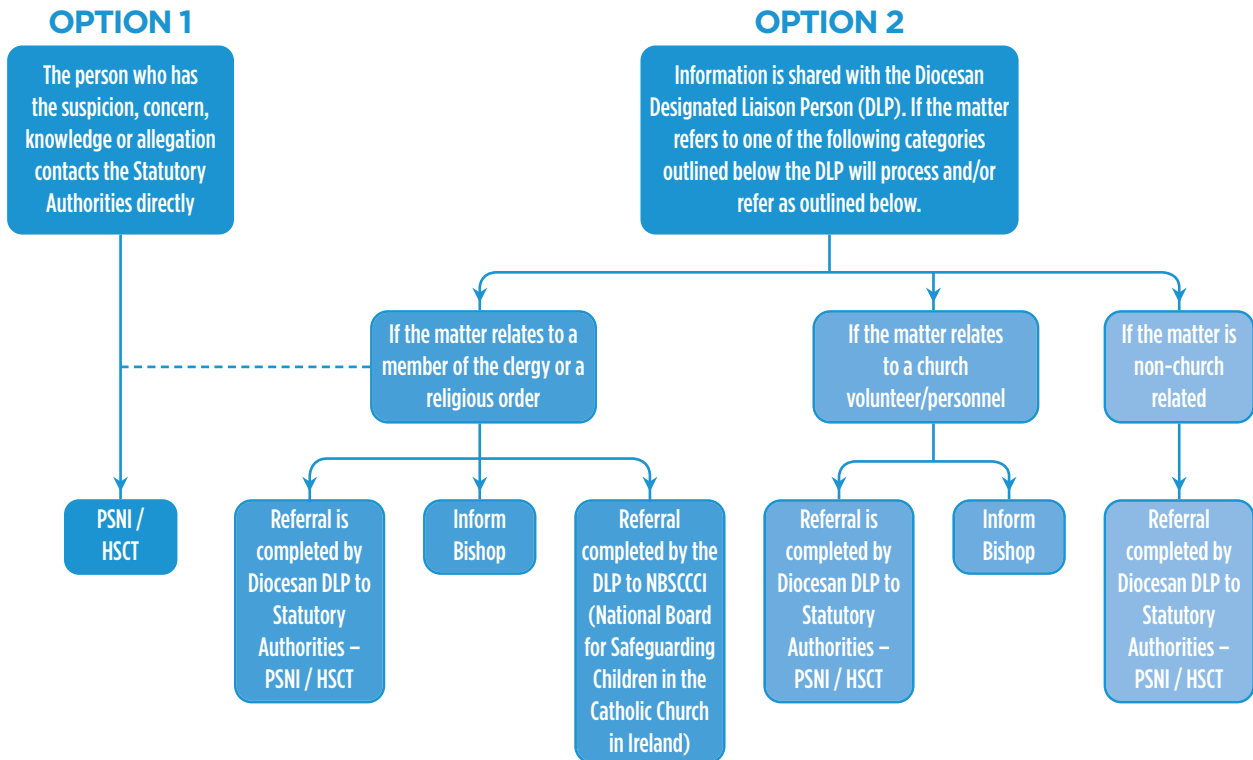
All Church organisations must provide guidance and training on recognition of abuse, and clear procedures on what to do when a child protection concern arises, so that everyone knows how to respond appropriately. This involves knowing who to tell and how to record it. It is important that the local reporting procedures are fully consistent with statutory legislation, regulations and guidance.

Reporting a concern can be a challenging responsibility. The procedure needs to ensure that everyone is clear what steps to take to ensure that the safety of children and young people is the paramount consideration.

The reporting flow chart overleaf refers to any child protection concern, including where the concern is about a situation or person involved in the Church. It is the responsibility of everyone in the Church to ensure that children and young people who may need help and protection, are not left at risk of abuse.

REPORTING FLOWCHART FOR DIOCESE OF DOWN AND CONNOR

A PERSON WHO HAS A SUSPICION, CONCERN, KNOWLEDGE OR ALLEGATION RELATING TO A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON HAS TWO OPTIONS WITH REGARDS TO REPORTING THIS MATTER



If you have any query about the referral process, please contact the Diocesan DLP who is a qualified social worker and will explain the process in full

The guiding principles about the reporting of abuse or neglect are:

- The safety of the child and young person at risk is paramount.
- If you have a safeguarding concern and are not sure what to do, contact the Diocesan Designated Liaison Person (DLP).
- Reports should be made without delay to the DLP, Health and Social Care Trust Gateway Team.
- If a child and young person is in immediate danger, contact the PSNI directly.

There are two options for the person who has a suspicion, concern, knowledge or allegation which are outlined in the reporting flow chart above.

How to make a Complaint

Option 1: Direct Reporting

Church personnel or volunteers have an option of reporting directly to the statutory safeguarding services.

POLICE SERVICE	
Police Service (IN an Emergency)	999
Police Service (NOT an Emergency)	101
<i>Monday to Friday 8.00am – 5.00pm / Saturday and Sunday 9.00am – 5.00pm</i>	

CONCERN ABOUT A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON	
<i>During normal working hours – Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm</i>	
Local Social Services offices	
Belfast HSC Trust	Tel: 028 9050 7000
South Eastern HSC Trust	Tel: 0300 1000 300
Northern HSC Trust	Tel: 0300 1234 333
Southern HSC Trust	Freephone: 0800 7837 745 Tel: 028 3741 5285

CONCERN ABOUT A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON	
<i>Outside normal working hours, including Bank holidays</i>	
Regional Emergency Social Work Service	Tel: 0800 1979 995 Email: resws1@belfasttrust.hscni.net

Option 2: Report via Designated Liaison Person (DLP)

Church personnel or volunteers can contact the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) who will refer the matter appropriately depending on the nature of the allegation.

DOWN & CONNOR SAFEGUARDING OFFICE	
<i>During normal working hours – Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm</i>	
Designated Liaison Person (DLP)	Tel: 075 3499 2124
Office Telephone	Tel: 028 9049 2798
Email	office@soddc.org

Relevant Forms

SO21

USEFUL RESOURCES

- **Dept of Health – Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland (updated October 2024)**
- **The Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland Regional Child Protection Policies and Procedures Manual**
- <https://downandconnorsafeguarding.com/report-a-concern/>

Guidance on Whistleblowing

This guidance is for volunteers working with children, young people and adults at risk within the parishes of the Diocese of Down and Connor.

This whistleblowing guidance is not designed to replace the need to report allegations, suspicions, knowledge, and concerns about the abuse of a child, young person or adult at risk. [\(See Guidance on Reporting\)](#). [\(LinkTBC\)](#)

This guidance is designed for volunteers who may, from time to time, feel that they need to raise certain issues relating to their engagement as a volunteer in the Diocese with someone in confidence.

A Diocesan Whistleblowing Policy for staff working in the Down and Connor Diocese is available and can be accessed on the Diocesan intranet.

Safeguarding children, young people and adults at risk requires those working with children, young people, adults at risk, and families to be committed to the highest possible standards of openness, integrity, and transparency. Volunteers must acknowledge their individual responsibility to bring matters of concern to the attention of senior management and/or relevant statutory agencies.

Although this can be challenging, for example, you may be the first to recognise that something is wrong, but you may not feel able to express your concerns due to a feeling that this would be disloyal to colleagues, or you may fear harassment or victimisation, these feelings however natural, must never result in a child, young person or adult at risk continuing to be unnecessarily at risk.

Remember, it is often the most vulnerable children, young people and adults at risk, who are targeted. These children, young people and adults at risk need an advocate to safeguard their welfare.

Don't think, 'what if I'm wrong?' Think, 'what if I'm right!'

Share your concerns rather than walking away or doing nothing.

Aims and Scope of this Guidance

This guidance aims to:

- Encourage all volunteers to feel confident in raising serious concerns and to question and act upon concerns about practice.
- Provide avenues for you to raise those concerns and receive feedback on any action taken.
- Ensure that you receive a response to your concerns and that you are aware of how to pursue them if you are not satisfied.
- Reassure you that you will be protected from possible reprisals or victimisation if you have a reasonable belief that you have made any disclosure in good faith.
- Ensure that you understand how to handle personal information properly and safely in accordance with the [Data Protection Act 2018](#) and other relevant data protection laws.

What is Whistleblowing?

Whistleblowing can be defined as 'raising concerns about wrong-doing or misconduct within an organisation or within an independent structure associated with it'.

It differs from raising concerns about allegations of abuse. It is when someone, who works for, or in an organisation (in a paid or voluntary capacity) wishes to raise concerns about malpractice in the

organisation or practice which falls below the standards set out in [A Safe and Welcoming Church; Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2024. NBSCCCI](#).

The concern could relate to:

- A breach of the Diocese of Down and Connor's child safeguarding procedures.
- A breach of the law.
- Failure to comply with legal obligations.
- A possible miscarriage of justice.
- A health and safety risk.
- Damage to the environment.
- Misuse of public money.
- Corruption or unethical conduct.
- Deliberate concealment of any of these matters and the cover-up of these.

Those in ministry within the Church have certain common law confidentiality obligations to the Diocese. However, in a limited set of circumstances, whistleblowing may override these obligations if a person has information which they believe will not be addressed properly within the Diocese.

This guidance sets out the circumstances under which these disclosures may lawfully be made. In the case of safeguarding, these concerns are likely to be about activity that presents a possible risk to children, young people and adults at risk or systemic failure/acts of omission, in relation to children, young people and adults at risk and/or the services they receive. It applies when you have no vested interest and are reacting as a witness to misconduct or malpractice that you have observed. It is important to check out your concerns with those who are in a position to assess and deal with such matters appropriately.

Legislation Underpinning Whistleblowing

In Northern Ireland, the law that covers

whistleblowing is [The Public Interest Disclosure \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1998, \(as amended in October 2017\)](#).

Within the Diocese of Down and Connor this guidance applies if you are a volunteer. Blowing the whistle is more formally known as 'making a disclosure in the public interest'. The law states the importance of disclosing concerns, knowing that you are protected from losing your role and/or being victimised because of what you have uncovered and made public.

Harassment or Victimisation

The Diocese of Down and Connor is committed to good practice and maintaining high standards. It wishes to be supportive of all who contribute to its work.

However, the Diocese recognises that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make. If what you are saying is true, you should have nothing to fear because you will be doing your duty to your parish and those for whom you are providing a service.

The Diocese will not tolerate any harassment or victimisation (including informal pressures) and will take appropriate action to protect you when you raise a concern in good faith.

Confidentiality

All concerns will be treated in confidence and every effort will be made not to reveal your identity if you so wish. Whilst reporting may remain confidential, in most instances this cannot be guaranteed. Everyone has the right to know who makes a complaint against them. This should not deter one from raising the concern but is a reminder of the importance of providing evidence to support the concern. At the appropriate time, you may need to come forward as a witness.

Anonymous Allegations

This guidance encourages you to put your name to your allegation whenever possible. Concerns expressed anonymously will be considered and addressed but will be treated with extra caution and at the discretion of the Diocese of Down and Connor. It should be remembered that wherever possible, confidentiality will be preserved. In exercising this discretion, the factors to be taken account of would include:

- The seriousness of the issues raised.
- The credibility of the concern.
- The likelihood of confirming the allegation from attributable sources.

Anonymous allegations may be impossible to verify and will not generally provide sufficient scope for a full and proper investigation within the terms of this policy. Anonymous allegations will, therefore, be considered on a case-by-case basis at the sole discretion of the Diocese of Down and Connor and may be rejected without any further action being taken.

Untrue/Unfounded Allegations

If you make an allegation in good faith, but it is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against you. If, however, you make an allegation frivolously, maliciously or for personal gain, further action, may be taken against you.

How to Raise a Concern

- You should voice your concerns, suspicions, or uneasiness as soon as you feel you can. The earlier a concern is expressed, the easier and sooner action can be taken.
- Try to pinpoint exactly what practice is concerning you, and why.
- You may wish to consider discussing your concern with a friend or colleague first, and you may find it easier to raise the matter if there are two (or

more) of you who have had the same experience or have the same concerns.

- Approach your immediate group leader or Designated Liaison Person (DLP) for the Diocese of Down and Connor. If your concern is about your immediate group leader, speak to the DLP, or if you feel you need to take it to someone outside of the Safeguarding Office, then contact the Diocesan Curia, the statutory services, or the NBSCCCI.
- Confirm your concerns with factual information (dates, times details, history, giving names, dates, locations and any other relevant information) in writing.
- The reason why you are particularly concerned about the situation.
- You are not expected to prove the truth of your disclosure, but you need to demonstrate sufficient grounds for concern.
- Seek a satisfactory response in writing; do not let matters rest. If you do not receive a written response within a reasonable timeframe, write again seeking a written response. A failure to respond should be included in any further disclosure to the statutory authorities or the NBSCCCI.
- Follow up if the person to whom you reported has not responded within a reasonable time period and if that follow up is not acted upon, report the matter to the relevant statutory authorities.

Please note that the information provided will be held on file in accordance with the [Data Protection Act 2018](#), the [Data Protection Policy of the Diocese of Down and Connor](#) and the [Privacy Notice of the Down and Connor Safeguarding Office](#).

Diocesan Response

The Church personnel to whom the disclosure is made should acknowledge receipt in writing within seven days of receiving it.

This person to whom you report your concerns under

this guidance must, in turn, report them to the DLP within five working days. If the concern raised indicates immediate risk, it would be expected that this be brought to the attention of the Diocesan Safeguarding Office immediately and no later than within twenty-four hours.

The Church personnel to whom the disclosure is made should keep detailed notes of the disclosure, action taken, who was consulted and the outcome of the inquiries.

The Diocese of Down and Connor will respond to your concerns. Relevant information on the nature and progress of any enquiries resulting from the concern may be shared with the person who made the disclosure. It is acknowledged that confidential sensitive data cannot be shared so the response should include general information about internal inquiries and statutory referrals made. Do not forget that testing out your concerns is not the same as either accepting or rejecting them.

Where appropriate, the matters raised may be investigated by management, internal audit, through the disciplinary process, be referred to the police, be referred to an external auditor i.e., NSBCCCI forming the subject of an independent inquiry.

To protect individuals and those accused of misdeeds or possible malpractice, initial enquiries will be made to decide whether an investigation is appropriate and, if so, what form it should take.

The overriding principle which the Diocese of Down and Connor will have in mind is the public interest. Concerns or allegations which fall within the scope of specific procedures (for example, child, young person safeguarding, adult safeguarding, and discrimination or harassment issues) will normally be referred for consideration under those procedures. Some concerns may be resolved by agreed action without the need for investigation. If urgent action is required, this will be taken before any investigation is conducted. Within seven working days of a concern being raised, the Diocese will write to you: acknowledging that the concern has been received indicating how the Diocese proposes to deal with the

matter giving an estimate of how long it will take to provide a final response, telling you whether any initial enquiries have been made supplying you with information on support available from the Diocese and telling you whether further investigations will take place and if not, why not.

The amount of contact between the officers considering the issues and you will depend on the nature of the matters raised, the potential difficulties involved, and the clarity of the information provided. If necessary, the Diocese will seek further information from you. Where any meeting is arranged, off-site if you so wish and you can be accompanied by an appropriate companion at the agreement of the Diocese.

The Diocese of Down and Connor will take steps to minimise any difficulties which you may experience because of raising a concern. For instance, if you are required to give evidence in criminal or disciplinary proceedings, the Diocese will arrange for you to receive advice about the procedure and you may also wish to contact the support officers.

The Diocese of Down and Connor accepts that you need to be assured that the matter has been properly addressed. Thus, subject to legal constraints, we will inform you of the outcome of any investigation, but any information needs to be kept confidential.

A volunteer is not expected to prove the truth of an allegation but will need to demonstrate sufficient grounds for the concern.

What Happens Next?

You should be given information on the nature and progress of any enquiries. The Diocese of Down and Connor has a responsibility to protect you from harassment or victimisation. No action will be taken against you if the concern proves to be unfounded and was raised in good faith.

Self-Reporting

There may be occasions when a volunteer has a personal difficulty, perhaps a physical or mental health problem, which they know to be impinging on their competence. Volunteers have a responsibility to discuss such a situation with their group leader, so that support can be offered to the volunteer concerned. While such reporting will remain confidential in most instances, this cannot be guaranteed where personal difficulties raise concerns about the welfare or safety of children, young people and adults at risk.

External Disclosures

Disclosure to an external person, other than statutory bodies, government officials or the NBSCCCI. A disclosure made to an external person, for example, a journalist, may be a protected disclosure if it meets several conditions:

- You must reasonably believe that the information disclosed, and any allegation contained in it, are substantially true.
- You must not make the disclosure for personal gain.
- For making of the disclosure in public in all the circumstances, to be reasonable, at least one of these conditions must be met:
 - At the time you make the disclosure you must reasonably believe that you will be penalised if you make the disclosure to the Church.
 - Authority, statutory personnel or a government minister, or NBSCCCI.

- Where you reasonably believe that it is likely that the evidence will be concealed or destroyed if you make the disclosure directly to the Diocese, statutory body, or NBSCCCI.
- You have previously made a disclosure of substantially the same information to the Diocese, statutory personnel, government minister or NBSCCCI.
- The wrongdoing is of an exceptionally serious nature.

Support and Advice

It is recognised that whistleblowing can be difficult and stressful.

Advice and support are available from the Safeguarding Office by contacting: 028 9049 2798

Alternatively, you can seek advice from the Charity, "Advice Ni" <https://www.adviceni.net/>

"Absolutely without fail – challenge poor practice or performance. If you ignore or collude with poor practice it makes it harder to sound the alarm when things go wrong."

(Reproduced with acknowledgement to "Sounding the Alarm" – Barnardo's)

Relevant Forms

SO22

USEFUL RESOURCES

- **Dept for the Economy Guide to the Public Interest Disclosure (Northern Ireland) Order 1998**
- **Data Protection Act 2018**
- **National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (NSBCCCI)**
- **<https://www.adviceni.net/>**
- **Down and Connor Privacy Notices**

Guidance on Complaints Procedure for Safeguarding Concerns that are Not Allegations of Abuse

A complaint is defined as a grievance and/or the raising of a concern about [Breaches of Codes of Behaviour](#). [\(LinkTBC\)](#)

Allegations or suspicions of child abuse or adult abuse do not fall into this category of general complaints and should always be dealt with in accordance with Diocesan child safeguarding and adult safeguarding policies and procedures. [\(See Guidance on Reporting\)](#). [\(LinkTBC\)](#)

This complaints procedure is not for use by Church personnel who should use the [Whistle-Blowing Procedure](#) [\(LinkTBC\)](#) to raise their complaint.

Having a culture of openness, transparency and fairness means that a parish or organisation has nothing to hide in terms of practice, and that it is open to hearing feedback from children, young people, vulnerable adults, carers, other clergy, volunteers and parishioners about the services the parish offers and how it can improve upon them.

Parishioners, carers and children and young people should be made aware of the complaints procedure and should be provided with an information leaflet.

All recorded information relating to complaints should be kept confidential and stored in a secure place in the parish office. Records regarding complaints should be kept for a period of time as indicated in the [Data Protection Guidelines](#). [\(LinkTBC\)](#)

A framework for a simple complaints procedure

If there is a complaint which is not a child protection issue, the parent or child, as far as possible, should do the following:

Step One

- Discuss the complaint with the leader of the group/activity.
- If the matter is not resolved, then the complainant should discuss it with the Parish Priest in charge, who would facilitate a meeting between the parties.
- The Parish Priest's decision or resolution of the issue should be accepted by both parties.

A similar framework could be used to create a grievance procedure where a leader has a concern.

Step Two

If resolution has not been achieved the following steps should be taken:

- The Bishop or his delegate should be contacted by completing a [Complaints Form](#). [\(LinkTBC\)](#)
- A letter acknowledging receipt of the complaint should be sent within seven calendar days, enclosing a copy of the complaints procedure.
- All complaints must be thoroughly investigated.
- The Bishop or his delegate, may organise a meeting to discuss and hopefully resolve the complaint. This communication may also take place by telephone if a meeting is not possible. They will do this within fourteen calendar days of sending the acknowledgement letter to the complainant.

- Within seven days of the meeting or discussion, the Bishop or his delegate will write to the complainant to confirm what took place and to set out any solutions that were agreed upon.
- If the meeting is not agreeable or possible, the Bishop or his delegate will issue a detailed written reply to the complainant, setting out their suggestions for resolving the matter within twenty-one calendar days of sending the acknowledgement letter to them.

Relevant Forms

SO23

USEFUL RESOURCES

- Breaches of Codes of Behaviour
- Whistleblowing Guidance
- Diocesan Reporting Procedures
- Data Protection Guidelines

Guidance on Diocesan Safeguarding Data Protection/Privacy Guidelines

For the avoidance of doubt, the Safeguarding Office is subject to the general **Privacy Notice for the Diocese of Down and Connor**.

The following is intended to provide additional information in a safeguarding context about how we use and protect the information that we hold about you. This is not intended to replace or amend the general **Privacy Notice for the Diocese of Down and Connor**.

What personal data do we hold about you?

We hold basic information about who you are, what your contact details are and details of your family and social circumstances. We may also collect a “special category” of data which means sensitive data like information about your ethnicity, religious beliefs, sexual orientation or sexual life, information about physical or mental health, political beliefs etc. Due to the nature of the work we undertake as the Safeguarding Office, we may process this kind of sensitive information where it is relevant to our work. For example, in disclosing an allegation of abuse, you may share sensitive information with us.

How do we process your personal data?

The Safeguarding Office complies with its obligations under the **Data Protection Act 2018** (and any other applicable data protection laws) by adhering to the following;

- Keeping personal information up to date.
- Storing and destroying it securely.
- Not collecting or retaining excessive amounts of personal information.
- Protecting personal information from loss, misuse, unauthorised access and disclosure.

- Ensuring that appropriate organisational and technical measures are in place to protect your personal information.

How is your personal data used?

We will only use your personal data when we have a lawful reason to do so or where you have provided your consent. For example, your personal data may be used:

- To gather information about allegations, suspicions and concerns of child, young person or adult abuse made against any volunteers.
- To provide an outreach and support service if you, or a member of your family has been abused by clergy, or others working on behalf of the Diocese.
- To enable you to make a complaint about child, young person or adult abuse.
- To help you to access counselling and other services.
- To take steps to address complaints of child, young person or adult abuse, including reporting such complaints to the relevant authorities (Social Services, PSNI), and taking action to prevent harm to children, young people or adults at risk.
- To allow a support person to provide help and assistance to those who are in the process of making a complaint about child, young person or adult abuse, such as assistance in accessing counselling services or other services.

When can we share your personal data?

Your personal information will be treated as strictly confidential and may only be shared:

- Internally within the Safeguarding Office, amongst our employees and consultants who are subject to a contractual duty of confidentiality.

- Where we become aware of an alleged offence we are under a legal obligation to report this to the PSNI/ Social Services, even if you or the affected individual withdraws the complaint.
- Where it is necessary to protect you, or a child, young person or an adult at risk from physical, mental or emotional harm.
- With the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel, the members of which are subject to a duty of confidentiality.
- The Diocesan Safeguarding Committee does not have access to personal data, they do have access to parish data (not personal data) for audit purposes.
- We may share anonymised, statistical data, from which you cannot be identified with the **National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland**, for audit purposes and with the Diocese to enable them to report to **Charity Commission for Northern Ireland** in furtherance of its duty as a charity to report serious incidents.

We always aim to work together in a collaborative way with anyone who is reporting a child, young person or adult at risk abuse complaint. Due to our legal obligations, however, we may have to share information that you have provided to us with third parties without your consent.

How long do we keep your personal data?

We keep personal information in accordance with the guidance provided by the Diocese of Down and Connor, and in accordance with our legal obligations.

If you require more information on this, please contact us using the details in the **General Privacy Notice for the Diocese of Down and Connor**.

What rights do you have to your personal data?

You have the right to be informed that your information is being processed and to request a copy. You have the right to request that your personal information is rectified if it is out of date or inaccurate and where there is a dispute in relation to the accuracy or processing of your personal information, to request a restriction is placed on further processing. You can request that your personal data is erased when there is no compelling reason for the Safeguarding Office to continue to process the information and you have the right to withdraw your consent to the processing at any time.

It is important to note that there are exceptions to the above rights. If we are not able to comply with a request from you in relation to one of the rights above, we will write to you to explain the legal reasons why we are unable to do so.

The Diocesan Data Protection Officer's role is to ensure that the Diocese processes the personal data of all Church personnel, volunteers and parishioners who engage in Church activities in compliance with applicable data protection legislation and regulations.

If you have a query with any aspect of how your personal information is being processed, please contact: Diocesan Data Protection Officer

Email: dataprotection@downandconnor.org

You can contact the **Information Commissioners Office**

If you have any queries or require more information please see the general Privacy Notice for the Diocese of Down and Connor.

USEFUL RESOURCES

- **Data Protection Act 2018**
- **General Privacy Notice for the Diocese of Down and Connor**
- **Down and Connor Safeguarding Office Privacy Notice**
- **Information Commissioners Office**

Glossary of Terms

TERM	DESCRIPTION
Abuse	Harm can be suffered by a child or young person by acts of abuse perpetrated upon them by others.
AccessNI	Is a branch in the Department of Justice. Its role is to process applications from members of the public who require a criminal record check for volunteer or employment purposes.
Adult at Risk of Harm or in need of Protection	An 'Adult at Risk of Harm' is a person aged 18 or over, whose exposure to harm through abuse, exploitation or neglect may be increased by their personal characteristics and/or life circumstances.
Advisory Panel	A group of professionals with relevant safeguarding experience who support the Bishop through the DLP/Director of Safeguarding on risk assessment and interim management plan for those Clergy (Respondents) about whom a credible allegation has been received.
Associations of the Faithful	Canon 298 defines associations as “distinct from Institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life; in these associations the Christian faithful, whether clerics, lay persons, or clerics and lay persons together, strive in a common endeavor to foster a more perfect life, to promote public worship or Christian doctrine, or to exercise other works of the apostolate, such as initiative of evangelization, works of piety or charity and those which animate the temporal order with a Christian spirit”. Associations of the Faithful can be international, national or local organisations and can apply and become associate members of the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (NBSCCCI)
Canon Law	In the Catholic Church, Canon Law is the system of laws and legal principles made and enforced by the Church's hierarchical authorities to regulate its internal organisation and government, and to order and direct the activities of Catholics toward the mission of the Church.
Child/Children	Anyone below the age of eighteen years.
Children with Specific Needs	This term is used to cover the specific, or unique, out-of-the-ordinary concerns created by a child's medical, physical, mental or developmental condition or disability. Additional services are usually needed to help a person with specific needs.

Church Authority	It can refer to the leader of the Church Body, usually the Bishop or Provincial, or the senior administrative authority of a lay organisation or ecclesial movement.
Church Body	The term 'Church Bodies' is used as shorthand to include all constituent members of the Catholic Church in Ireland.
Church Personnel	This term is used to define those who work (voluntarily or paid) for the Church Body. This includes clergy, male and female religious, all in formation for priesthood and religious life, staff and volunteers.
Complainant	This term describes a person who has made an allegation of abuse.
Delegate	A person sent or authorised to represent others.
Designated Liaison Person (DLP)	The person appointed by the Church Authority to liaise with the statutory authorities regarding child safeguarding suspicions, concerns, knowledge or allegations.
Designated Person	An individual designated for a particular role or task.
Emotional Abuse	Is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child, sometimes also called psychological abuse.
Enhanced Disclosure Check	Is a type of AccessNI application (criminal record check) required for volunteers or Church personnel working or volunteering with children, young people or vulnerable adults.
Incardination	Incardination is the formal process where a Bishop's Diocese officially accepts a cleric (priest, deacon) from another Diocese. Incardination refers to the canonical process by which a priest or deacon is formally attached to a specific Diocese whereby they are formally accountable to.
Mandated Persons Republic of Ireland	People who have contact with children, young people and/or families, who, by virtue of their qualifications, training and experience, are in a key position to help protect children from harm.
Mandatory Reporting	There is a legal requirement to report offences in Northern Ireland. This means that any concerns of this nature must be referred to the police by law. The DLP makes this referral to the police. Criminal Law Act (Northern Ireland) 1967
Ministry with Children and Young People	This includes: Any work or service undertaken by Church personnel with children and young people which is under the authority of their Church Body. All priests in active ministry under the authority of their Church Body are to be considered as having ministry with children and young people.

NBSCCCI	National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland.
Neglect	Is the failure to provide for a child's or young person's basic needs, whether it be adequate food, clothing, hygiene, supervision or shelter, that is likely to result in the serious impairment of a child's or young person's health or development.
PFC	Parish Finance Committee
PSC	Parish Safeguarding Committee
Physical Abuse	Is deliberately physically hurting a child or young person. It might take a variety of different forms, including hitting, biting, pinching, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning, scalding, drowning or suffocating a child.
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland.
Religious	Female and male members of religious institutes and societies in which the members take public vows and live a life of ministry in common.
Respondent	Is the person about whom child protection suspicions, concerns, knowledge or allegations have been made.
Reporting	<p>Providing mandatory information to government agencies or regulatory bodies as required by law.</p> <p>Northern Ireland: Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland version 2.1, 2024 and Children Order (Northern Ireland) 1995 2(2) and Article 50(3) define the threshold for reporting as 'reasonable cause to suspect that the child is suffering, or is likely to suffer significant harm'.</p> <p>Criminal Law Act (Northern Ireland) 1967</p>
Safe Recruitment	Is a robust set of policies and practices designed to ensure that individuals working with vulnerable groups, such as children, young people and adults at risk, are suitable and safe to do so.
Sexual Abuse	Is when others use and exploit children or young people sexually for their own gratification or gain or for the gratification of others.
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. An international convention that outlines in 54 articles the fundamental rights of those aged under 18 years and the obligations of States that sign the Convention to uphold the rights it contains.
VELM	Vos estis lux mundi is a motu proprio issued in May 2019 by Pope Francis. It established new procedural norms to combat sexual abuse and ensure that Bishops and their equivalents are held accountable for their actions.

Vetting

AccessNI vetting is a criminal record checking process in Northern Ireland, run by the Department of Justice, that allows employers to make safer recruitment decisions for roles involving vulnerable groups or significant responsibility. Through an enhanced check, it provides details on convictions, cautions, and other information to determine if an applicant is suitable for a particular job or volunteer position.

Young Person

Means a person who has attained the age of fourteen and is under the age of eighteen years.

Sources used

[National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland](#)

[Children Order \(Northern Ireland\) 1995 2\(2\) and Article 50\(3\)](#)

[Types of Abuse \(from Cooperating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland version 2.1, 2024\)](#)

[Criminal Law Act \(Northern Ireland\) 1967](#)