

Stay safe

Best Practice in Child Protection



Guidance for Schools.

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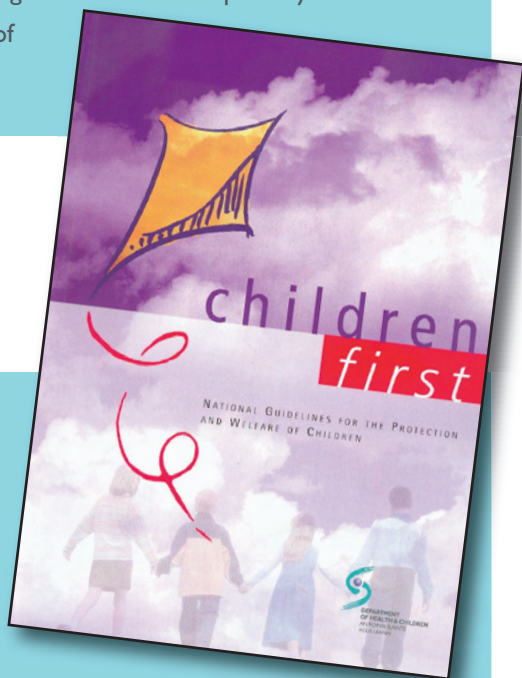
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“TEACHERS ARE PARTICULARLY WELL PLACED to observe and monitor children for signs of abuse. They are the main care givers to children outside the family context and have regular contact with children in the school setting. Teachers have a general duty of care to ensure that arrangements are in place to protect children and young people from harm. In this regard, young people need to be facilitated to develop their self-esteem, confidence, independence of thought and the necessary skills to cope with possible threats to their personal safety both within and outside the school. Boards of Management, principals and senior management teams have primary responsibility for the care and welfare of their pupils.

MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS within primary and post-primary schools should provide for the following:

- (i) the planning, development and implementation of an effective child protection programme;
- (ii) continuous monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of such provision;
- (iii) the effective implementation of agreed reporting procedures;
- (iv) the planning and implementation of appropriate staff development and training programmes.”



Children First, Chapter 6, pp 50/51

INTRODUCTION

Children, because of their dependency and immaturity, are vulnerable to abuse. Child abuse may take many forms but it can be categorised into four different types: neglect, physical abuse, emotional abuse and sexual abuse. A child may be subjected to one or more forms of abuse at any given time. While parents/guardians have primary responsibility for the care and protection of their children, personnel working with children also have clear responsibilities in this area.

'*Children First*': the National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children, clearly outlines the significance of the role each school has to play in the prevention, reporting and handling of child abuse.

The development of a Child Protection Policy which addresses the role, responsibilities and practices of the school in relation to child protection is therefore advisable.

The overall aim of this booklet is to assist schools in developing a comprehensive Child Protection Policy which addresses appropriate educational provision, procedures for dealing with concerns and/or disclosures of abuse and child protection practices in operation in the school. A comprehensive Child Protection Policy aims to protect children in the school while, at the same time, protecting the staff*.

To that end, this booklet seeks to draw together the recommendations/guidelines currently available for schools and to add to these by giving practical advice and guidance on the development and adoption of best practice in the day-to-day organisation of school activities.

**The staff of the school includes all personnel (paid and voluntary) working within the school environment e.g. teachers, special needs assistants, visiting speakers/teachers, bus escorts/drivers, ancillary staff, parents helping out etc.*



DEVELOPING A CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

The Child Protection Policy document should specifically address the followings areas:

I PREVENTION

- A. Objectives
- B. Resources
- C. Formal Lessons
- D. Informing/Involving Parents
- E. Other Considerations

II PROCEDURES

- A. Children First, National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children'
- B. DES 'Child Protection

III PRACTICE

- A. Recruitment and Selection of Staff
- B. General Conduct
- C. Toileting/Intimate Care
- D. Changing for Games
- E. Supervision of Pupils
- F. One-to-one teaching
- G. Visitors/Guest

I PREVENTION

SINCE THE IMPLEMENTATION of the Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum, the school Board of Management is required to ensure that a programme of education on abuse prevention is in place in the school.

Curricular provision can be achieved through the full implementation of the Stay Safe programme as part of the school's SPHE curriculum, under the Strand unit Safety and Protection.

The abuse prevention section of the school's child protection policy should include the following:

A. The Objectives of the Programme

The document should outline the objectives of the programme of education to prevent child abuse in use in the school i.e.

- to develop children's self-esteem, assertiveness and self protective skills.
- to teach children that they should always tell an adult about any situation which they find unsafe, upsetting, threatening, dangerous or abusive
- to give children the skills necessary to enable them to recognise and resist abuse/victimisation/bullying
- to teach the rules –

i) Say No, Get Away and Tell and

ii) Never Keep Touch A Secret



B. The Resources in use in the School

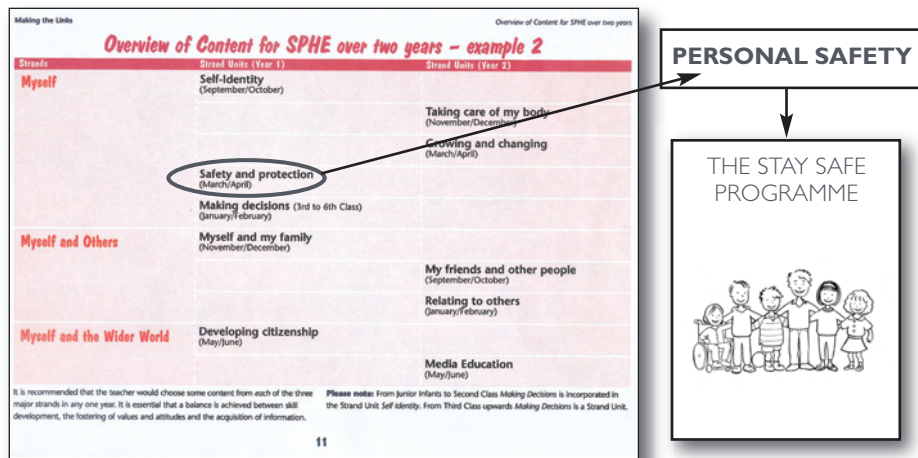
- Stay Safe Programme/An Clár Bí Sábháilte
- Stay Safe pack 'Personal Safety Skills for Children with Learning Difficulties'

C. The Formal Lessons of the Stay Safe Programme

As part of the Child Protection Policy it is necessary to outline how the formal lessons of the Stay Safe programme will be taught within the context of the SPHE curriculum. Many schools find the publication 'Making the Links' useful in planning for SPHE. The Stay Safe programme should be taught in its entirety under the section 'Personal Safety' of the Safety and Protection strand unit.

Figure 1: 'Making the Links, p 11'

A full copy of the publication can be viewed or downloaded from the Stay Safe website www.staysafe.ie



D. Informing and Involving Parents/Guardians

MOST PARENTS welcome the inclusion of a broad SPHE curriculum in schools. Programmes like Stay Safe are most effective when parents/guardians are actively involved in the process. Many schools work closely with parents/guardians to ensure their active participation and involvement.

PARENTS SHOULD BE INFORMED about the school policy in relation to teaching the sensitive aspects of SPHE. Most schools address this by informing parents, on enrolment of their child, of the school's policy in relation to the teaching of the Stay Safe programme and other sensitive areas. Many schools include a copy of the booklet entitled 'Stay Safe – A Parent's Guide' with the material sent to parents of newly enrolled children.

INFORMATION MEETINGS for parents on specific aspects of the SPHE curriculum, e.g. Stay Safe, are organised by schools on a regular basis.

It should however be noted that parents/guardians retain the right to withdraw their child from the sensitive aspects of SPHE.

Personal SAFETY RULES



E. Other Considerations

The following may also need to be considered under this section:

- Teaching the programme in a multi-cultural/multi-lingual situation – issues around informing parents and ensuring the messages of the programme are clearly understood by all

- Extra provision for children with special educational needs

- Teaching the programme in a multi-class situation

- The role of ancillary teaching staff in relation to the teaching/support of personal safety skills

- Education for children around the safe use of technology particularly with regard to mobile phone, internet use etc.

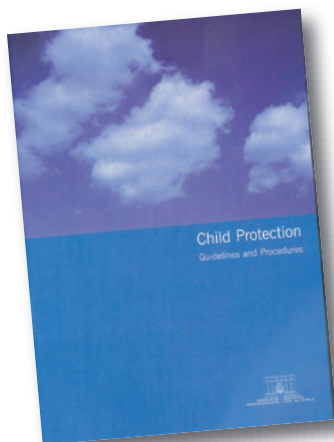
- The arrangements that will be put in place if:
 - i) a parent wishes to withdraw his/her child from the sensitive aspects of the SPHE curriculum
 - ii) a teacher opts out of teaching the sensitive aspects of the SPHE curriculum.

PROCEDURES

THE PROCEDURES that schools should follow when dealing with concerns and/or disclosures of abuse are outlined in two publications, namely:



'Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children'
Department of Health and Children
(DOHC)



'Child Protection: Guidelines and Procedures',
(Department of Education and Science,
(DES))

A COPY of both documents was sent to all schools in 1999.
They may be downloaded from the Stay Safe website www.staysafe.ie

A 'Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children'

'Children First' is intended to support and guide all those who come into regular contact with children in recognising and responding to possible abuse. The guidelines apply to all children – not just children who are victims of abuse or neglect. Under the guidelines a child is defined as a person under the age of 18 years, excluding a person who is or has been married.

B 'Child Protection: Guidelines and Procedures' (DES)

As well as general information the following areas are specifically addressed:

Chapter 1: Introduction and Legal Framework Confidentiality

- Protection for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act
- Qualified Privilege
- Freedom of Information Act

Chapter 2: Responsibilities of All School Personnel

- Designated Liaison Person
- How to Recognise Possible signs of Abuse
- Handling Disclosures from Children
- Keeping Track of Records

Chapter 3: Reporting of Concerns and Role of Health Boards

- Action to be taken by School Personnel
- Action to be taken by Designated Liaison Person
- Role of Health Boards
- Child Protection Conferences

Chapter 4: Allegations or Suspicions of Child Abuse by School Employees

- Reporting Procedure
- Action to be taken by Chairperson
- Further follow-up required
- Feedback from Health Boards

Chapter 5: Peer Abuse and Bullying

Sexual Abuse by Children and Young People Bullying

The guidelines also contain useful contact numbers for all HSE areas and information on reporting to the HSE and on child protection conferences.

IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF the school Board of Management to ensure that every member of the school staff is familiar with the DES guidelines and that the procedures outlined therein are adhered to when dealing with child welfare or child protection issues.

To that end, the Board of Management should ensure that appropriate training and information on child protection is provided for all staff, parents and board of management members on a regular basis.

The 'procedures' section of the school's child protection policy should state the school's commitment to ensuring the full adoption of the DES guidelines by all staff.

PLEASE NOTE that the DES guidelines recommend that the Board of Management designate a senior member of staff as Designated Liaison Person (DLP), normally the Principal. Where the DLP is not the Principal is it good practice to ensure that the Principal assumes the role of Deputy DLP.

This section of the policy should name the current DLP and Deputy DLP, as agreed by the Board of Management.

The school policy in relation to the practicalities of record keeping should also be addressed here. Sample recording sheets are contained in Appendix II.

Frequently Asked Questions:

Since the introduction of the DES guidelines the Child Abuse Prevention Programme has compiled a list of some of the more frequently asked questions concerning the implementation of the DES guidelines. These are available on the Stay Safe website: www.staysafe.ie



Stay Safe

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HOME

Stay Safe is a personal safety skills programme which aims to:-

- ✍ give children the skills necessary to enable them to recognise and resist abuse/victimisation.
- ✍ teach children that they should always tell an adult about any situation which they find unsafe, upsetting, threatening, dangerous or abusive.
- ✍ develop children's self-esteem, assertiveness and self-protective skills.

Stay Safe was developed in Ireland by the Child Abuse Prevention Programme (CAPP) which aims to reduce vulnerability to child abuse and bullying through the provision of:-

- ✍ personal safety education for children at primary school level.
- ✍ in-service training for teachers and school management.
- ✍ parent education.



A special gift to the use of programme material in the Department of Education & Science is the endorsement of the DES website

PRACTICE



BEST PRACTICE in child protection is about schools identifying areas of practice that need to be addressed to ensure that children and staff are protected.

When children are under the supervision of the school, teachers are considered to be ‘in loco parentis’.

To that end, schools are advised to act with prudence, having due regard for their responsibilities in the area of child protection. In most situations, schools will put in place suitable arrangements to cater for the needs of the pupils and have a prior understanding with parents of these arrangements.

There are, however, specific areas of concern around which a **Code of Best Practice** should be agreed by staff and endorsed by the Board of Management.

This is particularly important when schools are dealing with children with special educational needs. It is crucial that practices take account of their individual needs, their protection and the protection of school staff involved with meeting those needs.

IT IS IMPORTANT that school staff be given an opportunity to identify and agree practices to be adopted. Where necessary, a written protocol outlining agreed practices (e.g toileting, changing for games/swimming etc.) should be included in the school’s Child Protection Policy document.

While this booklet attempts to give schools the basic principles to drive this Code of Best Practice it does not attempt to answer all questions but rather to offer practical guidance.

PRACTICES WILL VARY from school to school depending on the needs of the children, staffing, physical layout etc. It is, however, extremely important that, whatever practices are adopted, all staff work within these agreed practices. Schools should not include anything in their policy document with which staff cannot comply.

It is also important to note that while every effort should be made to adhere to agreed best practice, in the event of an emergency or unforeseen occurrence, this may not be possible or practicable. In such instances, a full record of the incident should be made and reported to the principal, parents of children involved and Board of Management, as appropriate.



A. Recruitment and selection of staff

The recruitment of staff and volunteers is crucial to ensuring that those working with the children in the school are safe adults insofar as this can be determined. While correct procedures must always be followed in relation to advertising, interviewing and the selection of staff, other practices should also be considered.

All applicants should be asked to supply in writing information which includes:

- appropriate personal details
- a resumé of past and current work/volunteering experience, indicating relevant qualifications or skills acquired
- at least two written references – verification of references should be sought through making verbal contact with the referees

GARDA VETTING, where necessary, should always be sought but it is important to note that garda vetting is not in itself a complete safeguard, as many perpetrators of abuse are not known to the authorities.

IT IS ALSO CONSIDERED GOOD PRACTICE to do background checks on anyone being considered to assist in a voluntary capacity or seeking work experience in the school. Many colleges and organizations seeking to place individuals on work experience in the school will supply that information.

IT IS ALSO THE RESPONSIBILITY of the Board of Management to ensure that all personnel are properly supervised and supported in the work they are doing.

B. General Conduct

IT IS IMPERATIVE that in all dealings with the children in our care a balance is struck between the rights of the child and the need for intervention.

As a general rule any physical contact between school personnel and the child should be in response to the needs of the child and not the needs of the adult. While physical contact can be used to comfort, reassure or assist a child the following should be factors in assessing its appropriateness:

- it is acceptable to the child concerned
- it is open and not secretive
- it is appropriate to the age and developmental stage of the child

School personnel should not do things of a personal nature for a child which the child can do for him/herself.

Inappropriate physical contact also includes rough physical play and horseplay (tickling, wrestling etc).

All children should be treated with equal respect – favouritism is not acceptable.

School personnel should never engage in or allow:

- the use of inappropriate language or behaviours, e.g sarcasm
- physical punishment of any kind
- sexually provocative games or sexually suggestive comments about or to a child
- the use of sexually explicit or pornographic material etc.

ALL MEDIA products: CDs, DVDs, computer software etc. – should be checked for its appropriateness with regard to age and suitability.

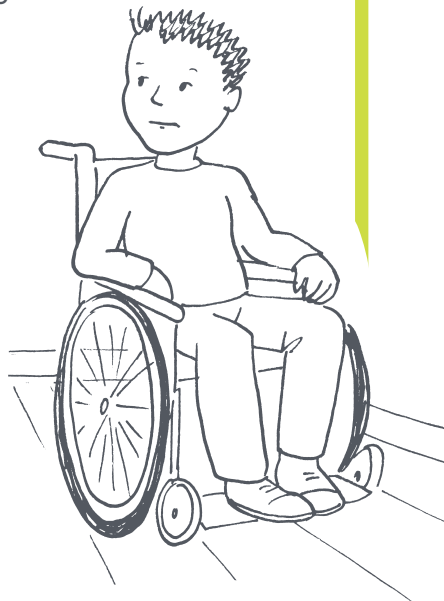
Where a doubt exists with regard to the suitability of material, parents, principal and/or board of management should be consulted as necessary.

It is incumbent on the Board of Management to ensure that all school personnel are familiar with the DES guidelines on child protection and to ensure that they are adhered to in the event of concerns or disclosures around child protection. The Designated Liaison Person should be notified promptly of any concerns with regard to the behaviour of a staff member or any allegations of abuse made by a child or an adult.

C. Toileting/Intimate Care

a. Children with specific toileting/intimate care needs

Normally a child who has specific toileting needs will have a special needs assistant assigned to him/her. It is very important that, before the child is enrolled in the school, a meeting is held at which all school personnel involved with the child attend along with the child's parents/guardians. At that meeting the needs of the child should be addressed and agreement reached as to how the school can meet those needs. It is important that those involved with the intimate care of the child agree practices which are acceptable to the staff, the child and the parents. It may be useful to have an Intimate Care Policy outlining the agreed practices. Practices agreed should be sufficiently flexible to cover unforeseen situations, e.g. if personnel involved in assisting the child are absent.



The Board of Management should be made aware of practices agreed.

b. Toileting 'Accidents'

Toileting accidents are not uncommon, particularly at junior level, and it is therefore prudent that schools address how these situations will be dealt with in the school. Parents may not be in a position to come to the school immediately should their child have a toileting accident and consideration has to be given to the implications of leaving a child unattended to in this situation. Unless there are very specific reasons why school staff should not attend to the child, procedures with which staff members are comfortable and which have due regard to minimising upset to the child should be agreed. A note should be kept of such incidents and parents should be informed.

D. Changing for Games/PE and Swimming

Many schools avoid difficulties in this area by requesting parents to ensure that children wear suitable clothing for games/PE and swimming e.g. shoes with 'Velcro' fastenings and clothes that children can change easily.



However, in activities that require children to change clothing, appropriate steps should be taken to ensure that reasonable protection is afforded to the children and staff members involved.

Due regard needs to be given to the potential health, safety and abuse concerns. To that end the Board of Management should ensure that:

- a balance is struck between the child's right to privacy and adequate supervision with due regard to gender issues
- where children need assistance with changing agreement should be reached between parents and staff as to how best those needs can be met
- clear boundaries are set down if volunteers are involved in assisting with changing, supervision etc.
- boundaries will vary depending on age/needs of child and on the physical constraints
- parents are notified if volunteers are assisting children
- staff should avoid assisting children with anything of a personal nature that the child can do for him/herself
- a report of any incident be made to the principal, parents and Board of Management, as appropriate.

It is good practice to have at least two adults present while children are changing for swimming or at any 'out-of-school' event.

E. Supervision of Children

SUPERVISION ARRANGEMENTS will vary from school to school depending on the physical layout, the ages and the needs of children. School staff should have agreed arrangements for the recording of accidents or incidents that take place while children are under the supervision of school staff.

Inadequate supervision can contribute to greater opportunities for peer abuse, bullying and victimisation.

OTHER AREAS that should be considered are the administering of First Aid, the possible implications of taking children alone on journeys and the collection of children by someone unknown to staff.



WHERE SCHOOLS are aware of a court order being in place which prevents someone from having access to a child, a copy of that order should be requested by the school.

In the event of the parent/guardian's non compliance with the court order the Gardaí should be summoned to the school to enforce it.

F. One-to-one teaching

PROVIDED IT IS DEEMED APPROPRIATE

for an individual one-to-one teaching may be provided. Schools need to weigh up the benefits of this against the possible disadvantages in relation to a child protection issue. Every effort should be made to ensure the protection of children and

staff. It is crucial that clear boundaries are put in place regarding physical environment (e.g. vision panel in door), seating arrangements, proper timetabling etc.

IF A CHILD NEEDS learning support or one-to-one teaching parents should be advised of any arrangements in place.



G. Visitor/Guest Speakers

VISITORS/GUEST SPEAKERS SHOULD NOT be left alone with children. The school (BOM/principal/teacher as appropriate) has a responsibility to check out the credentials of the visitor/guest speaker and to ensure that the content/material in use is appropriate.

H. Internet Safety

IT IS INCUMBENT ON SCHOOLS to ensure that child protection concerns are addressed in the school's Acceptable Use Policy as part of its Information and Communication Technology policy. These policies typically deal with issues relating to use of the Internet at school, such as access or use of children's photos or names on the school web-site.

Many aspects of Child Protection policy require regular review and this is especially true of technological issues. It sometimes seems that, by the time we understand the Child Protection implications of a new technology, it has already moved on. It is important that school communities continue to aim at this moving target.

Other issues which might be considered in a school's policy on acceptable use of technology include:

- Mobile/Camera Phones
- Handheld game devices.
- MP3 players etc.



IT SHOULD BE RECOGNISED that none of the above technologies are inherently bad; many have significant potential benefits for the child and a simplistic ban is rarely the best policy. Up-to-date information will be readily available from various websites including www.webwise.ie.

CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Research has shown that children with special educational needs are more vulnerable and consequently more at risk of becoming victims of abuse for reasons such as:

- Poor communication skills
- Limited sense of danger
- Need for intimate care
- Lack of mobility and greater reliance on adults
- Need for attention, friendship or affection
- Limited assertiveness and poorer self-confidence
- Limited understanding of sexuality or sexual behaviour
- Fear of not being believed

SCHOOLS NEED TO ENSURE that the personal safety education needs of all children with special educational needs are adequately met with due regard to the specific vulnerabilities of individual children. The Stay Safe pack '*Personal Safety Skills for Children with Learning Difficulties*' (1996) was designed to supplement the Stay Safe mainstream pack to assist teachers with this work. Consideration should also be given to how classwork can be supplemented by learning support and resource teachers, e.g. oral language, vocabulary development and communication work around the Stay Safe programme.

SPECIAL NEEDS ASSISTANTS play a vital role in the everyday care of children with special educational needs. It is, therefore, crucial that awareness and training around child protection is provided for all Special Needs Assistants and other staff who have contact with children.

DRAWING UP A CHILD PROTECTION POLICY FOR YOUR SCHOOL

Insofar as is possible the staff, parents and Board of Management of the school should be involved in the development of this policy. The policy should be in line with the current recommendations and guidelines relating to child abuse prevention and child protection guidelines.

A sample child protection policy document for schools is contained in the appendix. It can be downloaded from www.staysafe.ie and amended to suit the needs of individual schools.

PLEASE NOTE: Policy in schools may vary with regard to the prevention programme and in relation to best practice. However, the DES Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures must be adopted in their entirety by each school.

Once agreed, an individual copy of the school's child protection policy document and a copy of the Department of Education and Science Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures should be made available to all staff members. All staff should be reminded on a regular basis to familiarise themselves with the

school policy in this area and every effort should be made to ensure that the attention of new staff is drawn to the school child protection policy.



The school Child Protection Policy should be reviewed on a regular basis and training and information on child protection provided for all staff, parents and Board of Management members.

KEY POINTS CHECKLIST

The Stay Safe lessons are covered as recommended under the school's SPHE curriculum



Extra provision has been made for children with special educational need



Parents have been informed of school policy in relation to Stay Safe programme



The Board of Management has nominated a Designated Liaison Person (DLP) and a Deputy DLP



Record keeping – all staff are familiar with agreed procedures



Reporting procedures – all staff are aware of DES guidelines



Staff have identified and agreed areas of Best Practice



The BOM has ratified the child protection practices in place



All staff have received appropriate training in all areas of child protection



Provisions are in place to ensure that all new staff are made aware of the school's Child Protection Policy



APPENDIX I

SAMPLE CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

Introductory Statement

The Staff, Parents and Board of Management of _____ have developed and agreed this policy in line with the current recommendations and guidelines relating to child abuse prevention and child protection guidelines.

This policy addresses the responsibilities of the school in the followings areas:

PREVENTION – curricular provision

PROCEDURES – procedures for dealing with concerns /disclosures

PRACTICE – best practice in child protection

An individual copy of this policy document and a copy of the Department of Education and Science Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures will be made available to all staff.

It is incumbent on all staff to familiarise themselves with ‘*Children First*’ and the DES child protection guidelines and procedures.

Aims

This policy aims to:

- Create a safe, trusting, responsive and caring environment
- Provide a personal safety skills education which specifically addresses abuse prevention for all children in the school
- Develop awareness and responsibility in the area of child protection amongst the whole school community
- Put in place procedures for good practice to protect all children and staff
- Ensure that all staff members are aware of and familiar with the ‘*Children First*’ and the DES guidelines and procedures in relation to reporting concerns and/or disclosures of child abuse
- Provide for ongoing training in this and related areas for all school staff.

Prevention

The Stay Safe programme is the primary resource used in this school to provide education for children on abuse prevention. The programme is taught as part of the schools' Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum under the strand unit Safety and Protection.

On enrolment of their child parents will be informed that the Stay Safe programme is in use in the school and a copy of the '*Stay Safe: A Parent's Guide*' provided.

The formal lessons of the programme will be taught in their entirety every second year in accordance with the SPHE two-year cycle plan.

Staff will make every effort to ensure that the messages of the programme are reinforced whenever possible.

Other Considerations - See PREVENTION, page ??

Procedures

All staff (Teachers, SNAs, ancillary, secretarial, caretaking etc.) in this school will follow the recommendations for reporting concerns or disclosures as outlined in '*Children First*' and the Department of Education and Science document, '*Child Protection, Guidelines and Procedures*'.

The Board of Management of this school has appointed

_____ as the Designated Liaison Person (DLP), and

_____ as the deputy DLP.

The staff and management of this school have agreed:

- All concerns/disclosures involving child protection/child welfare issues will be reported in the first instance to the DLP (deputy DLP where appropriate)
- Each report to the DLP will be dated and signed by the person making that report
- A strict adherence to maintaining confidentiality – information regarding concerns or disclosures of abuse should only be given on a 'need to know' basis.

Practice

The staff and board of management of this school have identified the following as areas of specific concern in relation to child protection. Following discussion and consultation the staff and board of management have agreed that the following practices be adopted:

See section on PRACTICE for guidance.

Practices agreed should be listed under the specific heading

Links to other policy/planning areas

SPHE curriculum – Strand Unit on ‘Safety and Protection’,

The School Code of Discipline

Anti – Bullying

Health and Safety Statement

Information and Communication Technology

Special Needs

Swimming Policy

School Tours/Outings

Review and Monitoring

This policy will be monitored and reviewed by the Board of Management on an annual basis and when the need arises. The board of management will ensure that adequate training/information and support is provided for all staff, parents and board of management members.

Policy adopted by the BOM on _____

Signed: _____

Chairperson

APPENDIX 2

Code