

# **THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS'** **CONFERENCE.**

## **SAFEGUARDING OUR CHILDREN**

### **Section A. Introduction.**

The Catholic Church worldwide functions within the legal framework of the Code of Canon Law. The Code covers the rights and duties of all members of the Church and it has a penal section which legislates for disciplinary procedures. Members of the Church are also subject to the laws of the countries in which they live and they are expected to be models of respect for those laws.

The sexual abuse of minors is a crime in both Canon and Civil Law. Catholics, including clergy and Religious, are subject to whatever civil laws are in force in regard to such abuse. Over and above those civil laws, the Church in Southern Africa (South Africa, Botswana and Swaziland) has its own disciplinary procedures for responding to allegations of sexual abuse of minors by members of the clergy. This is called the '*Protocol for Church Personnel in Regard to the Sexual Abuse of Minors*'.

The Church expects a high degree of integrity in all its workers, clerical and lay. In Southern Africa it has published a document of ethical standards called '*Integrity in Ministry*'. Its aim is to enable all Church workers to develop and maintain the highest possible standards in pastoral ministry. '*Integrity in Ministry*' is based on the values of the Gospel. The point of reference is Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life.

The Catholic Church is not satisfied with merely responding to the sexual abuse of the young. It seeks to safeguard and protect the young from any form of abuse. The primary responsibility for the safety and well-being of children lies with the parents and the immediate family, but the parents need the active support of the whole community, and an important part of that community is the Church. Ministry to the young is an essential part of the mission of the Church, given to it by Christ Himself. Young people spend a lot of their time in the Church and in Church-related activities: Sunday Mass and Sunday school; catechism classes during the week or just playing in the Church yard; parish-run clubs and societies; excursions, pilgrimages and retreats. The whole Catholic community has a duty to ensure that these and other activities take place in an environment that is safe physically, spiritually and emotionally. That is the purpose of this document. As Church leaders, we realise that a document cannot cover every possible situation and we pledge ourselves to revise it after three years in the light of experience in implementing it and in the light of new circumstances which will arise with the passage of time.

In the meantime we trust that this first edition will heighten our awareness of our responsibility to our children, will set before us the standards expected of us, help us to be aware of the possibility of abuse within our Church environment, to recognise signs of it and provide a structure for responding in an adequate manner. Children are a precious gift to families, the community and the Church. We have a serious obligation to ensure that they grow and mature in a safe and nurturing environment.

## **Section B. Principles and Standards**

### **B. 1. Underlying Principles**

In Mark 9: 36-37 we read “Jesus took a little child, set him in front of them, put His arms around him and said to them, ‘ Anyone who welcomes one of these little children in my name, welcomes Me, and anyone who welcomes Me welcomes not Me but the One who sent Me’. In verse 42, Jesus gives a stern warning: ‘ Anyone who is an obstacle to bring down one of these little ones who have faith, would be better thrown into the sea with a great millstone round his neck’.

Children are a gift from God. They have a right to be respected, nurtured, cared for and protected. This right is embedded in Gospel values, best practice guidelines and international and domestic laws.

In the light of the teaching of the Church and of international and domestic law, every part of the Church and every organisation within the Church must be committed to take the necessary steps to

- demonstrate that the right of the child to protection from harm is paramount
- ensure that all minors in the care of the Church are in a safe and secure environment
- that codes of behaviour and procedures are in place and implemented, making clear what is and is not acceptable behaviour
- that all Church members are made aware of child safeguarding issues as well as Church policies and procedures
- support Church organisations and personnel in safeguarding children
- establish safe recruitment and vetting practices, aimed at preventing those who pose a risk to children from holding positions of trust.

### **B. 2. Seven Standards**

The Standards described in this document represent the expected level of performance that all parts of the Church should reach.

Meeting the Standards will protect:

- children – by ensuring they are in a good safe environment and minimising risk of abuse to them if allegations or suspicions of further abuse do arise
- Church personnel – by clarifying how they are expected to behave with children and what to do if there are allegations or suspicions about the safety of a child
- The integrity of the Church and its mission – by making clear its commitment to keeping children safe and by modelling best practice.

The seven standards are of a general nature and are intended to help a wide range of Church communities and Church-related organisations address the challenges of keeping children safe. Specific organisations such as Catholic schools will adapt them as required to their particular situations and needs.

The Standards are:

<b>Standard 1</b>	A written policy on keeping children safe.
<b>Standard 2</b>	Procedures – how to respond to allegations and suspicions in the SACBC territory
<b>Standard 3</b>	Preventing harm to children: - recruitment and vetting - running safe activities for children - codes of behaviour
<b>Standard 4</b>	Training and education
<b>Standard 5</b>	Communicating the Church’s safeguarding message: - to children - to parents and adults - to other organisations
<b>Standard 6</b>	Access to advice and support
<b>Standard 7</b>	Implementing and monitoring the Standards

We will now give what we regard as the basic requirements demanded by each of these standards. All seven will be taken into account in the overall policy given in Section C.

### **B. 3. Standard 1: A Written Policy on Keeping Children Safe.**

The written policy of the Church is based on the conviction that each child should be nourished and affirmed as a gift from God with an inherent right to dignity of life and bodily integrity which must be respected, nurtured and protected by all. The policy communicates the commitment of the Church at all levels to keep children safe by creating a safe environment for children participating in Church-related activities. It aims to prevent abuse and to make sure that the Church personnel are aware of situations that reasonably lead to abuse. It takes into account the provisions of state law.

According to South African law:

- Any person who has knowledge that a sexual offence has been committed against a child must report such knowledge to a police official or registered social worker.
- Any person, who on reasonable grounds, suspects that a child has been physically abused or deliberately neglected must report that suspicion to the police or registered social worker who has had the appropriate training.

Moreover, the SACBC Protocol stipulates that anybody who has information on the sexual abuse of a minor by a cleric passes that information to the Contact Person appointed by the relevant Church authority.

#### **B. 4. Standard 2: Procedures on How to Respond to Allegations and Suspicions.**

Children have a right to be listened to. Church authorities and organisations must respond effectively and ensure all allegations and suspicions of abuse are reported within the Church as well as to civil authorities as required by law. Church authorities must give clear guidance on what to do when a concern arises. Clear procedures will ensure there is a prompt response to allegations or suspicions about a child's safety or welfare. The procedures will give step-by-step guidance on what action is to be taken and by whom with clear timescales. They will also make provision for recording incidents, allegations, suspicions and referrals. There will be guidance on confidentiality and information sharing. The procedures will include contact details for local Church and State protection services.

#### **B. 5. Standard 3: Preventing Harm to Children.**

Children should have access to good role models they can trust, who will respect and nurture their spiritual, physical and emotional development. They also have a right to an environment free from abuse and neglect. Church organisations will strive to develop a culture that minimises risk to children by:

- safe recruitment and vetting practices – helping prevent those who pose a risk to children from holding positions of trust
- codes of behaviour – having clear guidelines that set out what is and is not acceptable behaviour as an essential part of keeping children safe
- operating safe activities for children – can help ensure a safe environment for children.

Guidance will be provided on expected standards of behaviour of adults towards children, of children towards other children (e.g. anti-bullying policy) and on how to raise allegations and suspicions of unacceptable behaviour. Guidance will be provided on dealing with the unacceptable behaviour of children and on the prohibition of physical punishment and any form of degrading or humiliating treatment. There will also be guidance on the care of children engaged in activities away from home, on the supervision of children and on the appropriate use of information technology.

#### **B. 6. Standard 4: Training and Education for Keeping Children Safe.**

All Church personnel will be offered training in child protection issues and in particular on understanding and implementing this policy. Special training will be provided for those charged with recruiting staff and dealing with complaints.

#### **B. 7. Standard 5: Communicating the Church's Safeguarding Message.**

Children are welcomed, cherished and protected in a manner consistent with their central place in the life of the Church. Clear processes will be put in place in disseminating the Church's policy and procedures to personnel, parishes and non-church agencies. The policy will be placed on the SACBC website and made available to everyone. Children will be made aware of their right to be safe from abuse and who to speak to if they have concerns. The name and contact details of the designated Contact Person will be displayed in every Church facility. Contact details of the statutory child protection agencies will be made available to Church personnel.

## **B. 8. Standard 6: Access to Advice and Support.**

Those who have suffered child abuse should receive a compassionate and just response and should be offered appropriate pastoral care to rebuild their lives. Those who have harmed others should be helped to face up to the reality of abuse, as well as being assisted in healing. Children, parents and those who get information about the abuse of children in a Church context must know where to find help. Church personnel with special responsibility for the protection of children need to have access to specialist advice, support and relevant information. Contacts will be established with relevant agencies and help-lines. Guidance will be given on how to respond to a child who is suspected to have been abused, whether that abuse is by someone within the Church, the family or the community. Appropriate support will be provided to those who have perpetrated the abuse, without compromising the safety of children.

## **B. 9. Standard 7: Implementing and Monitoring the Standards.**

To keep children safe, policies, procedures and plans have to be implemented across all Church organisations. Checks are needed to ensure this is happening consistently. The views of those involved inside and outside of Church organisations can help to improve the effectiveness of any measure taken. Arrangements will be put in place to monitor compliance with the Child Protection Policy. It will be made clear how this will be done at parish, diocesan and Conference levels of the Church in Southern Africa.

## **Section C. Policy for Safeguarding Children.**

The foregoing standards are for the Church in South Africa and all its institutions. The following policy is generic in nature. It may be adapted by different sections of the Church but all adaptations will be in line with the seven standards and be submitted to the Administrative Board of the Bishops' Conference through the Secretary General.

### **C. 1. General Code of Behaviour.**

**It is important for all employees and volunteers and others in contact with children to:**

- treat all children with respect
- provide an example of good conduct they wish others to follow
- operate within the Church principles and guidance and any specific procedures
- be visible to others when working with children whenever possible
- challenge and report potentially abusive behaviour
- develop a culture where children can talk about their contacts with staff and others openly
- respect each child's boundaries and help them to develop their own sense of rights as well as help them to know what they can do if they feel there is a problem.

**In general, it is inappropriate to:**

- spend excessive time alone with children away from others
- take children to your own home, especially where they will be alone with them

### **Employees, volunteers and others must never:**

- hit or otherwise physically assault or physically abuse children
- develop sexual relationships with children
- develop relationships with children which could in any way be deemed exploitative or abusive
- act in ways that may be abusive or may place a child at risk of abuse.

### **Employees, volunteers and others must avoid actions or behaviour that could be construed as poor practice or potentially abusive. For example, they should never:**

- use language, make suggestions or offer advice which is inappropriate, offensive or abusive
- behave physically in a manner which is inappropriate or sexually provocative
- have a child/children with whom they are working to stay overnight at their home unsupervised
- sleep in the same room or bed as a child with whom they are working
- do things for children of a personal nature that they can do for themselves
- condone, or participate in, behaviour of children which illegal, unsafe or abusive
- act in ways intended to shame, humiliate, belittle or degrade
- discriminate against or favour particular children to the exclusion of others.

The above must be read in conjunction with 3.4, 3.5 and 3.6 of *Integrity in Ministry*, which attached as Appendix D.1. for easy reference.

## **C. 2. Supervision**

In general, every effort must be made to minimise the risk of any form of abuse. The following guidelines should be observed:

- Church-related youth groups, activities and trips should have adequate adult supervision. A ratio of one adult to every ten children is suggested.
- If an outing or event is for a mixed group of boys and girls, there should be male and female supervisors.
- Try to ensure no adult is left alone with a minor where there is little opportunity for their activity to be observed by others.
- Where an adult and minor meet in a one-to-one situation, it should be in a situation where they can be seen by other adults, e.g. in an open space, in a room with a glass or open door.
- When transporting children, make sure that there is more than one adult in the vehicle, that the vehicle is roadworthy and insured and that the driver has a valid drivers licence.
- The use of IT equipment should be carefully monitored to reduce the risk of harmful online activity.
- Obtain parents' consent, especially when activities involve trips outside the local Church facilities or spending nights away from home. A sample Parental Consent form is attached as Appendix D.2.
- Maintain a culture of awareness among adults and children by ensuring everyone is clear about roles and responsibilities, and people are encouraged to challenge and report any inappropriate conduct with children. Inform children how to report concerns.

### **C. 3. Recruitment and Vetting of Staff.**

It is important that all possible steps are taken to prevent unsuitable people working with children in Church organisations. While the vast majority of people who want to work with children are well-motivated, good recruitment and selection procedures will help screen out those who are not suitable and enhance the prospects of identifying the best person for the post.

The following are recommended steps to help in the recruitment process:

- An application form should be completed for all prospective paid and voluntary staff members. “Voluntary staff member” is not intended to cover volunteers for a once-off event. A sample form is attached as Appendix D.3.
- National registers of child molesters will be consulted. These are the National Register for Sex Offenders kept by the Department of Justice and the National Child Protection Register, compiled by the Department of Social Development.
- Applicants will be asked if they have any convictions relating to the abuse of children. A written record of the interview will be kept on file.
- Obtain at least two references from persons who have experience of the applicant’s paid or voluntary work with children.
- All appointments should be conditional on an adequately supervised probation period of 3 to 6 months.
- Each staff member is to be given a copy of *Integrity in Ministry* and of this document, *Safeguarding Our Children*. They will sign that they have received it and agree to be bound by its spirit and rules.
- Before a cleric is given work in a diocese, the sending diocese or Religious Congregation will send to the receiving diocese a completed copy of the form already approved by the Bishops’ Conference.
- Workshops will be organised in each diocese for all Church personnel, full-time and volunteers, on *Integrity in Ministry* and this document, *Safeguarding Our Children*.

### **C. 4. Responding to Allegations and Suspicions.**

Allegations of abuse of children or of failure to comply with this safeguarding policy are to be reported and investigated according to the procedure laid down in the SACBC Protocol for Church Personnel in Regard to the Sexual Abuse of Children (see Appendix D.4 for summary of the procedures). In each diocese, all allegations and suspicions are to be made to or passed on to the Diocesan Contact Person.

**The following should be kept in mind:**

- The safety of the child is always the most important consideration
- State regulations on reporting must be strictly followed ( see B.4 above)
- Every allegation should be treated seriously
- Particular care should be taken in regard to confidentiality and the sharing of information with appropriate people.

### **Those who receive a report of abuse should:**

- Listen carefully to that person, but not ask intrusive or leading questions.
- Stay calm, take what the person raising the concern says seriously, and reassure them.
- Allow the person to continue at his/her own pace.
- Check with the person to make sure that you have understood what they actually said. Do not suggest words, but use theirs.
- Make no promises that cannot be kept, particularly in relation to secrecy, but listen carefully to what is being sought.
- Explain these procedures and the referral procedures.
- Offer to accompany the person to the Contact Person.
- Do not make any comments about the respondent, make assumptions or speculate.
- Be aware that a person's ability to recount his or her concern or allegation will depend on age, culture, nationality and upon any disability which may affect the use of language and range of vocabulary.
- Adopt a listening style which is compassionate, calm and reassuring. If the information given to you shocks, disgusts or distresses you, do not allow these feelings to show. If you do, you may inadvertently dissuade the person from giving any further information.
- Avoid statements about your belief or otherwise, of the information given.
- Do not question beyond checking what has been said. There must be no probing for detail beyond that which has been freely given.
- Do not speak to alleged abuser.

### **C. 5. Communication.**

Refer to what has been said in B8 above on Communicating the Church's Safeguarding Message. This policy will be effective only if everyone in a diocese knows about it and knows how to implement it. There needs to be an effective and clear communication system at Conference level and within each diocese. In particular:

- A copy of this policy will be given to all full-time personnel of each diocese
- A copy will be given to each institution and organisation within the diocese, including the diocesan youth organisations
- All Parish Councils will be given a copy
- The name and contact details of the Diocesan Contact Person will be displayed on the notice board of each Church ( see Appendix D.5. and D.6. for sample notices)
- The CIE and CaSPA, the agencies of the Church directly involved in Catholic schools, will be responsible for communicating an adapted form of this policy to all Catholic schools.



## **C. 6. Implementing and Monitoring.**

The duty of protecting our children rests on all Church members. Those in positions of leadership have a special duty to make sure this policy is made known to and implemented by:

- the head of each Church movement or institution that have a child-related apostolate
- the priest in charge of each parish
- the Bishop of each diocese
- the Bishops' Conference for the Church in Southern Africa.

*Safeguarding Our Children* will be monitored on an annual basis. The purpose of this monitoring is to:

- check on implementation
- ascertain what worked well, what did not work, what needs to be changed or added or removed
- record at Conference level the number of issues dealt with and how they were resolved.

To ensure this monitoring happens, the Bishops' Conference will set up a Monitoring Committee. Its function will be to monitor on an annual basis the functioning of both the *Protocol for Church Personnel in Regard to the Sexual Abuse of Minors* and *Safeguarding Our Children*. It will give an annual report to the January Plenary, based on the reports that it has received from the Diocesan Contact Persons, the Bishops' Delegates and the Chairman of the SACBC Professional Conduct Committee.

The members of the Monitoring Committee will include:

- the Liaison Bishop for the SACBC Professional Conduct Committee
- two other bishops
- the Secretary General of the SACBC
- a lay expert.

The SACBC is grateful to the Irish *National Board for Safeguarding Children* for permission to use *Safeguarding Children: Standards and Guidance Document for the Church in Ireland*.

## **Section D. Appendices.**

### **D. 1. From SACBC' S Integrity in Ministry**

#### **3.4. Clergy, religious and church lay workers shall respect the physical, emotional and cultural boundaries appropriate to pastoral relationships with adults and minors.**

Commitment to this standard would be indicated by:

- strictly following the rubrics with regard to the use of touch in celebrating the Sacraments of the Church;
- providing counselling only in rooms appropriately set up for such purpose;
- exercising prudence in initiating and responding to physical contact, such as giving a comforting hug or an affirming touch;
- exercising prudence in the use of language that expresses affection or regard;
- exercising prudence in the giving of gifts.

With regard to this standard, the following behaviour is mandatory for all clergy, religious and church lay workers:

- one shall never provide pastoral ministry in the sleeping quarters/bedrooms of one's community house, or of the presbytery/parish house.

#### **3.5. Religious and clergy shall have a profound esteem for the personal dignity of children and youth.<sup>17</sup>**

Commitment to this standard would be indicated by:

- Never staying overnight in the same room as a minor, even if there are two beds;
- Never supplying or serving alcohol or any controlled substance to a minor;
- Never administering corporal punishment to a minor.

#### **3.6. Clergy, religious and church lay workers, respecting the rights of children and youth, shall be concerned that these rights are respected by all.<sup>18</sup>**

Commitment to this standard would be indicated by:

- Being aware of the causes and signs of child abuse or neglect, the steps to take to protect children, and the procedures to follow if abuse or neglect is suspected or observed;
- Being aware of any legal responsibilities under civil law, and of the Church's procedures in relation to the notification of child abuse or neglect;<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 27

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> The SACBC'S *Protocol for Church Personnel in Regard to Sexual Abuse of Minors*

## **D. 2. Activity Permission Form for Persons Under 18 years.**

1. Name of Church organisation \_\_\_\_\_

Venue/Activity/ Group/Event \_\_\_\_\_

Date/Time \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Group Leader/person responsible \_\_\_\_\_

2. Name of Child/Young Person \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone No \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_

Give details of **any** medical condition of which the Organisers ought to be aware, please include details of any medication which has to be taken or any dietary requirements.  
(This information will be treated with confidence).

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. I have read all the information provided concerning the programme of the above activity. I hereby give permission for my son/daughter/ward to participate in the above activity.

4. The \_\_\_\_\_ *organisation* only accepts liability or responsibility for an incident or accident caused by the negligence or breach of statutory duty of the *organisation* its servants or agents.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
(Parent/Guardian)

Address \_\_\_\_\_  
(if different from above)

Any additional telephone numbers during the period of the activity \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### **D. 3. Form for all persons working as employees or volunteers with Children and Young People.**

#### **Confidential**

The welfare of children and young people must be the paramount consideration.

Church organisations therefore ask that everyone working or volunteering for the Church, who will come into contact with children or personal details of children, abide by good practice by completing and signing this declaration:

Do you have any prosecutions pending or have you ever been convicted of a criminal offence or been subject of a Caution or of a Bound Over Order (please tick)

Yes

No

If yes, please state below the nature and date(s) of the offence(s)

Date of offence: \_\_\_\_\_

Nature of offence: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever been the subject of disciplinary procedures or been asked to leave employment or voluntary activity due to inappropriate behaviour towards a child? (Please tick)

Yes

No

If yes, please give details including date(s) below:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Full name (print):** \_\_\_\_\_

Any surname previously known by: \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Date of Birth:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Place of Birth:** \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Declaration:**

**I understand that, if it is found that I have withheld information or included any false or misleading information above, I may be removed from my post whether paid or voluntary, without notice. I understand that the information will be kept securely by the Church organisation.**

**I hereby declare the information I have provided is accurate.**

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

#### **D. 4. Summary of Procedures from Protocol for Church Personnel in Regard to the Sexual Abuse of Minors.**

Chapter 3 of *The Protocol for the Investigation of Complaints Against Clerics and Religious in regard to Sexual Abuse of Minors* describes the structures in place for responding to accusations of such sexual abuse. The same structures will be used to respond to allegations of non-compliance with this *Safeguarding Our Children* policy. The following is a summary of that structure:

- Each Archdiocese and Diocese has two Contact Persons
- Each Ecclesiastical Province has a Provincial Professional Conduct Committee, headed by a Bishops' Delegate appointed by the Bishops of the Province
- The Bishops' Conference has an SACBC Professional Conduct Committee, led by a Chairperson appointed by the Conference.

Complaints are dealt with in the following way:

- Whoever receives a complaint or has a well-founded suspicion reports it to one of the Contact Persons
- The Contact Person meets the one who made the complaint and makes a written report of the interview, signed by the Contact Person and the one who made the complaint
- The Contact Person submits the written report to the relevant Church authority and to the Bishops' Delegate
- The Contact Person and Bishops' Delegate meet and decide if further investigation is called for
- If the decision is for further investigation, the Church Authority is informed
- If the Church authority agrees that an investigation is called for, he will instruct the Bishops' Delegate to appoint two investigators
- The Church Authority informs the respondent about the allegation and the action being taken
- Reports to the civil authorities are made in accordance with the law
- The Investigators meet the complainant and the alleged victim (they may or may not be the same person) and make a written report of the interview
- They meet with the respondent and write an account of the interview
- They meet others as required
- The Provincial Committee examines the report of the investigators and submits its own report to the Church Authority
- The Church Authority examines the report, meets with the Bishops' Delegate and comes to a decision
- If the allegation concerns the sexual abuse of minors by a cleric the case is referred to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF)
- If the issue is being investigated by the civil authorities, the Church suspends the above procedure until the civil case is completed.

Please note that that is merely a summary of the procedure. All concerned must familiarize themselves with the structure as outlined in the Protocol and its accompanying *Vade Mecum*.

## **D. 5. Protecting Children and Young People in the Archdiocese/Diocese of \_\_\_\_\_**

Children and young people have a very important place in our Church and we are always eager to encourage their active participation in parish life. We are committed to doing everything we can to create a safe and welcoming place for our young parishioners, where their welfare is of greatest importance. It is our archdiocesan/diocesan policy to ensure that children and young people will always be safe, protected and supported in all activities associated with the Church.

**If you have any concerns about the well-being of a child or young person connected to or involved in the Church, or you suspect that a child or young person may be being abused by anyone within the Church, please report the matter immediately to one of the Archdiocesan/Diocesan Contact Persons (details given below) or to a priest whom you know.**

Please provide as much detail as possible, so that the matter can be quickly and fully investigated, in the first place by the Professional Conduct Committee of the Archdiocese/Diocese. It is important that we do everything we can to protect children and to prevent them being harmed in any way.

The names and telephone numbers of the  
Archdiocesan/Diocesan Contact Persons are:

**Name:**

**Telephone No:**

**Name:**

**Telephone No:**

Thank you for your help in protecting children and young people.

**D.6.**

**From the Catholic Church  
To all Children and Young People**

**KEEPING YOU SAFE**

You are always welcome in Church and in our parish community.  
We are committed to keeping you safe from harm.

If you have been hurt in any way by someone,  
or you are at risk of being hurt,  
please tell us straight away so that we can help you

**or**

If you know of another child or young person who has been  
hurt by someone, or is at risk of being hurt,  
please tell us straight away so that we can help him or her.

Contact one of these people listed below:

**Name:**

**Telephone no:**

**Name:**

**Telephone no:**

Thank You!

N.B: This poster should appear prominently in all our churches, Mass centres, presbyteries, parish halls, schools, etc.

## **D. 7. Definition of Abuse.**

**In the context of this document a Child is a person under the age of 18 years.**

### **What is Child Abuse?**

Abuse of a child may occur when somebody inflicts harm on the child or fails to act to prevent harm. Children may be abused in a family or in an institutional or community setting by those known to them or more rarely, by a stranger.

**Physical** abuse includes hitting, shaking, kicking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning or suffocating, or otherwise causing physical harm to a child.

**Psychological** abuse includes sarcasm, degrading punishments, threats and not giving love and affection, which can have adverse effects on the behaviour and emotional development of a child or young person. It may involve conveying to a child that he/she is worthless, unloved, inadequate or valued insofar as he/she meets the needs of another person. It could feature having unrealistic expectations of a child. Eliciting fear, or exploiting or corrupting a child can also be features.

**Neglect** occurs when basic needs such as food, warmth, shelter and medical care are not met which results in serious impairment of the development of the child or young person. It may also involve failure to protect the child from harm or danger. It may also include unresponsiveness to a child's basic emotional needs.

**Sexual** abuse involves forcing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. It may include penetrative or non-penetrative acts. It may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in production of or viewing of pornographic material or encouraging children to act in sexually inappropriate ways.

These types of abuse apply equally to children with disabilities but the abuse may take slightly different forms e.g. where there is lack of supervision, or where restraints are used to confine a child or young person to a wheelchair or bed.

**It is vital that all Church personnel, staff and volunteers be alert to signs of child abuse.** They may be alerted by:

1. Noticing signs and symptoms of abuse of a child e.g. bruising, withdrawal
2. A child reporting or showing signs of having been mistreated
3. Allegations made by another person
4. An admission or 'cry for help' from someone who says they are harming a child.

### **IMPORTANT TO NOTE:**

1. Children and young people may be suffering from abuse which has taken place in the past as well as current abuse.
2. Abuse is always wrong.
3. Abuse is never the child's fault.



4. Women and children can be victims and/or perpetrators.