

## **S5. A Guidance on Risk Assessment of Activities with Children**

### **Introduction**

Risk assessment is an important part of working with children. It assists with managing both health and safety issues, and the welfare of children. Part 2, Article 11 of the Children First Act 2015 requires all services who work with children to have a child safeguarding statement. The core component of this statement is risk assessment. This should focus on any risks of harm to a child that could occur while availing of or in attendance in your service. As adults we assess risks throughout our lives, but when working with children it is important to consider potential hazards that may lead to risk to children 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 the 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 Church body.

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

### **What does the term 'risk' mean?**

A risk is a potential source of harm or adverse health effect on a person or persons. In the Republic of Ireland 'Risk' in the context of this risk assessment is the risk of harm to children as defined in the Children First Act (2015) – (a) assault, ill-treatment, or neglect of the child in a manner that seriously affects or is likely to seriously affect the child's health, development or welfare, or (b) the sexual abuse of a child whether by a single act, omission, or circumstance or by a series or combination acts, omissions or circumstances, or otherwise.

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.

In the context of the Church related activities involving children may include the following examples

- failure to comply with effective safeguarding practice, such as lack of supervision ratios or consent forms;
- medical risks, such as failure to take medication, or inappropriate intimate care practice;
- physical risks, such as dangerous electrical cabling, or proximity to water.

## Assessing risks

For each activity that involves ministry with children, those involved in leading the ministry should meet with the parish priest/local superior (face to face or virtually) and any relevant safeguarding personnel and complete the following steps:

1. Identify and list the risks: look for hazards in the nature of the activity, and in the place where you are holding the activity. Areas to be considered include:
  - Have all staff and volunteers been recruited properly? (including vetting reference checks etc).
  - Have all staff and volunteers been trained in safeguarding and in working with children?
  - Does everyone understand their role?
  - Does everyone know what to do if they are concerned about a child?
  - Have appropriate supervision ratios been put in place?
  - Have children and their Guardians been informed of rules for the activity and given their consent to participate?
  - Have practical considerations been assessed for risk – e.g. where are toilets, washing and changing facilities?
  - What security measures have been considered – e.g. access to the venue by non-participants?
  - Will ICT be used in the activity? Who has access and how is it monitored?
  - Has consideration been given to the safe collection of children after the activity?
  - Has everyone been briefed on the content of the risk assessment and what policies to follow in the event that a concern is identified?
  - Does everyone know who the DLP is and how to contact them?

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

2. Identify the controls that need to be put in place to limit the risk.
3. Identify who is responsible for managing the risk and the correct implementation of the associated procedures. This should include those directly responsible for the children's ministry and those with specific responsibilities for child safeguarding in the Church body.
4. These steps should be used to complete the risk assessment form (S5.A Template 1).

The leaders of each local activity involving children's ministry are required to identify risks and procedures relevant to its own situation. Some examples are given in the following template.

Given the similarities that exist across certain activities, whatever the location, it is likely that these examples may be appropriate to many situations. However, it is important that those completing a risk assessment keep the focus on their own situation and even where identified risks are the same as those in the example

template (S5.A Template 1), consider whether the needed controls may differ based on the local context of the activity. The risk assessment must be available to all. Leaders of activities with children must have a copy and be aware of its contents.

### **Reviews**

Risk should be periodically reviewed, especially in circumstances when a venue changes, a new activity takes place or the members of the group change. If no new risks are present, a review of the risk assessment should take place at least annually.