

**(DRAFT) Child Safeguarding Statement
of the Irish Provinces of
The Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy, Ireland.**

This statement has been prepared to comply with the requirements of the *Children First Act 2015* and is derived from “A Safe and Welcoming Church, Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2024”. The policy of the Catholic Church in Ireland is based on standards of practice accompanied by criteria which assist in reaching these standards and which can be used in assessing and managing risk.

Statement

On 11th June 2024, the Irish Provinces of the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy adopted and committed to implementing the NBSCCCI “A Safe and Welcoming Church, Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards, 2024”. As constituent members of the Catholic Church in Ireland, we (Northern, Southern, Western and South-Central Provinces of the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy) recognise and uphold the dignity and rights of all children and we are committed to ensuring their safety and well-being and will work in partnership with parents/ guardians to do this.

The Gospel teaches the importance of ensuring that the Catholic Church community is a warm, welcoming and safe place for children.

Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it. (Mark 10:14-15)

Children are gifts from God, to be cherished and recognised for the joyful contribution they make as valued members of the Church.

Our challenge is to follow the example of Jesus in cherishing them. Safeguarding is key to this important task and should be seen, not as a burden, but as an opportunity to embrace and encourage children's ministry, following the example of Jesus Christ. The Sisters of Mercy pledge to

safeguard children and young people from harm and to support them in their development as valued and integral members of the Catholic Church in Ireland. The Mercy ministry will be inclusive and will uphold their rights. Consistent with Gospel values, and with civil and criminal law, those who minister will do so with dignity and integrity, honouring their calling to ensure that children and young people are welcomed, cherished and protected, following the example set by Jesus.

This Safeguarding Children Policy will be honoured and complied with by all Mercy personnel (including religious, staff and volunteers) in the Catholic Church in Ireland.

Nature of Service and Principles to Safeguard Children from Harm

The Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy, as a constituent member of the Catholic Church in Ireland, exists to promote the teachings of the Catholic Church. The Irish Provinces of the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy (hereafter referred to as The Irish Provinces) engages in ministry with children in a variety of activities including: -

- Pastoral Care/Visitation
- Counselling
- Rainbows
- Music lessons
- Home tuition/Grinds
- Retreats
- Mercy Centres
- Social support
- Community Development
- Support for refugees/migrants

As outlined in a Safe and Welcoming Church, Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2024, we are committed to the following standards and principles:

Leadership, Governance and Accountability. Mercy Leadership embodies and imparts the Catholic Church's vision, principles and values. These are reflected and apparent in the child safeguarding culture, structures and practices at all levels and in all Mercy ministries with children and young people. This demonstrates, through words and actions Mercy Leadership's personal commitment to fulfil the safeguarding mission of the Church.

Nurturing a Culture of Safeguarding. Ensuring the creation and maintenance of a culture of safety, including a safe Church environment that is welcoming of children. Keeping children safe from harm is an imperative but more than that, Mercy will promote the well-being of children through their participation in the ministry of the Church. Mercy will create and maintain environments that uphold children's rights and that create nurturing, caring conditions where children will flourish in faith and love. Through fostering a culture of care, children will feel safe and looked after and in turn, they will be supportive of and respectful to their peers.

Responding Pastorally and Reporting According to Civil and Canon Law. Caring for complainants and ensuring a just process of inquiry, anyone who brings any suspicion, concern, knowledge or allegation of current or past abuse of a child to the notice of Mercy, will be responded to sensitively, respectfully, actively and in a timely manner in line with statutory child protection procedures and Church requirements.

All Mercy personnel have a responsibility to report suspicions, concerns, knowledge or allegations of child abuse that reach the threshold for reporting to the statutory authorities. The Designated Liaison Person (DLP) can assist with this process. These reports will be made irrespective of the status of the person (lay, cleric or religious) who is suspected of having been abusive to a child. If the allegation being reported relates to an employee or volunteer of Mercy personnel, in addition to notifying the statutory authorities, the allegation must be reported to the appropriate Provincial Leader and the DLP.

If the allegation being reported relates to a religious, in addition to notifying the statutory authorities, the allegation must also be reported to the

Provincial Leader, the DLP and the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland. Due diligence to GDPR is observed in all reporting to the National Board.

All Mercy personnel will cooperate with the statutory authorities in all cases. In responding to complaints of child sexual abuse relating to a religious, Provincial Leaders will act in accordance with the requirements of civil law and canon law, and in so doing will respect the rights and uphold the safeguards afforded in these laws both to the complainant and respondent.

Mandatory Reporting

Each of us has a legal requirement to notify the statutory authorities of suspicions, concerns, knowledge or allegations that a child is being or has been abused:

- physically
- emotionally
- sexually
- through neglect

Suspicions, concerns, knowledge or allegations can relate to incidents in the child's family or in the wider community or may relate to abuse by a member of Mercy personnel.

Those who have suffered child abuse by Mercy personnel will receive a compassionate and just response, and will be offered appropriate pastoral care, counselling and support as they seek to rebuild their lives.

The Irish Provinces will take responsibility for ensuring that a risk management plan is put in place for any religious who is considered to constitute a danger to children.

All requisite steps will be taken to restore the good name and reputation of anyone who has been wrongly accused of abusing a child.

The Irish Provinces will be mindful of the need to provide support to members of families and communities affected by the respondent's changed situation.

Risk Assessment

With regard to Mercy activities in which Sisters of Mercy constitute the majority of those exercising governance the table below sets out:

- (a) the identified risks to the safety of children and young people
- (b) the steps taken to minimise the risks of abuse.

Risk Identified	Procedure in Place to Manage Risk Identified
Risk of harm (as defined in the Children First Act 2015) of a child by Mercy personnel or by visitors to Mercy premises.	<p>Procedures for safe recruitment and creating and maintaining a safe environment as outlined within the criteria of ‘Nurturing a Culture of Safeguarding’ (<i>A Safe and Welcoming Church, Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2024</i>) which can be viewed at:</p> <p>https://www.safeguarding.ie.</p> <p>The procedures for safe recruitment and selection include,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Vetting• Induction in Safeguarding <p>Guidance and training is available for Sisters and staff on safe work with children and young people.</p>

<p>Risk of harm (as defined in the Children First Act 2015) of a child through bullying by Mercy personnel or peers.</p>	<p>Anti-bullying procedures as outlined within the criteria of ‘Nurturing a Culture of Safeguarding’ (<i>A Safe and Welcoming Church, Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2024</i>). Codes of Behaviour for children involved in any Church-related activities and codes of conduct for adults that promote best practice and integrity in ministry are in place and can be viewed at https://www.safeguarding.ie</p> <p>All Sisters and staff in ministry with children receive information about Sisters of Mercy Anti-Bullying procedures.</p>
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<p>The environment in which work with children is facilitated fails to protect them from harm (as defined in the Children First Act 2015).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Procedures to create and maintain safe environments including localised hazard assessments as outlined within the standard and associated criteria of ‘Leadership, Governance and Accountability’ (<i>A Safe and Welcoming Church, Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2024</i>). - Procedures and training are in place for creating a safe environment for children which include but are not limited to; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Safe adult-child ratios. - Completion of registration and consent forms. - Dealing with accidents <p>https://www.safeguarding.ie</p> <p>The Irish Provinces have in place a system of governance that identifies clear procedures, accountability structures and quality assurance, in which roles and responsibilities are explicit. These are specified in the Safeguarding Strategic Plan of the Sisters of Mercy.</p>
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<p>Risk of harm (as defined in the Children First Act, 2015) to children involved with external groups who use Mercy property</p>	<p>As outlined within standard ‘Nurturing a Culture of Safeguarding’ (<i>A Safe and Welcoming Church, Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2024</i>) procedures are in place for managing external groups including,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - lay associations of the faithful, - visiting clerics and male and female religious, - those ministering in external organisations and groups using Mercy property. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The organization who is leasing the property should follow the procedure at: <p>https://www.safeguarding.ie</p>
<p>Risk of harm (as defined by the Children First Act 2015) to a child during outings or trips away (including overnight) from home from peers, Mercy personnel or strangers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Irish Provinces have in place a system of governance that identifies clear procedures, accountability structures and quality assurance, in which roles and responsibilities are explicit. These are specified in the Strategic Safeguarding Plan and include; - guidelines on trips away from home procedures, - localised risk assessment, - safe supervision ratio and - safe recruitment available at https://www.safeguarding.ie

<p>Risk of harm (as defined by the Children First Act 2015) through the use of digital media (photography, video and social media).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procedures for the safe use of digital media as outlined within the criteria of ‘Nurturing a Culture of Safeguarding’ (<i>A Safe and Welcoming Church, Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2024</i>) are in place and can be viewed at: https://www.safeguarding.ie • All Sisters in ministry with children ensure that media permission forms issued to children and parents are completed in relation to the use of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - digital media - photography - social media
<p>Mercy personnel fail to report an allegation, suspicion, concern or knowledge appropriately.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Irish Provinces have in place a system of governance that identifies clear procedures, accountability structures and quality assurance, in which roles and responsibilities are explicit. As outlined within the standard ‘Nurturing a Culture of Safeguarding’ (<i>A Safe and Welcoming Church, Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2024</i>) procedures are in place to create and maintain written records which reflect that all safeguarding action is taken in line with appropriate data protection and information-sharing protocols. These can be viewed at: https://www.safeguarding.ie - Robust procedures for Recognising, Responding to, Recording and Reporting child abuse are in place. - Sisters of Mercy in direct ministry with children receive training.

<p>Mercy personnel fail to take action during and following any investigation into allegations of abuse against clerics and religious to ensure that children are protected from harm (as defined in the Children First Act 2015).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procedures for managing allegations after the civil investigation has concluded and which meet the criteria associated with the standard ‘Responding Pastorally and Reporting According to Civil and Canon Law’ (<i>A Safe and Welcoming Church, Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2024</i>) are in place and available at https://www.safeguarding.ie • The Irish Provinces ensure that designated trained personnel are in place to undertake risk assessment. • Safeguarding procedures are followed during the course of investigations into allegations of abuse against religious.
<p>Mercy personnel fail to support those who are victims of abuse.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procedures to support complainants which meet the criteria associated with the standard ‘Responding Pastorally and Reporting According to Civil and Canon Law’ (<i>A Safe and Welcoming Church, Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2024</i>) are in place and available at https://www.safeguarding.ie • Procedures are in place to listen to and provide information and pastoral support for complainants. This includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - information about the Mercy procedures for dealing with allegations of abuse - access to counselling and - additional resource information
<p>Mercy personnel fail to understand their responsibilities to safeguard children.</p>	<p>Procedures for child safeguarding training and support which meet the criteria associated with the standard ‘Nurturing a Culture of Safeguarding’ (<i>A Safe and Welcoming Church, Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2024</i>) are in place and can be viewed at https://www.safeguarding.ie</p>

<p>Children and their parents do not understand the Mercy policy, procedures and structure to safeguard children and protect them from harm (as defined in the Children First Act 2015).</p>	<p>Procedures to develop communications, training and support relating to child safeguarding to meet the criteria associated with the standard ‘Leadership, Governance and Accountability’ (<i>A Safe and Welcoming Church, Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2024</i>) are in place and can be viewed at</p> <p>https://www.safeguarding.ie</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procedures are in place to ensure that children and parents who are involved with Mercy activities receive safeguarding information through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - registration, - policy leaflets, - website <p>A Safeguarding poster is available in</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - English - Irish - Polish - and will be made available in other languages as required.

The procedures for safeguarding children from harm (as defined in the Children First Act, 2015) fail to be implemented.

- Procedures to ensure compliance with the child safeguarding standards outlined within the criteria of 'Leadership, Governance and Accountability' (*A Safe and Welcoming Church, Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2024*) are in place. The Irish Provinces have in place a system of governance that identifies clear procedures, accountability structures and quality assurance, in which roles and responsibilities are explicit and is available at

<https://www.sistersofmercy.ie>

The Sisters of Mercy in each Province have safeguarding personnel in specialist roles to monitor compliance with Child Safeguarding Policy and Procedures.

A Safeguarding Self-Audit is conducted annually within each Province.

<p>The Mercy authority fails to ensure the appointment of a relevant person and maintain a list of mandated persons.</p>	<p>Procedures to appoint relevant persons are in place in the Irish Provinces. Mercy has in place a system of governance that identifies clear procedures, accountability structures and quality assurance in which roles and responsibilities are explicit.</p> <p>The relevant person(s) is the Safeguarding Manager/Coordinator who is the first point of contact with regard to the Child Safeguarding Policy in each Irish Province.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A live register of mandated persons is maintained in each Irish Provincial Office. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mandated persons include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All Sisters of Mercy* Staff who are employed in specialist roles Members of the Safeguarding Committee Designated Liaison Persons Designated Safeguarding Trainers Support Persons Advisors Safeguarding Representatives HR Persons Health and Safety Persons <p>https://sistersofmercy.ie/safeguarding/</p>
<p>Risk of harm of a child (as defined in the Children First Act 2015) being disclosed during the Sacrament of Reconciliation.</p>	<p>Not applicable to the Sisters of Mercy</p>

❖ All Sisters of Mercy denotes with due regard for mental capacity of Sisters.

Localised Risk Assessment

Alongside the risks, listed in the table above, the Sisters of Mercy, Irish Provinces, individually risk assess their activities with children and put in place procedures to manage these risks.

Risk Identified	Procedure in place to manage risk identified
<p>Local activity with children is risk assessed in each location in which the activity takes place as part of national policy <i>A Safe and Welcoming Church, Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2024</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For localised risk assessments and the procedures in place to manage the risks, please refer to the assessments stored in the Provincial House/Offices. • Safeguarding activity is monitored through contact with Sisters in ministry with children. • The Annual Safeguarding Self-audit is completed in each Irish Province. • The information collated through the Self-audit process informs; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - risk assessments - the Safeguarding Annual Report - the Safeguarding Strategic plan and contributes to improvements in safeguarding practice.

Procedures

All procedures outlined in the risk assessment above are available at each Irish Provincial Office. The Child Safeguarding Statement has been developed in line with requirements under the Children First Act 2015, and *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (2017)*.

The procedures include the following:

- Procedure for the management of allegations of abuse or misconduct against staff/volunteers towards a child availing of our service. Available at Irish Provincial Offices.
- Procedure for managing allegations against Sisters and all in formation for religious life. Available at Irish Provincial

Offices.

- Procedure for safe recruitment and selection of staff and volunteers to work with children. Available at Irish Provincial Offices.
- Procedure for provision of and access to child safeguarding training and information, including on the identification of the occurrence of harm. Available at Irish Provincial Offices.
- Procedure for the reporting of child protection or welfare concerns to Tusla and An Garda Síochána. Available at Irish Provincial Offices.
- Procedure for maintaining a list of the Sisters of Mercy who are mandated persons. Available at Irish Provincial Offices.
- Procedure for appointing a relevant person. Available at Irish Provincial Offices.

Implementation

The Irish Provinces of the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy are committed to safeguarding children through the implementation of: A Safe and Welcoming Church, Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2024. This Child Safeguarding Statement and our practice supports our desire to keep children safe from harm while in our ministries. As part of our annual audit against the relevant criteria of the child safeguarding standards, we will review the effectiveness of our practice as outlined in this statement and will revise it, as appropriate based on those findings.

In addition, we will revise this statement at least every 24 months or as appropriate due to changes in ministries or legislation/guidance.

Provincial Leaders

Signed:  Province: Southern Province

Signed:  Province: South Central Province

Signed:  Province: Northern Province

Signed:  Province: Western Province

DATED: August 2024

For any queries relating to this statement please contact the following relevant persons who are:

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