

Child Safeguarding Statement (Amended)

of the Irish Provinces of

The Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy

This statement has been prepared to comply with the requirements of the *Children First Act 2015* and is derived from "Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2016". (National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland, NBSCCCI).

Statement

In 2016, The Irish Provinces of the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy adopted and committed to implementing the NBSCCCI Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards. 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. We recognise each child as a gift from God, and we value and encourage the participation of children in all activities that enhance their spiritual, physical, emotional, intellectual and social development.

All Mercy personnel (including religious, staff and volunteers) have a responsibility to safeguard children through promoting their welfare, health and development in a safe and caring environment that supports their best interests and prevents abuse.

Nature of Service and Principles to Safeguard Children from Harm

The Irish Provinces of the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy (hereafter referred to as The Irish Provinces) engage 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 the Safeguarding Children 2016 Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland and the *Children First Act 2015* we are committed to the following principles:

- **Mandatory Reporting**

Each of us has a duty 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.

- **Caring for the welfare of all children and the adults who work with them.**

- Measures to create and maintain environments that are safe for children, that prevent abuse and that create nurturing, caring conditions within the Church for children and the adults who work with them, will continue to be strengthened and reviewed. This will be done through training, support, communications and quality assurance.
- Responding appropriately to child protection suspicions, concerns, knowledge or allegations.
- Anyone who brings any suspicion, concern, knowledge or allegation of current or past abuse of a child to the notice of Mercy personnel will be responded to sensitively, respectfully, actively and in a timely manner, in line with statutory child protection procedures and Church requirements.
- All suspicions, concerns, knowledge or allegations of abuse should be reported to the appropriate statutory authorities. This will be done irrespective of the status of the person (lay, cleric or religious) who is suspected of having been abusive to a child. If the allegation relates to an employee or volunteer of Mercy personnel, the allegation must be reported to the appropriate Provincial Leader and the appropriate statutory authorities.
- If the allegation refers to religious, in addition to notifying the statutory authorities, the allegation must also be reported to the Provincial Leader 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.

- **Caring Pastorally for Complainants and Other Affected Persons**

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.

- **Caring Pastorally for Respondents and Other Affected Persons**

- The Irish Provinces response to suspicions, concerns, knowledge or allegations of child sexual abuse will respect the rights under civil law and canon law of accused religious or other Mercy personnel. A legal presumption of innocence will be maintained during the statutory and Mercy inquiry processes. As the processes develop, additional assessment, therapy and support services may be offered to the respondent.
- 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
<p>Risk of harm (as defined in the Children First Act 2015) of a child by Mercy personnel or by visitors to Mercy premises.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Procedures for safe recruitment and selection, include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vetting • Code of Behaviour - Guidance and training are in place for Sisters and staff on safe work with children and young people. - Appropriate procedures are in place for visiting clergy https://www.safeguarding.ie/images/Pdfs/Standards/Standard%201.pdf
<p>Risk of harm through bullying (as defined in the Children First Act 2015) of a child by Mercy personnel or peers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All Sisters and staff in ministry with children receive information about Sisters of Mercy Anti-Bullying procedures. • Guidance is available on creating a Code of Behaviour for Children and a Code of Behaviour for Adults. https://www.safeguarding.ie/images/Pdfs/Standards/Standard%201.pdf
<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 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. - thorough completion of registration and consent forms. - dealing with accidents. - maintaining adequate supervision ratios. - 1 to 1 contact with children. - participation of children with special needs. - whistle blowing. - complaints. - risk/hazard assessment of activities. - use of technology. https://www.safeguarding.ie/images/Pdfs/Standards/Standard%201.pdf

<p>External groups who use Mercy property are unsafe to do so.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External groups who use Mercy property must confirm that they have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a child safeguarding policy and procedures - appropriate insurance in place <p>This information is retained by each Irish Province. https://www.safeguarding.ie/images/Pdfs/Standards/Standard%201.pdf</p>
<p>Risk of harm (as defined by the Children First Act 2015) to a child during activities or trips away from home from Mercy personnel or other adults.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Sisters of Mercy operate comprehensive procedures on trips away from home including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Whistle Blowing procedures. - Procedures for dealing with safeguarding and non-safeguarding complaints. - Localized risk assessment. - Safe recruitment. - Safe supervision ratios. <p>https://www.safeguarding.ie/images/Pdfs/Standards/Standard%201.pdf</p> <p>https://www.safeguarding.ie/images/Pdfs/Standards/Standard%202.pdf</p>
<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"> • 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 • Guidance is in place for safe use of all digital media by sisters and staff. <p>https://www.safeguarding.ie/images/Pdfs/Standards/Standard%201.pdf</p>

<p>Mercy personnel fail to report an allegation, suspicion, concern or knowledge appropriately.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Robust procedures for recognising, responding to and reporting abuse are in place. • Sisters of Mercy in direct ministry with children receive training. <p>https://www.safeguarding.ie/images/Pdfs/Standards/Standard%202.pdf</p> <p>https://www.safeguarding.ie/images/Pdfs/Standards/Standard%205.pdf</p>
<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"> • Sisters of Mercy 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>https://www.safeguarding.ie/images/Pdfs/Standards/Standard%202.pdf</p>
<p>Mercy personnel fail to support those who are victims of abuse.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 Sisters of Mercy procedures for dealing with allegations of abuse - access to counselling and - additional resource information <p>https://www.safeguarding.ie/images/Pdfs/Standards/Standard%203.pdf</p>

<p>Mercy personnel fail to understand their responsibilities to safeguard children.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procedures to deliver Child safeguarding training and support to Mercy personnel are in place. <p>https://www.safeguarding.ie/images/Pdfs/Standards/Standard%205.pdf</p>
<p>Children and their parents do not understand the Mercy Policy, Procedures and Structure to safeguard children from harm (as defined in the Children First Act 2015).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procedures are in place to ensure that children and parents who are involved with Sisters of Mercy activities receive safeguarding information through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - registration - policy leaflets - website • Safeguarding poster is available in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - English - Irish - Polish - and will be made available in other languages as required. <p>https://www.safeguarding.ie/images/Pdfs/Standards/Standard%206.pdf</p>
<p>The procedures for safeguarding children fail to be implemented.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Sisters of Mercy in each Province appoint safeguarding personnel in specialist roles to monitor and review compliance with Child Safeguarding Policy and Procedures. • A Safeguarding Audit is conducted annually as part of the Child Safeguarding Strategy for the Sisters of Mercy in each Province. <p>https://www.safeguarding.ie/images/Pdfs/Standards/Standard%207.pdf</p>

<p>The Mercy authority fails to ensure the appointment of a relevant person and maintain a list of mandated persons.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 Province. • The Safeguarding Manager ensures that a live register of mandated persons is maintained. • 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 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>The Sisters of Mercy will ensure that where ministry with children is taking place, that the activity is risk assessed.</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 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 Provincial House/Office. The procedures include the following:

- Procedure for the management of allegations of abuse or misconduct by a child availing of our service against Sisters/ employees/volunteers.
- Procedure for safe recruitment and selection of employees and volunteers to work with children.
- Provision of and access to child safeguarding training and information for Sisters/employees/volunteers.
- Procedure for the reporting of child protection or welfare concerns to Tusla.
- Procedure for maintaining a list of the Sisters of Mercy who are mandated persons.
- Procedure for appointing a relevant person rests with each Provincial Leadership Team (PLT).

Implementation

The Irish Provinces of the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy are committed to safeguarding children through the implementation of "Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2016". 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 indicators of the child safeguarding standards, we will review the effectiveness of our practice as outlined in this statement and will revise, as appropriate.

Provincial Leaders

Signed:  Province: Southern Province

Signed:  Province: South Central Province

Signed:  Province: Northern Province

Signed:  Province: Western Province

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For any queries relating to this statement please contact the following Relevant Persons:

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