



Child Protection Policy & Procedures

Code of Behaviour for Staff

Child-Centred Approach

Ballina Arts Centre operates a Children's Arts programme, comprising events and activities for children and young people. A child-centred approach underpins the delivery of the programme.

We endeavour to:

- Treat all children and young people equally
- Listen to and respect children and young people
- Involve children and young people in decision-making, as appropriate
- Provide encouragement, support and praise (regardless of ability)
- Use appropriate language (physical and verbal)
- Have fun and encourage a positive atmosphere
- Offer constructive criticism where needed
- Treat all children and young people as individuals
- Respect a child's or young person's personal space
- Discuss boundaries on behaviour and related sanctions, as appropriate, with children and young people and their primary carers
- Agree group 'contract' before beginning session
- Encourage feedback from group
- Use age-appropriate teaching aids and materials
- Lead by example
- Be aware of a child's or young person's other commitments when scheduling rehearsals or activities, e.g. school or exams
- Be cognisant of a child's or young person's limitations, due to a medical condition perhaps
- Create an atmosphere of trust
- Respect differences of ability, culture, religion, race and sexual orientation

Good Practice

Ballina Arts Centre aims for the highest possible standards of practise in all its programmes. This is especially important in the Children's Arts programme.

To attain best practise, we:

- Register each child/young person (name, address, phone, special requirements, attendance, emergency contact) for all events/activities involving children/young people
- Make primary carers, children/young people, visitors staff and facilitators aware of the Child Protection Policy and procedures
- Have emergency procedures in place and make all staff aware of these procedures
- Be inclusive of children and young people with special needs
- Plan and be sufficiently prepared, both mentally and physically, for all eventualities
- Report any concerns to the Designated Person and follow reporting procedures as outlined in the Child Protection Policy and Procedures
- Encourage children and young people to report any bullying concerns or worries and to be aware of anti-bullying policy.
- Observe appropriate dress and behaviour
- Evaluate work practices on a regular basis through formal and informal processes
- Provide appropriate training for staff and volunteers
- Report and record any incidents and accidents
- Update and review policies and procedures regularly
- Keep primary carers informed of any issues that concern their children
- Ensure proper supervision based on adequate ratios according to age, abilities and activities involved, and observe appropriate gender balance
- Ensure clear communication between artist and organisations; have guidelines and a prompt sheet for artists
- Have a written agreement with any external organisation that an artist is working with
- Will not be passive in relation to concerns, i.e. don't do nothing
- Will not let a problem get out of control
- Will avoid, if possible have an artist/facilitator take a session on his/her own. If this is not possible then it should be in an open environment with the full knowledge and consent of primary carers.
- Do not encourage giving a lift to a child/young person and if it happens, we will make sure that primary carers are informed
- Will maintain awareness around language and comments made. If you something is said or done which may have caused offence or upset, then we will try to address it in a sensitive manner.

Inappropriate behaviour

In appropriate behaviour will not be tolerated by staff or participants. We will endeavour to:

- Avoid spending excessive amounts of time alone with children/young people
- Not use or allow offensive or sexually suggestive physical and/or verbal language
- Avoid singling out a particular child/young person for unfair favouritism, criticism, ridicule, or unwelcome focus or attention
- Will not allow/engage in inappropriate touching of any form

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- Will not hit or physically chastise children/young people
- Will not encourage socialising inappropriately with children/young people, e.g. outside of structured organisational activities

Physical contact

We will:

- Seek consent of child/young person in relation to physical contact (except in an emergency or a dangerous situation)
- Avoid horseplay or inappropriate touch
- Check with children/young people about their level of comfort when doing touch exercises.

Health & safety

- Don't leave children unattended or unsupervised
- Manage any dangerous materials
- Provide a safe environment
- Be aware of accident procedures and follow accordingly.

Code of Behaviour for Children / Young People

Children and young people using Ballina Arts Centre or participating in Ballina Arts Centre events will be required to adhere to the Ballina Arts Centre Code of Behaviour for Children / Young People.

All children / young people participating in activities and events are expected to:

- Be enrolled by primary carer in given activity and have supplied appropriate details for example; special needs requirements; emergency contact number
- Meet standards of good conduct and behaviour. Bullying, verbal/physical abuse or aggressive behaviour towards staff or other participants is not acceptable
- Be courteous and cooperative to Ballina Arts Centre staff and other participants
- Use appropriate language (physical and verbal)
- Follow directions given by the facilitator/staff members; especially when handling equipment
- Ask permission to leave workshop for any reason, e.g.: to go to the toilet
- Respect the rights, dignity and worth of all participants regardless of their gender, ability, cultural background or religion

A child / young person involved in inappropriate/disruptive behaviour must be reported to Paul Cunningham/Audrey Robinson.

Any child or young person unable to adhere to Ballina Arts Centre's Code of Behaviour for Children / Young People may be excluded from Ballina Arts Centre's events and activities. However, this may only be done by the Designated person or the Deputy Designated person.

Reporting Procedures

Designated Person

Paul Cunningham, Director of Ballina Arts Centre, has been designated as the person to contact if you have an issue or concern about any aspect of a child's or young person's safety and welfare. It is the responsibility of this person to support and advise staff about policy and procedures in relation to child protection and to ensure that procedures are followed. It is also the responsibility of the Designated Person to liaise with Tusla or Gardaí where appropriate.

Paul Cunningham can be contacted at Ballina Arts Centre, 096 73593 / 086 3675235.

Audrey Robinson has been designated as deputy to Paul Cunningham and can be contacted at Ballina Arts Centre, 096 73593 / 087 288 6307.

Reasonable grounds for concern

The following examples would constitute reasonable grounds for concern and should be reported to the Designated Person:

- disclosures of abuse by a young person
- age-inappropriate or abnormal sexual play or knowledge
- specific injuries or patterns of injuries
- signs of injury for which there is no explanation, or which is consistent with abuse and unlikely to be caused in any other way
- absconding from home
- attempted suicide
- under-age pregnancy or sexually transmitted disease
- someone else (a parent, friend, co-worker) may disclose that a young person has told them they are being abused, or may have witnessed the abuse themselves
- a young person's behaviour may raise concerns
- a staff member may personally witness abuse taking place
- there may be consistent indication, over a period of time, that a young person is suffering from emotional or physical neglect
- signs in one or more of the above categories at any one time.

A suspicion that is not supported by any objective indicator of abuse or neglect would not constitute a

reasonable suspicion, or be reasonable grounds for concern.

Under no circumstances should any individual member of staff or volunteer attempt to confront an alleged abuser. Proper procedures should be followed at all times. The Health Board and/or An Garda Síochána will determine how far and in what manner an investigation should be conducted.

Procedures for recording incidents and concerns

In all situations, including those in which the cause of concern arises from a disclosure made in confidence, it is extremely important to record the details of an allegation or reported incident, regardless of whether or not a referral is subsequently made to a statutory agency. This should happen as soon as possible after the incident has taken place.

Any reports/completed forms will be stored in a safe and secure location. A file will be kept one each incident. All incidents will also be recorded in an Incident Book, which will be stored in the Ballina Arts Centre main office.

The need for good record-keeping at all stages of the child protection process is very important. No adjustments will be made to an existing document. In the event of new developments/information a new document should be completed which will accompany the existing document. These documents will be stored permanently as they belong to Ballina Arts Centre, not to the person who first made the report. When an individual makes a report to the statutory authorities, the possibility always exists that he/she may be called to give evidence should legal action be taken. It is therefore important to record details of disclosure and any other relevant information that may have been heard and seen.

As well as recording actual incidents, all occurrences of concern will be noted, recorded and filed.

Procedures for dealing with a disclosure

Ballina Arts Centre strives to provide a secure environment that enables children / young people to share their concerns. It is important that a child / young person who discloses abuse feels supported and facilitated in what, for him / her, may be a frightening and traumatic process. He / she may feel perplexed, afraid, angry, despondent or guilty. It is important that any negative feelings that the young person may have are not increased by the kind of response that the disclosure elicits. A young person who divulges abuse to a staff member makes a profound act of trust and should be treated with respect, sensitivity and care. It is important to remember the following:

- react calmly, as over-reacting may alarm the child / young person and compound feelings of anxiety and guilt
- listen carefully and attentively; take the child /young person seriously
- reassure the child / young person that they have taken the right action in telling
- do not make false promises, particularly regarding secrecy
- do not ask the child / young person to repeat the story unnecessarily
- ask questions only for the purpose of clarification. Be supportive, but do not ask leading questions or seek intimate details beyond those volunteered by the child / young person. Detailed investigative interviews will, if necessary, be carried out by Tusla staff or members of An Garda Síochána

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- check with the child / young person to ensure that what has been heard and understood by you is accurate
- do not express any opinions about the alleged abuser
- record the conversation as soon as possible, in as much detail as possible. Sign and date the record
- explain and ensure that the child / young person understands the procedures which will follow
- pass the information to the Designated Person, who will in turn report it to the Statutory Authorities for investigation
- treat the information confidentially, sharing it only with persons who have a right to hear it

Reporting procedures

A staff member who knows / suspects that a child / young person has been harmed or is at risk of being harmed has a duty to convey this concern to the Designated Person, who in turn will report the information to the Tusla duty social worker. Tusla will, in turn notify An Garda Síochána. In an emergency, a report should be made directly to An Garda Síochána. Allegations should always be handled in a sensitive and discreet manner. Children / Young people should be encouraged and supported in making known any concerns that they may have, to a member of staff.

The protections of the person(s) reporting an incident will be maintained, where possible, in keeping with the *Children's First Act 2015*. This Act provides immunity from civil liability to persons who report child abuse 'reasonably and in good faith' to Tusla or An Garda Síochána.

Verbal / written reports to the HSE without delay

If a child abuse case is suspected or alleged, the following steps will be taken by the Designated Person:

- a report should be made to the Tusla verbally (in person or by telephone) or in writing. The report will be made to the Tusla duty Social Worker. (Contact details of the local area Duty Social Worker in Appendix 2)
- in the event of an emergency, or the non-availability of Tusla staff, the report should be made to Ballina Garda Station. (Contact details in Appendix 2). Under no circumstances should a young person be left in a dangerous situation pending the intervention of Tusla.

This procedure should be followed even where the suspicion arises in another organisational context but is disclosed to a staff member who is delivering a programme in another setting, for example, in a school. In this instance, he / she should report to the Designated person in his / her own organisation.

A standard reporting form will be used as part of any written reports. A standard reporting form is contained in Appendix Three.

When completing a reporting form, all details should be checked the against the first record made of the incident or concern to ensure accuracy. The form should be signed and dated, when completed.

While the information in some cases will be limited, as much as possible of the following detail should be included in a report where this is readily available to you:

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- names and addresses of the child / young person, parents/carers and any other children in the family
- name and address of the person alleged to be causing harm to the child / young person
- a full account of the current concern about the child / young person's safety or welfare
- the source of any information which is being discussed with the Tusla
- dates of any incidents being reported
- circumstances in which the incident or concern arose
- the child / young person's own statement, if relevant
- name of the child / young person's school
- name of y child / young person's General Practitioner
- reporter's own involvement with the child / young person and their parents/carers
- details of any action already taken in relation to the child / young person's safety and welfare
- names and addresses of any agency or key person involved with the family
- identity of person reporting, including name, address, telephone number, occupation and relationship with the family.

Procedures for informing parents / primary carers in the event that a report is made (if it would not put the child at further risk)

Parents or carers of any young person deemed to be at risk should be treated with respect. For this reason, families should be informed by an appropriate person if a report about them is submitted to Tusla or An Garda Síochána, unless doing so is likely to endanger the child or undermine an investigation. Advice should be sought from the statutory authorities about the best procedure to follow for any particular case.

Copy of HSE standard reporting form (Appendix 3)

Contact details for local HSE duty social worker and Gardaí (Appendix 2).

Confidentiality Statement

We in Ballina Arts Centre are committed to ensuring peoples' rights to confidentiality. However, in relation to child protection and welfare, we undertake that:

- Information will only be forwarded on a 'need to know' basis in order to safeguard the child/young person;
- Giving such information to others for the protection of a child or young person is not a breach of confidentiality;
- We cannot guarantee total confidentiality where the best interests of the child or young person are at risk;
- Primary carers, children and young people have a right to know if personal information is being

shared and/or a report is being made to Tusla, unless doing so could put the child/young/person at further risk;

- Images of a child/young person will not be used for any reason without the consent of the parent/primary carer (however, we cannot guarantee that cameras/videos will not be used at public performances);
- Procedures will be put in place in relation to the use of images of children/young people;
- Procedures will also be put in place for the recording and storing of information in line with our confidentiality policy.
- Any records of incidents or concerns will be stored and filed in the Ballina Arts Centre main office. Designated person and Deputy Designated persons will have access to the records. These records will be treated and handled in strict confidentiality.

Recruiting and selecting staff

Recruitment and selection policy statement

We will ensure that staff are carefully selected, trained and supervised to provide a safe environment for all children and young people, by observing the following principles:

- Roles and responsibilities will be clearly defined for every job (paid and voluntary);
- Posts will be advertised widely;
- We will endeavour to select the most suitably qualified personnel;
- Candidates will be asked to sign a declaration form;
- At least two written references that are recent, relevant, independent and verbally confirmed will be necessary;
- Staff will be selected by a panel of at least two (or more) representatives through an interviewing process;
- No person who would deem to constitute a 'risk' will be employed;
- Some of the exclusions would include
 1. any child-related convictions;
 2. refusal to sign application form and declaration form;
 3. insufficient documentary evidence of identification
 4. concealing information on one's suitability to working with children
- There will be a relevant probationary period (3 months)
- All staff will be required to consent to Garda clearance, and where available, this will be sought.

Managing and supervising staff

Staff management policy statement

To protect both staff (paid and voluntary) and children/young people, we undertake that:

New staff will:

- Take part in a mandatory induction training session;
- Be made aware of the organisation's code of conduct, child protection procedures and the identity and role of who has been designated to deal with issues of concern;
- Undergo a probationary or trial period.

All staff will:

- Receive an adequate level of supervision and review of their work practices. An 'open' approach will be maintained between staff and management, underpinned by regular dialogue and information exchange.
- Be expected to have read and signed the Child protection Policy Statement;
- Be advised to undertake child protection training. This will include some basic in-house training referring to the constituent parts of Ballina Arts Centre's Child Protection Policy and Procedures. More specialist training will also be delivered by agents from Tusla.

Involvement of primary carers

It is Ballina Arts Centre's objective to involve parents and primary carers in any consultative processes surrounding the structure of our Children's Arts programme and any related events/activities. We encourage parents/primary carers to take an active involvement and interest in the activities we offer children.

Policy statement on the involvement of primary carers

We undertake to:

- Advise primary carers of our child protection policy; primary carers will be presented with a copy of our Child Protection Policy Statement, which refers to the Child Protection Policy and Procedures in full, when registering their child / young person for an activity / event for the first time. The Child Protection Policy Statement will also be visible in public area of the Arts Centre. The Child Protection Policy and Procedures in full will be posted on Ballina Arts Centre's website;
- Inform primary carers and schools of all activities;
- Issue contact/consent forms where relevant;
- Comply with health and safety practices;
- Operate child-centred policies in accordance with best practice;
- Adhere to our recruitment guidelines;
- Ensure as far as possible that the activities are age-appropriate;
- Encourage and facilitate the involvement of parent(s), carer(s) or responsible adult(s), where appropriate.

If we have concerns about the welfare of the child/young person, we will:

- Respond to the needs of the child or young person;

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- Inform the primary carers on an on-going basis unless this action puts the child or young person at further risk;
- Where there are child protection or welfare concerns, we are obliged to pass these on to the Duty Social Worker and, in an emergency, the Gardaí;
- In the event of a complaint against a member of staff, we will immediately ensure the safety of the child/young person and inform primary carers as appropriate.

As a child-centred organisation, we are committed to putting the interest of the child/young person first. To that end we will:

- Contact local Tusla and Gardaí where there is a child protection welfare concern;
- Encourage primary carers to work in partnership with us under the guidelines set out by our organisation to ensure the safety of their children;
- Have a designated contact person available for consultation with primary carers in the case of any concern over a child or young person's welfare.

Parents / primary carers will be presented with a copy of our Child Protection Policy Statement.

Dealing with allegations against staff

When dealing with an allegation against staff, two separate procedures will be followed:

1. In respect of the child/young person, Audrey Robinson, Deputy Designated Person, will deal with issues related to the child/young person.
2. In respect of the person against whom the allegation is made, Paul Cunningham, Designated Person, will deal with issues related to the staff member.
 - The first priority is to ensure that no child or young person is exposed to unnecessary risk;
 - If allegations are made against the Designated Person, then the Deputy Designated person should be contacted;
 - The reporting procedures outlined in Section 3 of these guidelines should be followed. Both the primary carers and child/young person should be informed of actions planned and taken. The child/young person should be dealt with in an age-appropriate manner;
 - The staff member will be informed as soon as possible of the nature of the allegation
 - The staff member should be given the opportunity to respond;
 - The chairperson/head of the organisation should be informed as soon as possible;
 - Any action following an allegation of abuse against an employee should be taken in consultation with Tusla and Gardaí;
 - After consultation, the chairperson/head of the organisation should advise the person and agreed procedures will be followed.

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All allegations must be taken seriously and dealt with promptly and efficiently, with the best interests of the child / young person taking prime concern. All persons concerned are entitled to a proper response and therefore two separate procedures are involved:

- the reporting procedure in respect of the young person
- the procedure for dealing with the worker

Ballina arts Centre will, at all times, ensure that no child is exposed to unnecessary risk.

Reporting Procedure in respect of the young person

This procedure is the responsibility of the Designated Person

1. The person who receives the allegation from the young person should record the details in writing, sign and date it and then pass it on to the Designated Person.

2. Upon receipt of an allegation against staff, the Designated Person

will:

- speak with the young person involved, to clarify the allegation, and
- record the allegation, date and sign it

3. The Designated Person will:

- in consultation with the CEO, decide whether or not to contact Tusla or An Garda Siochana.
- inform the parent / primary carer of the child / young person involved; record this decision, date and sign it

Procedure for dealing with staff member

Upon receipt of an allegation the Designated Person will:

- meet with the staff member whom the allegation has been made against, informing them of an allegation against them and allowing them to respond to the allegation
- record the meeting, signed and dated by both parties.

The staff member may then be suspended, depending on the seriousness of the allegation and in consultation with the Tusla / An Garda Siochana, pending a full inquiry. This suspension will be recorded, dated and signed.

Upon completion of inquiries a further disciplinary hearing will be heard, and appropriate action taken as required. This hearing will also be recorded, dated and signed.

Complaints and comments procedures

In the event of complaints or comments:

- Complaints of comments will be responded to within 2 weeks;
- Paul Cunningham, Director of Ballina Arts Centre, has the responsibility for directing

complaints/comments to the appropriate person;

- Verbal complaints will be logged and responded to.

Complaints Procedure

Once a complaint is received, the staff member will bring the matter to the attention of the Designated Person, who will deal with the matter urgently.

In case of a complaint being made which would be impacted by the Child Protection Policy, staff will contact the Designated Person. The Designated Person will then act on the matter in the terms laid out in this policy, at all times keeping the welfare of the child / young person paramount.

Any concerns, issues or complaints will be dealt with promptly and a response in writing will be issued, when required.

Complaints may be lodged through a Complaints Form, available by request from Ballina Arts Centre. (A Complaints Form is attached in Appendix 4)

Accidents procedure

To deal with accidents, Ballina Arts Centre will:

- Maintain an up-to-date register of the contact details of all the children/young people involved in the organisation;
- Children/young people's details will be cross-referenced between the incident book and the file;
- Ensure that external organisations with whom we have dealings provide proof that they have public liability insurance;
- Provide First-aid boxes, which are available, accessible and regularly re-stocked;
- Ensure that the location of the First-aid boxes be made known to staff;
- Ensure that the availability of first-aid be in accordance with the organisation's Health and Safety guidelines. The location of accident/incident books will be made known to staff;
- Ensure that children and young people be advised of risks of dangerous material;
- Record details of risky equipment used and take steps to minimise risk;
- Take cognisance of responsibility for first-aid on off-site trips.

The First –Aid boxes are located in:

- the main workshop area
- Ballina Arts Centre main office

In the event of first-aid being required, Designated Person, Paul Cunningham has first-aid training.

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Ballina Arts Centre has an accident/incident book. Details of all accidents and incidents will be recorded and the book is located in Ballina Arts Centre main office.

All staff will be informed of the exact locations of first-aid boxes and the accident/incident book.

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Appendices

Appendix 1	Definitions used in this document
Appendix 2	Contact details
Appendix 3	Standard Reporting Form
Appendix 4	Complaints Form
Appendix 5	Anti-Bullying Policy

Appendix 1

Definitions used in this document

Staff – People employed on a contract basis either part-time or full-time. Staff includes those employed through Community Employment. Also refers to professional facilitators providing facilitation services to Ballina Arts Centre in either a voluntary or contracted capacity.

Child / Young Person - Person under 18 years of age.

Definitions of 'Abuse':

There are four main categories of abuse as outlined in *Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children*. The following is a synopsis of the information contained in that document. For the full definitions please refer to *Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children* 1993.

1. Neglect

"Neglect can be defined as being where the child suffers significant harm or impairment of development by being deprived of food, clothing, warmth, hygiene, intellectual stimulation, supervision and safety, attachment to and affection from adults, medical care. The threshold of significant harm is reached when the child's needs are neglected to the extent that his or her well-being and/or development are severely affected." (*Children First* p.31)

2. Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse usually happens where there is a relationship between a carer and a child rather than as a specific incident or incidents. "Unless other forms of abuse are present, it is rarely manifested in terms of physical signs or symptoms." (*Children First* p.31)

Rather, it can manifest in the child's behaviour or physical functioning. Examples of these include 'anxious' attachment, unhappiness, low self-esteem, educational and developmental underachievement and uncooperative or hostile behaviour.

"The threshold of significant harm is reached when interaction is predominantly abusive and become typical of the relationship between the child and the parent/ carer." (*Children First* p.32)

Examples of emotional abuse in children include:

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- Imposition of negative attributes on children, expressed by persistent criticism, sarcasm, hostility or blaming;
- Emotional unavailability by the child's parent/carer;
- Unresponsiveness, inconsistent or inappropriate expectations of the child;
- Premature imposition of responsibility on the child;
- Unrealistic or inappropriate expectations of the child's capacity to understand something or to behave and control him/herself in a certain way;
- Under- or over-protection of the child;
- Use of unreasonably harsh discipline;
- Exposure to domestic violence.

3. Physical abuse

Physical abuse is any form of non-accidental injury or injury which results from wilful or neglectful failure to protect a child.

Examples of physical injury include the following:

- Shaking;
- Use of excessive force in handling;
- Deliberate poisoning;
- Suffocation;
- Allowing, or creating, a substantial risk of significant physical harm to a child.

4. Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse involves the use of a child for gratification or sexual arousal by a person for themselves or others.

Examples of sexual abuse include:

- Exposure of the sexual organs or any sexual act intentionally performed in the presence of a child;
- Intentional touching or molesting of the body of a child whether by a person or object for the purpose of sexual arousal or gratification;
- Masturbation in the presence of the child or involvement of the child in an act of masturbation;
- Sexual intercourse with a child whether oral, vaginal or anal;
- Sexual exploitation of a child... may also include showing sexually explicit material to children which is often a feature of the 'grooming' process by perpetrators of abuse;
- Consensual sexual activity involving an adult and an under-age person.

Appendix 2 Contact details

Tusla Child and Family Agency Contact details:

Tusla
Child and Family Agency,
1st Floor, Mill Lane,
Bridge Street,
Castlebar,
Mayo
Tel: 094 9049137

Garda Síochána contact details:

Ballina Garda Station
Lord Edward St.
Ballina
Co. Mayo
Tel: 096 21422 (24 hour line)

*In Emergency situations dial 999 / 911 for Garda Síochána, Ambulance or Fire Service.

Appendix 3

Standard Reporting Form

Private and Confidential

In case of emergency or outside Tusla hours, contact should be made with An Garda Síochána.

A. To Principal Social Worker / Designate: _____

1. Details of the child:

Name: _____ Male: __ Female: __

Address: _____ Age / DoB: _____
 _____ School: _____

1a.

Mother's name: _____ Father's name: _____

Address: _____ Address: _____

Tel: _____ Tel: _____

1b.

Care and custody arrangements of the child (if known):

1c.

Members of the household:

Name	Relationship	DoB	Additional information

Appendix 4

Complaints Form

Name: _____ Date: _____

Contact details: _____

Activity / event: _____

Please describe briefly the issue / incident which caused you concern:

Please give the names and contact details of any witnesses:

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 5

Anti-Bullying Policy

Ballina Arts Centre provides a place where

- Everyone can feel secure
- It is known that bullying is not acceptable behaviour
- Name calling is not tolerated
- No one suffers abuse of any nature
- No one is victimised
- Each person who partakes in our activities is supported and listened to
- It is each participant's responsibility to ensure that all are treated equally
- Where solutions to problems are the concern of all

Definition of Bullying

Bullying can be defined as repeated aggression, be it verbal, psychological or physical conducted by an individual or group against others. It is behaviour that is intentionally aggravating and intimidating, and occurs mainly in social environments such as schools, clubs and other organisations working with children. It includes behaviour such as teasing, taunting, threatening, hitting and extortion behaviour by one or more children against a victim.

Persistent bullying can have a devastating effect on a child's self esteem. They may feel it's somehow their fault, or that there's something wrong with them, they may become withdrawn and insecure, more cautious, and less willing to take any sort of risk. Being victimised in this way can cause days of mental anguish and leave lifelong emotional scars. It has driven some young people to try to murder their tormentors and others to suicide. A child who has suffered bullying often needs professional counselling to let out their feelings and rebuild their self-confidence. Bullying also affects any child who witnesses it.

Some of the factors involved in bullying include:

- Puberty
- Peer pressure
- Gender differences
- Stereotypes / prejudice
- Structure of the group – hierarchy of dominance
- Family background of victims and bullies

How would you know if a child is being bullied?

All bullies operate using furtiveness, threats and fear. Bullying can therefore only survive in an environment where the victim does not feel empowered to tell someone who can help or in which it is not safe to do so.

The following indicators are warning signs that a young person might be getting bullied.

Reluctance to come to a centre or take part in activities

- Physical signs (unexplained bruises, scratches, or damage to belongings)
- Stress-caused illnesses – headaches, and stomachaches – which seem unexplained

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- Fearful behaviour (fear of walking to activity, going different routes, asking to be driven)
- Frequent loss of “subs” or shortage of money with vague explanations
- Having few friends
- Changes in behaviour (withdrawn, stammering, moody, irritable, upset, distressed)
- Not eating
- Attempting suicide or hinting at suicide
- Anxiety (shown by nail-biting, fearfulness, tics)

Of course, there are other possible reasons for many of the above.

What makes a person bully others?

Bullies are often making a plea for help through their violent behaviour, which may reflect a sense of insignificance. Bullies whose activities go unaddressed often fail socially and academically later in life. They need to be taught all important negotiation and co-operative skills, working with others rather than competing.