



DIOCESE OF DOWN & CONNOR



Addendum 1 **Whistle Blowing Policy and** **Procedures**

BEST PRACTICE IN SAFEGUARDING AND
PROTECTING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE
AND THE ADULTS WHO WORK WITH THEM

ADDENDUM 1: DIOCESE OF DOWN AND CONNOR CHILD PROTECTION POLICY AND PROCEDURES.

WHISTLE BLOWING POLICY AND PROCEDURES

FOR ALL EMPLOYEES AND VOLUNTEERS WORKING IN THE DIOCESE OF DOWN AND CONNOR

INTRODUCTION

This policy and guidance is written for all employees and volunteers working with children and young people within the parishes of the Diocese of Down and Connor. It does not apply to the staff in parish schools who will follow their own policies and procedures.

Safeguarding children and young people requires staff working with children and families to be committed to the highest possible standards of openness, integrity and transparency. Staff and volunteers must acknowledge their individual responsibility to bring matters of concern to the attention of senior management and/or relevant agencies. Although this can be difficult, this is particularly important where the welfare of children may be at risk.

You may be the first to recognise that something is wrong but may not feel able to express your concerns out of a feeling that this would be disloyal to colleagues or you may fear harassment or victimisation. These feelings, however natural, must never result in a child or young person continuing to be unnecessarily at risk. Remember it is often the most vulnerable children or young persons who are targeted. These children need someone like you to safeguard their welfare.

1. AIMS AND SCOPE OF THIS POLICY

This policy aims to:

- encourage all staff and volunteers to feel confident in raising serious concerns and to question and act upon concerns about practice
- provide avenues for you to raise those concerns and receive feedback on any action taken
- ensure that you receive a response to your concerns and that you are aware of how to pursue them if you are not satisfied
- reassure you that you will be protected from possible reprisals or victimisation if you have a reasonable belief that you have made any disclosure in good faith.

2. WHISTLEBLOWING

Whistleblowing is the term used when someone who works for or in an organisation (paid or voluntary) wishes to raise concerns about malpractice in the organisation, for example crimes, civil offences, dangers to health and safety and the cover up of these. In the case of safeguarding these concerns are likely to be about activity that presents a risk to children or systemic failure in relation to children and/or the services they receive. It applies when you have no vested interest and are acting as a witness to misconduct or malpractice that you have observed.

3. SAFEGUARDS:

Harassment or Victimisation

The Diocese of Down and Connor is committed to good practice and high standards and wants to be supportive of employees and all others who contribute to the work of the Diocese.

The Diocese recognises that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make. If what you are saying is true, you should have nothing to fear because you will be doing your duty to your employer and those for whom you are providing a service.

The Diocese will not tolerate any harassment or victimisation (including informal pressures) and will take appropriate action to protect you when you raise a concern in good faith.

Thus, any serious concerns that you have about any aspects relating to parish life or the conduct of other Diocesan employees or others acting on behalf of the Diocese can be reported under the Whistleblowing Policy.

This may be about something that:-

- makes you feel uncomfortable in terms of known standards, your experience or the standards you believe the Diocese of Down and Connor subscribes to; or
- is against the Catholic Church's Constitution or policies; or
- falls below established standards of practice; or
- amounts to improper conduct.

4. CONFIDENTIALITY:

All concerns will be treated in confidence and every effort will be made not to reveal your identity if you so wish. At the appropriate time, however, you may need to come forward as a witness.

5. ANONYMOUS ALLEGATIONS:

This policy encourages you to put your name to your allegation whenever possible. Concerns expressed anonymously will be considered and addressed but will be treated with extra caution and at the discretion of the Diocese of Down and Connor. It should be remembered that wherever possible confidentiality will be preserved.

In exercising this discretion the factors to be taken into account would include:-

- the seriousness of the issues raised;
- the credibility of the concern; and
- the likelihood of confirming the allegation from attributable sources.

6. UNTRUE/UNFOUNDED ALLEGATIONS:

If you make an allegation in good faith, but it is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against you. If, however, you make an allegation frivolously, maliciously or for personal gain, disciplinary action may be taken against you.

Don't think what if I'm wrong - think what if I'm right

7. REASONS FOR WHISTLEBLOWING:

There are good reasons for speaking out about concerns that come to your attention:

- Each individual has a responsibility for raising concerns about unacceptable practice or behaviour;
- To prevent the problem worsening or widening;
- To protect or reduce risks to others;
- To prevent becoming implicated yourself.

8. WHAT STOPS PEOPLE FROM WHISTLEBLOWING:

It is recognised that people can have genuine fears and misgivings about raising any concerns. These can be:

- Fear of starting a chain of events which spirals out of control;
- Disrupting the work;
- Fear of getting it wrong;
- Fear of repercussions or damaging careers;
- Fear of not being believed.

It is important however not to ignore the concerns you have. If it helps you are encouraged to seek help and support from a colleague.

9. HOW TO RAISE A CONCERN:

You should voice your concerns, suspicions or uneasiness as soon as you feel you can - the earlier a concern is expressed the easier and sooner action can be taken.

Try to pinpoint exactly what practice is concerning you and why.

Approach your immediate manager/ group leader or Designated Officer for the Diocese.

If your concern is about your immediate manager / group leader speak to the Designated Officer or if you feel you need to take it to someone outside of the Safeguarding office then make contact with the Chancellor or the Bishop of Down and Connor.

Concerns may be raised verbally or in writing. If you wish to make a written report, you are invited to use the following format:-

- the background and history of the concern (giving relevant dates);
- the reason why you are particularly concerned about the situation.

If your concern is raised verbally, a written note will be taken in line with the format above.

Although you are not expected to prove beyond doubt the truth of an allegation, you will need to demonstrate to the person contacted that there are reasonable grounds for your concern.

Advice or guidance on how to pursue matters of concern may be obtained from your line manager or the people named at the end of this document.

You may wish to consider discussing your concern with a colleague first and you may find it easier to raise the matter if there are two (or more) of you who have had the same experience or have the same concerns. You may invite a work colleague to be present during any meetings or interviews in connection with the concerns you have raised.

10. HOW THE DIOCESE WILL RESPOND:

The person to whom you report your concerns under this policy must, in turn, report them to the Designated Officer within five working days. If the concern raised indicates immediate risk it would be expected that this is brought to the attention of the Diocesan Safeguarding Office immediately and no later than within 24 hours.

The Diocese of Down and Connor will respond to your concerns. Do not forget that testing out your concerns is not the same as either accepting or rejecting them.

Where appropriate, the matters raised may:-

- be investigated by management, internal audit, or through the disciplinary process
- be referred to the police
- be referred to the external auditor (i.e. National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland- NSBCCC)
- form the subject of an independent inquiry.

In order to protect individuals and those accused of misdeeds or possible malpractice, initial enquiries will be made to decide whether an investigation is appropriate and, if so, what form it should take. The overriding principle which the Diocese will have in mind is the public interest. Concerns or allegations which fall within the scope of specific procedures (for example, child protection, vulnerable adults, and discrimination or harassment issues) will normally be referred for consideration under those procedures.

Some concerns may be resolved by agreed action without the need for investigation. If urgent action is required this will be taken before any investigation is conducted. Within ten working days of a concern being raised, the Diocese will write to you:-

- acknowledging that the concern has been received;
- indicating how the Diocese proposes to deal with the matter;
- giving an estimate of how long it will take to provide a final response;
- telling you whether any initial enquiries have been made;
- supplying you with information on support available from the Diocese, and
- telling you whether further investigations will take place and if not, why not.

The amount of contact between the officers considering the issues and you will

depend on the nature of the matters raised, the potential difficulties involved and the clarity of the information provided. If necessary, the Diocese will seek further information from you. Where any meeting is arranged, off-site if you so wish, you can be accompanied by a union representative or a work colleague.

The Diocese of Down and Connor will take steps to minimise any difficulties which you may experience as a result of raising a concern. For instance, if you are required to give evidence in criminal or disciplinary proceedings, the Diocese will arrange for you to receive advice about the procedure and you may also wish to contact the support officers

The Diocese of Down and Connor accepts that you need to be assured that the matter has been properly addressed. Thus, subject to legal constraints, we will inform you of the outcome of any investigation but any information needs to be kept confidential.

A member of staff / volunteer is not expected to prove the truth of an allegation but will need to demonstrate sufficient grounds for the concern

11. WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

You should be given information on the nature and progress of any enquiries. The Diocese has a responsibility to protect you from harassment or victimisation. No action will be taken against you if the concern proves to be unfounded and was raised in good faith. Malicious allegations may be considered as a disciplinary offence

12. SELF REPORTING:

There may be occasions where a member of staff/ volunteer has a personal difficulty, perhaps a physical or mental health problem, which they know to be impinging on their competence. Diocesan staff have a responsibility to discuss such a situation with their manager / group leader, so professional and personal support can be offered to the member of staff / volunteer concerned. Whilst such reporting will remain confidential in most instances, this cannot be guaranteed where personal difficulties raise concerns about the welfare or safety of children.

13. FURTHER ADVICE AND SUPPORT:

It is recognised that whistle blowing can be difficult and stressful. Advice and support is available from the Safeguarding Office by contacting; Barbara McDermott at: cpodownconnor@gmail.com and the NBSCCC by contacting Ian Elliott, CEO, National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland at: www.safeguarding.ie

"Absolutely without fail- challenge poor practice or performance. If you ignore or collude with poor practice it makes it harder to sound the alarm when things go wrong"

(Reproduced with acknowledgement to "Sounding the Alarm" – Barnardo's)

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This policy and guidance is in keeping with Standard 3 - Preventing harm to children, Standards and Guidance Document for the Catholic Church in Ireland (Jan 2009)