

Q What will the health board social worker do with the information I give them?

A The health board social worker will consider your information and if they feel it needs to be followed up, they will assess the situation. That means they will look for more information from other sources and will contact the child and their parent/s. They will try to establish what is going on, and will act to protect the child in whatever way is necessary.

Q Will the Gardaí be told?

A Physical abuse, sexual abuse and wilful neglect are crimes and must be reported by the health board to An Garda Síochána. Likewise, An Garda Síochána must report any child abuse that comes to their attention to the health board. The Gardaí and the health board will work together as sensitively as possible and take any action necessary to protect the child, or any other children from future harm.

Q Will the child be taken away from his/her parents?

A Very few children are removed from their parents because of child abuse. It is much more likely that the health board, together with other services who work with children, will try to help the children and families, and attempt to prevent the abuse happening again. They will provide advice, counselling, family support and practical help wherever they can. Children and parents are separated only as a last resort when other measures to help them have failed. Except in emergencies, this can only happen without parental consent following a court hearing.

Q Where can I get more information about child abuse?

A You can get a free summary of the national child protection guidelines from your local health board or the Department of Health and Children, Hawkins House, Dublin 2. A full edition of the guidelines, entitled "Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children" may be purchased from the Government Publications Office at Molesworth St., Dublin 2. The summary and the full version of the National Guidelines are also on the Dept.'s website at: www.doh.ie

Your health board will have information about local procedures and services which are aimed at promoting the safety and welfare of children.

Contact Child Care Managers at:

Child Abuse!

What can I do?



children
first

NATIONAL GUIDELINES FOR
THE PROTECTION AND WELFARE
OF CHILDREN



DEPARTMENT
OF HEALTH & CHILDREN
AN ROINN SLÁNTE
AGUS LEANAÍ

Q What is child abuse?

A Child abuse is complicated and can take different forms, but usually consists of one or more of the following:

Neglect: Where a child's needs for food, warmth, shelter, nurturance and safety are not provided, to the extent that the child suffers significant harm.

Emotional abuse: Where a child's needs for affection, approval and security are not being met and have not been met for some time by their parent or carer.

Physical abuse: Where a child is assaulted or injured in some way that is deliberate.

Sexual abuse: Where a child is used for the sexual gratification of another.

Q What should I do if I suspect that a child is being abused?

A It can be difficult to know whether or not your suspicions about child abuse are real. Before you act on them, you need to consider whether any alternative explanations might exist and ask yourself these questions:

- Is there any other reason why the child or parent might be behaving in a particular way?
- Is there a pattern to this type of occurrence?
- Did you or anyone else see what was happening?
- Has the child said anything to indicate that he or she is being harmed?
- Could injuries or signs have been caused another way?

If you have considered these questions and you are still concerned, it is likely that you have

reasonable grounds to take some action. It is important to remember that everyone has a duty to protect children and to co-operate with professionals as necessary.

Q What action should I take?

A If you think that a child is being abused or is at risk from someone inside or outside their family, get in touch with the social worker or other health professional in your local health board centre. If it is an emergency and outside health board hours, you should report it to An Garda Síochána.

Q What if I am mistaken?

A Don't worry - if in doubt talk to the social worker anyway, and they will decide whether or not your suspicion needs to be followed up. Under the law, nobody will be penalised for making a report of child abuse to the health board* or An Garda Síochána as long as the report is not malicious and their intentions are genuine.

* The health board personnel designated to receive reports under the Protections for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act, 1998 are:

Social Workers • Child Care Workers • Public Health Nurses • Hospital Consultants • Psychiatrists • Non-Consultant Hospital Doctors • All other health board medical and dental personnel • Community Welfare Officers • Speech and Language Therapists • All health board nursing personnel • Psychologists • Radiographers • Physiotherapists • Occupational Therapists • Health Education Officers • Substance Abuse Counsellors • Care Assistants

Q Can I report suspected or actual child abuse without giving my name?

A All reports will receive attention. However, experience shows that it is much harder to help children when reports are made anonymously, or through a third party.

It is much more useful if you telephone, or better still, go to see the social worker personally. While the health boards cannot guarantee confidentiality, they will not normally reveal the names of members of the public who report suspected child abuse unless they have permission to do so. The health board social worker or other health professional will be able to assist you with your concern and the making of a report. You should give as much information as you can about the child and their family, along with detailed reasons for your suspicion or concern.

If a professional, e.g. a G.P., hospital or clinic staff, or teacher is reporting suspected or actual child abuse, they should tell the family so beforehand, unless doing so would put the child in danger.

Q What should I do if I suspect that someone I am working with is abusing children in their care?

A Every organisation that provides services to children should have somebody who is responsible for dealing with suspected or actual child abuse. You should go to that person, or if there is no designated person, go to the manager and tell them of your suspicions. If they are reluctant to take it further, and you still feel concerned, you should report it yourself. Under the law, you cannot be penalised for reporting suspected child abuse to the health board or An Garda Síochána as long as your report is not malicious and your intentions are genuine.