

Coláiste Pobail Chléire Child Protection Policy: 2027

The aim of the College: To strengthen and develop our pupils' ability in Irish as well as to provide a taste of island and Gaeltacht life in an enjoyable and appropriate way.

Aims of the policy:

- 1: Protect the college community from bullying – follow the 'Children First' guidelines and the specific guidance set out here.
- 2: To create an atmosphere of trust, honesty and safety among the college community

Scope:

This policy applies to college staff and students.

Data Protection

All records and particulars should be kept in strict confidentiality and should be placed in a safe place by the management of the College.

Specific Guidelines for Students of Coláiste Pobail Chléire:

1. Always demonstrate courtesy, respect, and good manners in the college, in the houses, and with the general community
2. Punctuality is required for classes, events, and all college activities.
3. Follow the directions from the principal, teachers, cinnirí, and Mna Tí to ensure the safety of all members of the college community.
4. Maintain a safe physical environment in the college, i.e., putting rubbish in the available bins, keeping classrooms clean, and ensuring that students and staff keep their personal spaces clean and neat in the houses.
5. Chewing gum is not allowed during the course.
6. No physical interference with any person in the college community is allowed.
7. No psychological interference with any person in the college community is allowed.
8. No damage to or destruction of college equipment/buildings is allowed.
9. Alcohol, tobacco, or any illegal or dangerous substances or items are not permitted to be possessed or used during the course.
10. Classrooms must be locked when classes are over to ensure child safety.
11. Students are not allowed to be in any place without a ceannaire or teacher present.
12. Swimming is not allowed without a ceannaire or teacher present.

Bullying or Harassment

If any complaint is made in relation to this to any member of staff, the information must be given to the Principal or Manager as the DLA (**Designated Liaison Person**) and the matter must be fully investigated with discretion and consideration.

In most cases a formal complaint of bullying is not made by the bullied person and all members of staff should be on the lookout. The “Bean an Tí” has a particular role to play in this issue, as this is usually easier to identify in the homes than in the College.

To recognize physical bullying is often straight-forward. However, psychological bullying is also very common but harder to identify. This is usually aimed at the weakest and most vulnerable. Any member of staff who thinks that bullying is occurring, should report this to the Principal or Manager.

All complaints OR suspicions of bullying should be reflected in the notebooks. The names of the people involved, the date, the incident and the steps taken are recorded.

Bullying thrives in secret places and atmospheres and cannot be controlled until the College community recognises that **it is everyone's responsibility to bring bullying to light if it is happening to them or those around them.**

The DLA/Assistant DLA (Designated Liaison Person) will be available to staff and students for consultation regarding suspicions or information about child abuse

Definition

The Department of Education defines bullying as 'persistent, verbal, psychologically or physically assaults perpetrated by an individual or group against others.' Recent research shows that a third of Irish adolescents experience bullying at some point in their lives. It is clear that children who are living away from home for the first time and have no friends are at particular risk. They are often too late to say anything for fear of being ridiculed or attacked again.

The College is unwilling to allow any kind of altercation to occur between the children in the care of the organisation or from members of staff and will act immediately when there is any evidence that it is happening.

Bullying affects everyone, not just the bullies and victims, it's also affects the students who witness it. Also, there is a risk that less aggressive students are drawn into the behaviour through group pressure.

Bullying can occur through some type of antisocial behavior. It can be

- a) **Physical.** A pupil can be beaten, kicked or spat at etc.
- b) **Verbal** Verbal abuse includes name-calling, harassment and making threats. It can be directed to type, ethnic origin, physical/social disability, or personality, etc
- c) **Exclusion:** A student can be bullied by being excluded from activities/conversations with those who are considered friends
- d) **Robbery** The bully can use physical threats so that they can extort the victim.
- e) **Damage** to property or theft.

As a result, it is imperative that all those with responsibility for young people – teachers/bean an ti /cinnirí – be vigilant and watch for signs of the following:

- Fear of going out alone
- Nervous disposition
- Torn clothes with no explanation
- Unexplained injuries e.g. bruises to the eyes, face, limbs and legs
- Loss of money on a regular basis
- Out-of-character behaviour
- Being alone/ostracised

A caretaker or member of staff who becomes suspicious and receives information about an incident must inform the Principal (or other appropriate person)

Young people should be encouraged to speak to a ceannaire or teacher if they or their friends are being bullied. Staff need to be extremely vigilant as young people, research shows, don't often report bullying.

It should also be remembered the person who carries out the bullying behaviour is also under the care of the organization, it is necessary to be very careful in dealing with them. They may themselves be stressed or pressured or are experiencing bullying or abuse themselves in colleges or in their own neighborhood. It may be beneficial to them to write a piece about the incident of bullying, that could give them an understanding of how the other person themselves feel.

As soon as possible the students should be made clear of the consequences of bullying behaviour. It will be made clear to them that the Principal will carry out a full investigation and take the necessary steps to determine such e.g. discussing the matter with the student and their parents – and if necessary, sending them home.

How to deal with information disclosed by children.

When information is provided in confidence, the staff member will need to be considerate of the sensitivity in responding to the information released. It is understandable that the child will be under a lot of stress so the staff member must put the child at ease, and maintain his/her trust in explaining to the child the importance of acting in the situation, or the consequences of the action and that he/she will have to pass on the information to other adults.

Talking to the child;

- Listen to the child
- Put the child at ease but don't promise them anything
- Let the child tell the story themselves. Don't add any guidance to the conversation.
- Stay neutral
- Explain to the child that you will need to seek further help
- Keep an accurate report of the discussion.

If the **Designated Liaison Person** (DLP) is satisfied that there is a reasonable basis for suspicion or an allegation, they should make a written or phone report to the duty social worker in the HSE. In an emergency, the report should be forwarded to An Garda Síochána at any Garda station.

Proper Reporting.

Responsibility for child abuse cases rests with TUSLA and An Garda Síochána. It is not appropriate for individuals or the organisation to conduct internal investigations in cases where young people are considered to be abused. The person responsible in the organisation e.g. Manager should report to the Director of Community Care in the appropriate Health Board.

If there is any suspicion that a bully is taking place, the victim, the bully and any witnesses are spoken to. Help, advice and support are given to the victim and the bully.

The victim is supported by:

- Give them an opportunity to talk about the incident. The victim may choose the teacher that they would like to talk to
- Report the incident to the victim's parents/guardians.
- By providing them with ongoing support when they need it.

The bullies are controlled and assisted by:

- Talk to them about what happened and try to find out why it was done.
- Report the incident to the bully's parents/guardians.
- Working with the bully to change their biased attitudes.

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Disciplinary Steps:

1. The bully is given an official warning to stop the behaviour.
2. The parents/guardians of the bully are contacted.
3. The bully may be separated from the main group during breaks and lunchtime.
4. The bully may be put on 'detention'.
5. Arrangements may be made for them to be escorted to and from school.
6. If the behavior does not stop, they will be sent home from the course.

Child Abuse

Today it is incumbent on all of us to strive to provide the highest standard of care for pupils in order to maintain their health and protect them from danger or harm.

Comharchumann Chléire Teo will appoint a senior member of each team working on the different courses during the summer, as **the Designated Liaison Person**. The Designated Liaison Person will be responsible for all dealings with Tusla and will have specific responsibility for child protection. The principal is usually the Designated Liaison Person. However, if the DPP is not available, arrangements should be made for another member of staff to take over his/her duties.

Child abuse can be broken down into four different categories; carelessness, emotional abuse, physical abuse, and sexual abuse.

1. **Neglect**

Neglect is seen as abuse of a young person when it is persistent and serious and results in a serious impairment of a young person's health or development. Neglect can be defined in terms of failing to provide for the child's needs, such as food, clothing, warmth, hygiene, safety, supervision, etc.

2. **Emotional abuse**

This is found in the relationship between a child and the person caring for them. It occurs when a child's need for affection, approval, consistency and security is not met. This includes the harm a young person suffers as a result of intimidation, being shut out of the community, emotional exploitation, persistent harassment, scolding, or verbal attacks.

3. **Physical abuse**

Physical abuse in the case of a young person is the use of force, which is not accidental, but deliberate, by the caretaker of the young person in his or her care with the aim of the abuse or to injure the young person or, for the sole purpose of not preventing such injury. In some cases physical abuse is done solely by the adult. But in other cases it happens when parents or guardians use excessive physical punishment, which leaves the young person injured. It is important for professionals, including non-medical teachers, who notice abuse to investigate, as a start, the cause of the injury, although they may not accept the explanation and decide to take further steps. Physical abuse is also intentional injury caused by failure to protect the child.

4. **Sexual abuse**

Sexual abuse occurs when another person uses a child for their own or others' sexual gratification or arousal. Sexual abuse is the involvement of dependent, desperate young people in sexual activities that they do not fully understand cannot consent to knowingly or that violate the social taboos of the family or caretaker or that are against the law. This is the use of young people by others for the sake of sexual gratification and to give the wearer a sense of power. There are different types involved e.g. talking about sexual mode, exposure, touching the child etc to the point of sexual cohabitation.

It is an offence to abuse a young person under the age of 18 and will be reported to An Garda Síochána by the Health Board.

Signs of Abuse

Young people will respond to abuse in different ways. The response could range from the child's withdrawal into himself, being overly alert, to, aggressive or attention-seeking behavior. When a child is extremely quiet, withdrawn, frequently seeking attention, tearful, or aggressive, it could be a sign that the child is experiencing trauma. Bedwetting, nightmares, running away from home (or threatening to do so), talk or actions related to suicide, excessive drinking of alcohol, drug use, and theft are all signs that should concern an adult and prompt action.

Signs of Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is often difficult to recognise as its essence is often located in the interaction between a parent, or the teacher and the young person and there are usually no obvious signs.

The psychological consequences of emotional abuse can be long-term and very damaging. A drop in self-esteem will lead to emotional abuse and can generate a wide range of negative outcomes – from indolence, to avoiding companionship, anger, deceit and bullying.

Signs of Sexual Abuse:

- References about sexual activity or abuse
- An understanding of sexual behaviour beyond his/her age level
- Sexually inappropriate play with other young people or with toys
- Being reluctant about removing clothes
- Expressing inappropriate fear or resentment towards adults or older people
- Blood on underwear .

The above are symptoms that may indicate a child is experiencing abuse. But one clue should not be taken as an undeniable proof and it is important not to arrive at an immediate judgment.

However, they should be sufficient to alert the adult who has to deal with them carefully.

Guidelines for handling abuse reporting

If a young person reports abuse to an employee of the organization or a caretaker, the following steps should be taken:

- **Initial Response:** Start with a positive response to the young person who tells their story. It is important to remain calm and not to display any inappropriate reaction to what has been said. The young person may be very afraid because they may have been threatened not to speak about what happened.
- **Clarification:** Do not question the young person unless what they are saying is unclear. Do not ask specific questions about the type of abuse. If you are satisfied that there is a basis for the complaint, you should not seek further information from the child.
- **Reassurance:** Tell the young person that they are not at fault and that they did the right thing by making a complaint. They should be praised for their decision to come forward, and it should be assured that they need not worry about what they have disclosed.
- **No Physical Examination:** Do not conduct any physical examination of the child, except to note external signs. Do not touch the child, and do not allow them to remove or raise their clothing—nor should you do so yourself.
- **Confidentiality:** Do not promise confidentiality to the young person, but assure them that the information will only be shared with those who need to know in order to address the situation.
- **Immediate Action:** Immediate action must be taken if the young person remains in the location where the abuse occurred. This should be done in consultation with the Principal or Manager.
- **Written Report:** A written report should be prepared, noting all details as accurately as possible—what was said and how the young person behaved. This report may be required by a court under subpoena if a legal case arises. The report should be signed, dated, and given to the Principal, who will keep it in a safe place.
- **Reporting:** The appropriate person in the organization, as outlined in the Responsibility Lines, should be notified, who will then contact **Tusla**.
- **Follow-Up:** The young person should be informed about what is likely to happen next. This should be done by the appropriate person and in the correct manner. The person who receives the information must be careful not to provide inaccurate information or speculate.
- **Supporting the Young Person:** While it is necessary to remain detached from the case, continued support should be provided to the young person. It is important to understand that the responsibility is out of the hands of the caregiver as soon as the case is reported.

- **Personal Impact:** It is important to recognize that the listener may be personally affected while the young person is describing the abuse. If necessary, the listener should seek appropriate support, but without breaching confidentiality.

Suspicion of Abuse

If there is a suspicion of abuse of any kind of a young person from any source, **but has not been reported**, the following steps should be taken.

A note should be taken of the caretaker's suspicions. It may be helpful to the caretaker if they discuss the situation with a colleague. Where the caretaker is still concerned the situation should be reported to the person directly in charge, who will contact a Manager or other suitable person in the organisation, contact the HSE and follow their advice. The caretaker should understand that he/she is not making an allegation when he/she presents any concern. When a worker expresses *bona fide* doubt, the organisation will make every effort to ensure that the person expressing the suspicion does not suffer any ill will or be prejudiced as a result.

Where the suspicion or allegation relates to another member of staff, this may be a problem for the worker but the worker must take into account that the primary duty of the organisation is the safety and welfare of the young person and, accordingly, that he/she has a duty to report a doubt.

Discipline

Disciplinary Steps

- The person in question is spoken to
- Their parents/guardians are immediately notified
- They are immediately sent home from the course
- If abuse was committed by a member of the team, the matter must be reported to the Designated Liaison Person. The **Designated Liaison Person** should immediately send a report to TUSLA. If the Co-op is of the opinion that the allegation requires immediate action, the Manager should order the employee to remain absent from the College immediately.

Appeals System

Through our discipline system, parents/guardians are made aware of a situation after a student has received a verbal warning. Parents or students can speak to the following people if they are not satisfied with the discipline system

- The DIA/ Deputy DIA (Designated Liaison Person)
- Ceannaire, Teacher or Bean an Tí
- Course Manager

If the student and/or parents/guardians are still having problems they could call the manager of Comharchumainn Chléire Teo.

- Sending a child home

Sending a child home is a very serious thing. Here is an excerpt from the rules

Alcohol or drugs or tobacco of any kind are not permitted.

Students must stay in the homes from 10.30 p.m. at night until 9.30 a.m. in the morning.

Students may not endanger their own life or the life of anyone else in any way

If the above rules are broken, pupils will be sent home immediately. (Breaking of the above rules will result in immediate dismissal from the course.)

Coláiste Pobail Chléire will not make a decision like this without thoroughly discussing it with the student and everyone involved in the incident, all staff and parents/guardians.

Bad behaviour

We cannot accept bad behaviour of any kind because it puts others at risk. Therefore, bad behaviour of any kind is not permitted in Coláiste Pobail Chléire, Comharchumann Chléire Teo.

When a large group of teenagers get together there is always the risk of a personality conflict. Often, this is expressed in the form of bad behavior. The staff encourages the highest standards of self-discipline and collective discipline among the students. The spirit of the College and curriculum planning fosters the attitudes necessary for students to enhance their personal development. Giving work and praise to students is used to encourage good behaviour. However, if these strategies do not work, sanctions are used. If a pupil is engaging in bad behaviour it is recommended to take the following disciplinary steps:

1. The pupil is officially warned to stop the bad behaviour and an appropriate strategy/punishment is used,
e.g.
 - a. talking to the pupil in question
 - b. Talking to the parents
 - c. putting the pupil on a 'report' and keeping an eye on them
2. If the pupil does not stop, the pupil is placed on 'detention' for the evening and any privileges are removed.
The student will also need to make a phone call to their parents.
3. If the student is not willing to stop their bad behaviour it is recommended that they be sent home from the course.

Bad behaviour takes a variety of forms. Below is an example of various bad behaviors:

- Bad Language
- Graffiti
- Fighting
- Bullying
- Calling people names
- Racist or sexually oriented references or behaviour
- Misconduct at the place of accommodation
- Interfering with the education of others
- Taking things that don't belong to you
- Damaging College equipment
- Throwing stones

