

RIALTO COMMUNITY DRUG TEAM

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY (Oct. 2022)

1.1 PURPOSE

To set out the Rialto Community Drug Team's (RCDT) approach to minimising the risks to children. In Ireland under the Children Act 2001 and the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child a child is defined as **anyone under the age of 18**.

1.2 INTRODUCTION

This document contains a policy statement (Part One) and procedural guidance (Part Two). The functions of each are set out briefly below.

Part One – Policy Statement

The policy statement sets out the broad framework of principles within which the particular area of work will be carried out. It sets out the organisation's broad style and approach to the issue, including any aims and guiding principles.

Part Two – Procedural Guidance

The procedural guidance sets out the details that staff will require to carry out their duties in this particular area of work. It also sets out the specific tasks involved in undertaking this area of work and identifies who is responsible for carrying them out.

PART ONE – POLICY STATEMENT

1.4 AIMS AND PRINCIPLES

The aim of the RCDT is to minimise the risks to all children that may engage with. RCDT will do this by adhering to the Child Protection guidelines detailed in this policy.

- 1.4.1 RCDT will endeavour to provide children with appropriate safety and protection.
- 1.4.2 All children, whatever their age, culture, disability, gender, language, racial origin religious beliefs and/or sexual identity have the right to protection from abuse.
- 1.4.3 All suspicions and allegations of abuse and poor practice will be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately.
- 1.4.4 All RCDT staff and volunteers have a responsibility to report concerns to the appropriate person.

RCDT Staff and Volunteers must remember that they are not trained to deal with situations of abuse or to decide if abuse has occurred. They should immediately refer onwards as appropriate and follow up to ensure referral was enacted.

PART TWO – PROCEDURAL GUIDANCE

1.5 RCDT Staff & Volunteers

- 1.5.1 Children should only attend RCDT in the company of a parent, guardian, family therapists, and youth worker with consent.
- 1.5.2 Will always remain in an open public space (visible to others present & where the child feels safe) when in the company of children.
- 1.5.3 Will treat all children and adults equally with respect and dignity.
- 1.5.4 Will always put the welfare of the child first.
- 1.5.5 Will always maintain a safe and appropriate distance with children visiting the site and will ensure that if any form of manual/physical support is required, it is provided in a public space. The child and his/her parents/guardians should always be consulted, and their agreement gained.
- 1.5.6 Will keep a written record of any injury that occurs, along with the details of any treatment given.
- 1.5.7 Will always act upon and record any allegations made by a child
- 1.5.8 WILL NOT spend time alone with children away from others.
- 1.5.9 WILL NOT engage in rough, physical, or sexually provocative games, including horseplay
- 1.5.10 WILL NOT allow or engage in any form of inappropriate touching
- 1.5.11 WILL NOT allow children to use inappropriate language unchallenged (sensitively)
- 1.5.12 WILL NOT make sexually suggestive comments to a child, even in fun

1.6 INCIDENTS THAT MUST BE REPORTED AND RECORDED

If any of the following occur RCDT staff/volunteers must report this immediately and record the incident; They must ensure that the parents/guardians of the child are informed:

- If you accidentally hurt a child visitor.
- If he/she seems distressed in any manner.
- If a child visitor misunderstands or misinterprets something you have done and has raised a concern.

1.7 RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING OF STAFF

RCDT recognises that anyone may have the potential to abuse children in some way and that all reasonable steps are taken to ensure that unsuitable people are prevented from working in an environment where they may encounter children. Pre-employment checks will include the following for roles where staff will be working with or will encounter young people Under 18:

- A successful applicant will be required to complete a Garda Vetting application form
- Two confidential references will be required. These references must be taken up.
- Evidence of identity (passport or driving licence with photo).

1.8 INTERVIEW AND INDUCTION

Prospective staff will be selected by interview conducted to acceptable protocol. All new staff should receive an induction, during which:

- Procedures including protecting children from Abuse and Child protection are explained and training needs are identified.
- They should be made aware of the organisation's Code of Conduct as well as the Protecting Vulnerable Adults from Abuse and Child Protection policies. Any training by staff should be recorded in their files.

1.9 TRAINING

In addition to pre- selection checks, the safeguarding process includes training after recruitment for staff/ volunteers to:

- Analyse their own practice against established good practice, and to ensure their practice is not likely to result in undue harm to a child or allegations being made.
- Recognise their responsibilities and report any concerns about suspected poor practice or possible abuse. This should be done by speaking to one of the designated individuals (see below) and if agreed to complete the TUSLA report form attached to this policy.
- Respond to concerns expressed by a child or young person.

Existing staff will up-date any training in relation to this particularly that provided by the HSE. Designated persons should complete appropriate training within a 3 year period.

1.10 RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS OR SUSPICIONS

It is not the responsibility of RCDT staff member to decide whether child abuse has taken place. However, there is a responsibility to act on any concerns by reporting these to the Manager¹/Senior staff member

RCDT assures all staff that it will fully support and protect anyone, who in good faith reports his or her concern that someone is, or may be, abusing a child. Where there is a complaint against a RCDT staff member, there may be three types of investigation:

- A criminal investigation,
- A child protection investigation,
- A disciplinary or misconduct investigation.

The results of the Garda and child protection investigation may well influence and inform the disciplinary investigation, but all available information will be used to reach a decision.

1.11 ACTION IF THERE ARE CONCERNS

1.11.1 About poor practice:

- If, following consideration, the allegation is clearly about poor practice; the Manager will deal with it as a misconduct issue.
- If the matter has been handled inadequately and concerns remain, the Chair will decide how to deal with the allegation and whether to initiate disciplinary proceedings.

1.11.2 Concerns about suspected abuse

- Any suspicion that a child has been abused by a member of staff, a volunteer or a service user should be reported to the Manager, who will take such steps as considered necessary to ensure the safety of the child in question and any other child who may be at risk.
- The designated person(s) can contact the Duty Social Worker (details below) for information if there is some uncertainty around the allegation or information on next steps.
- The Manager will refer the allegation to Tusla who may involve An Garda Siochana. This is done through a referral form through the Tusla Portal. Concerns need to be described, form submitted and Tusla will contact the referrer.

¹ If the allegation relates to the Manager/Senior Staff Member, the Chairperson will lead this process

- The Manager will inform the Chairperson who will inform the Management Committee.
- If the Chairperson is the subject of the suspicion/allegation, the report must be made to the Secretary of the Management Committee who will refer the allegation to Tusla.

1.12 CONFIDENTIALITY

Every effort should be made to ensure that confidentiality is maintained for all concerned. Information should be managed and disseminated sensitively to the following people:

- The parents of the person who is alleged to have been abused
- The person making the allegation.
- The person accused.
- Tusla/An Garda Síochána

Information should be stored in a secure place with access limited to designated people on a need-to-know basis, in line with data protection laws (e.g., that information is accurate, regularly updated, relevant and secure).

1.13 INTERNAL ENQUIRIES AND SUSPENSION

- RCDT will make an immediate decision about whether any individual accused of abuse should be temporarily suspended pending further Tusla and Garda inquiries.
- Taking account of the findings of any external inquiries the RCDT Manager and Chairperson of the Management Committee will assess all individual cases to decide whether a staff member can be reinstated and how this can be sensitively handled. This may be a difficult decision; particularly where there is insufficient evidence to uphold any action by the Gardai.
- In such cases, the Chairperson of the Management Committee must reach a decision based upon the available information which could suggest that on a balance of probability, it is more likely than not that the allegation is true. The welfare of the child should remain of paramount importance throughout. The disciplinary policy will then be followed.

1.14 SUPPORT TO DEAL WITH THE AFTERMATH OF ABUSE:

- Consideration should be given to the kind of support that children, parents, and members of staff may need. Use of helplines, support groups and open meetings will maintain an open culture and help the healing process.

- Consideration should be given to what kind of support may be appropriate for the alleged perpetrator.

1.15 ALLEGATIONS OF PREVIOUS ABUSE

Allegations of abuse may be made some time after the event (e.g., by an adult who was abused as a child or by someone who is still working with children). Where such an allegation is made, the organisation should follow the procedures as detailed above and report the matter to Tusla. This is because other children may be at risk from this person. Anyone who has a previous criminal conviction for offences related to abuse is automatically excluded from working with children.

1.16 ACTION IF BULLYING IS SUSPECTED

If bullying is suspected, the same procedure should be followed as set out in **'Responding to suspicions or allegations'** above.

Action to help the victim and prevent bullying:

- Take all signs of bullying very seriously and report them to the Manager/senior member of staff.
- Encourage all children to speak and share their concerns by the person investigating the allegation. As there is a high correlation between bullying and suicide ideation among young people, if anyone talks about or threatens suicide, report to the Manager/senior member of staff who will seek professional help immediately.
- Reassure the victim that you can be trusted and will help them, although you cannot promise to tell no one else. Additional external support may need to be considered to support the child if staff (or RCDT) feel there is a limit to the support they can offer.
- Keep records of what is said (what happened, by whom, when).
- Report any concerns to the Manager/Senior member of staff.

1.17 CONCERNS OUTSIDE THE IMMEDIATE ENVIRONMENT (E.G. A PARENT OR CARER):

- Report your concerns to the RCDT Manager, who should contact Tusla (Duty Social Worker)
- Tusla will advise what action should be taken and decide how to involve the parents/carers.
- The Chairperson should report the incident to the RCDT Management Committee who should ascertain whether the person/s involved have a role with RCDT and act accordingly.
- Maintain confidentiality. Maintain records.

1.18 INFORMATION FOR TUSLA OR AN GARDA SIOCHANA ABOUT SUSPECTED ABUSE

The Tusla report form attached should be used when making a formal report. To ensure that this information is as helpful as possible, a detailed record should always be made at the time of the disclosure/concern, which should include the following:

- The child's name, age, and date of birth of the child.
- The child's home address and telephone number.
- Whether or not the person making the report is expressing their own concerns or those of someone else.
- The nature of the allegation. Include dates, times, any special factors, and other relevant information.
- Make a clear distinction between what is fact, opinion, or hearsay.
- A description of any visible bruising or other injuries. Also, any indirect signs, such as behavioural changes.
- Details of witnesses to the incidents.
- The child's account, if it can be given, of what has happened and how any bruising or other injuries occurred.
- Have the parents been contacted?
- If so, what has been said?
- Has anyone else been consulted? If so, record details.
- If the child was not the person who reported the incident, has the child been spoken to? If so, what was said?
- Has anyone been alleged to be the abuser? Record details.
- Where possible referral to Tusla or An Garda Siochana should be confirmed in writing within 24 hours and the name of the contact who took the referral should be recorded.

Designated Child Protection contacts

Manager: Alan Cleere 0879525721 (01 4540021), alan@rcdt.ie

Family Worker: Anne Walsh 0851574706 (014540021) annel@rcdt.ie

Chairperson: Trish Conway 0876220349

Duty Social Worker (D.8) Lord Edward Street 016486555

Garda (Kilmainham) 01 6669700

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