



# Child Protection and Safeguarding Summary Policy

**St Patrick's College** is an inclusive school that values diversity in ability, culture, sexual orientation, gender identity, and background. The school recognises these aspects as integral to personal identity and relationships.

## **Child Protection:**

The school aims to provide a safe environment where young people can grow free from psychological or physical harm. All staff have a duty to protect pupils from abuse, follow safeguarding procedures, and work professionally with parents/guardians on concerns.

## **Adult Safeguarding:**

The College also safeguards adults at risk, following Northern Ireland's Adult Safeguarding Policy. This includes:

- Identifying and supporting vulnerable adults.
- Responding effectively to concerns.
- Promoting dignity, respect, and empowerment.
- Collaboration with families and external agencies ensures high standards of care.

## **Ethos:**

The school prioritises pastoral care, welfare, and safety, creating a supportive environment where every child is valued and can reach their potential. Staff are trained to recognise signs of abuse and follow referral procedures.

## **Principles:**

The policy is guided by:

- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Children (NI) Order 1995.
- Department of Education guidance (DENI Circular 2017/04).
- SBNI Core Child Protection Policy & Procedures.
- *Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland* (2017).

The following principles form the basis of our Child Protection Policy:

- The welfare of the young person is paramount at all times.
- Every young person has a right to be heard, listened to and taken seriously.
- The right to confidentiality for parents/guardians, carers, members of staff and students will be respected in so far as legal requirements permit.
- Employees and all working with students in St. Patrick's College are subject to enhanced Disclosure checks by Access N.I.

## School Safeguarding Team

The following are members of the schools Safeguarding Team

- Designated Teacher Head of Pastoral Care
- Deputy Designated Teacher Head of Key Stage 3
- Principal Mrs C. McHugh
- Designated Governor for Child Protection Mrs P. Kane
- Chair of the Board of Governors Mr D Coleman

# Child Protection Team

## Designated Teachers



**Designated  
Teacher**  
Ms R. Shields



**Deputy  
Designated Teacher**  
Mrs S. Devlin

In St Patrick's College

**Every Student Is**

**Seen, Heard and Cared for.**

## What Is Child Abuse?

Child abuse occurs when a child is harmed, neglected, or not given proper care. It can happen in various settings—within families, institutions, communities, or, less commonly, by strangers. Abuse may involve one or multiple forms, and safeguarding procedures aim to protect children at risk of significant harm caused by parents, carers, or others with a duty of care.

The official definitions of child abuse used by St Patrick's College are based on *Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland (2016)*.

## Types of Abuse

Detecting abuse is rarely straightforward, and no single indicator proves abuse conclusively. The main types are:

- **Physical Abuse:** Deliberate physical harm to a child, such as hitting, biting, shaking, burning, poisoning, drowning, or suffocating.
- **Emotional Abuse:** Persistent emotional maltreatment, sometimes called psychological abuse. This includes making a child feel worthless, silencing them, mocking their communication, or bullying (including online).
- **Neglect:** Ongoing failure to meet a child's basic needs—such as food, clothing, hygiene, supervision, or shelter—leading to serious harm to health or development. Neglected children often experience other forms of abuse.
- **Sexual Abuse:** Exploiting a child for sexual purposes. This may involve physical contact (penetrative or non-penetrative acts) or non-contact activities.
- **Exploitation:** Intentional manipulation or abuse of power for personal gain, including child labour, slavery, criminal activity, benefit fraud, or trafficking. Exploitation can also be sexual.

## Signs and Symptoms of Abuse

Detecting abuse is rarely straightforward; indicators alone do not prove abuse. Common signs include:

### Physical Abuse

- Unexplained injuries, scratches, bite marks, bruises, burns.
- Untreated injuries, chronic runaway, self-harm tendencies.
- Aggressive or withdrawn behaviour; fear of returning home.

### Neglect

- Unmet medical/physical needs; constant hunger; steals food.
- Poor hygiene, inappropriate dress, frequent absenteeism.
- Low energy, tiredness, low self-esteem, repeated accidents.

### Emotional Abuse

- Sudden speech disorders; wetting/soiling; self-mutilation.
- Frequent vomiting; poor peer relationships; attention-seeking.
- Fear of change.

## Sexual Abuse

- Soreness or bleeding in genital/anal areas; itching.
- Stained/bloody underwear; bruises on inner thighs/buttocks.
- Pain on urination; difficulty walking/sitting.
- Eating disorders; low self-esteem; inappropriate sexual knowledge.

## Child Sexual Exploitation

- Exploitation for money, power, or status.
- May involve violence, humiliation, degrading acts.
- Can occur through technology without physical contact.

## Online Abuse and E-Safety

Children use a wide range of technologies, including websites, social media, messaging apps, blogs, gaming platforms, and mobile devices. While these tools offer benefits, they also pose risks.

**E-safety** means using electronic technologies safely and responsibly, protecting children in the digital world and educating them to feel secure online.

## Risks Identified by NCBNI (*National Children's Bureau, N.I.*)

- **Content Risks:** Exposure to harmful material (e.g., violence, pornography).
- **Contact Risks:** Adult-initiated online activity (e.g., grooming).
- **Conduct Risks:** Peer-to-peer harm (e.g., cyberbullying, sexting).
- **Commercial Risks:** Inappropriate advertising, scams, hidden costs.

## Reducing Risk:

- Proactive education through PD programmes and curriculum integration.
- Presentations and workshops by pastoral staff and external agencies.
- Policies for safe technology use.
- Collaboration with parents/guardians and referral to support services (e.g., counsellors, CAMHS, Family Support HUB).
- Mandatory referral to Social Services and PSNI for grooming or sexual activity concerns.

## Domestic Violence and Abuse

Children living in an environment of domestic violence are recognised as being at risk.

**Domestic violence** refers to any incident or pattern of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence, or abuse between individuals aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality.

This abuse can include:

- **Psychological**
- **Physical**
- **Sexual**
- **Financial**

- **Emotional**
- **Virtual** (online or digital forms of abuse)

Children exposed to domestic violence may experience one or more forms of abuse, either as direct victims or through the harmful impact of witnessing such behaviour.

## Operation Encompass

St Patrick's College is an **Operation Encompass school**, working in partnership with local Police to provide early intervention and support for children exposed to domestic violence and abuse.

We recognise that witnessing domestic abuse is a traumatic experience and an **Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE)**, which can lead to emotional, physical, and psychological harm. Operation Encompass helps mitigate these effects by enabling **immediate support within the school environment**, safeguarding children against short, medium, and long-term impacts.

### How It Works:

- When Police attend a domestic incident involving one of our pupils, they contact the school the next working day.
- Information is shared confidentially with a member of the safeguarding team.
- This allows the school to provide **immediate emotional support** and assess wider safeguarding concerns.
- All information is processed in line with **DE Circular 2020/07** and recorded in the child's protection file.
- Details are shared only on a **need-to-know basis** outside the safeguarding team.
- All safeguarding team members complete **Operation Encompass training**.
- Staff answering phones are trained to pass these calls urgently to the safeguarding team.

Further guidance: *The Domestic Abuse Information Sharing with Schools etc. Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022*.

## Adult Safeguarding – Contacting the Adult Protection Gateway Service

St Patrick's College is committed to creating a safe, respectful, and supportive environment for all members of our community, including adults. In line with **Northern Ireland's Adult Safeguarding Policy**, we work to:

- **Identify and support adults at risk.**
- **Prevent and respond effectively to safeguarding concerns.**
- **Promote dignity, respect, and empowerment for every individual.**

We collaborate with families, external agencies, and safeguarding bodies to uphold the highest standards of care.

**If you have concerns about adult safeguarding within our school, please contact a member of the Child Protection Team immediately.** They will liaise with the **Adult Protection Gateway Service** and other relevant agencies as required

## Role of Members of Staff

When a staff member suspects or becomes aware that a young person may be a victim of abuse, they must respond **sensitively and appropriately** and act promptly by reporting concerns to the **Designated or Deputy Designated Teacher**.

#### **If a Young Person Makes a Disclosure:**

- **Listen calmly** without showing shock.
- Allow the pupil to speak in their own words without interruption or interrogation.
- **Reassure** the pupil that they have been understood and that their interests are paramount.
- Explain the obligation to refer the matter to seek help.
- **Do not promise confidentiality.**
- Make written notes **as soon as possible** (not during the conversation), using the pupil's actual words.
- Keep notes factual and store securely.
- Refer the matter immediately to the Designated/Deputy Designated Teacher.
- The members of staff must respect the child and their family and their right to a non-judgemental confidential response.
- Ensure the child is informed about steps and supported during the disclosure.

### **Concerns About Abuse by Someone Other Than School Staff (Including Volunteers)**

- **Immediate Reporting:**  
Staff must report concerns or information about possible abuse to the **Designated or Deputy Designated Teacher** immediately and make **full factual notes**.  
Notes should include:
  - What was seen, said, heard, or reported.
  - Details of time, place, and who was present.
  - Objective, factual language.
- **Confidentiality:**  
The person reporting must treat the matter in confidence.
- **Next Steps:**
  - The Designated/Deputy Teacher decides if referral to **Social Services** is necessary in the child's best interest.
  - If there are concerns the child may be at risk, the school **must make a referral**.
  - Parents are informed unless there is concern that a parent may be the abuser.
  - If the Principal believes a child is at **immediate risk from a volunteer**, the volunteer's services will be terminated immediately.

### **Attendance at Child Protection Case Conferences**

- The Designated Teacher/Deputy or Principal may attend **case conferences** and **core group meetings** convened by Health & Social Care Trust.
- A **written report** is prepared after consulting relevant staff.
- Feedback to staff is shared on a **need-to-know basis**.
- Children on the Child Protection Register are monitored and supported according to the protection plan.

### **Confidentiality and Information Sharing**

- Information about possible child abuse **cannot be kept confidential**.

- Staff must share relevant details with investigative agencies.
- Schools have a **legal duty to refer** suspected abuse to statutory agencies.
- Information within school is shared only on a **need-to-know basis**.
- If a child transfers to another school with ongoing concerns, these are shared with the receiving school's Designated Teacher

## Record Keeping

- All child protection records are kept in **separate, locked files**, accessible only to the safeguarding team.

## Code of Conduct

- All actions must prioritise the child's best interests.
- Staff must maintain behaviour **above reproach**, recognising their position of trust.
- The school's **Code of Conduct** is available on request.

## Preventative Curriculum

Safeguarding is embedded throughout the school year via:

- **PD classes** and **year group assemblies** addressing child protection issues.
- A **permanent child protection notice board** in the main corridor displaying advice and helpline numbers.

Additional initiatives include:

- Posters and leaflets providing safeguarding information.
- Assemblies focused on keeping safe.
- PD schemes promoting **self-care**.
- Anti-Bullying Policy and **Anti-Bullying Week presentations**

## Complaints Against Staff

- If a complaint of possible child abuse is made against a **member of staff**, the **Principal** (or Designated/Deputy Designated Teacher if the Principal is unavailable) must be informed immediately.
- If the complaint involves the **Principal**, the Designated/Deputy Designated Teacher informs the **Chairperson of the Board of Governors**, who ensures appropriate action.
- If referred to Social Services, the staff member may be **removed from duties** involving pupils or **suspended** pending investigation.
- The Chair of the Board of Governors is informed immediately.
- Procedures follow Department of Education guidance

## How a Parent can make a complaint/raise a concern?

- I have a concern about my/a child's safety

- I can talk to the class/form teacher
- If I am still concerned, I can talk to the designated/deputy designated teacher for child protection: Ms Shields/Mrs S Devlin
- If I am still concerned, I can talk/write to the Chair of the Board of Governors, (Mr. D Coleman)

If I am still concerned I can contact the NI Public Services Ombudsman

Tel: 0800 343 424

At any time a parent can talk to a Social Worker at the Gateway Team

**Tel: 0800 7837745** {Free Phone from a Landline}

Or can contact the PSNI Central Referral Unit

**Tel: 101**

**At any time you have the right to talk/write to the Public Service Ombudsman under NI ACT 2016**

## Procedure where the School has concerns, or has been given information, about possible abuse by someone other than a member of staff

A member of staff completes a Note of Concern on what has been observed or shared, and **MUST** act promptly.

Staff member discusses concerns with Designated or Deputy Designated Teacher in his absence and provides the Note of Concern

**DESIGNATED Teacher should consult with the Principal or other relevant staff, taking care to avoid delay. If required act**

### **CP Referral is required.**

Designated Teacher seeks consent of parent/carer/child (if they are competent to do this) unless this would place the child at risk of significant harm, then telephones the Children's Services Gateway team and/or PSNI if the child is at immediate risk. An UNOCINI referral should be submitted within 24 hours.

### Designated Teacher

clarifies/discusses concern with child/parent/carer & decided if CP Referral is or is not required.

### **CP Referral is not required.**

School may consider options including monitoring the situation within an agreed timescale, signposting or referring the child/parent/carer to appropriate support services such as Children's Services Gateway team or local family support Hub with parental consent & child/young parent's consent (where appropriate)

Where appropriate the source of concern will be informed as to the action taken. The Designated Teacher will maintain a written record of all discussions & actions taken to ensure that the record is appropriately & securely stored.

## Dealing with Allegations of Abuse against a Member of Staff

### Key Points

Lead Individual learns of an allegation against a member of staff and informs the Chair/Vice Chair of BOG as appropriate

### Guidance on next steps

Lead Individual then:

Establishes the facts, seeks advice from the key agencies as appropriate, usually through informal discussion

### Possible Outcomes

Following on from establishing the facts, seeking advice from Key Agencies and discussion with the Chair and/or the BoG to agree way forward from the options below

Precautionary suspension is not appropriate and the matter is concluded

Allegation addressed through relevant Disciplinary Procedures

Precautionary suspension under Child Protection Procedures imposed

Alternatives to Precautionary Suspension imposed

**Any time you have the right to talk/write to the Public Service Ombudsman under NI ACT 2016**

**Important Telephone Numbers if you are concerned about a child or vulnerable adult:**

## Gateway Team (Social Services)

**0800 783 7745** (free from landlines only).

**0800 1979995** The Out of Hours Emergency Service Number is:

This is an emergency service only. It operates on Bank Holidays and also every day after 5pm to 9am each day.

## Adult Protection Gateway Service (Southern Trust)

**028 3756 4423**

## PSNI (Police)

**999** for immediate danger; **101** for non-emergencies (PSNI Central Referral Unit)

## Childline:

**0800 1111**

## NSPCC Helpline:

**0808 800 5000**

## Shout:

**Text SHOUT to 85258** - Free, 24/7 text service for immediate crisis support.

## Samaritans:

**116 123** - Available 24/7 for anyone needing to talk.

## Lifeline (NI):

**0808 800 8000** - Local helpline in Northern Ireland.

