




**Men's  
Development  
Network**

Better Lives for Men, Better Lives for All



# Child Safeguarding Policy



Revised July 2020



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## Introduction

A Critical aspect to the work of the Men's Development Network is keeping all involved in the organisation as safe as possible. Although we do not work directly with children, we do offer some services to young people such as workshops. With this in mind it is imperative that the organisation and its staff and contracted workers are aware of the best practice and standards set by the organisation regarding child safeguarding and reporting.

This policy document will set out the context of the child safeguarding and reporting, explain the obligations of staff under the act and set out a clear policy on steps to be taken by staff in the event of a disclosure.

Please note although the requirements for reporting and procedures remain the same for all staff, there are specific aspects for the MDN and Male Advice Line that are individually outlined in this document.

## Context

In 2017 the new act was incorporated in law whereby a series of guidelines issued by the Department of Children and youth affairs now became law. This included the requirement for Mandated Reporting. Within the law those who are obliged to report where identified and it is the Men's Development Network's assertion our workers and contractor fall under the heading of Mandated Persons.

What this means is that all our staff are obliged under law to report any incidents of violence or abuse of a child or vulnerable adult that become known to you.

## Guiding Principles

The safety, welfare and development of children and young people are core objectives and key priorities for the Men's Development Network. (MDN)

The following guiding principles are informed by Children First guidance and legislation. They underpin this Policy and inform best practice within the MDN.

The guiding principles are:

- The safety and welfare of children is everyone's responsibility.
- The best interests of the child should be paramount.
- Early intervention is vital for better outcomes.
- A proper balance must be struck between protecting children and respecting the rights, needs and duties of others, such as MDN staff, parents/carers, and families. Where there is conflict, the child's welfare must come first.
- Children have a right to be heard, listened to and to be taken seriously. Taking account of their age and understanding, they should be consulted and involved in all matters and decisions that may affect their lives.



- All children must be treated equally in line with the Equal Status Acts 2000 and 2012 and have the right to be protected from harm and discrimination. Parents have a right to respect and should be consulted and involved in matters that concern their family.
- Child protection is a multi-agency, multidisciplinary activity. Agencies and professionals must work together in the interests of children.
- Effective prevention, detection and treatment of child abuse or neglect requires clarity of responsibility and training of staff involved in services working with children. It is important that every individual working with children and families is aware of their own role and the roles of other professionals. All staff have a responsibility to report concerns to Tusla without delay, where there is a reasonable concern in relation to the safety or welfare of a child.

## Definition

### Neglect:

Neglect occurs when a child does not receive adequate care or supervision to the extent that the child is harmed physically or developmentally. It is generally defined in terms of an omission of care, where a child's health, development or welfare is impaired by being deprived of food, clothing, warmth, hygiene, medical care, intellectual stimulation or supervision and safety.

### Emotional abuse:

Emotional abuse is the systematic emotional or psychological ill-treatment of a child as part of the overall relationship between a caregiver and a child. Once-off and occasional difficulties between a parent/carer and child are not considered emotional abuse. Abuse occurs when a child's basic need for attention, affection, approval, consistency, and security are not met, due to incapacity or indifference from their parent or caregiver. Emotional abuse can also occur when adults responsible for taking care of children are unaware of and unable (for a range of reasons) to meet their children's emotional and developmental needs

### Physical abuse:

Physical abuse is when someone deliberately hurts a child physically or puts them at risk of being physically hurt. It may occur as a single incident or as a pattern of incidents. A reasonable concern exists where the child's health and/ or development is, may be, or has been damaged as a result of suspected physical abuse.

### Sexual abuse:

Sexual abuse occurs when a child is used by another person for his or her gratification or arousal, or for that of others. It includes the child being involved in sexual acts (masturbation, fondling, oral or penetrative sex) or exposing the child to sexual activity directly or through pornography.

## Roles and Responsibilities

All staff are responsible for ensuring the protection and welfare of children in the MDN. Some staff have additional responsibilities arising in relation to their position as a line manager or senior manager, or in relation to a specific role they may hold, such as a mandated person or Designated Officer. These roles and responsibilities are:

## All Staff

The welfare and protection of children is the responsibility of all MDN staff. Staff members must support each other and work in partnership in the best interests of children and young people, as well as ensuring full organisational compliance with the law and policies governing Children First guidance and legislation in Ireland. All staff must be aware of and understand their responsibilities in terms of Children First guidance, legislation, and safeguarding policies. Members of staff must ensure they:

- Have read, understand, and incorporate into practice: o This Policy document, o Their relevant service's Child Safeguarding Statement (where applicable).
- Are familiar with and consult as necessary: o Children First National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (2017), o Relevant Tusla reporting guidance.
- Complete the mandatory MDN eLearning module 'An Introduction to Children First' and attend additional training as appropriate to their role.
- Check if they are a Designated Officer under the Protections for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act 1998 and be familiar with the role and responsibilities.
- Check if they are a mandated person under the Children First Act 2015 and be familiar with the role and responsibilities. 17 CFNO \_002/2019
- Inform service users, and parents/guardians, about their roles and responsibilities in relation to child protection and safeguarding children as relevant.
- Report and record child protection and welfare concerns in accordance with the procedures outlined in this Policy.
- Provide any necessary and proportionate assistance to support Tusla in its assessment of a child protection or welfare concern.
- Where a staff member has a concern regarding unsafe practices taking place within the service/organisation, they should inform their line manager, or consider making a Protected Disclosure as soon as possible.

## Line Managers

Line managers are required to support senior management in the implementation of this Policy and may be delegated responsibilities in addition to those outlined below. Roles and responsibilities of line managers include ensuring within their area of responsibility that:

- Staff understand their roles and responsibilities as outlined in this Policy and have signed the signature sheet in Appendix 3 to that effect.
- This Policy forms part of the induction process for new staff.
- They provide consultation and assistance to staff who have a child protection or welfare concern.
- The MDN Child Protection and Welfare Reporting Procedure is followed where there is a child protection or a welfare concern.

- There is an appropriate and secure filing system in place to maintain all documentation related to child protection and welfare concerns in line with the requirements outlined in this Policy.
- Staff maintain records of all child protection and welfare reports to Tusla and/or An Garda Síochána in an appropriate and secure filing system in accordance with Data Protection
- Staff maintain appropriate records of all child protection and welfare concerns that do not reach the threshold for a report to Tusla and consider any patterns of concerns that may be identifiable over time.
- All staff complete the mandatory MDN eLearning Programme “An Introduction to Children First” and refresher training as required, as well as any other additional training appropriate to their role. A certificate of completion should be retained on the staff file.
- Confidential information relating to child protection or welfare concerns is shared on a need-to-know basis in line with the requirements outlined in this Policy.
- They raise awareness of child protection and welfare issues through supervision, support, training, assistance, and advice.
- They monitor and advise of any issues affecting the implementation of the MDN Child Protection and Welfare Policy in their area of responsibility.
- The MDN Integrated Risk Management Policy is used to identify, evaluate, and respond to any child protection or welfare risks which arise.
- In addition to making a report of a child protection or welfare concern to Tusla and/or An Garda Síochána, the MDN Safety Incident Management Framework should also be used to inform senior management of any incident where a child has been harmed or is at risk of harm, whilst availing of the service.

### Mandated Persons

Staff should check to see if they are a mandated person as outlined in Schedule 2 of the Children First Act 2015. Mandated persons have two main legal obligations under the Children First Act 2015 in relation to reporting and assisting - these are:

### Mandated Reporting and Assisting

A mandated person is required to report to Tusla without delay, any knowledge, belief, or reasonable suspicion that a child has been harmed, is being harmed, or is at risk of being harmed. This includes where a child discloses their belief to a mandated person that they have been, are being or are likely to be harmed. Harm is defined in the Act as assault, ill-treatment, or neglect of the child in a manner that seriously affects or is likely to seriously affect the child's health, development or welfare, or any concern regarding sexual abuse. Note: If a mandated person has any concern regarding the protection or welfare of a child, which does not meet the threshold for making a mandated report the MDN Child Protection and Welfare Reporting Procedure must be followed, and the concern reported to Tusla where there is Reasonable Grounds for Concern.

Where requested, a mandated person is required to assist Tusla in its assessment of a concern which has been the subject of a mandated report. According to the Children First Act 2015, Mandated assistance is the provision of:

- Verbal or written information or reports.
- Attendance at any meeting arranged by Tusla in connection with an assessment of a child, e.g. Strategy Meeting, Child Protection Conference.
- The production to Tusla of any document or thing. Tusla has five conditions that need to be met before making a formal mandated assisting request:
  - ✓ The legal threshold for a mandated report should have been reached, i.e. the child has suffered, is likely to or is suffering harm.
  - ✓ The request is necessary and proportionate in all the circumstances of the case.
  - ✓ The mandated person is reasonably believed to be in a position to assist having an identified and specific contribution to make to the assessment, as it may be reasonably required.
  - ✓ That not making the request for assistance may be detrimental to the best interests of the child.
  - ✓ The mandated person is not already voluntarily, as part of their normal duties, participating and assisting with the assessment.

## Reporting Procedure

This procedure outlines the key stages and considerations in relation to reporting a child safeguarding or welfare concern in the MDN. All stages in the reporting procedure should be considered. The key stages include:

- Recognise a concern.
- Respond to any immediate safety needs of the child.
- Consult with your line manager (or most senior staff member available) to determine what actions may need to be considered in relation to the concern. Where further advice is required, have an informal consultation with Tusla.
- Report to Tusla, without delay, where there are reasonable grounds for concern (applicable to all staff), or where there is a legal requirement to report as a Mandated Person.
- Inform the family, unless there is good reason not to.
- Record in line with MDN Record Keeping Policy and Data Protection requirements.
- Assist Tusla, where requested, with its assessment of a concern. Monitor / no further action required.

## Detailed Reporting Procedure

This procedure is MDN Policy and is relevant for all staff. Some staff members have additional legal responsibilities in relation to their status as a mandated person. Outlined below are detailed steps to be completed. Some of our Programmes have additional reporting procedures or criteria for reporting such as the MDN and Male Advice Line and are included below.

**MDN** recognises that:

- the agencies with primary responsibility for the welfare and protection of children are Tusla (The Child and Family Agency) and An Garda Síochána.
- Perpetrator Programmes have a role in enhancing the safety of children.



- one-to-one contact with the mother through our Partner Support Service provides important indirect support to children.
1. According to the MDN Child Protection and Welfare Practice Handbook (page 30), reasonable grounds for a child protection or welfare concern include:
    - a. An injury of behaviour that is consistent both with abuse and an innocent explanation, but where there are corroborative indicators supporting the concern that it may be a case of abuse
    - b. Consistent indication that a child is suffering from emotional or physical neglect.
    - c. Admission or indication by someone of an alleged abuse.
    - d. A specific indication from a child that he or she was abused.
    - e. Evidence, for example an injury or behaviour, that is consistent with abuse and is unlikely to have been caused in any other way
    - f. Any concern about possible sexual abuse
  2. If a **MDN** worker, partner support worker or group facilitator, has concerns about the welfare of a child or children, through their work on the programme, they should make brief, factual notes of their concerns and contact the DLP as soon as possible.
  3. If during the Assessment process for the Programme it emerges that there is an immediate risk to a child or children, a referral must be made to Tusla at the earliest opportunity, in consultation with the **MDN** DLP.
  4. If information comes to light during the Programme, regarding an immediate threat to the well-being of a child or children, the Group Facilitator or Partner Support Facilitator will liaise with the Designated Liaison Person where possible and in an emergency outside office hours, the Gardaí must be contacted.
  5. Similarly, if child protection concerns of a retrospective or historical nature are raised with a worker by someone on the **MDN** Programme (men or their partners), regarding themselves or others, the worker will take brief, factual notes (stored securely) about the concerns raised getting, as much detail as possible and then contact the DLP.
  6. Current **MDN** Designated Liaison Persons: Sean Cooke CEO
  7. The DLP, who having been notified of a concern by a worker, will ascertain in consultation with that worker, if a referral should be made to Tusla.
  8. If, following this consultation, it is deemed necessary to make a referral to Tusla, the worker directly involved in the case will give the essential information to the DLP who will make the referral to Tusla on their website ([www.tusla.ie](http://www.tusla.ie)) portal.
  9. Where the DLP decides not to make a referral following the concern brought to their attention by a **MDN** worker, the DLP must inform the **MDN** worker of this and inform them that they may report their concerns, as a private individual in the context of working with **MDN**, directly to the Duty Social Worker and that the provisions of the Protection for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act 1998 would pertain.
  10. An individual or organisation making a referral in good faith and having sought appropriate advice, is protected in law under the Protection of Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act 1998.
  11. Workers should be proactive in contacting the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) regarding child protection concerns, current or retrospective, to seek an informal consultation, where appropriate.
  12. Parents have a right to know when information regarding their child/children is being shared with a third party, unless to do so would place the child or worker at further risk. The timing of this must be carefully co-ordinated to ensure the safety of the children and the custodial



- parent. Men and women, engaging with the **MDN** assessment process will all have signed a form agreeing to the limits of confidentiality regarding child abuse and neglect.
13. Child Protection Referrals are now exclusively made through the portal on the Tusla website
  14. All written reports or records will be kept in a safe and secure place at the **MDN** offices 49 O'Connell St. Waterford.
  15. Where a man is deemed unsuitable for the programme the Assessment team will, where appropriate, discuss with the DLP the situation of any child or children involved and decide if a referral should be made to Tusla.
  16. Similarly, when a man drops out of or is asked to leave the programme the needs of the children should be discussed with the DLP.
  17. In the absence of the DLP's a **MDN** worker with concerns should contact the deputy DLP, **Mend** National Coordinator John Doyle [john@mens-network.net](mailto:john@mens-network.net) or call 087 2311786. If the deputy DLP is not available, having sought informal advice from a colleague and where an imminent concern exists regarding a child or children, s/he should contact the Duty Social Worker (DSW) or Duty Team Leader (DTL) for an informal discussion of their concerns. The DLP needs to be made aware of this discussion as soon as possible.
  18. Information should only be shared on a "need to know" basis and sharing child protection concerns is not a breach of confidentiality or of data protection.
  19. Workers must be aware of the protections afforded under the Protection of Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act 1998. This Act provides immunity from Civil Liability or Penalisation by Employers for anyone who reports child abuse reasonably and in good faith to designated officers of Tusla or An Garda Síochána.

### For the MEND/Choices Programme

*"Holding the violent abuser responsible for ending the use of violence is the path that leads to safety for these children and their abused mothers" Edleson (1999)*

The primary aim of **MEND** [men ending domestic abuse] in working with male perpetrators of Domestic Violence is to promote the safety of women and children. **MEND** offers parallel one-to-one support for the partners and ex-partners of the men who are on the weekly group programme. While we do not work directly with people under 18 years of age, **MEND** believes that the welfare of children is paramount and upholds the principles of Children First National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children. Both Partner Support Facilitators and Perpetrator Group Facilitators must adhere to the following Child Protection Procedures.

Child Protection concerns are on the agenda of every Risk Management meeting over the course of all local **MEND** Programmes and this provides a regular opportunity to reflect with colleagues on the safety and well-being of children linked to the **MEND** Programmes. However, if concerns arise outside of this monthly meeting workers must follow the procedures below.

In the context of the **MEND** Programme, where there is no direct contact with children, workers need to be aware of the following reasonable grounds for a child protection or welfare concern:



Where there are children in a family workers should be particularly conscious of regular reporting of on-going and frequent references to conflict at home (e.g., lots of stressful rows and arguments) and should discuss their concerns with the reporting parent and keep the relevant **MEND** Area Coordinator (DLP – see Appendix 1 below) informed.

Parents involved with the programme who have children under one year of age; all young children are vulnerable but Children First makes specific reference to children under one year of age

Current **MDN** Deputy Designated Liaison Persons: Waterford, Wexford and South Tipperary: Mairtin Doheny [martin@mens-network.net](mailto:martin@mens-network.net) or 087 318 0156 and Carlow/Kilkenny, Laois/Offaly and Kildare: Michael Hennessy [michael@mens-network.net](mailto:michael@mens-network.net) or call 087 716 8674.

### For Male Advice Line Workers.

All support workers on the advice line are recognised as mandated persons under the 2017 Act. Therefore, they are required under law to report any disclosure in which a child or vulnerable able may be at risk of abuse.

As the Male Advice Line (MAL) operates as an anonymous and confidential freephone service the opportunities to have access to all the required information to make a formal report are limited. Callers to the line may not use their real name or their own phone (whether mobile or landline).

The minimum requirement to make report is:

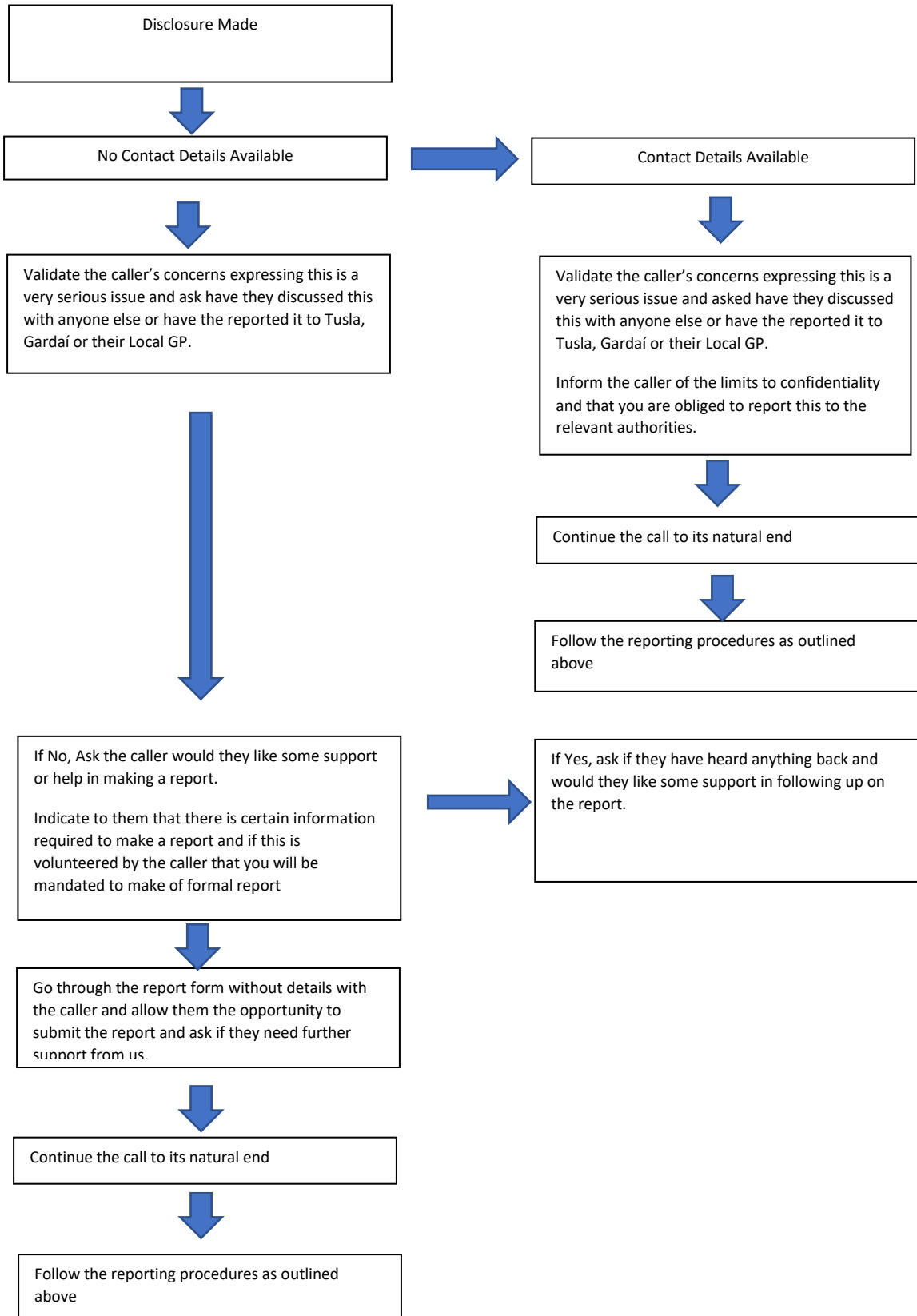
- Name of Caller
- Address of Caller
- Telephone number
- Names of Children
- Age of Children

Below is a call flow chart to be followed in the advent of a disclosure in two scenarios:

- The support worker **does not** have access to the minimum information required
- The support worker **has** access to the minimum information required



### Call Flow Male Advice Line (Child Safeguarding)



## APPENDIX 1 Designated Liaison Person (DLP)

MDN has four Designated Liaison Persons and are listed below:

Sean Cooke	CEO
John Doyle	National Mend Co-ordinator
Mairtín Doheny	Mend Area Co-ordinator.
Michael Hennessy	Mend Area Co-ordinator

Considering the potential volume of reports The **MEND Local Area Coordinators** will be the Designated Liaison Persons regarding Child Safeguarding and Welfare for the Mend Programme only. In the absence of the DLP's the **MDN National Coordinator** will be the deputy DLP.

All other programmes most inform the CEO of potential reports. The role of the Designated Liaison Person will be to act as a liaison with outside agencies and a resource person to any **MDN** workers who have child protection concerns. The DLP will be familiar with Children First: National Guidelines (2011)

The DLP is responsible for ensuring that the standard reporting procedure is followed, so that suspected cases of child neglect or abuse are referred promptly to the Tusla Child and Family Agency Duty Social Worker.

The **MDN** DLP will ensure that they are knowledgeable about child protection and **MDN** will source any training considered necessary to keep the DLP updated on new developments.

The DLP will receive reports of suspected abuse or concerns about a child's safety or welfare. It's the DLP's responsibility:

- To be fully conversant with **MDN's** duties for the protection and welfare of children.
- To know **MDN's** child protection and welfare policy and procedures, to know what they are and where to find the most up-to-date version.