

Safeguarding Trust: Habitat for Humanity Ireland's Child Protection Policies and Procedures

'All children have a right to protection from abuse, violence and exploitation.'
(UNCRC)

This policy is concerned with specific incidents of maltreatment against a child who is in contact with a Habitat staff. It exists primarily to protect the child, whom a Habitat volunteer or staff member may be directly or indirectly in contact with through their engagement in communities and with families. In providing information on the 'why' of appropriate contact *and* training in appropriate behaviour around children, volunteers and staff are protected by the appropriate boundaries and incident reporting which they can then put in place. It is not to restrict engagement, rather it is to enhance freedom and relationship building as healthy interaction is promoted and safety for all is prioritised.

It is not Habitat's task to decide whether a child has been abused. Habitat's task is to refer concerns to the correct authorities.

What is abuse and neglect?

This can be a difficult issue. A person may abuse a child by inflicting harm or by failing to prevent harm. There are 4 categories of general abuse:

Physical Injury: may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating, or otherwise causing physical harm to a child including fabricating the symptoms of, or deliberately causing, ill health to a child.

Neglect: the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the impairment of the child's health or development, such as failing to provide adequate food, shelter and clothing, or neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.

Emotional Abuse: persistent or emotional ill treatment of a child that adversely affects their development. May involve conveying to the child that they are worthless,

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unloved, and inadequate, there only to meet the needs of another, or when inappropriate expectations are imposed on them. In addition it includes children who are regularly frightened, exploited or corrupted.

Sexual Abuse: involves forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including penetrative or non-penetrative acts. This may also include involving children in looking at, or in the production of, pornographic material, or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.

- **In countries where Habitat works there may be different definitions and understandings about what constitutes child abuse. In-country guidelines and procedures should be relevant and socially sensitive, while not undermining the principle that children’s rights must be protected.**
- **In countries where Habitats works there may be extreme poverty, where parents are unable to provide some fundamental needs for their families. The differentiation between poverty-led denial of rights and abuse-driven denial of human rights needs to be understood by staff and volunteers in order for reporting to be effective rather than damaging of families and children.**

Procedures:

1. Person who witnesses the perceived or real abuse must fill out an incident report form which must be passed immediately to the local Habitat Staff and to the sending coordinator in Ireland.
2. These staff members in respective countries must file the report with their country programme director and executive director respectively.
3. Serious concerns are then passed on to the relevant authorities. For example, advice can be sought from social services in Ireland as well as the Garda Siochana. On their recommendation, a report of witnessing the incident should or should not be filed in Ireland with them.
4. The ISPCC Child Protection Helpline is also available for external advice and guidance.
5. In other countries, the procedure is dependent on the legislation, organisations and governmental groups set up to deal with such reporting.

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6. The local habitat staff will follow the procedure specific to their country and customs. In the case of a serious offence, this should involve an investigation by appropriate bodies.
7. If medical attention is needed, this will be addressed as a priority as will the safety and well-being of the child.

Habitat aims to create a safe environment for the children who are indirectly engaging with the organisation, but also to keep child protection concerns proportionate and to guard against the growth and promotion of over-zealous attitudes.

Prevention and Training:

- Habitat for Humanity Ireland and Host countries comply with the Minimum Standards for Hosting and Sending International Work Teams set out by Habitat for Humanity International in accordance with the HFHI child labour policy
- Minors must be accompanied by a parent/legal guardian (or HFH staff member), or travel as part of a team from an organisation that has signed a memorandum of understanding with Habitat for Humanity
- The minimum age for participation on an international work team build site is 16 years or older if required by the hosting program and the local child labour laws
- All Habitat for Humanity staff have been Garda Vetted
- All volunteers and staff are interviewed; their references are checked and are assigned manager or team leader who will monitor their role as part of the Habitat team.
- Garda vetting is carried out on all team leaders for minor teams in line with government legislation irrespective of whether their place of employment has already vetted them.
- Training will be provided for all staff and volunteers (primarily team leader volunteers) to understand the why of child protection procedures and learn best practise around children.
- All work on-site will be done in accordance with the Habitat for Humanity International child labour policy

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- All volunteers are provided with an orientation book; chapter 8 outlines the principles of good practice when working with local children; all team members are required to sign that they have read and understand the contents of the orientation book prior to travel.
- Habitat for Humanity Ireland is annually audited by Comhlámh who have approved this policy

Best Practise includes:

- Never be alone with a child – this includes when visiting a home/school/orphanage or when in transport. Even if a child wishes to speak with you privately, always have another adult present or within view and inform them of the situation.
- Never promise to keep secrets. If a child discloses abuse and you do not pass on the information, you are party to that abuse.
- Avoid horseplay – piggy-back rides, having one child on the lap regularly, wrestling on the ground.
- Avoid full body physical contact unless initiated by the child – this is mainly relating to hugs.
- Be aware that children don't often understand sarcasm, or fake anger/hurt. Be aware that these may be inappropriate. Avoid adult humour, joking about relationships and 'fancying' people, particularly as these remarks can often be in relation to members of the Habitat team.
- Document suspicious behaviour, marks/bruises etc and pass the report on. It is not the volunteers' responsibility to allocate blame and uncover abusive behaviour; rather their responsibility lies in their own behaviour and then in reporting suspected cases and allowing the legitimate body to investigate.

Habitat for Humanity's codes, principals and procedures aim to help build a safe organisation. Through defining what is and is not acceptable behaviour, good practice can be promoted and opportunities for abuse minimised.

These policies will be monitored and evaluated on an annual basis.

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