

# Child Protection Policy

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Jane Mitchell

[www.janemitchell.ie](http://www.janemitchell.ie)

### **About me**

I am an award-winning Irish writer of books for children and young people. I have published over a dozen books and short stories—several of which are award winners.

### **Introduction**

Children, because of their dependency and immaturity, are vulnerable to abuse in various forms. Parents or guardians have primary responsibility for the care and protection of their children.

As a writer who works closely with children in a variety of settings in relation to reading, writing and books, I have a personal responsibility to ensure the protection of children participating in any workshops and activities that I run.

### **Policy Statement**

I, Jane Mitchell, aim to create an environment in which children are listened to, given a sense of belonging, and kept safe. Standards of excellence extend to personal conduct.

- I remain sensitive to the vulnerability of children during the course of my duties
- I am conscious of the need to act in a responsible manner at all times
- I am committed to a child-centred approach in my work with children in all services and activities I organise and run.
- I undertake to provide a safe environment where the welfare of the child is paramount.
- I am aware that I do not have expertise in the area of child abuse and recognise that the investigation of suspected child abuse is the responsibility of the statutory authorities
- I adhere to the key principles of best practice from *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children*,

### **Policy Development**

I developed this policy and statement document in accordance key principles of best practice from *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children*, published in 2017 by Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

### **Definition of 'child'**

In this policy, 'child' means any person under the age of 18 years, excluding a person who is or has been married.

### **Activities**

All activities that I organise and run and that involve children are:

- Guided by what is best for children
- Conducted in an atmosphere that is safe, positive and encouraging

### **Child-centred approach**

I take a child-centred approach in my work, which means that I:

- Treat all children equally
- Listen to and respect children
- Involve children as appropriate
- Include children with special needs and disabilities
- Provide encouragement, support and praise, regardless of ability
- Use appropriate language, both physical and verbal
- Have fun
- Encourage a positive atmosphere
- Offer constructive criticism when needed
- Treat all children as individuals
- Respect a child's personal space
- Use age-appropriate teaching aids
- Lead by example
- Am aware of time limitations such as school events and exams when scheduling activities
- Create an atmosphere of trust
- Respect differences of ability, culture, religion, race and sexual orientation and membership of the Traveller Community
- Use all information in respect of children only for the purpose for which it is given, subject to child protection concerns

### **Good Practice Framework**

I aim to work within the following framework for good practice by:

- Complying with legislation and statutory requirements with regard to Garda vetting and safety clearance procedures, and mandatory reporting of suspicions of child abuse

- Familiarising myself with and adhering to Guidelines and Policies for the Protection of Children published by organisations with which I work, including but not limited to Poetry Ireland, Children's Books Ireland, Department of Education, local County and City Councils, and the Irish Writers' Centre
- Attending relevant training in the protection of children on a regular basis and as required by the organisations with which I work, including but not limited to Poetry Ireland, Children's Books Ireland, Department of Education, local County and City Councils, and the Irish Writers' Centre.
- Reporting any concerns to the designated Child Protection Liaison Officer for the relevant hosting organisation and/or the local setting in which I am undertaking my work and in accordance with Section 3 of this policy: Reporting child protection & welfare concerns
- Reviewing and updating this policy as required, or at least every two years
- Ensuring appropriate supervision of my work with children at all times depending on age, abilities and activities involved. This requires a minimum of one adult from the relevant hosting organisation and/or the local setting in which I am undertaking my work to be with me at all times.
- Not photographing or filming or otherwise recording or permitting the photographing or filming or otherwise recording of children without the written consent of the parent or guardian.

### **Conduct of behaviour around children**

Whenever possible, I avoid the following situations when working in schools, libraries and with groups of children:

- Being alone with a child
- Spending excessive amounts of time alone with children
- Transporting children to and from activities without the consent of the parent or guardian. If in exceptional circumstances, I have no option but to transport children, they shall at all times be in the back seat.
- Permitting offensive or sexually suggestive physical conduct and/or verbal language
- Singling out a particular child for unfair favouritism, criticism or ridicule
- Permitting inappropriate touching of any form
- Hitting or physically chastising children
- Leaving children unattended or unsupervised
- Socialising inappropriately with children outside of structured activities
- Revealing personal information about children in any way, subject to child protection concerns
- Contacting children engaged in activities organised by me by voicemail, text or email except in relation to reading, writing and/or activities undertaken during the course of

my work with them

- Avoiding horseplay or inappropriate touching with children who are engaged in activities organised by me

### **Physical contact**

Where physical contact is an inherent part of an activity, for example, games which might involve holding hands, I will check with the child about his or her level of comfort in advance and I will seek his or her consent before proceeding, except in an emergency or a dangerous situation.

### **Dealing with disruptive behaviour**

**Disruptive behaviour is unacceptable. I will ask disruptive children to behave.**

If I need to talk separately to a child about his or her behaviour, I will do so in an open environment in view of others, while offering the child confidentiality.

If a child continues to be disruptive to the extent that his or her behaviour interrupts the continuation of the activity and the enjoyment of other children, I will request that the hosting organisation (library, school or festival organiser) withdraw the child from the activity.

### **Reporting child abuse and welfare concerns**

I am aware that I do not have expertise in the area of child abuse. I am committed to a child-centred approach in my work with children in all services and activities I organise and run.

#### **Recognising child abuse**

Everyone must be alert to the possibility that children with whom they are in contact may be being abused. Child abuse can be difficult to identify and may present in many forms. I understand that early detection is important.

If I suspect or am told of abuse, my primary responsibility is to report it and to ensure that my concerns are taken seriously. I am cognisant of the fact that any investigation of suspected child abuse is the responsibility of the statutory authorities.

#### **Guiding principles**

I adhere to the guiding principles in regard to reporting child abuse, summarised as follows:

- The safety and well-being of the child must take priority
- Reports should be made without delay
- The principle of natural justice shall apply, as appropriate
- A person is innocent until proven otherwise, however any measures necessary to protect a child must be taken
- The principle of confidentiality shall apply, whereby only those who need to know should be told of a suspicion, allegation or disclosure of abuse and the number that need to be kept informed shall be kept to a minimum.

## **Sharing welfare concerns**

I undertake to share any concerns that I might have about child protection or welfare with the designated Child Protection Liaison Officer for the relevant hosting organisation and/or the local setting in which I am undertaking my work. Depending on the nature and location of the activity, this could include, but is not limited to librarians, school principals, and festival organisers.

In doing so, I undertake to make any report in accordance with the Guiding Principles, and in particular, as they relate to confidentiality.

## **Response Guidelines**

If a child hints at or tells me that he or she is being abused, I will respond in accordance with the following guidelines:

- Stay calm and listen – give the child time to say what she or he wants
- Do not ask leading questions or details; do not make suggestions
- Do not stop the child recalling significant events, but do not make him or her repeat the story unnecessarily
- Reassure the child, but do not promise to keep it a secret
- Explain what needs to be done next
- Record the discussion as carefully as possible
- Any information regarding concerns of child abuse shall be shared only on a 'need to know' basis in the interests of the child. I will give no undertakings regarding secrecy.

Ethical and statutory codes concerned with confidentiality and data protection provide general guidance and are not intended to limit or prevent the exchange of information between different professionals who have a responsibility for ensuring the protection of children.

I am aware that giving information to others for the protection of a child is not a breach of confidentiality. If I receive information about possible or actual child abuse, I will treat it as having been given in confidence.