



ÚDARÁS UCHTÁLA na hÉIREANN
THE ADOPTION AUTHORITY of IRELAND

Child Safeguarding Statement 2024-2026

Revision and Approval History					
Version	Revised By	Revision Date	Approved By	Approval Date	Comments
1.0					
1.1	PSW	16.09.2024	Board	08.10.2024	

To ensure the provision of the highest possible standards of adoption related services, throughout the lifelong adoption process, with the best interests of children as the first and paramount objective.

The Adoption Authority of Ireland's Child Safeguarding Statement 2024-2026 has been developed in line with the requirements as set out in the Children First Act 2017, subsequent governmental guidance on best practice and the relevant court rulings.

1. Name of Service

The Adoption Authority of Ireland (AAI) is located on the 3rd and 4th floor of Shelbourne House, Shelbourne Road, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4.

2. Nature of Service

The core areas of AAI work which are most likely to intersect with families and children are:

- Review of all documentation and digital media relating to current adoptions
- Consultation hearings with children and families in relation to adoption matters
- Consultation with children and families when adoption order is being made
- Tracing service in relation to a specific cohort of adoptees and family members
- Information service for records held by the AAI

The Children First principles underpinning this document are:

- The safety and welfare of children shall be everyone's concern
- The best interests of the child are paramount
- The overall aim in all interactions with children and their families should be one of proportionality
- Interventions by any state body should seek to build on the strengths that exist within the family
- Early and timely interventions with families will lead to better outcomes
- Children have the right to be heard and taken seriously in matters concerning them
- Children should only be separated from their families when all alternatives have been exhausted
- Parents and caregivers' have a right to be consulted in all matters relating to their families
- A balance should be struck between the rights of parents and caregivers and their children. Where a conflict exists between these two, the needs of children take precedent
- Child safeguarding and protection is a multi-disciplinary and multi-agency undertaking

3. Risk Assessment

For the purpose of this document, risk is defined as "any potential for harm to a child while availing of the service" (Children First Act 2015, Section 11(1)). Harm to a child is defined as "sexual abuse of the child", "assault, ill-treatment or neglect...likely to seriously affect the child's health, development or welfare". The AAI is committed to ensuring that no harm comes to a child who is using the service and to following legislative protocols where the

organisation becomes aware that any child may be at risk of experiencing any form of abuse that is likely to impact on a child's development.

Beyond the above, the AAI is committed to ensuring that any adult who discloses historic child abuse to us will be responded to in a way that is sensitive and timely. Further, where the need for reporting arises within three days.

Risk	Procedure in place to manage risk
Harm to children as a result of their contact with AAI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children are always in the company of parents or guardians when in the AAI building • Board consultations with children and hearings involving children are child sensitive through; clear and accessible information about what will happen being provided to families and children beforehand, consultation with children is only conducted by board members and staff who are Garda vetted and appropriately qualified to do so, where any person under 18 seeks a service from the AAI they are met in the company of their primary care givers.
Observation by staff of abusive or neglectful behaviour toward children on AAI premises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All AAI staff will have completed Children First e-learning module to support them to recognise signs/indicators of child abuse • All staff will be clearly advised as to who they should speak to should they have concern about a child
Inappropriate use by staff of confidential and identifying information on children (including photographs or videos)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only staff who absolutely need to be included on group emails pertaining to children will be • Multi-disciplinary staff will be suitably qualified and regulated by their respective bodies • Information will be held digitally and securely. Photographs of children do not need to be kept in hard copy on paper files.
Retrospective/contemporary disclosures of child abuse are dealt with in a manner that is legally sound, ethical and timely	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All staff are clear on what needs to be reported to Relevant Person (Relevant Person – means a person who is appointed by a provider of a service to be the first point of contact in respect of the Child Safeguarding Statement). • Relevant Person ensures any issue where a child is suspected to be at risk is reported to Tusla- the Child and Family Agency in a timely manner using online portal. • If required, AAI social worker will be available if a person wishes to make a disclosure in person. • It is also possible that a staff member may make a disclosure pertaining to their own lives (for example: where their own children are being put at risk in the home through domestic abuse).

4. Procedures

4.1 Responding to Child Protection or Welfare Concern

Reasonable grounds for a child protection or welfare concern include;

1. evidence, for example an injury or behaviour, that is consistent with abuse and is unlikely to have been caused in any other way
 2. any concern about possible sexual abuse
 3. consistent signs that a child is suffering from emotional or physical neglect
 4. a child saying or indicating by other means that he or she has been abused or
 5. an admission or indication by an adult or a child of an alleged abuse they committed, an account from a person who saw the child being abused.
- The concern should be raised with the Relevant Person who ascertains the response required to effectively address the matter.
 - All social workers are mandated persons under the Children First Act and must report any incidence where a child has been harmed, is being harmed or may be at risk of being harmed.

It is usually good practice to tell the family that you are making a report. This means that the family is fully informed about the services they are being referred to and understand what information professionals are passing on and why. However, there are some exceptions to informing the family namely by doing so the child is placed at further risk, where the family knowing of the report could affect Tusla's ability to carry out a risk assessment, there is a belief that doing so could put the reporting person or their family at risk.

4.2 Retrospective Disclosures of Child Abuse

- In light of the McGrath-v-HSE judgement in the Court of Appeal, it has been clarified that only adult disclosures where there is a reasonable suspicion that a child is at risk must be report to Tusla- the Child and Family Agency.
- Therefore, an adult disclosing experiences of childhood abuse does not automatically necessitate a report to Tusla- the Child and Family Agency.
- An adult may disclose experiencing childhood abuse as part of their communication with any staff member within the AAI.
- If this happens it is important that the person is advised that the AAI may be required to refer such disclosures to Tusla- the Child and Family Agency where there is a

reasonable suspicion that a child is currently at risk (i.e. where a person is named as an alleged abuser and it is reported that they have access to children). It is important that any such disclosure is directed to the Relevant Person as soon as possible.

- Most likely disclosures of child abuse will take place during a person's contact with AAI social workers. It is vital that, in as far as practicable, AAI social workers advise all clients that there are limits to confidentiality as part of clarifying their role during first contact/communication.
- Where this has not been possible AAI social workers should advise the person after they have made the disclosure that a referral to Tusla will have to be made.

Where the matter is to be reported to Tusla this is done by the Relevant Person using the [Retrospective Abuse Report Form](#) within three working days

4.3 Allegation of Child Abuse Made Against an AAI Staff Member

- The complaint will be notified to the CEO first, and they should advise the Relevant Person as soon as possible thereafter
- Procedures should be followed in line with 4.2
- If it does not increase the risk to the child the staff member should be advised immediately of the allegation against them and the steps that have been/will be taken

A number of parallel processes relating to HR may also need to be implemented and this should be done within three working days

4.4 Safe Selection of Staff with Potential Access to Children

- Staff must show evidence of registration with their relevant regulatory body
- Registration numbers are cross-referenced prior to interview
- If successful at interview, work and character references are sought along with any information pertaining to prior complaints relating to children in their care
- All candidates are Garda vetted
- Newly appointed staff sign confidentiality agreement

Conflict of interest statements are required from all board members

4.5 Child Protection Training and Information

- All new and current staff to receive Children First online training
- PSW/SWTL are available to staff if they have any concerns about historic or current child abuse concerns that they wish to discuss

- Staff will be reminded on an annual basis of their responsibilities under the Children First Act 2015
- Opportunities to learning and training in the area of child abuse/neglect will include opportunities for all staff

All updated training material and information will be provided to staff as it is developed by Tusla.

4.6 Possible Areas of Concern in Historic Records

- Given the centrality of information and tracing services to the Authority a significant number of historic files are accessed as part of core business functions.
- On occasion, some of the information within these files may give rise to concern about perceived historic sexual harm.
- It is important that staff are clear that information within historic records is not a disclosure.
- There are no mandated reporting requirements in relation to information gleaned from files and to undertake a practice of reporting these could lead to considerable distress for those involved who have not made a disclosure.

If staff have any concern about information they read in a historic record, they should discuss same with the Relevant Person

4.7 Procedure for Appointing a Relevant Person

- The Relevant Person is to be the first point of contact in relation to the Child Safeguarding Statement and all matters pertaining to retrospective or current child abuse.
- The role carries responsibilities in relation to clear judgement and decision making, risk management, report-writing, providing guidance and monitoring the implementation of the Children First Act.
- The Relevant Person in the AAI is required to examine any child welfare concerns as they arise and make sound, timely judgements in regards to reporting.

Due to reasons of professional training, qualifications and experience to protect children from harm and respond to harm sensitively, social workers as mandated persons fulfil this role for the Authority.

5. Implementation of the Children First Act at the Authority

All staff within the Authority are expected to have an awareness of child safety matters. The Authority recognises that protecting children from harm is everyone's responsibility. The

Authority requires all staff to undertake Tusla's Children First e-learning programme and the social work team through the Relevant Person will update staff to any new issues or guidance in the area. The Authority is committed to responding to all matters of concern in a manner that is sensitive, empathetic, timely and in line with statutory guidelines.

The Authority is fully committed to the implementation of this Child Safeguarding Statement and the procedures to support staff to keep children safe from harm and respond appropriately to matters of historic disclosure.



Lorraine Horgan
Chief Executive Officer

Date 06/11/2024

If you have any questions about the above please contact Liz McCotter (Social Worker/Children First Relevant Person) at (01) 2120 805 or Elizabeth.McCotter@aai.gov.ie or Sorcha O'Reilly (Social Worker/Deputy Liaison Person) at 01 230 9346 or sorcha.oreilly@aai.gov.ie

