

# BARNAHUS

**A GUIDE FOR PROFESSIONALS**



## BARNAHUS

**Barnahus is a child-friendly interagency, multidisciplinary response and is being established in Ireland to integrate health, medical, child protection, therapeutic, and policing services for children and young people who may have experienced child sexual abuse.**

**There are currently two Barnahus services: Barnahus South and Barnahus West.**

## What happens at Barnahus...

At Barnahus, we know that any form of sexual abuse can affect children, young people and their families in different kinds of ways. Families may need support to navigate their way through the different systems, not knowing where they can get the right support. At Barnahus, we want to make sure that children and young people receive the right help and support by coordinating and providing all the services children and young people need. We bring together Tusla, the HSE, and the Garda Síochána, the agencies responsible for child protection. **By responding in this way, the services can gather the best evidence, help prevent any further trauma to the child by limiting the number of times they have to tell professionals what has happened to them and to provide the support children and families need to ensure overall better outcomes.**

## Collecting evidence...

The Criminal Evidence Act 1992 allows for the submission of pre-recorded video evidence from a child victim under 18 years for sexual and violent offences. The purpose of submission of video recording is to prevent re-traumatisation, gather and present the child's best evidence to court. These interviewers are social workers and Gardaí who work together in pairs. **Specialist interviewers are highly trained to gather the best evidence when speaking with children and young people.**



## Child protection...

Under the Child Care Act 1991, the specific role of Tusla is to promote the welfare of children who are at risk of not receiving adequate care and protection. Tusla has a duty to take appropriate action to promote the welfare of the child. This may include supporting families in need of assistance in providing care and protection to their children. The Tusla social worker also has a statutory role in the delivery of child protection services under the Children First Act 2015 and 2017.



Tusla's first consideration is always the immediate safety of the child, and if the child safety concerns require an assessment, a Tusla worker will begin the process using the Signs of Safety approach. Social workers work collaboratively with families and children to conduct risk assessments and produce safety plans to increase a child's safety and wellbeing. **Through this approach, the Tusla worker ensures the child's safety and works collaboratively as part of the Barnahus team.**



## Medical support...

Not all children who come to Barnahus will require a medical assessment, but an assessment may be helpful for the purposes of wellbeing, investigation, and recovery. Forensic examination can provide very important physical evidence to the court. The benefits of an examination and follow-up appointments will be discussed with the caregivers, and they can decide, with the help of medical professionals, whether to proceed. Regardless of the time elapsed since the incident; consideration should always be given to availing medical support.

**Specially trained doctors and nurses carry out these child friendly medical examinations when it is agreed to be in the child's best interest.**

### A forensic medical assessment involves:

- A detailed medical history;
- Top to toe medical assessment;
- Evaluation of health, development and emotional wellbeing;
- Consideration of forensic evidential needs;
- Screening and treatment of sexually transmitted infection.

## Emotional wellbeing...

Children, young people, and supportive caregivers will be offered therapeutic screening with our therapy team. Following screening, and if a therapeutic need is identified, children and their caregivers will be offered an assessment to determine the child's requirements.

Based on outcome of this assessment, children, young people, and their caregivers may be offered short-term trauma focused intervention at Barnahus, or they might be referred to another service for longer-term support.



The therapy team will offer the caregiver psychoeducation, support, information, and advice to help them best support their child.

## Background...

The Minister for Children and Youth Affairs prioritised the establishment of regional centres for supporting children who may have suffered sexual abuse, in a way that would avoid retraumatisation, while accessing care or health services and engaging with the criminal justice system.

Reports<sup>1</sup> that have examined the issue conclude that a national model for services for children who may have experienced sexual abuse should incorporate all resources currently applied to sexual abuse services into a coordinated service, providing standardised models of best practice with national, multiagency oversight.

Barnahus was subsequently selected as a model of practice that constitutes a child-friendly space in which agencies work together to achieve best practice for children who may have been exposed to violence or abuse. **Key components of the Barnahus model are child protection services, forensic medical services, specialist interviewing according to evidence-based protocols and therapeutic services.**



1. National Review of Sexual Abuse Services for Children and Young People Final Report June 2011 Health Service Executive (Mott McDonald Report unpublished internal report); Report of the Ferns 4 (Children) Working Group: Assessment, therapy and counselling needs of children who have been sexually abused, and their families (September 2009, HSE unpublished internal report); Ferns 4 National Steering Committee Final Report (September 2014, HSE unpublished internal report).

## Frequently Asked Questions...

### Q. How do I refer to Barnahus?

- A. Once Tusla receive a child sexual abuse referral or a Child Protection and Welfare Report Form and subsequent receipt or notification to An Garda Síochána a referral to Barnahus should be discussed with a caregiver. The Barnahus Caregiver Information Leaflet and Barnahus Data Protection Notice must be provided to the caregiver. The completed Barnahus referral form is sent to the Barnahus team within 5 working days.

Referrals to Barnahus may also come directly from HSE Forensic Medical Services and An Garda Síochána with mandated reporting to Tusla also completed and referenced in referral form. The referral to Barnahus must be discussed with a caregiver and sent to the Barnahus team via the Tusla portal within 5 working days. Please see contact email addresses at the back of the leaflet.

### Q. What if a caregiver is unsure about their child attending Barnahus?

- A. We can talk to you, or the caregiver. Please see contact details at the back of this leaflet.

If a parent decides not to avail of Barnahus, Tusla and An Garda Síochána will continue to work together, and medical care can be accessed through the HSE/SATU.



### Q. How can families avail of this service when they live so far away?

- A. If the distance is too far to travel, we can work with the family and identify support in their locality. We can discuss what may be available in your locality and if online support would work for the child, young person, and family.

### Q. What happens if a child's therapy needs cannot be met at Barnahus?

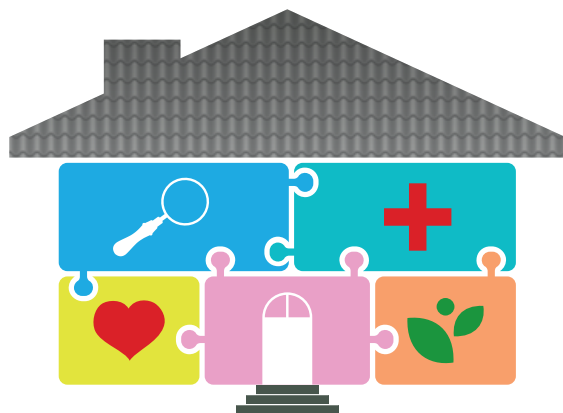
- A. As the referrer, you will be provided with an explanation of the reason, and we can talk through our recommendations and the next steps.

### Q. Can a caregiver refuse one part of the service and not the others?

- A. Yes, it is their decision what services they choose to avail of at Barnahus.

### Q. How will Barnahus record the child's information?

- A. Barnahus has an integrated IT system, TCM (Tusla Case Management). Once referred, the child's Barnahus details will be recorded and stored in line with all relevant legislation and requirements. Once a child has concluded their journey, Tusla will be provided with a closing letter.



- Currently, there are two Barnahus services. Barnahus South serves Cork and Kerry and Barnahus West serves all counties in the West and Mid-West of Ireland.
- We have a website [www.barnahus.ie](http://www.barnahus.ie) if you would like to find out more.
- We would like to know what you think of Barnahus.
- You can fill out a feedback form, or you and your caregiver can let us know at [tellus@tusla.ie](mailto:tellus@tusla.ie)

## CONTACT US

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