



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

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From: Gordon Jeyes, National Director
To: All staff in Children and Family Services, Health Services Executive
Re: Children First
Date: 15th July 2011

As you may be aware, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs Ms. Frances Fitzgerald, recently launched **Children First National Guidance 2011**.

Our aspiration for children in Ireland is that they will fulfill their potential and be healthy in every aspect of their lives, physically and mentally. This vision can only be achieved with the co-operation of the relevant professions across departments, support services and communities.

I welcome, support and commend the launch of **Children First National Guidance 2011** which has been updated to reflect new policy, legislation and organizations. It will assist us all in recognising, reporting and managing child safety concerns in Ireland.

Children First National Guidance 2011 promotes the protection of children from abuse and neglect. It states what organisations need to do to keep children safe, and what different bodies, and the general public should do if they are concerned about a child's safety and welfare. It sets out specific protocols for HSE social workers, Gardaí and other front line staff in dealing with suspected abuse and neglect. The scope of *Children First* extends beyond the reporting to statutory bodies. It emphasizes the importance of multi-disciplinary, inter-agency working in the management of concerns about children's safety and welfare. Key to this is the sharing of information between agencies and disciplines in the best interests of children and the need for full co-operation to ensure better outcomes.

As you are well aware child protection requires vigilance by all in the community, and consistent support from all public sector partners in: education, health, justice and local government as well as the children's voluntary and community sector.

All of our work needs to be accountable, consistent and transparent. It is the task of social workers to apply their skills, judgement and analysis to outline key risks and determine protective action which is balanced and proportionate, engaging the family and other agencies in the process. It is crucial that we act decisively, objectively and consistently, recording clearly the evidence, the decisions and the reasoning. All of this is supported by the detail of the definitions and circumstances of abuse set out in **Children First National Guidance 2011**. Using it as our framework we can ensure we are consistent in our implementation and our work.

We need to be clear in explaining our stages of intervention, in building quality relationships with colleagues and the community and responding promptly and clearly to all referrals provided to us. By doing so we provide the best possible services from the resources available, we need dependable partners who share information with us, understand our thresholds and provide clear, objective referrals. In turn it is incumbent on us to be equally reliable.

We are developing a Child Protection and Welfare Practice Handbook, to assist with the standard implementation of Children First 2011 and to support the vital work of social workers and other relevant practitioners in dealing with child protection and welfare cases. I will update you on these developments in due course.

Children First National Guidance 2011 represents the core HSE Children and Family Services policy and as such the top priority of this services. The reissuing of Children First and the imminent publication of the handbook will be supported by a series of regional, area and locality events. Further information will be provided to you shortly.

Cases judged to meet the criteria of a child not receiving care and protection, must be accepted at the point of intake and subject to a formal initial assessment. If the assessment confirms the risk then a child protection plan is instigated and the child is counted as in receipt of protective services. Capacity problems, such as waiting lists

and unallocated cases, are management issues to be dealt with after cases have been accepted as eligible for a service.

You can access a copy of Children First and supporting material by visiting:

www.hse.ie/go/childrenfirst

All staff in Children and Family Services have my unconditional support. I have never failed to be impressed by the quality of frontline staff whom I have met. It is essential that I amass the evidence to describe these qualities to the general public.

Thank you for your continued commitment, professionalism and dedication. Your work is vital in the protection of Ireland's children.

Regards
Gordon Jeyes

Gordon Jeyes
National Director
Children and Family Services