

Children First Governance Framework



Document developed by:	Tusla's Children First Information and Advice Service (CFIAS) on behalf of Tusla's Children First Steering Committee
Document approval history:	2023 – Children First Framework developed to support Tusla's Children First Compliance Plan, approved by CEO. 2025 - Extracted as standalone Children First Framework for universal use.
Review date:	Q4 2026
Responsible for review:	Tusla's Children First Information and Advice Service under Tusla's Children First Steering Committee.



Contents

1.0 Purpose	5
2.0 Introduction and Background	5
3.0 Rationale	5
3.1 Challenges Identified	6
3.2 Why a Children First Governance Framework is needed?	6
4.0 Application of Children First Governance Framework	7
5.0 The Children First Governance Framework	7
6.0 Summary	13



Children First Governance Framework

1.0

Purpose

The purpose of the Children First Governance Framework is to provide an enhanced and consistent understanding of what are Children First requirements of organisations and services. This framework supports the implementation of Children First across all departments, sectors, and organisations that work with children and young people. The term *Children First* incorporates *Children First National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017* and the *Children First Act 2015*.

2.0

Introduction and Background

The *Children First Act 2015* was signed into law on 19 November 2015 and fully commenced in December 2017, it reflects the commitment of successive governments to strengthen protection for children. The *Children First National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* is issued under section 6 of the *Children First Act 2015*. It is intended that the non-statutory best practice outlined in *Children First National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* operates alongside the statutory duties described in the *Children First Act 2015*. In addition, *Tusla's Child Safeguarding: A Guide for Policy Procedure and Practice* provides further guidance for organisations/services working with children and young people.

The *Children First Act 2015* introduced a range of statutory obligations for organisations providing services to children and young people. These obligations include the preparation of child safeguarding statements, mandatory reporting by designated professionals, and enhanced inter-agency cooperation in child protection matters.

3.0

Rationale

The Children First Governance Framework was originally embedded in the Tusla Children First Compliance Plan which was signed off by Tusla's CEO in 2023.

The introduction of Children First legal requirements and related best practice guidance presented challenges for some organisations and individuals. It was recognised that the Children First Governance Framework could assist all organisations/services, and it has now been extracted into this stand-alone document.

The framework provides a tool for understanding and measuring Children First requirements for everyone.

3.1 Challenges Identified

- 1. Complexity of Legal Obligations:** The Children First Act introduced statutory obligations (e.g. mandated persons reporting, child safeguarding statements) that some found difficult to interpret and apply.
- 2. Inconsistent Implementation:** Different sectors and organisations have varied levels of understanding and capacity, leading to inconsistent implementation and lack of clarity about governance. For example, some organisations have developed Child Safeguarding Statements that meet the requirements of the Children First Act 2015, but closer examination of the child safeguarding procedures in practice illustrate gaps, lack of understanding, lack of clarity or poor communication within the organisation.
- 3. Child Centred Practices:** In some cases, safeguarding was seen as a compliance task to satisfy the legislation rather than a core organisational value/culture of ensuring children are safe from harm and all staff are supported to respond in an appropriate and consistent manner to all child safeguarding concerns and practice matters.

3.2 Why a Children First Governance Framework is needed?

To address these challenges, Tusla developed and published the Children First Governance Framework which was informed by the *Children First Act 2015*, *Children First Guidance 2017* and *Tusla Child Safeguarding: A Guide for Policy Procedure and Practice, 2nd Edition*. The framework features Four Pillars that support/illustrate the legal and good practice responsibilities described in Children First.

This framework provides:

- **Standardised Understanding:** Provides a shared language and approach to Children First across departments, sectors, organisations and solo practitioners.
- **Clarity on Responsibilities:** Define who is accountable at every level—from board/management to frontline staff/volunteer.
- **Supports on Compliance/Requirements:** Helps organisations meet both statutory and best practice obligations.
- **Promotion of a Safeguarding Culture:** Embed child safeguarding into the ethos and daily operations of organisations.
- **Integration of Oversight and Improvement:** Facilitates monitoring, evaluation, and continuous learning.

4.0 Application of Children First Governance Framework

The application of the Children First Governance Framework plays a crucial role in strengthening oversight, governance, and consistency in how Children First is implemented.

The Children First Governance Framework is adaptable and may be used by government departments, sectors, organisations and individuals working with children, young people and families.

Organisations and Services may use the framework to:

1. Support their compliance and implementation with Children First
2. Obtain assurances from services they contract / fund to ensure that child safeguarding measures are in place.

5.0 The Children First Governance Framework

This framework is supported by a visual image using four pillars to capture the essential Children First requirements for good governance and compliance in the implementation of Children First.

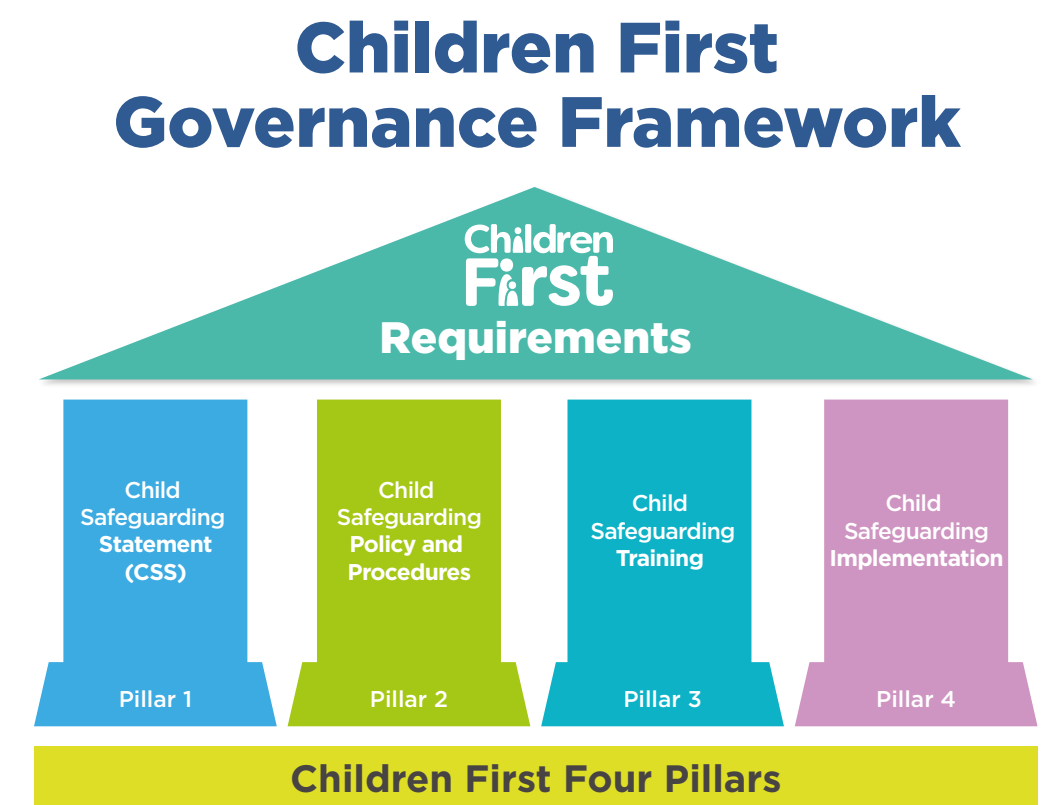


Figure 1: Children First Governance Framework – Four Pillars



Pillar 1: Child Safeguarding Statement (CSS)

The *Children First Act 2015* places specific obligations on organisations which are classed as providers of relevant services to develop a Child Safeguarding Statement (CSS).

A Child Safeguarding Statement (CSS) is a written statement describing the services you provide to children and their families, it contains a commitment to safeguarding principles and procedures. A CSS aims to ensure as far as practicable, that a child is safe from harm (abuse) while availing of your service.

It includes a risk assessment and must detail any potential risks of “harm” to a child; Your risk assessment also specifies the procedures in place to manage and reduce the identified risks (Section 11 (3) of the Children First Act 2015).

The Child Safeguarding Statement is underpinned by the implementation of accompanying child safeguarding policy and procedure documents that may be referenced in the CSS. Your Child Safeguarding Statement must be shared with your staff and volunteers, or anyone who requests it. It should be publicly displayed in your service(s)



Timeline: Must be reviewed every 2 years or sooner if there are material changes in the service or its operations.



Resources: You may also want to consider the following resources to assist you with your Child Safeguarding Statement.

1. [Tusla Guidance on Developing a CSS](#)
2. [CSSCU Guidance for Relevant Services on Risk Assessment](#)



Pillar 2: Child Safeguarding Policy and Procedures

The second pillar in the governance framework refers to Child Safeguarding Policy and Procedures which describes the practices and processes to ensure the safety and welfare of children and young people.

All organisations and solo practitioners who have contact with children and young people should develop child safeguarding procedures appropriate to the service they provide and if classed as a provider of a relevant service, must ensure that all specified procedures as per the *Children First Act 2015* are in place. These demonstrate how your organisation manages the risk of harm to children and young people while in your service.

Child Safeguarding Policies and Procedures support several functions including:

1. Protect Children from Harm

- a. Prevent abuse, neglect, exploitation, and bullying.
- b. Create a safe environment where children feel secure and respected.

2. Ensure Legal Compliance

- a. Align with legislation such as the *Children First Act 2015* and *Children First National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children*.

3. Promote a Culture of Child Safeguarding

- a. Embed child safeguarding into the ethos of the organisation.
- b. Encourage vigilance and responsibility among staff, volunteers, and management.

4. Clarify Roles and Responsibilities

- a. Explains roles of everyone in organisation
- b. Explains specific safeguarding responsibilities (e.g. Designated Liaison Person, Mandated Persons).

5. Support Staff and Volunteers

- a. Provide clear guidance on how to act in safeguarding situations.
- b. Offer training and resources to build confidence and competence.

6. Engage Families and Communities

- a. Promote transparency and trust with parents and guardians.
- b. Encourage collaborative safeguarding efforts.

7. Enable Monitoring and Accountability

- a. Establish systems for reviewing and improving safeguarding practices.
- b. Ensure incidents are documented and addressed appropriately.





Timeline: Update and review as per organisation/ services planned timelines, or sooner if there are failures in safeguarding practices.



Resources: Details of these procedures are available in the *Children First Act 2015* and the *Children First National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children*. Support in writing these procedures is provided in *Tusla's Child Safeguarding: A Guide for Policy Procedure and Practice*.

1. [Tusla's Child Safeguarding: A Guide to Policy, Procedure and Practice](#)
2. [Child Safeguarding Self-Assessment Tool](#)



Pillar 3: Child Safeguarding Training

The third pillar in the Children First Governance Framework refers to child safeguarding training. Child safeguarding training ensures that everyone working with or around children and young people understands how to **protect them from harm** and promote their **wellbeing**. Its key purposes are:

- **Raise Awareness:** Recognise signs of abuse, neglect, and exploitation.
- **Understand Legal Duties:** Know the legislation, policies, and reporting responsibilities
- **Promote Safe Environments:** Implement your organisation's child safeguarding procedures and best practices.
- **Empower Action:** Respond confidently and appropriately to concerns or disclosures.
- **Foster a Culture of Safeguarding:** Reinforce that child safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.

All organisations and solo practitioners need to develop a training strategy to support the implementation of your child safeguarding policy and procedures.



Timeline: Training should be refreshed routinely; your training strategy should describe the timeline.



Resources: The following resources have been developed to support you

1. [Child Safeguarding Resource List](#) (includes links to E-learning)
2. [Child Safeguarding Information and Training - What you need to know](#)
3. [Best Practice Principles for Organisations in Developing Children First Training Programmes](#)



Pillar 4: Child Safeguarding Implementation

Pillar 4 in the Children First Governance Framework refers to Child Safeguarding Implementation. It is intrinsically linked to the other pillars. Child Safeguarding Implementation is the practical steps and systems that organisations must take to ensure children and young people are protected from harm and their welfare is promoted.

It is grounded in the *Children First Act 2015* and *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* and involves translating safeguarding policies into everyday practice.

All organisations should develop a child safeguarding implementation plan that describes how your child safeguarding measures are implemented and reviewed.

To support the development of your Child Safeguarding Implementation plan 6 key areas have been identified which include:

1. Governance – Leadership and Accountability

Governance refers to the strategic leadership, accountability, and decision-making structures that guide child safeguarding efforts.

2. Resource Planning

Allocating safeguarding resources effectively is crucial to ensuring the safety and well-being of children and young people.

3. Involving Children and Young People

Child participation in safeguarding refers to actively involving children and young people to support in the processes, decisions, and practices that are designed to protect them from harm.

4. Communication and Awareness

Effective communication ensures a common understanding of child safeguarding, consistency of practice within the organisation, promotes parent buy-in and most importantly that child safeguarding concerns and practices are identified, reported, and addressed appropriately.

5. External Collaboration

External collaboration in child safeguarding is essential for ensuring the safety and well-being of children and young people. It involves coordinated efforts between various agencies, organisations, and professionals to identify, prevent, and respond to safeguarding concerns.

6. Oversight – Monitoring & Evaluation

Oversight involves monitoring, evaluating, and holding organisations accountable for their safeguarding practices.



Timeline: Ongoing



Resources: A number of resources are available to assist in Pillar 4 which include:

1. [Tusla's Child Safeguarding: A Guide to Policy, Procedure and Practice](#) (Theme 6)
2. [Child Safeguarding Resource List](#)

6.0 Summary

In essence, the Children First Governance Framework has been developed to provide an enhanced and consistent understanding of what are the Children First requirements within organisations and services. The framework supports the implementation of Children First and can be adapted to all departments, sectors, and organisations that work with children and young people. It ensures that all organisations and professionals working with children uphold the highest standards of child safeguarding.

The framework features Four Pillars that support/illustrate the legal and good practice responsibilities described in Children First. It also strengthens the importance and relevance of Child Safeguarding implementation which is crucial in embedding a child safeguarding culture where transparency and accountability are key, and practices are inclusive of all children and young people.

The application of the Children First Governance Framework plays a crucial role in strengthening oversight, governance, and consistency in how Children First is implemented through the inclusion of Pillar 4 Child Safeguarding Implementation.



TÚSLA
An Ghníomhaireacht um
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

**Children
First**

CFiAS

Children First
Information &
Advice Service