

Dear Members

Please find some information below regarding the Children First National Guidelines and their Implications for work of IACP Members. Thank you.

Yours sincerely

Shane Kelly

Professional Services Manager

IACP

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## **The Children First National Guidelines and their Implications for the Work of IACP Members**

In 2010, the National Executive of the IACP adopted the Children First Guidelines of the Department of Health and Children (1999) as part of the organisation's policy. The guidelines are on the IACP website and are widely available. It is the responsibility of all IACP members to familiarise themselves with them.

This note deals only with the reporting responsibilities by which members are expected to abide. It deals only with what is stated in the guidelines. The guidelines are non-mandatory under the law **at present**, but it is now the policy of the IACP that members act in accordance with them.

For IACP members, the key provisions of the guidelines are those regarding the reporting of concerns to the authorities. These provisions deal with concerns that a child may currently be experiencing abuse; and with disclosure by adults of abuse experienced when they themselves were children.

### **Current Abuse**

A member who has concerns that children with whom they are in contact may have been abused, may be suffering abuse or may be at risk of abuse should report these concerns to the HSE child protection services. If the child is in immediate danger and the HSE cannot be contacted, a report should be made to the Gardaí.

### **Retrospective Disclosure by Adults**

For most counsellors / psychotherapists this may be the most relevant section. This issue arises when an adult discloses abuse that occurred during his / her childhood. The section places an onus on the member to consider whether a child is at risk currently and if so to act upon that concern. The guidelines state that "If any risk is deemed to exist to a child who may be in contact with an alleged abuser, the counsellor / health professional should report the allegation to the HSE Children and Family Services without delay."

It is important to note that these guidelines concern not only sexual abuse but also neglect, physical abuse and emotional abuse.

As mentioned above, the Children First guidelines are non-mandatory in a legal sense, **at present**, but this is expected to change in the near future. However the formal adoption by the National Executive of the IACP of the guidelines places an obligation on members to act in accordance with those guidelines.

Members would be wise to ensure that their contracts with clients refer to these obligations under the Children First Guidelines.

IACP members should also make themselves familiar with the **Child Protection and Welfare Practice Handbook** published by the HSE.

The handbook incorporates the Children First National Guidelines and is a user-friendly document. It is strongly recommended by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

IACP has a formal agreement with **One In Four** to assist IACP Members regarding any abuse / reporting issues they may experience.

If you need further advice or guidance in relation to the above or any area of Child Protection / Abuse / Reporting you can contact **One In Four** on 01-6624070 or

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

One In Four can assist you with understanding the information and also guide and assist you with the reporting mechanisms if necessary.

Both the **Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children** and the **Child Protection and Welfare Practice Handbook** can be viewed and downloaded from the IACP website by clicking on the link below.

<http://www.iacp.ie/childrens-first-guidelines>

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