

Addendum to *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children*

Online Safety

Action Plan for Online Safety

This addendum is intended to supplement *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* [DCYA, 2017] which are the national guidelines to assist professionals, organisations and individuals to recognise and report child abuse and neglect. It has been issued by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs under section 6 of the Children First Act 2015 following a commitment made in the Government's Action Plan for Online Safety 2018 – 2019, which states:

“We will amend the Children First guidance to include a specific reference to the need to consider online safety in the context of completing the child safeguarding statement.”

Obligations on organisations to safeguard children and young people

One of the main objectives of the Children First Act 2015 is to ensure that children and young people are kept safe from harm while using the services of relevant organisations. The Act does this by placing the following specific statutory obligations on organisations:

- To keep children safe from harm while they are using the service
- To carry out a risk assessment to identify whether a child or young person could be harmed while using the service
- To develop a Child Safeguarding Statement that outlines the policies and procedures which are in place to manage the risks which have been identified
- To appoint a relevant person to be the first point of contact in respect of the organisation's Child Safeguarding Statement

The types of organisations and services that have statutory responsibilities under the Children First Act 2015 are listed in full in [Appendix 1 of the Children First Guidance](#).

This addendum does not alter or increase these obligations. It has been published to clarify that organisations providing relevant services to children should consider the specific issue of online safety when carrying out their risk assessment and preparing their Child Safeguarding Statement.

Keeping children and young people safe from harm online

The Government's Action Plan for Online Safety notes that *"it is now almost impossible to imagine a world without the internet or to imagine a future where the internet has less of a role in our lives than it does today."*

It is important that we acknowledge the central role of the internet in all of our lives and that we support children and young people to take advantage of all of the unprecedented opportunities to learn, discover, create and communicate that new technologies provide.

However, while they are often confident and competent users of new technologies, children and young people may be less aware of the inherent risks involved. Children First operates on the premise that it is the responsibility of everyone in society to keep children and young people safe from harm. This responsibility includes keeping children safe from harm online.

Children should be supported and encouraged to develop safe and responsible online behaviours. If a relevant service is allowing children access to the internet where they could become exposed to harm, including harm of assault or sexual abuse (as set out in Section 2 of the Act), there is an obligation on the service provider to ensure that the risk is identified and that the policies and procedures that are in place to manage the risk are set out in the Child Safeguarding Statement. Further detailed information on undertaking a risk assessment is set out in the Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children [DCYA, 2017] and Guidance on Developing a Child Safeguarding Statement [Tusla, 2017].

You should always contact Tusla if you have reasonable grounds for concern that a child may have been, is being, or is at risk of being harmed.

Guidance on what constitutes a reasonable concern is set out in chapter 2 of the Children First: National Guidance.

Concerns can be reported to Tusla using its [web portal](#).

If you think that a child is in immediate danger and you cannot contact Tusla should contact the Gardaí without delay.

Further resources:

[Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children](#) [DCYA 2017]

[Guidance on Developing a Child Safeguarding Statement](#) [Tusla 2017]

[Child Safeguarding: A Guide for Policy, Procedure and Practice](#) [Tusla 2017]

[Be Safe Online: Ireland's Official Online Safety Hub](#) [Government of Ireland]

www.webwise.ie

www.hotline.ie

www.watchyourspace.ie

***Department of Children and Youth Affairs
January 2019***