



**STAY SAFE**

**A PARENT/GUARDIAN'S GUIDE**

Published by the **Child Abuse Prevention Programme (CAPP)**

## Message to Parents/Guardians

Most children grow up happy and safe, but we know that from time to time they can encounter upsetting, frightening or unsafe situations. The Stay Safe Programme is designed to help our children deal with these situations.

Research has shown that children who participate in the Stay Safe Programme are more likely to tell if they become victims of abuse or bullying, and that parents/guardians and teachers involved with the programme are more likely to respond in a protective and supportive manner. As well as reducing children's vulnerability to abuse, the Stay Safe programme aims to increase wellbeing and resilience by giving children knowledge, skills and strategies in an age-appropriate manner, using developmentally structured lessons and resources to empower them.

Since the programme was introduced into primary schools, we've had many requests from parents/guardians to provide more information on preventing child abuse and bullying. In response, this booklet has been produced to explain how you and your school, working together through the Stay Safe Programme, can help keep your child happy, confident and safe.

# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
PERSONAL SAFETY	1
STAY SAFE PROGRAMME	2
THE LESSON TOPICS	3
SAFETY ON THE INTERNET	5
CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS	6
BULLYING	7
CHILD ABUSE	9
USEFUL CONTACTS	12
RESOURCES	14

## INTRODUCTION

The Child Abuse Prevention Programme (CAPP) was established in 1987 to tackle the problems of bullying and child abuse. To this end, CAPP introduced the Stay Safe Programme in 1991 into primary schools with the aim of developing the personal safety skills of primary school children.

In accordance with the Department of Education and Skills, *'Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017'*, all primary schools are required to fully implement the Stay Safe programme.

The Stay Safe Programme was revised (CAPP 2016) and additional support materials were developed to aid the understanding of the key messages.

The Stay Safe programme and accompanying support materials are available to view in English/Irish on <http://www.staysafe.ie> and <http://pdst.ie/staysafe>.

## PERSONAL SAFETY

Children need personal safety skills in order to respond safely to dangerous, upsetting or abusive situations before they become serious. We already teach children about the danger posed by traffic and how to cross a road safely, but we also need to teach them how to handle other unsafe situations. We've found that children are better at learning and remembering personal safety skills when home and school work together.

### BUILDING CONFIDENCE AND SELF-ESTEEM

A confident child with high self-esteem is less likely to become a victim of abuse or victimisation. It's important that parents/guardians, teachers and other adults in the child's life use every possible opportunity to build the child's self-esteem and confidence. Given that the family is the most important learning environment for the child, every effort should be made at home to promote and develop a child's confidence and self-esteem. Some of the ways this can be done include:

- Showing love and affection
- Providing security
- Encouraging and praising
- Noticing when a child makes a special effort
- Setting realistic expectations
- Allowing your child to be involved in making simple, everyday decisions
- Setting well-defined limits for behaviour
- Showing respect for your child.

## COMMUNICATION

Children enjoy chatting about their everyday experiences and like to hear adults talking about their own childhood. Talking to your child in this way helps to open up communication. Taking the time to listen to a child express his or her opinions and feelings increases the child's confidence and encourages the child to be more open with you. Listening and responding to your child shows that you're interested in what they have to say.

Children need to be shown that they're loved, cared for and that their views and opinions are valued. You do this as much through listening to your child as talking with them. It's important that your child knows that they can turn to you if they have a problem.

### TALKING ABOUT PERSONAL SAFETY

You may have spoken at home about the dangers associated with fire and electricity, farm machinery, water safety and road safety. You may also have spoken to your child about internet safety and responding to strangers.

It's important to ensure your child knows:

- What to do if they feel worried, upset, confused or unsafe about any situation
- What to do if they get lost in a shop or town
- What to do if approached by a stranger
- What to do if contacted online by someone they don't know
- Never to take anything from someone they don't know
- Never to go anywhere without telling you first.

### Some other considerations:

- It is important to know where your child is, who they're with and what they're doing
- Think about who looks after your child when you're not with them, for example, baby-sitter/child-minder, and how well do they get on with your child. It's always okay to ask for references and not to feel embarrassed about doing so
- Create a safe support network of trusted adults that your child can turn to. Who could they turn to if they are out and about and you are not with them?
- Talk to your child as necessary about drugs, smoking and alcohol
- Discuss with your child growing and changing in the context of sex and sexuality
- Talk to your child about social media and streaming usage, gaming, online activity and safe use of the Internet.

# STAY SAFE PROGRAMME

The Stay Safe Programme is a mandatory personal safety skills programme for primary schools – both mainstream and special. Its overall objective is to prevent child abuse, bullying and other forms of victimisation. Personal safety skills are taught as part of the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum of primary schools.

## WHAT DOES THE PROGRAMME DO?

The programme develops children's ability to recognise, resist and report risk situations or abusive encounters by teaching children:

- To identify for themselves unsafe or upsetting situations
- Simple rules to help them avoid abuse
- To respect and value the rights of others
- The language and skills they require to seek help.

The programme also informs parents/guardians and teachers about preventing bullying and child abuse, whilst seeking to create a greater public awareness about the problems children can and do experience.

## HOW IS THE PROGRAMME TAUGHT?

Typically, children are taught the content of the Stay Safe lessons in the classroom by their class teacher, and then discuss the lessons at home with their parents/guardians. Teachers and parents/guardians work together to ensure that children learn the skills they need to keep safe. The programme consists of lessons presented within five topics (as outlined in the table below) and are taught once in the two year SPHE cycle.

Stay Safe Topic	Number of Lessons			
	J. Infants S. Infants	1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup> and 4 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup> and 6 <sup>th</sup>
Feeling Safe and Unsafe	3	3	3	3
Friendship and Bullying	3	5	6	6
Touches	2	2	2	2
Secrets and Telling	1	1	1	1
Strangers	1	1	1	1

## WHAT WILL CHILDREN LEARN?

The lessons teach children about what to do if they're frightened or upset. One of the central messages children learn is that if they ever have a problem, they should tell an adult they know and trust.

As well as reducing children's vulnerability to abuse, the Stay Safe programme aims to increase wellbeing and resilience by giving children knowledge, skills and strategies

in an age-appropriate manner, using developmentally structured lessons and resources to empower them.

## HOW ARE PARENTS/GUARDIANS INVOLVED IN THE PROGRAMME?

It's essential that you're involved in the programme because parents/guardians are the most important people in a child's life, and your child is most likely to turn to you for help when upset or worried. It has been shown that programmes such as Stay Safe are most effective when parents/guardians are actively involved in the process. Your school may organise a parent information evening, where you'll have an opportunity to ask questions.

The Stay Safe programme will be explained to you via home/school link worksheets. Worksheets to accompany the stay safe lessons may be given as homework to your child or may be brought home for discussion. (The illustrations throughout this booklet are taken from the children's worksheets.) It's important that you set aside time to use these to discuss the content of the lesson with your child. Doing so will give you an insight into what your child is learning, and present an opportunity to discuss the issues involved in a more personal way than is possible in the classroom situation. It also gives you an opportunity to discuss personal safety issues with your child and to explain the safety rules that exist in your family. Children sometimes use these worksheets to tell their parents/guardians about problems.

## BEFORE THE PROGRAMME STARTS:

- Make sure you're familiar with the lesson topics as outlined in the following section
- Talk to your child about the programme. Explain that the programme will teach them how to keep safe
- Decide on a time to set aside for discussion of the home/school worksheets.

## THE LESSON TOPICS

There are five topics discussed in the Stay Safe Programme:

Feeling Safe & Unsafe

Friendship & Bullying

Touches

Secrets & Telling

Strangers

Each topic is dealt with in a way that emphasises positive experiences while acknowledging that there are times when children may feel unsafe, threatened or frightened.

Through classroom discussion, role-play and repetition, children learn simple safety strategies for dealing with problems. A central message is that children faced with any kind of victimisation or abuse should: **Say No, Get Away and Tell** an adult they trust. The importance of telling an adult who can help is emphasised. The content of each topic is outlined below, followed by suggestions that may help when you're discussing the topic with your child.

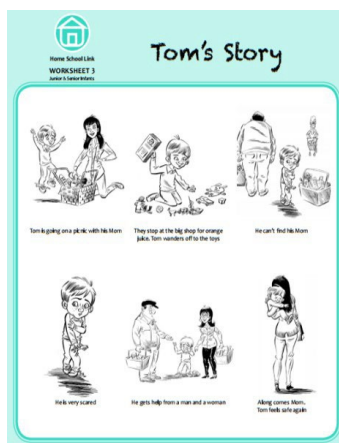
### TOPIC 1: FEELING SAFE AND UNSAFE

In this section children learn . . .

- That all feelings, even ones we don't like, are important. Feelings are like messages that tell us how we are inside. The lesson contains specific teaching on feelings vocabulary.
- To identify situations in which they feel safe and unsafe.
- That they should always tell an adult if they feel unsafe, threatened or in danger.
- About other safety strategies they can use when they feel unsafe or are in potentially dangerous or threatening situations.

#### Suggestions for Parents/Guardians

Discuss with your child times when they feel safe and unsafe and ask him or her to give you examples from the lessons. Talk to your child about the rules they should follow if lost or if someone they don't know calls to the door or on the phone. What should they do about online contact from someone they don't know? Encourage your child to tell an adult about any situation in which they feel unsafe, upset, confused or worried.



### TOPIC 2: BULLYING

In this section children learn:

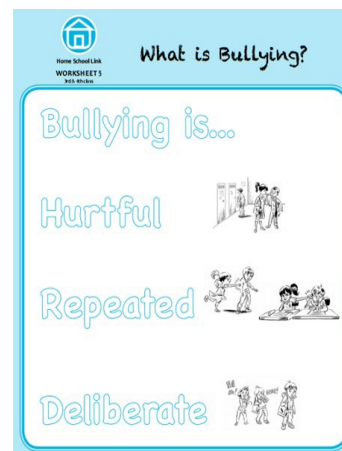
- To understand the value of friendship and the importance of treating one another with respect and dignity
- To explore ways in which we make and keep friends
- That bullying can be physical, verbal or emotional. It can involve excluding another child from games or activities.
- That people can be bullied because of their race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, appearance or disability
- To explore strategies that will help to prevent and manage bullying
- About online bullying – Cyberbullying – and how it can be combatted.
- To understand the role of the bystander.
- The importance of telling to help keep ourselves or others safe.

#### Suggestions for Parents/Guardians

Talk to your child about the importance of friendship. Discuss bullying with your child. Talk to your child about respecting others and how that it is unacceptable to bully others.

Ask your child if they have ever been bullied and remind your child of the Stay Safe rules: say 'No', get away and tell.

Talk about the importance of telling to be safe. Stress that your child should never be ashamed or afraid to tell a trusted adult, even if they have done something wrong. See page 7 for additional information on bullying.



### TOPIC 3: TOUCHES

In this section children learn . . .

- To value and enjoy normal affection and to identify touches they like/don't like/confuse them
- To understand the meaning of personal and private
- What to do if someone touches them in a way that is unwanted or feels like an unsafe touch
- Never to touch anyone else in a way that they don't like
- To respect the rights of others
- That it is OK to say 'No' to anyone who asks them to

do something that is wrong or dangerous – even if that person is an adult

- Never to keep secrets about touches.

From Infants, children are taught that some parts of their bodies get touched a lot – people might shake their hand, pat them on the head or put their arms around them. Children also learn that other parts of their bodies are private and are not often touched, except when the child is being washed or examined by a doctor or nurse. If the doctor examines them, does he/she ask them to keep it a secret? Of course not!

It's explained to the children that private parts are those parts of their bodies that are covered by their underwear or swimsuit. From Infants, children learn the anatomically correct terms for the private parts of their bodies –bottom, penis, testicles, vagina, vulva, breast. Having this vocabulary is seen as a protective factor in preventing incidents of inappropriate touch and supports a child's ability to tell. Children are taught that it's okay to say 'No' to anyone who asks them to do something that is wrong or makes them feel unsafe. They're encouraged to tell a trusted adult if anyone asks them to keep a touch a secret.

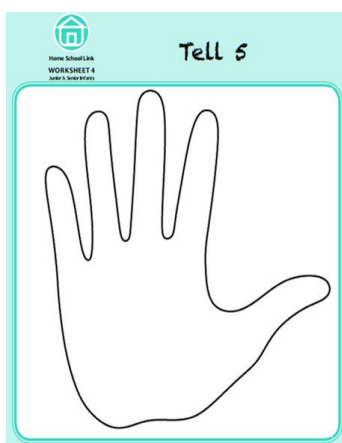


### Suggestions for Parents/Guardians

Talk with your child about the types of touches they like, dislike or touches they find confusing.

Tell your child it's okay to say 'No' if a person asks him or her to do something the child feels is dangerous or unsafe. Remind your child that it's okay to say 'No' if a person touches him or her in a way that the child doesn't like – for example, some children don't like being tickled, hugged or kissed by some adults.

Discuss with your child safe and unsafe touches and the rules they have learned in class: say 'No' – get away and tell. Tell your child never to keep any touch a secret and that they should always tell an adult. The concept of TELL 5 is reinforced at school, which helps children identify 5 adults in their lives that they can tell. You can help your child to identify 5 adults they could turn to if they feel worried or unsafe.



## TOPIC 4: SECRETS AND TELLING

In this section children learn:

- To distinguish between good and bad secrets
- That they should never keep a bad secret or a secret about touch
- That they should always tell a trusted adult about touches they do not like or want
- To identify who they should tell if they have a problem
- The difficulties in telling when bribery or threats are involved
- How to tell - and to keep telling until they get help.

### Suggestions for Parents/Guardians

Talk to your child about secrets. Explain the difference between a good and a bad secret. Good secrets are like surprises. Bad secrets make children feel afraid, upset or unsafe, and may involve a threat or a bribe.

Talk to your child about what they should do if somebody asks them to keep a bad secret. Emphasise that nobody has the right to make anyone keep a touch a secret, and that they should always tell a trusted adult about a bad secret.

Make sure that your child knows to come to you or any of their five trusted adults, if they have a problem or are upset about something. Setting aside time to listen to your child is very important. Your child is more likely to come to you when they're worried or concerned about something if they know they'll be listened to. Listening and responding to children shows them you're interested in what they have to say, in their opinions and in their feelings. For some useful information on Listening to Children and Young People, visit [National Educational Psychological Service \(NEPS\)](https://www.neps.gov.uk/).



Discuss the importance of telling, and ensure your child knows that they should never be ashamed or afraid to tell if they have a problem. Help your child draw up a list of adults who could be approached for help. These should be people both you and your child trust and your child can easily contact. Explain that adults can be busy and sometimes may not properly 'hear' what's being said. Discuss what your child should do if the adult doesn't listen or understand. Emphasise that they should tell another person and to keep on telling until they get help.



## TOPIC: STRANGERS

In this section children learn . . .

- That a stranger is anyone they don't know
- A stranger can be a man or a woman, an adult, a teenager or a child
- That most strangers are nice people, but we cannot tell just by looking at them if they are nice
- Never to go anywhere with a stranger or take anything from a stranger
- To say No, get away and tell if a stranger does anything to make them feel unsafe
- Not to share personal information on the internet.

### Suggestions for Parents/Guardians

Discuss with your child the meaning of the word 'stranger'. It's important to stress that most strangers are nice people and that we occasionally may have to rely on strangers in times of trouble but that, at the same time, there are rules children should always use with strangers.

Ask your child what they would do in different situations with strangers, such as if a stranger asks your child for directions or offers your child a lift. Stress that it's not rude to refuse to talk to strangers if your child feels unsafe.



## SAFETY ON THE INTERNET

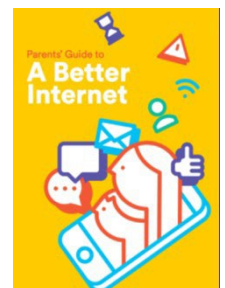
Children increasingly use the internet as a source of both fun and education. While it is indeed a wonderful resource there can be dangers attached to using the net and it makes sense to take some basic precautions. Children may access sites containing material that is pornographic, violent or racist in nature, or may receive unsolicited messages through social media. They may also end up spending way too much time online, neglecting friends and other activities.

### TOP TIPS FOR PARENTS

(from - [A Parent's Guide to a Better Internet - Webwise](#))



- Discover the Internet Together
- Agree with your child rules for Internet use in your home
- Talk about internet safety with your child
- Disable in-app purchases
- Use parental controls
- Agree on what to do when things go wrong
- Set up a family email
- Encourage your child to be careful when disclosing personal information
- Talk about the risks associated with meeting online "friends" in person
- Teach your child about evaluating information and being critically aware of the information they find online
- Don't be too critical towards your child's exploration of the internet
- Let your child show you what they like to do online
- Remember that the positive aspects of the internet outweigh the negatives.



## SOCIAL MEDIA & ONLINE GAMING

[Social Media & Online Gaming: Tips for Keeping Your Child Safe Webwise](#)

- Check the age rating of the games your child is playing and ensure games are age appropriate.
- Advise your child not to share personal details online or in their profiles.
- Encourage your child to play fairly and treat other gamers with respect.
- Use family safety settings to protect your child from



discovering games which may not be age/content appropriate.

- For parents it is important to agree time limits on gaming with their children.
- Playing games online can leave computers/devices open to risk of a virus. Protect your computer by ensuring you have up to date anti-virus software in place.
- Ensure your child knows how to report or block other players who engage in online harassment or any other unsuitable behaviour.

## CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS (SEN)

International research studies have found that children with SEN are more vulnerable to experiencing abuse for the reasons outlined below:

- Poor communication skills
- Limited sense of danger
- Inability to see warning signs
- Need for intimate care such as washing and toileting
- Lack of mobility
- Reliance on adults for many of their needs
- Need for attention, friendship or affection
- Poor self-confidence and limited assertiveness
- Fear of not being believed
- Limited understanding of sexuality or sexual behaviour
- Children with SEN are more likely to suffer from low self-esteem, feelings of isolation and powerlessness.

If you are a parent/guardian of a child with SEN, you'll be aware of the extra help that your child needs and the extra adults/carers in your child's life. It's important, however, that you encourage your child to be as independent and confident as possible.

You can develop your child's self-confidence and independence by:

- Emphasising your child's strengths
- Allowing your child to make choices and decisions
- Encouraging independence in dressing, hygiene and cleanliness
- Developing appropriate social skills – greeting others, good manners, etc.
- Teaching your child how to say or write their name, address and phone number
- Teaching your child how to seek help in an emergency
- Recognising the child's need for dignity and privacy. It's important to have rules as to who looks after the

intimate needs of your child and to ensure that your child feels comfortable with whatever arrangements are made. It should always be explained to a child what is being done and why

- Discussing 'what if' situations with your child. Children with SEN may need specific rules for each specific situation. They will need to practise these rules and to practise saying 'No'
- Ensuring your child knows what is meant by 'safe', 'unsafe', 'private', 'secret', 'stranger', 'trust', 'rights', etc.
- Adapting some of the 'Suggestions for Parents/Guardians' outlined in the previous section to suit you and your child. For example, if your child has speech difficulties, it's important that they have some other way of letting you know they're upset or need help.

Considerable time may need to be given for the development of personal safety skills for children with SEN. You may wish to discuss with your child's teacher how you can support the teaching of the programme to your child.

# BULLYING

## WHAT IS BULLYING?

*“Bullying is defined as unwanted negative behaviour, verbal, psychological or physical, conducted by an individual or group against another person (or persons) and which is repeated over time. These procedures make clear that this definition includes cyber-bullying and identity-based bullying (such as homophobic bullying and racist bullying)”.*

**(Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools, 2013)**

The following are some examples of the types of bullying behaviour that can occur amongst pupils. This is not an exhaustive list.

- |                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| <b>Physical</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Hitting, pushing, shoving, pinching, tripping, etc.</li><li>• Damage to a child’s possessions, e.g. books, money or lunch</li><li>• Physical harassment or inflicting pain</li></ul>   |
| <b>Verbal</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Name-calling</li><li>• Hurtful, insulting or humiliating remarks about a child’s appearance, ability/disability, family, race or religion, gender or sexuality (perceived or real)</li><li>• Spreading mean, hurtful or untrue gossip or rumours about an individual</li></ul> |
| <b>Cyber-bullying</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Personal intimidation, impersonation, exclusion, personal humiliation, false reporting.</li><li>• More information on cyberbullying can be found at:<br/><a href="https://www.webwise.ie/parents/">https://www.webwise.ie/parents/</a></li></ul>                               |
| <b>Emotional</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Deliberately excluding or isolating a child</li><li>• Intimidation</li><li>• Belittling someone’s efforts</li><li>• Ganging up on an individual</li></ul>  |

All types of bullying are damaging and quite often difficult to detect – particularly verbal and emotional bullying – due to the secrecy upon which it relies. In many cases of bullying, the victim is too frightened to tell.

There are no innocent bystanders when it comes to bullying. As parents, teachers or children we all have a part to play in ensuring that those around us can live a life free from bullying.

## HOW WOULD YOU KNOW IF YOUR CHILD IS BEING BULLIED?

The following may be indications that your child is being bullied. It’s important to bear in mind, however, that many ‘signs’ of bullying can also be signs of other difficulties. No one sign on its own should be seen as absolute proof that bullying has occurred. It’s important to investigate unexplained changes in your child’s behaviour.

If your child is being bullied, he or she may . . .

- Be unusually anxious, nervous or tense
- Develop sleeping problems, such as nightmares, bed-wetting, sleeplessness
- Develop eating problems
- Have unexplained bruises, scratches, etc.
- Come home regularly with books, clothes or other possessions damaged or missing
- Constantly ask for or steal money
- Begin to bully others
- Become reluctant to go to school, to go out to play or to continue with other usual activities
- Become reluctant to walk to or from school or other activities
- Show a deterioration in school performance
- Become isolated or withdrawn
- Become anxious or evasive when asked if they have a problem
- Children may make excuses for any of the above.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO IF YOU SUSPECT YOUR CHILD IS BEING BULLIED?

- |               |   |
|---------------|---|
| <b>Ask</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• It’s often not easy for children to tell, so it’s important to ask your child about bullying. Let them know that they can tell you if they have a problem.</li></ul>  |
| <b>Talk</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Discuss the problem with your child and how it might be resolved. Your child should not be encouraged to retaliate as there may be a risk of injury.</li><li>• Help your child to understand that bullying is wrong and that victims should never blame themselves when bullying takes place.</li></ul> |
| <b>Listen</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Listen to what your child tells you. If your child feels that they are being bullied, acknowledge this.</li></ul>   |

## Get Help

- Identify the places where the bullying is happening. If the bullying is school related, talk to the class teacher and/or school principal. It may help to make an appointment. It is important to have your facts straight before raising the issue with the school. If the bullying is related to a club or activity the child attends, talk to the group leader. Explain to the teacher or group leader what has been happening and how your child feels. Discuss with them how you might work together to stop the bullying.
- Enlist the help of friends to support your child.

Talk to other parents/guardians. Discuss with them how you could work together to support each other and your children.

## THE SCHOOL RESPONSE

The prevention of bullying in schools should be part of a written Anti-Bullying Policy in accordance with [DES Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary schools 2013](#).

This policy should ensure that:

- Your child's complaint is investigated and recorded
- The situation is monitored over a reasonable time
- Your child is supported in school
- The incident is treated in a confidential way
- You are kept informed about progress.

## PRACTICAL ADVICE YOU CAN GIVE YOUR CHILD if he or she is being bullied

Tell your child to...

- Try to avoid situations where they may be isolated or confronted by the bully
- If possible, walk away smartly when they see the bully/bullies approaching
- Talk to a parent or teacher about any bullying – even if the bullying is against someone else
- Remember the Stay Safe rules: Say 'No' – get away and tell an adult who can help
- Stand tall and try to look as confident as possible
- Make eye contact and use a strong and firm voice to say something like, "Stop it" or "Go away" or "I'm going to report you to the teacher"
- Stay as calm as possible even though they feel upset and very angry.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO TO PREVENT YOUR CHILD FROM BEING BULLIED?

It's important for your child to learn that they have a right to say 'no' and to tell of any situation that they find uncomfortable or threatening. A child needs to have high self-esteem and confidence in order to say 'no' and to tell. The more confident your child is, the less likely they will become a victim of abuse. You can build up your child's self-esteem and confidence in the way that you praise, encourage, talk and listen to your child.

- Provide opportunities to talk over little difficulties, problems or fears with your child. Listen to what they are saying to you.
- Let your child know that they can tell you if they have a problem.
- Remember – if your children can't come to you with their little problems, they're less likely to come to you with their bigger ones.

## WHY DO CHILDREN ENGAGE IN BULLYING?

There are many reasons why children engage in bullying. They may not recognise the potential impact of their words and actions on others. Children who bully may also have been bullied themselves. Some children who engage in bullying suffer from a lack of self-confidence and have low self-esteem. Some may be attention-seekers, trying to impress others by their bullying behaviour. Children who are under pressure to succeed at all costs may try to bully their way to success.

## WHAT TO DO IF YOUR CHILD ENGAGES IN BULLYING BEHAVIOUR:

- Talk to your child and try to find out what the problem is. Children who are prepared to admit being involved, will find it much easier to get the problem solved and change their behaviour. They should be encouraged to do this
- It is important that the child feels that your support will help solve the problem
- Children who engage in bullying behaviour are often ashamed when the truth is discovered and will need reassurance that you will help re-establish their standing with others in a way that creates goodwill all round
- Some young people may not realise that they are bullying. Others deliberately set out to hurt. Let the child know that it's wrong to bully. Explain how the other child/children feel. Try to get your child to understand the other child/children's point of view
- Contact your child's teacher/principal and let them know about the problem. Parents and teachers working together can help the child. Other people who care for your child may also be able to help with this problem.

# CHILD ABUSE

It is difficult to understand why anyone would want to hurt a child or make them feel bad about themselves. But whatever the reason, abuse is always wrong and is never the child's fault. It's always the responsibility of the abuser.

There are four different categories of abuse - neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse. The definition of each category of abuse is outlined in the table below.

A child may be subjected to one or more forms of abuse at any given time.

## TYPES OF ABUSE - Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (2017)

**Neglect** Neglect occurs when a child does not receive adequate care or supervision to the extent that the child is harmed physically or developmentally. It is generally defined in terms of an omission of care, where a child's health, development or welfare is impaired by being deprived of food, clothing, warmth, hygiene, medical care, intellectual stimulation or supervision and safety. Emotional neglect may also lead to the child having attachment difficulties.

**Physical abuse** Physical abuse is when someone deliberately hurts a child physically or puts them at risk of being physically hurt. It may occur as a single incident or as a pattern of incidents.

**Emotional abuse** Emotional abuse is the systematic emotional or psychological ill-treatment of a child as part of the overall relationship between a caregiver and a child. Abuse occurs when a child's basic need for attention, affection, approval, consistency and security is not met, due to incapacity or indifference from their parent or caregiver.

**Sexual abuse** Sexual abuse occurs when a child is used by another person for his or her gratification or arousal, or for that of others.

More detailed information is available in **Children First: National Guidance on the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017**

<https://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/publications/20171002ChildrenFirst2017.pdf>

## POSSIBLE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF ABUSE

While the following may be indications of abuse, it's important to remember that there could be other explanations. Many of the 'signs' of abuse can also be signs of other difficulties. ***No one sign on its own should be seen as absolute proof that abuse has occurred.***

It's important to note that some children may never give us any sign that they're being abused. Sometimes, a child will seem unaffected by an incident, but parents/guardians should still be alert for reactions. It's always important to investigate unexplained changes in your child's behaviour.

### Neglect

- Children persistently being left alone without adequate care and supervision
- Persistent failure to attend school
- Inadequate medical care
- Abandonment or desertion
- Malnourishment, lacking food, inappropriate food or erratic feeding
- Lack of adequate clothing
- Inattention to basic hygiene
- Lack of protection and exposure to danger, including moral danger or lack of supervision appropriate to the child's age
- Non-organic failure to thrive, i.e. child not gaining weight due not only to malnutrition but also to emotional deprivation
- Failure to provide adequate care for the child's medical and developmental problems.
- Inadequate living conditions – unhygienic conditions, environmental issues, including lack of adequate heating and furniture.

### Physical abuse

- Unexplained injuries such as bruising, burns, scalds, bites, marks
- Untreated injuries and repeated fractures; swollen joints; abrasions/lacerations
- Haemorrhages (retinal, subdural)
- Damage to body organs
- Poisonings – repeated (prescribed drugs, alcohol)
- Failure to thrive.

### Emotional abuse

- Lack of proper stimulation (e.g. fun and play)
- Lack of continuity of care (e.g. frequent moves, particularly unplanned)
- Continuous lack of praise and encouragement
- Exposure to family conflicts and/or violence

- Persistent lack of praise, encouragement, love, attachment or stimulation
- Rejection, serious over-protectiveness
- Inappropriate non-physical punishment, e.g. locking in bedroom for long periods
- Inappropriate expectations of a child's behaviour
- Persistent criticism, sarcasm, hostility or blaming of the child
- Bullying
- Conditional parenting in which care or affection of a child depends on his or her behaviours or actions.

#### **Sexual abuse**

- Hints about sexual activity
- Bleeding from the vagina/anus
- Difficulty/pain in passing urine/faeces
- An infection may occur secondary to sexual abuse, which may or may not be a definitive sexually transmitted disease
- A noticeable and uncharacteristic change of behaviour
- Age-inappropriate understanding of sexual behaviour
- Inappropriate seductive behaviour
- Uncharacteristic sexual play with peers/toys
- Unusual reluctance to join in normal activities which involve undressing, e.g. games/swimming.

### **CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE**

Child sexual abuse is often the most difficult form of abuse to detect because of the secrecy upon which it relies. It rarely involves just a single incident and usually occurs over a number of years. In many cases of sexual abuse, the victim is often made to feel guilty for what is happening to them.

Child sexual abuse can take many forms, from incidents such as indecent exposure and obscene phone calls to abuse involving full sexual intercourse. Even a seemingly minor incident might affect a child, and it's a mistake to assume that abuse is only serious when it involves intercourse.

#### **Who are the victims?**

Any child may become the victim of abuse. Victims of child abuse may be any age from infancy to late adolescence. The majority of known sexual abuse cases involve children between the ages of four and twelve. Victims come from every social background. Boys are as vulnerable as girls. Children with special educational needs (SEN) are more vulnerable and may therefore be more at risk of abuse (see section 'Children with Special Educational Needs', page 6) Confidence and assertiveness are protective factors.

#### **Who are the abusers?**

The abuser may be male or female, of any age and of any

social background. Many abusers that we know about are young men in their teens or early twenties.

A sexual abuser will normally try to develop a special relationship with a child – the child is targeted, groomed, tested and finally abused. Sexual abuse is habitual and compulsive. Most sexual abuse is committed by someone the child knows and trusts, such as a family member, relative, baby-sitter or neighbour.

#### **Behavioural signs and symptoms that may be suggestive of child abuse:**

##### **Particular behavioural signs and emotional problems suggestive of child abuse in young children - aged 0-10 years**

- mood change where the child becomes withdrawn, fearful, acting out
- lack of concentration, especially in an educational setting
- bed wetting, soiling
- pains, tummy aches, headaches with no evident physical cause
- skin disorders
- reluctance to go to bed, nightmares, changes in sleep patterns
- school refusal
- separation anxiety
- loss of appetite, overeating, hiding food.

##### **Particular behavioural signs and emotional problems suggestive of child abuse in older children - aged 10+ years**

- depression, isolation, anger
- running away
- drug, alcohol, solvent abuse
- self-harm
- suicide attempts
- missing school or early school leaving
- eating disorders.

***Remember – no one sign on its own should be seen as absolute proof that abuse has occurred. It's always important to investigate unexplained changes in your child's behaviour.***

## EFFECTS OF ABUSE

The effects of child abuse differ from one individual to the next, and depend on the age of the victim, their relationship with the abuser, and the extent of the abuse. Perhaps the greatest long-term injury to a child is the sense of betrayal felt towards the person who has abused the child, particularly when the relationship between victim and abuser is a close one.

The effects of abuse may lie dormant for many years and can often be triggered by events later in life, such as the onset of puberty, by marriage or by the birth of a child.

With treatment and counselling, most victims come to terms with the abuse and go on to lead normal lives.

## WHY CHILDREN DON'T TELL?

Children can find it hard to tell because:

- They may be bribed or threatened to keep the abuse secret.
- Sometimes they are led to believe that the abuse is normal and acceptable.
- They may not know they have the right to refuse.
- They may not have the language to talk about what has happened or have the ability to verbally communicate.
- The abuser may try to make the child feel guilty or responsible for the abuse.

Sometimes children are not believed – it's assumed they're making up stories or imagining things. Children rarely make up stories about abuse

## WHAT TO DO IF YOU SUSPECT A CHILD IS BEING ABUSED?

It can be difficult to know whether or not your suspicions about child abuse are real. Before you act on them, you need to consider whether any alternative explanation might exist and ask yourself these questions:

- Is there any other reason why the child might be behaving in a particular way?
- Is there a pattern to this type of occurrence?
- Did you or anyone else see what was happening?
- Has the child said anything to indicate that they are being harmed?
- Could the signs or injuries have been caused in some other way?

If you've considered these questions and are still concerned, it's likely that you have reasonable grounds to take some action. It's important to remember that everyone has a duty to protect children and to co-operate with professionals where necessary. For further information see:

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

## WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF A CHILD TELLS YOU ABOUT ABUSE?

- Listen to the child. Don't probe or push the child for explanations
- Accept that the child has had an upsetting experience. Don't deny the problem, no matter how difficult this may be
- Remain as calm as possible. Try not to panic
- Comfort the child and reassure them that they are not to blame and were right to tell you about what happened
- Act quickly – don't delay in getting help
- If you think that a child is being abused or is at risk from someone inside or outside the family, get in touch with a social worker or other health professional in your local Túsła office. If it's an emergency and outside Túsła working hours, you should report it to An Garda Síochána. Under the law, nobody will be penalised for making a report of child abuse to TÚSLA or An Garda Síochána as long as the report is not malicious, and their intentions are genuine.

### **Please Note:**

The Department of Education and Skills has issued Child Protection Procedures to all primary and post-primary schools. These state that, *"In any situation where a member of school personnel, receives an allegation or has a suspicion that a child may have been abused or neglected, or is being abused or neglected, or is at risk of abuse or neglect, he/she shall, without delay, report the matter to the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) in that school."*  
Department of Education.

[Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools \(revised 2023\)](#)

## ADULTS AFFECTED BY ABUSE

Some readers may themselves have had direct personal or familial experience of child abuse. Many will have coped well with a supportive network of family and friends. However, discussions of child abuse may evoke in them painful memories and emotions. Anyone experiencing such reactions to the programme should be aware that adults who have experienced childhood abuse often find it necessary and helpful to talk to a supportive person in a non-threatening and confidential environment, e.g. a professional counsellor. To facilitate the healing process, it is important that time and space is given to this. Various organisations provide support and advice regarding such counselling. (See Useful Contacts, Page 12)



## USEFUL CONTACTS

### Further Information and Helplines

#### **Anti Bullying Centre**

Based in DCU, the ABC carry out research on school bullying, workplace bullying, homophobic bullying and cyberbullying.

<https://antibullyingcentre.ie/>

**Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools (Department of Education and Skills) gov.ie - Anti-bullying procedures for primary and post-primary schools**

#### **Barnardos**

An organisation providing therapy to children who have experienced sexual abuse, and support services, including counselling, to families and groups affected.

01-4549699

<https://www.barnardos.ie/>

#### **CARI Foundation**

The CARI Foundation provides services for victims of abuse and non-abusing members of their families.

0818 924567

<http://www.cari.ie/>

#### **Childline**

This is a service run by the ISPCC for any child in trouble or danger. Childline have a text support service - just text 'Talk' to 50101. There is a special text service for young people experiencing bullying, text 'Bully' to 50101.

1800 66 66 66

<http://www.childline.ie/>

#### **National Parents Council**

NPC represents the view of parents on all important educational bodies.

12 Marlborough Court, Marlborough Street, Dublin 1

01-8874477

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

#### **One in Four**

One in Four supports men and women who have experienced sexual abuse during childhood. The organisation aims to reduce the incidence of sexual abuse by intervening in key areas of the cycle of abuse.

<http://www.oneinfour.ie/>

01 662 4070

#### **Tackle Bullying**

This website contains a number of different pages of information for young people, parents and teachers to learn more about bullying and cyberbullying. What they are, the different types of both and how to effectively prevent and counter bullying. Contact the National Anti-Bullying Research and Resource Centre at DCU for more information and support on bullying.

<http://www.tacklebullying.ie/>

#### **Rape Crisis Network Ireland**

Rape Crisis Network Ireland (RCNI) is a specialist information and resource centre on rape and all forms of sexual violence.

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

#### **Disability Federation of Ireland**

Fumbally Court, Fumbally Lane, Dublin 8

01 4547978

Email: [info@disability-federation.ie](mailto:info@disability-federation.ie)

[www.disability-federation.ie](http://www.disability-federation.ie)

#### **Dublin Rape Crisis Centre**

The Dublin Rape Crisis Centre offers a wide range of services to women and men who are affected by rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment or childhood sexual abuse. The services include a national 24-hour helpline.

1800 77 88 88

<http://www.drcc.ie/>

#### **Garda-Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault**

**Anyone who may wish to report or discuss an incident of Domestic or Sexual Violence can contact 112/999 or their local Garda Station.**

[dvsaiu@garda.ie](mailto:dvsaiu@garda.ie)

#### **Hotline.ie**

The hotline.ie service provides an anonymous facility for the public to report suspected illegal content encountered on the internet.

Office: +353 1 2945280

Reporting Line: +353 86 8116273

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

#### **LGBT Helpline**

The LGBT Helpline provides a listening support and information service for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people as well as their family and friends.

Tel. 1800 929 539

<http://www.lgbt.ie/>

#### **Stay Safe Programme**

Bridge House, Cherry Orchard Hospital, Dublin 10.

01 795 5547

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

[www.pdst.ie/staysafe](http://www.pdst.ie/staysafe)

#### **Parentline**

Provides a phone line which offers support and advice to parents particularly in times of stress.

01 8733500

<http://www.parentline.ie/>



### ***TUSLA: Child and Family Agency***

The Child and Family Agency has a primary responsibility to promote the safety and well-being of children. The agency should always be informed when a person has reasonable grounds for concern that a child may have been, is being or is at risk of being abused or neglected. Contact details for Child and Family Agency social workers are available at:

<http://www.tusla.ie/services/child-protection-welfare/contact-a-social-w...>

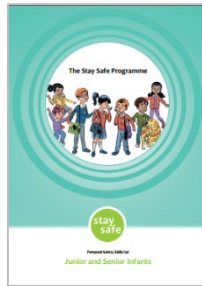
### ***Webwise***

Webwise is the Irish Internet Safety Awareness Centre. It provides teaching resources and advice on internet safety topics, including cyberbullying and social media.

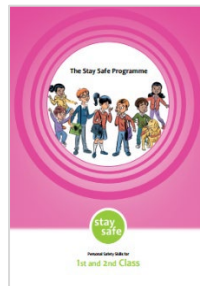
<https://www.webwise.ie/>

## RESOURCES

### Stay Safe Lessons



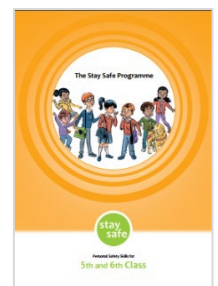
[Junior and Senior Infants](#)



[1st and 2nd Classes](#)

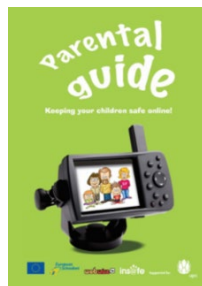


[3rd and 4th Classes](#)



[5th and 6th Classes](#)

### Webwise Parent Booklets



[Keeping your Children Safe Online](#)



[Play and Learn: Being Online](#)



[Parent's Guide to a Better Internet](#)

### Webwise Posters



[Managing your Online Reputation](#)



[How to Deal with Cyber-Bullying](#)

