

**INLAND WATERWAYS ASSOCIATION  
OF IRELAND**

**GUIDELINES**

**CODE OF ETHICS**

**AND**

**GOOD PRACTICE**

**FOR**

**CHILDRENS ACTIVITIES**

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## INTRODUCTION

It may seem sad that things have come to such a pass these days that a document such as this is necessary. This is however to miss the point. This is an opportunity to be positive, to lay down good practice so that a problem should never arise in the future.

This code of practice is for the benefit of all involved in children's activities - children themselves, their parents and those members organising activities for the children. By following the code all members concerned are playing their part in providing an enjoyable and safe environment in which children can thrive.

These guidelines are complementary to government guidelines both North and South covered in the documents *Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (IRL) and *Our Duty to Care* (N.I.) These guidelines respectively should be available to all Branches organising children's activities.

These Guidelines are addressed to members of the Association who are involved in organising any activities for children whether Branch or Rally activities. There is no imputation that committee members have been lax in the past. This Code of Practice will codify many of the arrangements already in place.

It is envisaged that details of these guidelines should be promulgated, perhaps on an annual basis in *Inland Waterways News*, to keep these issues before the members. The full guidelines should be held by all Association Officers, all Branch Officers and Child Protection Officers.

## **SAFE PRACTICES AND PREVENTION**

### **Committee Members**

#### **Where possible members should avoid**

- Spending time with children away from others
- Taking lone children either home or aboard a boat
- Taking children on journeys alone in their car

#### **Members should not**

- Use any form of corporal punishment or physical force on a child
- Engage in physical games, provocative games, engage in inappropriate touching of any kind or make sexually suggestive comments about or to a child.

### **Parents and Guardians**

Parents and Guardians have the primary responsibility for the care and welfare of their children. They should encourage their children to participate fully in all activities organised for the children in order to get maximum fun and enjoyment out of Association activities. They should always remember that children take part in these activities for their own enjoyment and not that of their parents.

Parents and Guardians should work in partnership with members organising children's activities. They should ensure that the Association is fulfilling its responsibility towards the children. They should encourage the children to tell them about anyone causing them harm. This would cover the whole gamut from bullying to sexual abuse.

### **To promote good practice parents / guardians should be:**

Informed of any problems or concerns relating to their children

Informed in advance and have their consent sought regarding activities away from themselves

Willing to help with activities

Willing to consider becoming Child Protection Officer for a period

Comments by parents/guardians should always be considered and their complaints acknowledged and dealt with through an effective and confidential complaints procedure.

### **Children**

Children have a great deal to gain in terms of their personal development and enjoyment from engaging in Branch and Rally activities. Children must be encouraged to realise that they in turn have responsibility to treat other children and committee members with fairness and respect.

### **Children are entitled to:**

Be safe

Be treated with sensitivity and respect

Be happy, have fun and enjoy the activities

Be afforded appropriate confidentiality

Be listened to

Be believed

Approach the Child Protection Officer with any questions or concerns they have

## **Safety**

Safety of children participating in all activities is of paramount importance  
Activities being undertaken should be suitable for the ability and experience of  
all participants

Lifejackets or buoyancy aids are essential for all waterborne activities

First Aid should be available at all times

Any injuries should be recorded with a note of the action taken in each  
instance

Parents/Guardians should be informed immediately of any injuries

Parents/Guardians should know the starting and finishing times of all activities

## **RECOGNISING SYMPTOMS OF ABUSE**

### **Bullying**

The risk of bullying and harassment by children and adults should be anticipated by taking active steps to prevent it. A decisive response should be made to any indications that it is happening.

### **Physical Abuse**

Physical abuse is any form of non-accidental injury that causes significant harm to a child. This would include shaking or the use of corporal punishment.

### **Sexual Abuse**

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

For example:

Any sexual act intentionally performed in the presence of a child

Intentional touching of the body of a child for the purpose of sexual arousal

Sexual exploitation of a child

It may include non-contact activities such as involving the child in looking at pornographic material

## **Signs of Child Abuse**

Signs of child abuse can be physical or behavioural. A pattern of signs is the most reliable indicator. The following indicators should be noted. It is important, however, to realise that all of these indicators can occur in other situations where abuse is not a factor. The list is not exhaustive.

### **Physical Indicators**

Unexplained bruising

Repeated injury

Inconsistent stories and excuses relating to injuries.

### **Behavioural Indicators**

Unexplained changes in behaviour - becoming withdrawn or aggressive.

Difficulty in making friends

Distrustful of adults or excessive attachment to adults

Inappropriate sexual awareness, behaviour or language.

## DEALING WITH THE ABUSED

### Person who first recognises the abuse

The following steps should be followed in reporting abuse to the statutory authorities.

- (i) Observe and note dates, times, locations and contexts in which an incident occurred or suspicion was aroused.
- (ii) Report the matter as soon as possible to the Child Protection Officer and Association President. The Child Protection Officer should independently report the incident to the President.

### Reporting Procedures

- (i) If the President has reasonable grounds for believing that a child has been abused he/she will immediately make a report to the local Health Board / Social Services who have the statutory responsibility for investigating cases of child abuse.

Under no circumstances should any formal investigation be undertaken by any unit of the Association.

- (ii) In cases of emergency where a child appears to be at serious and immediate risk of abuse and the Health Authorities or Social Workers cannot be contacted the President should inform the police authorities. **Under no circumstances should a child be left in a vulnerable position pending investigation by the statutory authorities.**

- (iii) If the President is unsure whether reasonable grounds for concern exist, he or she should consult informally with the Health Board/Social Services. He/she will then be advised whether the matter requires a formal report.
- (iv) The President when reporting suspected child abuse to the authorities should first inform the family of their intention to make the report **unless doing so would endanger the child or undermine an investigation.**
- (v) Any report given by the President to the Statutory Authorities should be in person or by phone and also in writing. It is best to make personal contact with relevant personnel in the Statutory Authorities.

## **Response to a Child reporting any form of Abuse**

The following points should be borne in mind:

- (i) It is important to deal with any allegation of abuse in a competent and sensitive way, listening and facilitating the child to tell about the problem, rather than interviewing the child about details of what happened.
- (ii) It is important to stay calm and not show any extreme reaction to what the child is saying. Take what the child is saying seriously.
- (iii) It should be understood that the child has decided to tell about something very important. The experience should be a positive one so that the child will not mind talking to those involved on the investigation.
- (iv) The child should understand that, recognising the need for confidentiality, it is not possible that this information be kept secret.
- (v) No judgemental statement should be made regarding the person against whom the allegation is made.
- (vi) The child should not be questioned unless what he/she is saying is unclear

Use only open questions such as “can you tell me what you mean by that”

The child should be given some indication and reassurance of what would happen next such as informing parents/guardian, Health Board or Social Services. Bear in mind that the child may have been threatened and may feel vulnerable.

## **Allegations of Abuse against Members**

The following points should be considered:

- (i) The safety of any child who makes an allegation and any other children at risk should be ensured and should take precedence over any other consideration.
- (ii) If a member is the subject of concern he/she should be treated with respect and fairness.
- (iii) If a member is the subject of an allegation he/she should be informed of the nature of the allegation and should be afforded the opportunity to respond. His/her response should be noted and passed on to the Health Board/Social Services.
- (iv) Any member of whom the President has reasonable grounds for belief of an incident of child abuse should immediately be informed that he/she should take no part in Association activities until the matter is satisfactorily resolved.
- (v) At least one officer of the Branch to which any member accused of child abuse belongs should be kept informed to ensure that the member involved in fact takes no part in Association activities, bearing in mind the presumption of innocence to which all are entitled.

## **Confidentiality**

Confidentiality should be maintained in respect of all issues about the welfare of children. It is important that the rights of the child and the person against whom the complaint has been made are protected.

Bear in mind the following:

- (i) A guarantee of absolute confidentiality or secrecy cannot be given as the welfare of the child will supersede all other considerations.
- (ii) All information should be treated sensitively **and should be discussed only with those who need to know.**
- (iii) Information conveyed to the parents/guardian of the child should be done in a sensitive way.
- (iv) Giving information to others who “need to know” is not a breach of confidentiality.

## **Anonymous Complaints**

There may be a feeling that anonymous complaints should be ignored. In this case in the interest of the safety of children no complaint should be ignored. Any such complaints should be brought to the attention of the President. The information should be checked out in a confidential manner. If the President has reason to believe that there is any substance in the complaint it should be dealt with in accordance with the procedures outlined in this Code.

## **Rumours**

Rumours should not be allowed to hang in the air. Any rumours circulating, relating to inappropriate behaviour, should be brought to the attention of the President

without delay and checked out confidentially and sensitively. If the President has reasonable grounds for concern that a child has been abused the procedures outlined in this Code should be followed.

## **APPOINTMENT AND DUTIES of a CHILD PROTECTION OFFICER**

All units of the Association, Branches and Rallies, who organise any activities of any description for children **must** appoint a Child Protection Officer.

The Child Protection Officer will be given training to enable him/her to carry out their responsibilities.

### **DUTIES**

- (i) The CPO is responsible for ensuring the safety of all children taking part in Association activities.
- (ii) The CPO will act as liaison between any organising committee and the children.  
He/she is the representative of the children.
- (iii) Children taking part in Association activities should be informed of the identity of the CPO and that he/she has the job of looking after any problems they might encounter.
- (iv) The CPO should, in the first instance, be notified of any complaint about mistreatment of a child. This includes all complaints, not merely those of a sexual nature.
- (v) If there is any allegation of serious abuse the CPO should immediately inform the President, giving all details

- (vi) The CPO should keep records of all incidents of which they are aware. These records should be sufficiently detailed to assist in the reporting of incidents to the Health Boards/Social Services if required

## **DRAFTING COMMITTEE**

The members of the committee who drafted both the Association policy on Child Protection and these detailed Guidelines on their implementation are:

Donal O'Siochain

Jane Glanville

Jacqueline Hamill

Liam Darcy

I am very grateful for all the effort and thought put into these guidelines by all the members of the committee.

Donal O'Siochain

President.