

Information about Reasonable Grounds for Concern

Reasonable Grounds for Concern

[Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children \(2011\)](#), Section 3.2 notes that the Child and Family Agency Duty Social Worker 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. It is important that a person reporting suspected child abuse or neglect establish the basis for their concerns.

Section 3.2.6 notes “**Any reasonable concern or suspicion of abuse or neglect must elicit a response. Ignoring the signals or failing to intervene may result in ongoing or further harm to the child.**”

Reasonable grounds for concern are set out in [Child Protection and Welfare Practice Handbook \(2011\)](#) Sections 2.2. They included:

- ✚ an injury or behaviour that is consistent both with abuse and an innocent explanation, but where there are corroborative indicators supporting the concern that it may be a case of abuse
- ✚ consistent indication over a period of time that a child is suffering from emotional or physical neglect
- ✚ admission or indication by someone of an alleged abuse
- ✚ a specific indication from a child that he or she was abused
- ✚ an account from a person who saw the child being abused
- ✚ evidence (e.g. injury or behaviour) that is consistent with abuse and unlikely to have been caused in any other way

A suspicion which is not supported by any objective indication of abuse or neglect would not constitute a reasonable suspicion or reasonable grounds for concern.

What to do if reasonable grounds for concern exist ([Child Protection and Welfare Practice Handbook 2011](#) Section 2.3) :

It is recommended that a referral to the Child and Family Agency should always be made in the following circumstances:

- ✚ any concern about a child at risk of sexual abuse;
- ✚ physical injury caused by assault or neglect which may or may not require medical attention;
- ✚ incidents of physical abuse that alone are unlikely to constitute significant harm, but taken into consideration with other factors may do so;
- ✚ children who suffer from persistent neglect;
- ✚ children who live in an environment which is likely to have an adverse impact on their emotional development;
- ✚ where parents' own emotional impoverishment affects their ability to meet their child's emotional and/or physical needs, regardless of material/financial circumstances and assistance;
- ✚ where parents circumstances are adversely affecting their capacity to meet the child's needs because of domestic violence, drug and/or alcohol misuse, mental health problems, intellectual disability;

- ✚ a child living in a household with, or having significant contact with, a person at risk of sexual offending or with previous convictions for offences against children;
- ✚ an abandoned child;
- ✚ children left home alone;
- ✚ bruising/injury to a pre-mobile baby;
- ✚ pregnancy where children have been previously removed;
- ✚ suspicion of fabricated or induced illness;
- ✚ where a child under one is present in a home where domestic violence is a concern.

Where an adult discloses historic abuse, and a concern is identified that children may be at risk, even if the children are unidentified, the staff member must follow the HSE Reporting Procedure and report the allegation to the Child and Family Agency in the area where the alleged perpetrator lives, if known, Otherwise it should be reported to the Child and Family Agency [Duty Social Worker](#) in the area where the child lives. The adult who has disclosed past abuse should be informed in advance that a report is being made and the process should be explained to them.

The welfare of the child is paramount and while steps also need to be taken to secure the welfare of any vulnerable adult, reporting such concerns to the Child and Family Agency should be made as soon as practicable.

PLEASE NOTE: The above are examples of circumstances that may occur. There are other circumstances under which a referral should be considered. If you are in any doubt, discuss your concern with your line manager, DLP or call your local Child and Family Agency Duty Social Work department for an informal consultation.

If a child is at immediate risk and the [Duty Social Worker](#) in the Child and Family Agency cannot be contacted please contact [An Garda Síochána](#) at any Garda Station without delay.