

ACET Child Safeguarding Policy

Date of last review and approval of Policy:	November 2024
Scheduled date of next review (must be within 2 years):	November 2026
Person responsible for ensuring review occurs:	Administrator (Lynn Caldwell)
Designated Liaison person:	CEO (Richard Carson)
Deputy Designated Liaison Person:	Administrator (Lynn Caldwell)

Child Safeguarding Policy Statement

The Trustees of ACET acknowledge the rights of children to be protected and treated with respect and have their views taken into account.

It is essential that in any interaction with staff and volunteers of ACET, the welfare of children is of paramount importance. Any abusive or risky behaviour by staff or volunteers of ACET will not be tolerated and will be reported to TUSLA in accordance with this policy.

This policy sets out safe working practices for staff and volunteers of ACET and outlines the reporting procedure should abuse be suspected.

This policy is based on the advice and guidance contained in “**Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children**” (2017) and “**Our Duty to Care: The Principles of good practice for the protection of children & young people**” (2002).

It is the responsibility of all staff, volunteers and trustees to ensure that this policy is complied with.

Our Organisation

ACET provides a practical and emotional support to those impacted by HIV in Ireland. We work with individuals and families, offering care and support across a range of issues within a community setting. We also provide training and support to migrant-led faith communities including their leaders and congregations while researching and overcoming barriers to integration for these communities.

Activities We Provide

ACET provides a diverse range of projects and activities, including:

- Care Support, including Positive Youth Project - emotional and practical support to adults, families and young people through individual care plans, including respite, which provides spaces for individuals and families to rest, recharge, and have fun.
- Quilt Project - bereavement support project run in conjunction with Rialto Community Drug Team;
- Migrant Plus - working with migrant faith communities toward improving their health promotion environment, including through training at external venues, 1-to-1 supports for leaders in community settings and primary research activities in community settings as well as an HIV testing service.
- Training, including anti racism training.

For our child and youth support, the age range of children engaging in our activities is from 5-17 years old, but exceptions are made for younger children who are accompanied by their parent(s) on a day out or residential trip.

Examples of youth/family activities include:

- Specific-need sessional support (e.g. - response to crisis by providing emotional support during an activity such as a walk in the park or hot chocolate in cafe).
- School- holiday/After-school respite days out in small groups, usually ranging from 2-6 children at a time (e.g. - trip to the zoo, cinema).
- Residential respite.
- annual camp run by Chiva, UK.
- In-home family projects (e.g. - baking/cooking tutorials, DIY).
- Accompaniment or referrals to other services, with parent/carer consent (such as health clinics, Youthreach, Teen Parent Support Programme, drug/alcohol services, counselling).

ACET Child Safeguarding

What is Abuse?

All workers should be aware that child abuse occurs when the behaviour by someone in a position of greater power than a child causes harm. Because children can be abused in a number of ways, sometimes at the same time, it is not always easy to categorise it, but four broad definitions can be considered: neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse.

Neglect can be defined in terms of an omission, where the child suffers significant harm or impairment of development by being deprived of food, clothing, warmth, hygiene, intellectual stimulation, supervision and safety, attachment and affection from adults, and/or medical care.

Emotional abuse is normally found in the relationship between a parent/carer and a child rather than in a specific event. It occurs when the child's developmental need for affection, approval, consistency and security are not met. Examples include imposition of negative attributes on a child, conditional parenting, emotional unavailability, unresponsiveness, unrealistic or inappropriate expectations, premature imposition of responsibility, or exposure to domestic violence.

Physical abuse results in actual or potential harm from an interaction or lack of interaction which is reasonably within the control of the person in a position of responsibility.

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

Further details on signs and symptoms of abuse are found in Chapter 2 of 2017 Children First National Guidelines and are considered to form part of this policy.

Suspecting child abuse

Staff and volunteers may come across actual or suspected child abuse in a number of different contexts:

- A child may give an account of what has happened to them in the past
- A concern may arise that a child is being abused
- A concern or an allegation may arise concerning a volunteer or staff member of ACET

Children will sometimes confide that they are being harmed or other people witness incidents which suggest that children are being harmed. However, it is also necessary to rely on signs of suspicious behaviour on the part of the child or adult. All signs, symptoms and indicators will be examined in the context of the child's situation and family circumstances to ensure the child is safe.

In relation to historical complaints, the person disclosed to (irrespective of mandated duties) must report it to the DLP. The welfare and wishes of the person and the potential for ongoing risk will guide the intervention. If a concern is identified that children may be at risk even if the children are unidentified, the reporting procedure must be followed, reporting the allegation to Tusla in the area where the alleged perpetrator lives, if this information is known. Otherwise it should be reported to Tusla in the area where those who may be at risk live. The adult who has disclosed past abuse should be informed in advance that a report is being made and the reporting procedures should be explained to them if not already known. If the ACET staff member is unsure if children may be at risk, they should consult with the Child and Family Agency without delay.

It is essential that concerns, no matter how small, are discussed with the relevant personnel as outlined within this policy, as in accordance with the Children's First National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (2017).

Reporting Procedure

Any volunteer or staff member who has a suspicion or concern about child abuse should report this to the ACET Designated Liaison Person who, together with the ACET CEO (if not the same person), will conduct an initial screening to consider the possibility of abuse. They must record all information including dates, times, names, locations, context and any other relevant information.

If there are reasonable grounds for concern, Tusla must be informed. Reasonable grounds exist where there is:

- An injury or behaviour that is consistent both with abuse and an innocent explanation, but where there are other 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/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.

In such circumstances the CEO will also inform the Chair of the Board of Directors of ACET and continue to keep them informed at all stages of the process.

Contact with Tusla may initially be an informal consultation with the duty social worker, disclosing the details of concern, without identifying information, to establish together whether to proceed to the formal reporting stage. Reporting process and forms can be accessed via Tusla's website (<http://www.tusla.ie/services/child-protection-welfare/concerns/>).

Where appropriate, ACET will work to encourage and support an affected client to report the information themselves, especially in the context of first-hand information.

If a formal report is deemed appropriate, the Designated Liaison Person will follow the standard reporting procedure and promptly contact the appropriate local Tusla office in person, in writing or by telephone. A Standard Report Form must be completed with as much information as possible and returned. In the event of an emergency, when it is believed that the child is in immediate danger and the Designated Liaison Person cannot get in direct contact with Tusla, the Gardaí should be advised.

The safety and welfare of the child must take priority in reporting; concerns and reports must be made to Tusla without delay. Ignoring the signals or failing to intervene may result in further harm to the child and opens the individuals to a charge of reckless endangerment of children under the Criminal Justice (Reckless Endangerment of Children) Act 2006 and the Criminal Justice (Withholding of Information on Offences against Children and Vulnerable Adults) Act 2012.

The child's parents/carers must be informed when a report is being submitted to Tusla unless doing so is likely to endanger the child.

Information shared by Tusla in the course of carrying out an assessment shall not be disclosed to a third party, except in accordance with law or with written permission from Tusla.

If the Designated Liaison Person and CEO determine that there are not reasonable grounds of concern and decide not to report the incident to Tusla, the staff or volunteer initially raising the suspicion must be given a full written account of the reasoning and should also be advised that if they remain concerned, they are free to consult with or report to Tusla as an individual. All internal records of the matter should be retained.

Written records of any incidents or allegations of child protection concerns will be kept with the client records, in compliance with data protection rules.

Staff and volunteers are advised that they are legally protected under the Protected Disclosures Act 2014 and the Protections for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act 1998 provided that all communications have been made reasonably and in good faith.

It is the duty of all staff & volunteers to report their concerns promptly and in accordance with this policy; failure to do so potentially puts children at further risk as well as damaging the reputation of ACET.

Designated Liaison Person

The Designated Liaison Person acts as a liaison with outside agencies and a resource person for any staff member or volunteer who has child safeguarding concerns. They are responsible for ensuring the standard reporting procedure is followed and should also ensure that they are knowledgeable about child protection, undertake any necessary training and keep up to date with any new developments.

A deputy Designated Liaison Person is appointed for when the Designated Liaison Person is not available.

ACET's Mandated Persons are:

- Family & Youth Support Coordinator
- Adult & Volunteer Support Coordinator
- Positive Youth Project director
- Supervisor/Counsellor

Mandated persons are required by law to report any concerns regarding child protection or welfare to the Designated Liaison Person.

The list of mandated persons will be kept updated by the ACET administrator.

Designated Liaison Person: CEO, Richard Carson

Deputy Liaison Person: Administrator, Lynn Caldwell

ACET's procedure for appointing any Liaison person would be that:

- They would be in receipt of relevant Child Protection/Welfare knowledge, experience and up to date training from the commencement of their post and for the duration of their role with ACET.
- Child Protection training will be refreshed and topped up regularly through refresher training and continued professional development, and they are expected to stay current on latest Children's First legislation.
- Both the Designated Liaison Person and Deputy Liaison Person will have regular and current training in Child Protection and have evidence to support this.

Confidentiality

All information regarding concern or assessment of child abuse should only be shared on a need to know basis in the interests of the child.

Staff or volunteers other than the person reporting a concern should only be informed of the situation when it is in the child's best interest.

We cannot guarantee anonymity or secrecy to any child or family regarding any potential disclosure of child protection concerns. We will also strive to reassure any affected individual that ACET's legal and ethical requirements, including data protection, are adhered to as outlined in ACET's policies.

Providing information to statutory authorities for the protection of a child is not a breach of confidentiality or data protection.

ACET has a policy of cooperating with Tusla in relation to sharing of records where a child protection or welfare issue arises.

If the child protection allegation concerns a staff member or volunteer, the Designated Liaison Person will inform the ACET CEO who will make immediate arrangements to have the allegation investigated. In the event that the allegation concerns the Designated Liaison Person, the Deputy Liaison Person would then inform the chair of the ACET board of trustees.

Record Keeping

All information recorded in relation to any child protection concern will be stored securely in line with ACET's data protection policy. This includes details of contacts, consultations and any actions taken.

Access to this information by staff, volunteers and external agencies is only on a need to know basis.

Safe Recruitment Procedures for Workers

ACET uses best practice in the recruitment of staff and volunteers with a structured application process, interviewing, induction training, references sought and followed up and Garda vetting if their position requires them to work with children or vulnerable adults. A probation period will also apply to each worker in which their terms and conditions are reviewed to be satisfactory.

ACET considers the following as reasonable grounds to refuse access to employment or volunteering to an individual who has been charged with or convicted of:

- a sexual offence;
- an offence that relates to the ill treatment of a child, or a vulnerable adult;
- the ownership, production or distribution of child pornography.

ACET considers the following list of offences to be relevant, and each case will be considered in a case by case basis:

- offences against the person, e.g. assault, harassment, coercion;
- breaches in trust, e.g. fraud, theft, larceny;
- offences against property e.g. arson, armed robbery;
- domestic violence;
- offences against the state.

ACET is conscious of not initiating policies that prohibit employment needlessly against rehabilitated individuals. Such cases will be objectively determined on a case by case basis.

Risk assessments should also be specific to the particular roles, for example risk concerning fraud is more likely to pose a risk for someone with financial responsibility. The level of risk relative to the position should be determined by management.

All staff and volunteers must complete a declaration form in relation to any criminal convictions or cautions that they may have.

All staff will receive training in:

- The principles and philosophy of ACET
- The activities provided by ACET
- Child safeguarding including their role, responsibilities, recognising abuse and reporting procedure
- Data Protection current legislation and best practice.

All volunteers will receive basic training on:

- Activities to be undertaken during ACET trips, summer camps and projects
- Role and responsibilities of volunteers
- Basic child welfare & protection including ACET safe working practices and reporting procedure.

Ongoing supervision and support are available for all staff and volunteers both on a formal and informal basis and is highly encouraged on a regular basis.

Procedure for Responding to Allegations of Abuse against Workers

If any allegation of abuse is received in relation to a staff member or volunteer, it will be assessed promptly by the Designated Liaison Person. Any decision taken will be based on an opinion formed reasonably and in good faith for concern criteria outlined in this policy.

The first priority is to ensure that no child is exposed to unnecessary risk, and protective measures should be taken. Such measures should be proportionate to the risk and not unduly penalise the staff member/volunteer. While the matter is being investigated the Designated Liaison Person and the CEO will ensure that the staff member/volunteer is suspended from all contact with children.

The staff member/volunteer against whom the allegation is made must be privately advised as soon as possible of the allegation and given an opportunity to respond. Any response from the

staff member/volunteer must be noted in writing and forwarded where necessary to Tusla. It must be noted that an allegation may be erroneous or malicious and therefore should be dealt with sensitively. Support will also be provided for the worker, including counselling where necessary.

Consideration will also be given to providing support/counselling to volunteers/staff involved in the project, in the event of such an allegation being made.

The CEO will also make all necessary arrangements for the staff member/volunteer's support throughout any investigation process: this support will be provided by someone other than the Designated Liaison Person.

Code of Behaviour

In order to ensure safe working practices for both children and volunteers/staff this policy sets out a code of behaviour that ACET expects all involved to adhere to. All children encountered by ACET must be treated with dignity, sensitivity and respect.

ACET endeavours to promote children's rights within their locality and also believe that it is essential that their rights are protected during any activities provided by staff and volunteers of ACET. This code of conduct is to be observed by both volunteers and staff in order to avoid the possibility of any misunderstandings, or the potential for allegations of misconduct.

Staff and volunteers should:

1. Be sensitive to the risks involved in participating in contact sports and other activities.
2. Should only use physical contact as a valid way of comforting, reassuring, and showing concern for children, with consent and when it is acceptable to all persons concerned.
3. Never physically punish or be in any way verbally abusive to a child, nor should they tell jokes of a sexual nature in the presence of children.
4. Not become over-involved or spend too much time with any one child.
5. Respect the personal space, safety and privacy of individuals.
6. Ensure that, where possible, they are never alone with a child. Where this is not possible, staff/volunteers should use best practice measures to stay accountable (e.g. - leave room door open; stay in public spaces; have lone child sit in back of car). It is not recommended that lifts should be given to an individual child. Where this is unavoidable, full disclosure must also be made and parental consent obtained. For Positive Youth Project one-to-one support of under-18s, parental consent is granted through the signed referral form and best practice measures are used (meeting in a public space or in a room with the door open, etc.).

Dealing with Challenging Behaviour for Volunteers

While ACET does everything to ensure that programmes and activities are safe for children, staff and volunteers, it is possible that challenging behaviour may be encountered. It is essential that any volunteer who faces behaviour that they find difficult or challenging should discuss this with a staff member as soon as possible. Assistance from locally based staff should be sought to respond to the behaviour: it is not the responsibility of volunteers to respond to such behaviour.

Supervision of Activities

1. It is the responsibility of staff to ensure that all activities with children are safe for both children and volunteers; the key to this is to ensure that all activities are properly organised, risk assessed beforehand and supervised.
2. It is the responsibility of staff to ensure that there are sufficient staff and volunteers for the chosen activities. For groups of up to 10 children, there should be two staff members or volunteers, with one extra staff member or volunteer for every group of 10 over that.
3. It is the responsibility of staff to explain and assign roles to volunteers concerning ACET activities.
4. During activities, staff must ensure that they are observing both children and volunteers.
5. Volunteers must ensure that they abide by any instructions given to them by the staff.
6. If volunteers experience any difficulties with the activities or role assigned, they must advise one of the staff.
7. Parental consent must be obtained in advance for any ACET activities involving children without their parent/carer in attendance. While parental consent is granted generally with the signed referral form, consent for group activities should be in written form, through text or email.
8. When ACET collaborates with another organisation or enables clients to participate in activities hosted by another organisation, we will undertake a risk assessment to ensure that our clients are safe-guarded, and our staff and volunteers maintain the standards set out in this document.

Other ACET policies that may be relevant include Lone Working Policy and Guidelines for Work with Children and Youth.

Reviews of ACET's Child Safeguarding Statement will be undertaken by the ACET administrator and relevant staff every two years.