

PROBATION BOARD FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

CHILD PROTECTION/SAFEGUARDING POLICY

2026

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Alternative Formats

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1. Rationale

The protection of children is a priority for PBNI. All children should be brought up in an environment that promotes their welfare and protects them from significant harm. The introduction of the Safeguarding Board (NI) Act 2011 placed a legal duty on PBNI, and other named agencies, to make arrangements to have due regard when exercising their function, for the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

PBNI also recognises that safeguarding processes can impact adult service users and staff, many of whom may have their own experiences of trauma. A trauma-informed approach will therefore be adopted, ensuring that safeguarding work is carried out in a way that prioritises psychological safety, transparency, dignity, and inclusivity for all involved.

2. Policy Aim

The aim of this policy is to promote the safeguarding and welfare of children.

In doing so, PBNI commits to implementing trauma-informed principles of safety, trust, choice, empowerment, collaboration, and inclusivity in all safeguarding activity.

3. Objectives

- To ensure PBNI's statutory obligations are met by having clear processes in place to promote the safeguarding and welfare of children
- To ensure in all PBNI's actions concerning children, the child's interests are paramount
- To ensure the timely and effective communication of all appropriate and relevant information is lawfully shared in accordance with data protection legislation so as to keep a child from harm.
- To ensure there is close cooperation between agencies and coordination of services across agencies
- To ensure adult service users are informed, wherever it is safe and lawful to do so, about safeguarding actions affecting them
- To ensure staff are supported and trained to manage safeguarding in a trauma-informed way, with access to supervision and debriefing to protect their wellbeing.

4. Programmes and Projects

Child Protection/Safeguarding Procedures are in place.

These procedures emphasise collaborative and transparent engagement with adult service users wherever possible, in line with trauma-informed principles.

5. Definitions

PBNI acknowledges that a child's vulnerability to abuse can also be shaped by wider social and cultural factors, including poverty, racism, discrimination, disability, and gender. Staff must take account of these in safeguarding practice.

5.1 Definition of Child

The Children (NI) Order 1995, Article 2(2), defines a 'child' as a person under the age of 18.

5.2 Definition of Abuse

Child abuse occurs when a child is neglected, harmed or not provided with proper care. Abuse can happen in any family, but children may be more at risk if their parents have problems with drugs, alcohol and mental health, or if they live in a home where domestic abuse occurs. Abuse can also occur outside of the family environment, for example, in an institutional or community setting, by those known to them or, more rarely, by a stranger. Evidence shows that babies and children with disabilities can be more vulnerable to suffering abuse. There are different types of abuse and the child may suffer more than one type of abuse.

5.3 Physical Abuse

The deliberate physical injury of a child, or the wilful or neglectful failure to prevent physical injury or suffering. It might take a variety of different forms, including hitting, biting, pinching, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning or suffocating a child, confinement to a room or cot, or inappropriately giving hugs to control behaviour.

5.4 Emotional Abuse

The persistent emotional ill treatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on a child's emotional development.

Emotional abuse may involve deliberately conveying to a child that they are worthless, unloved, inadequate or valued only in so much as they meet the needs of another person. It may include not giving a child opportunities to

express their views, unreasonably silencing them, or ‘making fun’ of what they say or how they communicate. Emotional abuse may involve bullying – including online bullying through social networks, online games or mobile phones – by a child’s peers.

5.5 Sexual Abuse

The forcing or enticing of a child to take part in sexual activities by others for their own gratification or the gratification of others. Sexual abuse may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape, or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside clothing. It may include non-contact activities, such as involving children in the production of sexual images, forcing children to look at sexual images or watch sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways or grooming a child in preparation for abuse (including via e-technology).

5.6 Child Sexual Exploitation

Where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/ or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.

Whilst a 16 or 17 year old can consent to sex in a healthy, age appropriate relationship, in situations where there is an imbalance of power between the child and the perpetrator or when the child is coerced or groomed in to having sex (e.g. through being supplied with drugs/alcohol) this constitutes sexual exploitation. 16 and 17 year olds may seem more resilient but often they have specific vulnerabilities, for example, being in care or being homeless. 16 and 17 year olds can suffer significant harm as a result of sexual exploitation and their right to be protected and supported should not be ignored or de prioritised.

5.7 Neglect

The persistent failure to meet a child’s physical, emotional and/or psychological needs likely to result in significant harm. It may involve failure to provide adequate food, shelter and clothing; failure to protect a child from physical harm or danger; failure to ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment; lack of stimulation or lack of supervision. Children who are neglected often also suffer from other types of abuse.

6. Resources

Resources will include provision for staff training, reflective practice opportunities, and accessible safeguarding information for service users (e.g. in plain language or easy-read formats).

7. Communications and Training

Training in relation to the Child Protection Policy and Procedures will be delivered to all operational staff during Onboarding and thereafter bi-annually. This training will also ensure staff are able to recognise indicators of potential or actual abuse and how to act in response to such concerns. The Assistant Director, Public Protection, will forward communication to all relevant staff advising of the updated policy and procedures.

Training will also cover trauma-informed approaches, ensuring staff understand how to approach safeguarding conversations with adult service users in a way that builds trust, avoids unnecessary re-traumatisation, and promotes empowerment. PBNi will also provide guidance on how to respect diverse cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds of individuals, ensuring safety whilst valuing their identity.

8. Review

A review of this policy will take place four years after Board approval. In the interim period, any changes will be addressed through the circulation of Practice Notes.

9. Non Compliance

In cases of non-compliance with the Policy and Procedures, PBNi will consider whether additional training, support, or reflective supervision may help staff meet expectations in line with trauma-informed principles, before disciplinary action is pursued. Breach of the Policy and Procedures may merit consideration under the Board's Disciplinary Policy.