

Communication Strategy under the auspices of the North South Ministerial Council on Safeguarding and Child Protection

This Communication Strategy has been developed by representatives of the statutory sector and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) from the voluntary and community sectors from both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

The purpose of the Strategy is to identify the most effective ways to:

- (a) Promote public awareness of the issues around child welfare and protection;
and
- (b) Assist adults in performing their duty to safeguard children.

It is the intention of both Governments to produce materials that promote the safeguarding of children that have common application by drawing on products that exist or that can be adapted and identify gaps in relation to guidance on new and emerging issues that convey key messages for both jurisdictions.

These key messages include that:

- Children must never regard themselves as responsible for acts of abuse perpetrated on them;
- Abuse is perpetrated by persons in every walk of life;
- Abuse may cause serious and lasting psychological damage; and
- Child sexual abuse of any kind is a serious criminal offence which should be reported to the PSNI / An Gardaí Siochana and/or social services.

Our Approach

We will research communication campaigns in other jurisdictions to learn of their effectiveness on the target audience and the effectiveness of the media used to promote the messages.

We recognise that we have each developed a number of existing guides and products which address the issue of prevention, the promotion of early intervention and key safeguarding messages which are not specific to any one jurisdiction and which provide the building blocks for the development of common publicity campaigns.

It is also acknowledged that both the Statutory and Voluntary / Community sectors have published many materials ranging from parenting tips to internet safety to targeted products for sporting organisations and schools. Thus, much of the material exists and is adaptable and applicable to each jurisdiction subject to some modifications.

We will consider this material and examine a range of mechanisms for delivering child protection messages through partnership with employers, sporting organisations, the voluntary sector and schools.

The Challenges

The key challenges will be to:

- Deliver messages in an accessible way that will help professionals to support parents;
- Encourage NGOs both North and South to be partners with the statutory agencies in developing materials;
- Maximise value for money through joint endeavours;
- Build on existing areas of cooperation, e.g. CAWT, Domestic Violence and Internet Safety; and
- Address the range of audiences with messages along the full spectrum of child protection from positive parenting to detecting abuse.

In our analysis to date and from our examination of both jurisdictions we have identified a number of target audiences and specific needs:

- **There is a need for guidance for the General Public to be able to identify and report abuse.**

This would fit with the development of new Gateway structures in Northern Ireland and meets a need following research in the Republic of Ireland following their review of their National Guidance document “Children First”.

- **Employers need guidance when recruiting staff to work with young people and vulnerable adults.**

This would help to reinforce and support the ongoing development of new safeguarding legislation in Northern Ireland which introduces a new vetting and barring scheme. It would also be useful in the Republic of Ireland where there would appear to be no published overarching guidance to employers except in “Duty to Care” targeted at the NGO sector.

- **Guidance for parents on positive parenting.**

This would deal with advice on positive parenting, dealing with behaviour and encouraging the development of your child.

- **Young people need guidance on internet safety.**

The work of the North South Internet Safety sub-group and the work of the Child Exploitation Online Protection Centre as well as the increasing global nature of the web makes this an ideal area in which to develop common awareness raising products.

There are other emerging needs which will be examined more closely at a later stage. These may include:

- (a) A focussed campaign, providing information and advice to young people, encouraging and supporting them to identify and report concerns. The approach to young people would require to be different to that of adults and merits careful consideration in its own right; and
- (b) To consider targeting abusers or potential abusers to stop and seek help as part of the overarching theme of seeking to prevent abuse.

Joint Communiqué under the auspices of the North South Ministerial Council on Safeguarding and Child Protection

1. The Government of the Republic of Ireland and the Northern Ireland Executive, under the auspices of the North South Ministerial Council, agree the following principles in relation to safeguarding and protecting children in both jurisdictions.
2. Recognising that both the UK Government and Government of the Republic of Ireland are signatories to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the principles under the convention relating to protection of children we state the following:
 - a. that we will maximise co-operation to better protect children and safeguard their welfare within existing legislative arrangements;
 - b. that we will do all to ensure enhanced information exchange on those who pose a risk to children or families and establish appropriate systems and processes to facilitate this;
 - c. that we will examine ways of ensuring common public messages on safeguarding and child protection are promoted;
 - d. that we will share and examine further ways of using common products and publications, suitably adapted for each jurisdiction for parents, children and professionals;
 - e. that we will examine further ways of promoting structured co-operation and sharing ideas on protecting children;
 - f. that we will develop protocols between relevant Departments, Health and Social Care Trusts in Northern Ireland and the Health Service Executive to ensure that services are provided to children at risk who move between the jurisdictions; and
 - g. to share good practice and evidence based outcomes on an ongoing basis.