

# CoderDojo Foundation

## Child Protection Policy

*approved by the CoderDojo Foundation Board*

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*Produced by the*

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# **1. Introduction**

The global CoderDojo community is supported by the CoderDojo Foundation. The CoderDojo Foundation consists of a core team of dedicated individuals, founded by the co-founder of the very first CoderDojo James Whelton, whose vision is a world where every child has the opportunity to learn how to code and be creative in a safe and social environment. The primary purpose of the Foundation is to support and scale CoderDojo globally.

As the CoderDojo Foundation organises youth orientated events, communicates with young people and parents, and supports Dojos worldwide, all employees and volunteers must be aware of this Child Protection policy and the safety of young people must be of paramount concern when any activity or tasks involve Young People.

## ***Scope***

This document is made for use by all staff members and volunteers of the CoderDojo Foundation, including any youth volunteers between the ages of 16 -18.

## ***Objectives of the CoderDojo Child Protection Policy***

- That all CoderDojo Foundation staff members and volunteers can be made aware of their responsibilities and duties when interacting with young people.
- That all CoderDojo Foundation activities and events involving young people are run safely and in accordance with appropriate child protection guidelines as outlined in this document.

## ***CoderDojo Foundation Commitments for Child Protection***

The CoderDojo Foundation commit to ensure that;

1. Every new employee and regular volunteer of the CoderDojo Foundation;
  - a. Receives a copy of the CoderDojo Foundation Child Protection Policy
  - b. Understands and agrees to the CoderDojo Child Protection Policy including the Code of Behaviour (included in the Child Protection Policy)
  - c. Receives Child Protection Awareness Training
  - d. Is aware of who the local Dojos contact person for Child Protection is if it is not the Dojos Champion.
2. Garda Vetting is carried out with all employees and regular volunteers of the Foundation.

- a. Ad hoc volunteers not Garda Vetted with the CoderDojo Foundation will not be able to participate in events involving Young People.
3. Reviewing the CoderDojo Foundation Child Protection Policy and the CoderDojo Community Child Protection Policy when relevant Child Protection legislation is changed or introduced, or in lieu of this it will be reviewed every 2 years.
4. Ensuring the provision & training of at least one Designated Liaison Person within the organisation.

The CoderDojo Foundation will also ensure that it fulfills the commitments to Dojos and community members, as laid out in the CoderDojo Ireland Child Protection Policy.

### ***CoderDojo Employee & Volunteer Commitments***

It is the responsibility of all CoderDojo Foundation Employees and Volunteers to ensure that;

1. Their behaviour is appropriate at all times.
2. They observe the guidelines established for the safety and security of young people.
3. They follow the reporting procedures and policies surrounding suspicion, disclosure or allegation of child abuse as outlined in this Child Protection Policy.
4. They recognise the position of trust in which they have been placed and maintain a policy of transparency with the members of the CoderDojo community, including but not exclusively parents / guardians.
5. They understand and agree to the CoderDojo Code of Behaviour.

### ***CoderDojo Foundation Child Protection Statement***

The welfare and safety of Youth Members of CoderDojo is paramount. All CoderDojo Foundation staff members and volunteers endeavour to ensure that children and young people are protected and kept safe from harm while participating in CoderDojo activities organised or attended by the CoderDojo Foundation.

In law, a child is defined as someone under the age of 18 (Child Care Act, 2001). The CoderDojo Child Protection Policy is designed to protect children and young people from neglect, physical, sexual and emotional harm or abuse.

The CoderDojo Foundation Child Protection Policy provides staff members and volunteers with

information to help them understand the various categories of child abuse, what situations might constitute reasonable grounds for concern and advice on how to respond to disclosure.

The CoderDojo Foundation Child Protection Policy is based on and consistent with current Child Protection legislation in the Republic of Ireland and procedures to be followed are in line with Children First, 2011. The CoderDojo Foundation Child Protection Policy will be reviewed when relevant Child Protection legislation is changed or introduced or in lieu of this it will be reviewed every 2 years.

## **2. Key Principles for Best Practice in Child Protection<sup>1</sup>**

The key principles that should inform best practice in child protection and welfare are:

- The welfare of children is of paramount importance.
- Early intervention and support should be available to promote the welfare of children and families, particularly where they are vulnerable or at risk of not receiving adequate care or protection. Family support should form the basis of early intervention and prevention.
- A proper balance must be struck between protecting children and respecting the rights and needs of parents/carers and families. Where there is conflict, the child's welfare must come first.
- Children have a right to be heard, listened to and taken seriously. Taking account of their age and understanding, they should be consulted and involved in all matters and decisions that may affect their lives. Where there are concerns about a child's welfare, there should be opportunities provided for their views to be heard independently of their parents/carers.
- Where appropriate, parents/carers have a right to respect and should be consulted and involved in matters that concern their family.
- Factors such as the child's family circumstances, gender, age, stage of development, religion, culture and race should be considered when taking protective action. Intervention should not deal with the child in isolation; the child's circumstances must be understood within a family context.
- The criminal dimension of any action must not be ignored.
- The prevention, detection and treatment of child abuse or neglect requires a coordinated multidisciplinary approach, effective management, clarity of responsibility and training of personnel in organisations working with children.

### ***Code Of Behaviour for Volunteers/Staff when running a Dojo/Pop Up***

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<sup>1</sup> *Children First; National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children, 2011, 1.1.1*

## ***Dojo***

### **Do**

- **Do** provide a safe secure environment for the young people attending the Dojo.
- **Do** ensure that the **minimum** ratio of 1:10, adults: young people, is always present at all CoderDojo activities.
- **Do** treat all young people as individuals, equally and with respect, regardless of gender, age, religion, ethnicity or creed.
- **Do** involve Dojo attendees, where appropriate, in decision making.
- **Do** offer constructive, age-appropriate criticism, encouragement and praise.
- **Do** use material appropriate to the age and wishes of the group.
- **Do** have fun and encourage a positive and collaborative atmosphere.
- **Do** be aware of what is appropriate physical contact and engage in this contact only.
- **Do** respect the personal and sexual boundaries of others.
- **Do** discuss any uncertainties with the Dojo Champion or another adult member.
- **Do** discuss discipline procedures with the Dojo beforehand and be familiar with their policy.

### **Don't**

- **Do Not** spend time alone with children. If meeting with children individually do so as openly as possible, leave the door open and inform another responsible adult of the meeting.
- **Do Not** use or allow the use of offensive or sexually suggestive physical or verbal language to go unchallenged.
- **Do Not** single out an individual child for unfair favoritism, criticism, ridicule or unwelcome focus of attention.
- **Do Not** allow or engage in inappropriate touching of any form. However there may be unavoidable occasions when this takes place, such as providing comfort or reassurance to a distressed child. In all cases physical contact should only take place with the consent of the child.
- **Do Not** physically chastise children or young people.
- **Do Not** socialize inappropriately with children or young people outside of structured organisational activities.
- **Do Not** take children to your home.
- **Do Not** take children alone on car journeys. If this is unavoidable do so only with the full consent and knowledge of the parents and someone in the hosting organization.
- **Do Not** do things of a personal nature for children that they can do for themselves.

- **Do Not** allow allegations a child makes go without being recorded and addressed.

## ***Special Events/Activities & Overnight Activities***

Special events such as daytrips should always be guided by the following;

- Parents of the young people attending should always have consented to their child's attendance/participation in the activity
- An emergency contact for each young person in attendance must be collected prior to the event and stored appropriately for access remotely if necessary
- Relevant medical and dietary information is requested from parents/guardians
- A minimum ratio of 1:4 adults to children should be maintained

## **3. Designated Liaison Person**

A Child Protection Designated Person has been appointed for CoderDojo (Ireland) & the CoderDojo Foundation. The Designated Person acts as a resource to any young person, staff member and volunteer who have Child Protection concerns. All dealings of a Child Protection nature go through the Designated Person who in turn may make a referral to the TUSLA or Gardaí.

### ***CoderDojo Designated Liaison Person:***

**Rosa Langhammer (Reporting Lead, CoderDojo Foundation)**

#### **Contact Details**

Mobile: +353872686779

Email: rosa@coderdojo.org

Address: Dogpatch Labs, The CHQ Building, Dublin Docklands, Dublin 1

### ***Role of the Designated Person***

- To report suspicions and allegations of Child Abuse to TUSLA or the Gardaí.
- To provide information and advice on Child Protection within the organisation.
- To build up networks of support for the victim and for the staff/volunteer making a referral.
- To ensure that the Child Protection policy and procedures are adhered to, and to inform TUSLA of relevant concerns about individual children.



- To give advice on individual cases, where appropriate.
- To advise on good practice and guidelines on Child Protection.
- To liaise with TUSLA, Gardaí and other agencies as appropriate.
- To keep the CEO of the CoderDojo Foundation informed about any referrals.
- To maintain proper records on all referred cases in a secure and confidential manner.
- To ensure that all staff and volunteers are familiar with the Designated Person and also that they each receive appropriate Child Protection awareness training, briefing and or information as appropriate.
- To ensure that all young people are familiar with the child protection policy by informing, briefing and providing accessible written information.
- To ensure that other persons interacting with young people at CoderDojo events, activities and programmes are informed of, are aware of and understand the CoderDojo Child Protection Policy (Contractors, Trainers, and Other Third Parties).
- To keep informed about current developments regarding the provision, practice, support services, legal obligations etc. with regards to Child Protection and to inform the CoderDojo Community & Local Dojos about these developments where necessary or beneficial.
- To ensure that the issue of Child Protection is considered and the policy implemented as an integral part of the delivery of all events, and programmes organised by the CoderDojo Foundation.

The Designated Person is accessible to everyone in the organisation and is supported by ongoing training and supervision. When she/he receives a report about suspected or actual abuse, she/he will consider whether there are reasonable grounds for concern before reporting it to TUSLA or other statutory agencies.

#### **4. Recognising child neglect or abuse**

Child neglect or abuse can often be difficult to identify and may present in many forms.

It may indicate conditions other than child abuse. All signs and symptoms must be examined in the context of the child's situation and family circumstances.

The ability to recognise child abuse can depend as much on a person's willingness to accept the possibility of its existence as it does on their knowledge and information. There are commonly three stages in the identification of child neglect or abuse:

(i) considering the possibility;

- (ii) looking out for signs of neglect or abuse;
- (iii) recording of information.

### ***Step 1 - Consider the possibility***

The possibility of child abuse should be considered if a child appears to have suffered a suspicious injury for which no reasonable explanation can be offered. It should also be considered if the child seems distressed without obvious reason or displays persistent or new behavioural problems.

The possibility of child abuse should also be considered if the child displays unusual or fearful responses to parents/carers or older children. A pattern of ongoing neglect should also be considered even when there are short periods of improvement.

### ***Step 2 - Look out for signs of neglect or abuse***

Signs of neglect or abuse can be physical, behavioural or developmental. They can exist in the relationships between children and parents/carers or between children and other family members/other persons. A cluster or pattern of signs is more likely to be indicative of neglect or abuse.

Children who are being abused may hint that they are being harmed and sometimes make direct disclosures. Disclosures should always be taken very seriously and should be acted upon, for example, by informing the CoderDojo Designated Liaison Person who will inform TUSLA. The child should not be interviewed in detail about the alleged abuse without first consulting with the Designated Liaison Person. This may be more appropriately carried out by a social worker or An Garda Síochána. Less obvious signs could be gently explored with the child, without direct questioning. Play situations, such as drawing or story-telling, may reveal information.

Some signs are more indicative of abuse than others. These include:

- (i) disclosure of abuse by a child or young person;
- (ii) age-inappropriate or abnormal sexual play or knowledge;
- (iii) specific injuries or patterns of injuries;
- (iv) absconding from home or a care situation;
- (v) attempted suicide;
- (vi) underage pregnancy or sexually transmitted disease;
- (vii) signs in one or more categories at the same time. For example, signs of developmental delay, physical injury and behavioural signs may together indicate a pattern of abuse.

Many signs of abuse are non-specific and must be considered in the child's social and family context. It is important to be open to alternative explanations for physical or behavioural signs of abuse.

### ***Step 3 - Recording of information***

If neglect or abuse is suspected and acted upon, for example, by informing the Designated Liaison Person or TUSLA, it is important to establish the grounds for concern by obtaining as much information as possible.<sup>2</sup>

Observations should be accurately recorded and should include **dates, times, names, locations, context and any other information that may be relevant**. Care should be taken as to how such information is stored and to whom it is made available.

### ***Children with additional vulnerabilities***

Certain children are more vulnerable to abuse than others. Such children include those with disabilities, children who are homeless and those who, for one reason or another, are separated from their parents or other family members and who depend on others for their care and protection. The same categories of abuse – neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse – are applicable, but may take a slightly different form. For example, abuse may take the form of deprivation of basic rights, harsh disciplinary regimes or the inappropriate use of medications or physical restraints.<sup>3</sup>

## **5. Disclosures**

### ***How to respond to a Disclosure***

Should a young person disclose abuse to you the following important points should be taken into consideration:

- Take what the young person says seriously.
- Be as calm and as natural as possible. Remember that you have been approached because you are trusted and liked by the young person. Do not panic.
- Be aware that disclosures can be very difficult for the young person.

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<sup>2</sup> See Section 6 Reporting Procedures

<sup>3</sup> Children First: National Guidance for the protection and Welfare of Children, 2011, pages 10 & 11, 2.6 - 2.8

- Reassure the young person that it was right to tell somebody what happened and that they have done nothing wrong.
- Remember that the young person may initially be testing your reactions and may only fully open up over a period of time.
- Listen to what the young person has to say. Give them the time and opportunity to tell as much as they are able and wish to. Do not pressure the young person. Allow him/her to disclose at their own pace and in their own language.
- Be careful when asking questions. Your job is not to investigate but to support the young person. Avoid leading questions such as whether a specific person carried out the abuse, or whether specific acts mentioned by the young person occurred. Such questions may complicate an official investigation.
- Do not express any opinion about the alleged abuser to the young person.
- It may be necessary to reassure the young person that your feelings towards him / her have not been affected in a negative way as a result of what he / she has disclosed
- Do not promise to keep secrets. At the earliest opportunity tell the young person that you acknowledge that they have come to you because they trust you. Tell him / her that there are secrets which are not helpful and should not be kept because they make matters worse. Such secrets hide things that need to be known if people are to be helped and protected from further on-going hurt. By refusing to make a commitment to secrecy to the young person, you do run the risk that they may not tell you everything or indeed anything, there and then. However, it is better to do this than to tell a lie and ruin the young person's confidence in another adult. By being honest, it is more likely that he / she will return to you at another time.
- At the earliest possible opportunity record in writing what the young person has said, including as far as possible, the exact words spoken by him / her. Record facts only, no opinions or hearsay.
- Pass on all information, as stated in the Reporting Procedures below, to the Designated Person and not to any other third party, as disclosures are on a need to know basis only.
- The Designated Person will carry out the necessary steps in making a referral to the Health Service Executive.

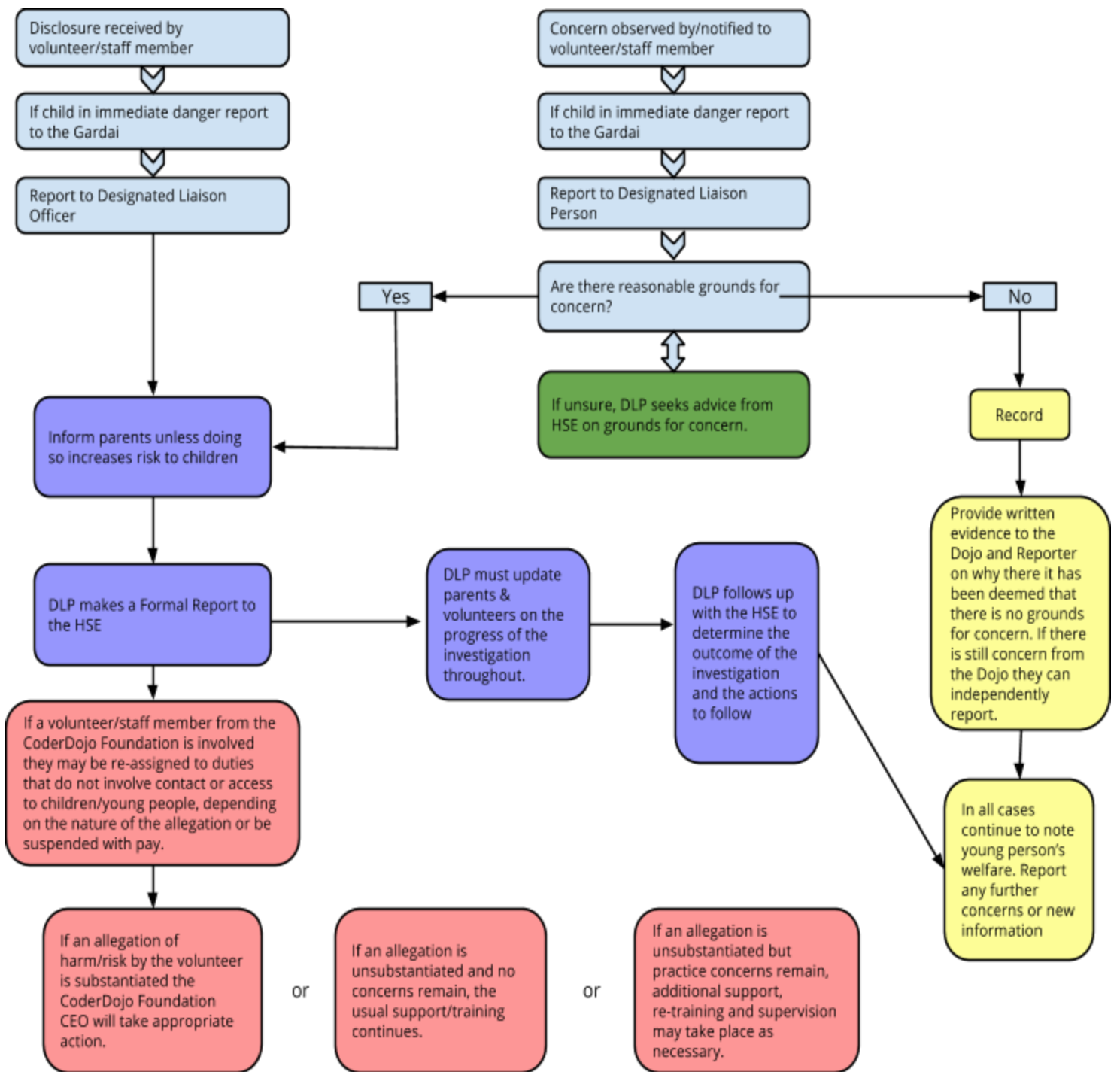
## ***Ongoing Support***

Following a disclosure by a child, it is important that the CoderDojo staff and volunteers continue in a supportive relationship with the child. Once the Designated Person makes the referral to TUSLA, our duty to care on the disclosure is passed on. Disclosure is a huge step for many children and support should be continued through:

- Maintaining a positive relationship with the child.
- Keeping lines of communication open by listening to the child.
- Continuing to include the child in the usual activities.

Any further disclosures should be treated as a first disclosure and responded to accordingly.

## **6. Reporting Procedures**



## ***Step 1 - Report the Complaint to the CoderDojo DLP***

A complaint should first be made to the CoderDojo Designated Liaison Person(DLP) or in the absence of the DLP, the Deputy Designated Liaison Person.<sup>4</sup>

The person making the complaint should detail the grounds for concern as well as any other information of related disclosures/incidents including;

- Dates
- Times
- Names
- Locations
- Context
- Other Relevant Information

The written account using the CoderDojo Child Protection Reporting Form should also include any details of disclosures, allegations, reports or concerns that have been brought to her/his attention.

### **Reasonable Grounds for Concern**

The following examples would constitute reasonable grounds for concern and should be reported:

- A disclosure from the child that he/she was abused.
- An account by a person who saw the child being abused.
- Evidence, such as injury or behaviour, which is consistent with abuse and unlikely to be caused another way.
- An injury or behaviour, which is consistent both with abuse and with an innocent explanation, but where there are corroborative indicators supporting the concern that it may be a case of abuse. An example of this would be a pattern of injuries, an implausible explanation, and other indicators of abuse or dysfunctional behaviour.
- Consistent indication, over a period of time that a child is suffering from emotional or physical neglect.

### **Dealing With a Suspicion of Child Abuse**

In situations where a suspicion / concern may be deemed vague i.e. where there is no specific allegation but there is some concern based on the emotional behaviour and/or physical presentation or behaviour of the child, then staff/volunteers should consult the Designated Person for advice. The

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<sup>4</sup> See Designated Liaison Person Section for details on the contact details and role of the DLP & Deputy DLP.

Designated Person will assess whether or not a report is warranted and will seek the advice of TUSLA if required. Details of the consultation will be recorded and filed. A formal report to TUSLA may follow as advised.

## ***Step 2 - The DLP will review reasonable grounds for complaint***

### **If child abuse is suspected or alleged**

A report should be made to TUSLA in person, by telephone or in writing. TUSLA is available to meet with, or talk to persons wishing to make a report.

It is generally most helpful if the person wishing to report child abuse concerns makes personal contact with TUSLA or a duty social worker as this will assist in gathering as much information as possible about the child and their situation.

The CoderDojo Designated Person is responsible for keeping the parents/guardians informed and updated on the progress of the procedure and the report status.

### **When a Case is not referred to TUSLA or Gardai**

In a situation where the CoderDojo DLP decides that it should not refer concerns to TUSLA or the Gardaí, the individual staff member or volunteer who raised the concern should be given a clear written statement as to the reasons why the organisation is not taking action. The staff member or volunteer should be advised that, if they remain concerned about the situation, they are free to consult with, or report to TUSLA or the Gardaí.

### **In The Event of an Emergency**

In the event of an emergency or the non-availability of the Designated Liaison Person, or TUSLA, the report should be made to the Gardaí. This may be done at any Garda Station.



## **7. Procedure for Allegations Against a Staff Member or Volunteer**

If an allegation is made against a staff member or volunteer within a Dojo, two separate procedures must be followed;

- The reporting procedure in respect of the child
- The procedure for dealing with the staff member or volunteer

### ***Reporting Procedure in Respect of the Child***

The reporting procedure in respect of the Child is laid out in Section 6 - Reporting Procedures.

It is important that when an allegation is made against a staff member that the CoderDojo Liaison Person is informed immediately.

The first priority will be to ensure that no child is exposed to unnecessary risk and as such any necessary protective measures will be taken e.g. suspension of the staff member / volunteer. These measures will be proportionate to the level of risk and will not unreasonably penalise the worker financially, or otherwise, unless necessary to protect children.

In this situation, the CoderDojo Foundation CEO have a responsibility to the volunteer/staff member against whom an allegation has been made. The Designated Person will have the responsibility of handling the reporting issue and supporting the child.

If an allegation is made against the Designated Liaison Person, the CoderDojo CEO will have the responsibility of handling the reporting procedures, and supporting the child as well as supporting and disciplining the volunteer/staff member.

If an allegation is made against the CEO, the Chair of the Board will be responsible for the CEO & any disciplinary actions that may have to be taken.

### ***Procedure for dealing with the staff member or volunteer***

Volunteers or employees may be subjected to erroneous or malicious allegations, therefore any allegation of abuse should be dealt with sensitively and support provided for staff as well as the child,

including counselling where necessary. However, the primary goal is to protect the child while taking care to treat the staff member/volunteer fairly.

It may be necessary for the CEO to seek legal advice for any action following an allegation against a staff member / volunteer. A meeting may need to be arranged with the Health Service Executive / Gardaí to discuss the allegation. The CEO will inform the person accused on the outcome of the above consultation.

Then, if appropriate, the CEO will inform the volunteer/staff member involved in the alleged allegation of the following:

- The fact that an allegation has been made against him/her.
- The nature of the allegation.
- That he/she is suspended from volunteering/working with the CoderDojo Foundation, pending the outcome of an investigation into the allegation.

The volunteer/staff member will be afforded an opportunity to respond. The CEO will note the response and pass on the information if and when a formal report is made to TUSLA.

### **If a TUSLA or Garda Report is made**

Pending the outcome of the investigation by TUSLA and/or Gardaí the staff member / volunteer may:

- Be re-assigned to duties that do not involve contact or access to children / young people, depending on the nature of the allegation.
- Be suspended with pay.

The staff member / volunteer will be offered counselling, should the need arise.

The CoderDojo Foundation, its staff members and its volunteers will cooperate in full with TUSLA assessment and any subsequent An Garda Síochána investigation.

When a formal notification to Garda Síochána is required or necessary, this should happen without delay. An immediate meeting will be requested between TUSLA & An Garda Síochána to advise them of the allegation, to clarify roles and responsibilities and to determine how the assessment of the

allegation will proceed and whether any criminal investigation may be implemented. The meeting will be attended by the CoderDojo Designated person and the CoderDojo Foundation CEO.

The volunteer/staff member is kept up to date by written communication in relation to the allegation and any relevant information arising from the above meeting. (As agreed with TUSLA and/or An Garda Siochana), This is the responsibility of the CoderDojo Designated person.

The CoderDojo Designated person shall ensure that all requirements as agreed with the childcare manager, principal social worker or An Garda Siochana will be followed through.

### **Reactions of other staff/members & volunteers**

The CoderDojo Foundation must accept the possibility that a number of factors may have a bearing on the organisation and will need to be considered:

- Possible reactions of other volunteers including anger, disbelief, doubt, fear, guilt, shock, anxiety and confusion.
- The effects on the alleged abuser of the internal disciplinary proceedings, the Child Protection investigation and the criminal investigation.
- The reactions of other staff / volunteers and the other children towards the young person who has been abused or whose allegation is being investigated.
- The reaction of parents / carers and other family members of the young person.

Through a series of basic Child Protection awareness training programmes, all persons involved in CoderDojo will be given the opportunity to discuss such issues in an open and non-threatening environment.

### ***Stand Down Orders***

In the event that the young person's allegation has been confirmed by either TUSLA or An Garda Siochana, the volunteer/staff member will not be permitted to have any future involvement in the Dojo or any other Dojo in Ireland.

In the case of an allegation being substantiated, the CoderDojo Foundation CEO will make a decision on any action regarding employment or other by the CoderDojo Foundation.

In addition, if Garda Vetting forms are returned with disclosures, the decision can be made by the CoderDojo Vetting Officer or the CoderDojo Appeals board to give a stand down order.

## **8. Peer abuse**

In some cases of child abuse, the alleged perpetrator will be another child. In such situations, it is particularly important to consider how TUSLA and other agencies can provide care for both the child victim and the child abuser. The purpose of this chapter is to provide guidance on the identification of and response to such cases.

## ***General guidelines***

In a situation where child abuse is alleged to have been carried out by another child, the child protection procedures should be adhered to for both the victim and the alleged abuser – i.e. it should be considered a child care and protection issue for both children.

Abusive behaviour that is perpetrated by children must be acted upon. If there is any conflict of interest between the welfare of the alleged abuser and the victim, the victim's welfare is of paramount importance.

As in all cases of child abuse, it is essential to respond to the needs of children who are abused by their peers. Each individual case will require its own unique intervention. Appropriate support and services should be provided to the child and his or her parents/carers as quickly as possible. In the case of child sexual abuse by peers, treatment approaches may include individual treatment and/or group therapy for the child or adolescent.

Children who are abusive towards other children also require comprehensive assessment and therapeutic intervention by skilled child care professionals. Treatment is more likely to be effective if begun early in the child's life.

It is known that some adult abusers begin abusing during childhood and adolescence, that significant numbers will have suffered abuse themselves and that the abuse is likely to become progressively more serious. Early referral and intervention is therefore essential.

Future abuse can be prevented if intervention takes place early in the child's life. Therefore, it is essential to refer concerns about peer abuse immediately to TUSLA.

It should be anticipated that an allegation of peer abuse will have a detrimental impact on relationships between the alleged abuser, his or her parents/carers and other family members. A negative impact on other social relationships, such as with peers and neighbours, should also be anticipated. As a result, the child and family may experience isolation, and in some situations

victimisation, following an allegation of abuse. The child's parents/carers will need support and advice to help them understand the abusive behaviour and to deal with the situation. Active participation and commitment by parents/carers can be an important factor in the success of treatment and may be crucial in influencing the general outcome of the case. It is therefore essential to provide adequate support services to the child and family throughout the assessment and treatment processes.

## ***Sexual abuse by children and young people***

Research shows that teenagers perpetrate a considerable proportion of child sexual abuse. Such cases should be referred to TUSLA. It is important that the different types of behaviour are clearly identified and that no young person is wrongly labelled 'a child abuser' without a clear analysis of the particular behaviour. Four categories of behaviour warrant attention: normal sexual exploration; abuse reactive behaviour; sexually obsessive behaviour; and abusive behaviour by adolescents and young people.

- Normal sexual exploration: This could consist of naive play between two children that involves the exploration of their sexuality. This type of behaviour may be prompted by exchanges between children, such as 'You show me yours and I'll show you mine'. One of the key aspects of this behaviour is its tone: there should not be any coercive or dominating aspects to this behaviour. Usually, there is no need for child protection intervention of any kind in this type of situation.
- Abuse reactive behaviour: In this situation, one child who has been abused already acts out the same behaviour on another child. This is serious behaviour and needs to be treated as such. In addition to responding to the needs of the abused child, the needs of the child perpetrator in this situation must also be addressed.
- Sexually obsessive behaviour: In this type of situation, the children may engage in sexually compulsive behaviour. An example of this would be excessive masturbation, which may well be meeting some other emotional need. Most children masturbate at some point in their lives. However, in families where care and attention is missing, they may have extreme comfort needs that are not being met and may move from masturbation to excessive interest or curiosity in sex, which takes on excessive or compulsive aspects. These children may not have been sexually abused, but they may be extremely needy and may require very specific help in addressing those needs.
- Abusive behaviour by adolescents and young people: Behaviour that is abusive will have elements of domination, coercion or bribery, and certainly secrecy. The fact that the behaviour is carried out by an adolescent, for example, does not, in itself, make it 'experimentation'.

However, if there is no age difference between the two children or no difference in status, power or intellect, then one could argue that this is indeed experimentation. On the other hand, if, for example, the adolescent is aged 13 and the child is aged 3, this gap in itself creates an abusive quality that should be taken seriously.

## ***Bullying***

Bullying can be defined as repeated aggression – whether it be verbal, psychological or physical – that is conducted by an individual or group against others. It is behaviour that is intentionally aggravating and intimidating, and occurs mainly among children in social environments such as schools. It includes behaviours such as teasing, taunting, threatening, hitting or extortion by one or more persons against a victim. Bullying can also take the form of racial abuse. With developments in modern technology, children can also be the victims of non-contact bullying, via mobile phones, the Internet and other personal devices.

Bullying of children can also be perpetrated by adults, including adults who are not related to the child. Bullying behaviour when perpetrated by adults, rather than children, could be regarded as physical or emotional abuse. However, other major forms of child abuse, such as neglect and sexual abuse, are not normally comprehended by the term 'bullying'.

Serious instances of bullying behaviour should be referred to TUSLA.

## **9. Confidentiality & Storage of Information**

## ***Confidentiality***<sup>5</sup>

The effective protection of a child often depends on the willingness of the staff and volunteers in statutory and voluntary organisations involved with children to share and exchange relevant information. It is therefore critical that there is a clear understanding of professional and legal responsibilities with regard to confidentiality and the exchange of information.

Any person who receives information from fellow volunteers and colleagues about possible or actual Child Abuse must treat it as having been given in confidence and follow the CoderDojo reporting procedures.

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

No undertakings regarding secrecy can be given. Those working with a child and family should make this clear to all parties involved, although they can be assured that all information will be handled taking full account of legal requirements.

Ethical and statutory codes concerned with confidentiality and data protection provide general guidance. They are not intended to limit or prevent the exchange of information between different professional staff with a responsibility for ensuring the protection and welfare of children.

**The provision of information to the statutory agencies, or relevant others for the protection of a child is not a breach of confidentiality or data protection.**

It must be clearly understood that information, which is gathered for one purpose, must not be used for another without consulting the person that provided the information.

## **10. Communications and Relationships**

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<sup>5</sup> *Children First: National Guidance for the protection and Welfare of Children, 2011, Page 16, 3.9 (3.9.1 - 3.9.5)*



## ***Communications with young people***

When speaking with young people the staff member/volunteer should maintain the conversation at the appropriate level for the age of the young member. This provides a positive experience to the young person and helps avoid causing misinterpretation of your intentions.

CoderDojo staff member/volunteer should speak respectfully of other members of CoderDojo (both Volunteers, Staff & Attendees) and not involve young people in conversations that are critical of others.

## ***Adult – Youth Relationships***

A CoderDojo staff member/volunteer holds a position of trust. Consequently CoderDojo staff members/volunteers have responsibilities in respect of their relationships with and behaviour towards youth members of all ages. It is a criminal offence in the Republic of Ireland for anyone to engage in, or attempt to engage in, sexual activity with anyone under the legal age of consent. The legal age of consent to sexual activity in the Republic of Ireland is 17 years (Criminal Law (Sexual Offences Act) 2006).

Because of the position of trust and authority that they hold, it is inappropriate for a CoderDojo staff member/volunteer to form, or seek to form, a personal relationship with a youth member who is over the legal age of consent. Where two people, one age 18 plus and one aged 17 (i.e. over the age of consent) are already in a relationship, they must both be aware that their conduct must at all times reflect their responsibilities as members of CoderDojo. CoderDojo staff member/volunteer should be aware that if they break this trust their suitability to work in their Dojo may be called into question.

In communications, CoderDojo Staff/Volunteers cannot contact a CoderDojo Ninja under 18 one on one and must include a parent/guardian in any communications.

## ***Youth - Youth Relationships***

It is important that CoderDojo staff members/volunteers are aware of the responsibility they have, within their role, of helping young people who are developing relationships. The key principle that CoderDojo staff members/volunteers should emphasise when talking about relationships is respect for others and for oneself.

When giving advice CoderDojo staff members/volunteers must uphold the law - sexual intercourse under the age of consent is illegal. For the purposes of criminal law the age of consent to sexual activity

in the Republic of Ireland is 17 years of age. The law on consent to sexual activity applies to young people as well as to adults.

## ***Communications with parents***

The communication process with parents begins at the start of the young person's journey with CoderDojo, and it is fostered and built upon as that young person progresses.

The relationship with parents need continuous attention. The following pointers are helpful:

- Listen carefully to what parents say about their children.
- If parents are expressing a concern, don't be defensive, try to understand it from the parents' perspective and seek to establish a common ground.
- Inform parents of any accidents involving their child and how they happened.
- Should a difficult issue or misunderstanding arise with a parent always use calm, respectful, and supportive language when communicating with them to avoid the situation becoming confrontational. Small issues can easily turn into a standoff situation and, when this occurs, it is the young person who is caught in the middle and who loses out.
- Ensure that anything you distribute to parents in writing is accurate and clearly stated. Be accurate on times, dates and locations and avoid the use of jargon.
- For notes, requests and explanations of CoderDojo activities, use a form of reproduction that is easy to read.
- Send your communication to the parents far enough in advance so that they can consider it and act, if you expect a response.
- Keep a copy of written communications.

A positive relationship between CoderDojo Foundation Staff/volunteers and parents/guardians should be nurtured and maintained through open communication in both directions. Ongoing good communication with parents develops a better understanding of the positive benefits of CoderDojo for their child and of what is expected of both their child and themselves to improve their experience of CoderDojo.

## **11. Recruitment, Selection, Vetting & Training of Volunteers**

## ***CoderDojo Foundation Recruitment Procedures***

All CoderDojo positions whether volunteer or employee will go through the below recruitment procedure.

1. **Advertisement:** The open position will be advertised on the coderdojo website for a specified time period.
2. **Application Form/Application Process** – Candidates will be required to submit a CV, Cover letter or other depending on the position.
3. **Interview/Informal Meeting** – An appropriate CoderDojo staff member should conduct an interview, or meet the potential volunteer/employee.
  - **Further Interviews** - If deemed necessary for the position, the volunteer or potential employee will have to take part in further interviews by the CoderDojo Foundation team .
4. **Referees** – Applicants may be required to supply the names of two referees (non-relatives) who are willing to supply the organisation with references on their behalf. All references should be checked by telephone or email and any additional notes recorded.
5. **Volunteer/Job Description** – On selection of the candidate, and when the role has been finalised, the functions should then be outlined in a comprehensive volunteer or employee job description, which describes in detail the tasks required of the potential volunteer.
6. **Selection** – Inform the applicant if they have been successful or unsuccessful in writing (via email or by letter). If they accept the offer additional information, including a copy of the CoderDojo Foundation Child Protection Policy, and Garda Vetting Forms should also be supplied in order to be filled in before or for the start date.
7. **Declaration of Suitability & Confidentiality Agreement** – applicants should be obliged to sign a declaration form indicating that there is no reason why they would be deemed unsuitable for working with young people. They will also be required to sign a confidentiality agreement.
8. **Training Identification** – the interview process may indicate some specific and immediate training needs. The Foundation should respond to these needs and arrange delivery. Training should include: Child Protection awareness training which will be offered twice a year. Other more targeted and specific training may be offered as an option to staff/volunteers.

## ***Training for CoderDojo Foundation Employees and Volunteers***

CoderDojo Foundation employees and volunteers must take a Child Protection Awareness Training Course. This will be provided regularly by the CoderDojo Foundation and must be undertaken within a reasonable time period since starting as a Foundation employee or volunteer.

Under no circumstances may a CoderDojo Volunteer/Staff Member lead a session or attend an overnight trip without Vetting and Child Protection Training.

## **12. Accidents/Incidents**

All accidents, however minor, should be recorded on the Accident & Incident report form. The report should be completed and forwarded to your direct line manager immediately.

If further action is to be taken a meeting will be convened to decide the procedures that may follow.

In the event of an accident involving children, parents or guardians should be informed immediately. Where medical attention is required, this should be sought as a matter of urgency and recorded in the accident report form.

If there is a Child Protection concern related to the accident/incident, a photocopy is to be held in the relevant file (keeping in mind confidentiality) and the original copy will be passed to the Designated Liaison Person of CoderDojo, who will in turn mark it 'received' and begin the process of investigating.

## **13. Non-Child Protection Related Complaints**

It is the policy of the CoderDojo Foundation to encourage young people, parents and Dojos to provide comment and feedback on any aspect of our work, inclusive of any complaints they may have.

The CoderDojo Foundation is committed to this practice, as it is acknowledged that an open,

transparent environment benefits all stakeholders of the organisation and allows the service to monitor and regularly review programmes. This forms an integral part of the organisation's commitment to best practice.

All staff or volunteers need to actively involve young people in the planning and decision-making of programmes and actively seek feedback on programmes and activities. The suggestions or complaints expressed by young people should always be taken into consideration and must receive a response.

## ***What is a complaint?***

A complaint is any form of criticism or suggestion in respect to any aspect of a service or programme. A complaint should not be confused with a Child Protection concern for which the reporting procedure must be followed. When a complaint is received that leads to a concern about a child's safety or well-being, the CoderDojo Foundation must ensure that it acts appropriately and in the best interests of the child, and that Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children are implemented as appropriate. The welfare of the child is paramount at all times.

A distinction must also be made between:

- Complaints that can be handled informally and internally.
- Complaints requiring a formal process within the organisation.
- Complaints requiring a formal process and reporting to the CoderDojo Board.

## ***Steps to be followed in handling complaints***

1. Any member of staff or volunteer with CoderDojo may take a complaint from any young person, parent or volunteer.
2. All young people, parents of young people and volunteers who access the service provided by the CoderDojo Foundation are fully entitled to give comment or feedback, whether positive or negative, on any aspect of the service provided.
3. A complaints form must be completed by the person making the complaint. A staff member/volunteer can support a person in doing this if necessary.

4. Volunteers/staff members must submit this form to their **direct line manager**.
5. All complaints are monitored by the Foundation to make changes to programmes / events if necessary, to ensure a quality service is being provided. Any action to be taken will be recorded on the complaints form.
6. The person who made the complaint will be responded to in writing within ten working days, unless otherwise requested.
7. If the Foundation considers it necessary, a meeting will be organised between themselves or the relevant person(s) and the person who made the complaint.
8. The person will be informed if there is any follow-up action or recommendation for change as the result of the complaint. If it is deemed unnecessary to make any change, the person who made the complaint will be informed of the reason for this.
9. If the complaint is of a serious nature and against the leadership of the CoderDojo Foundation, the complaint may be handled by the Chair of the CoderDojo Board.

## **14. Appendices**

### ***Appendix 1 - Definitions of Child Abuse***

This chapter outlines the principal types of child abuse and offers guidance on how to recognise such abuse. Child abuse can be categorised into four different types: neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse. A child may be subjected to one or more forms of abuse at any given time.

#### **Definition of 'neglect'**

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 to and affection from adults, and/or medical care. Harm can be defined as the ill-treatment or the impairment of the health or development of a child. Whether it is significant is determined by the child's health and development as compared to that which could reasonably be expected of a child of similar age.

Neglect generally becomes apparent in different ways over a period of time rather than at one specific point. For example, a child who suffers a series of minor injuries may not be having his or her needs met in terms of necessary supervision and safety. A child whose height or weight is significantly below average may be being deprived of adequate nutrition. A child who consistently misses school may be being deprived of intellectual stimulation.

The threshold of significant harm is reached when the child's needs are neglected to the extent that his or her well-being and/or development are severely affected.

### **Definition of 'emotional abuse'**

Emotional abuse is normally to be found in the relationship between a parent/carer and a child rather than in a specific event or pattern of events. It occurs when a child's developmental need for affection, approval, consistency and security are not met. Unless other forms of abuse are present, it is rarely manifested in terms of physical signs or symptoms.

Examples may include:

- the imposition of negative attributes on a child, expressed by persistent criticism, sarcasm, hostility or blaming;
- conditional parenting in which the level of care shown to a child is made contingent on his or her behaviours or actions;
- emotional unavailability of the child's parent/carer;
- unresponsiveness of the parent/carer and/or inconsistent or inappropriate expectations of the child;
- premature imposition of responsibility on the child;
- unrealistic or inappropriate expectations of the child's capacity to understand something or to behave and control himself or herself in a certain way;
- under- or over-protection of the child;
- failure to show interest in, or provide age-appropriate opportunities for, the child's cognitive and emotional development;

- use of unreasonable or over-harsh disciplinary measures;
- exposure to domestic violence;
- exposure to inappropriate or abusive material through new technology.

Emotional abuse can be manifested in terms of the child's behavioural, cognitive, affective or physical functioning. Examples of these include insecure attachment, unhappiness, low self-esteem, educational and developmental underachievement, and oppositional behaviour. The threshold of significant harm is reached when abusive interactions dominate and become typical of the relationship between the child and the parent/carer.

### **Definition of 'physical abuse'**

Physical abuse of a child is that which results in actual or potential physical harm from an interaction, or lack of interaction, which is reasonably within the control of a parent or person in a position of responsibility, power or trust. There may be single or repeated incidents.

Physical abuse can involve:

- severe physical punishment;
- beating, slapping, hitting or kicking;
- pushing, shaking or throwing;
- pinching, biting, choking or hair-pulling;
- terrorising with threats;
- observing violence;
- use of excessive force in handling;
- deliberate poisoning;
- suffocation;
- fabricated/induced illness (see Appendix 1 for details);
- allowing or creating a substantial risk of significant harm to a child.

### **Definition of 'sexual abuse'**

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

Examples of child sexual abuse include:



- exposure of the sexual organs or any sexual act intentionally performed in the presence of the child;
- intentional touching or molesting of the body of a child whether by a person or object for the purpose of sexual arousal or gratification;
- masturbation in the presence of the child or the involvement of the child in an act of masturbation;
- sexual intercourse with the child, whether oral, vaginal or anal;
- sexual exploitation of a child, which includes inciting, encouraging, propositioning, requiring or permitting a child to solicit for, or to engage in, prostitution or other sexual acts. Sexual exploitation also occurs when a child is involved in the exhibition, modeling or posing for the purpose of sexual arousal, gratification or sexual act, including its recording (on film, video tape or other media) or the manipulation, for those purposes, of the image by computer or other means. It may also include showing sexually explicit material to children, which is often a feature of the 'grooming' process by perpetrators of abuse;
- consensual sexual activity involving an adult and an underage person. In relation to child sexual abuse, it should be noted that, for the purposes of the criminal law, the age of consent to sexual intercourse is 17 years for both boys and girls. An Garda Síochána will deal with the criminal aspects of the case under the relevant legislation.

It should be noted that the definition of child sexual abuse presented in this section is not a legal definition and is not intended to be a description of the criminal offence of sexual assault.

*Children First: National Guidance for the protection and Welfare of Children, 2011, pages 8,9 & 10, 2.1 - 2.5*