



# Child Protection Policy




- Chief Executive's Foreword
- 1 Scope of the policy
- 2 Background
- 3 Aim of this policy
- 4 Awareness of abuse
- 5 Some facts about abuse
- 6 Indicators of abuse
- 7 The role of the Council's designated Child Protection Officer
- 8 Reporting Procedures
- 9 Common Do's and Don'ts in reporting suspected child abuse/neglect
- 10 What happens next...?
- 11 Code of Conduct
- 12 Recruiting and vetting of personnel, supervision and adult child ratios

Useful Contact Numbers





# Chief Executive's Foreword



The protection of children is something that is rarely far from the news these days and it is an issue that affects us all. Children may be physically, emotionally or sexually abused regardless of their age, gender, religious belief, racial origin or culture. They are usually abused by people that they know.


The Council deals with many children and their families in a range of settings. Most notably we work with many thousands of children who use our leisure, recreational and sporting facilities, but employees also come across children in a range of other ways through visits to homes and communities in the course of their work.

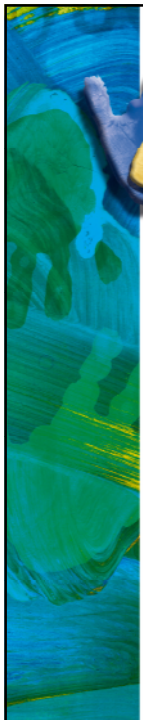
Employees may come across a situation where they are concerned about the welfare of a child or indeed are approached with information by a child or parent themselves. It is important that all our employees are equipped with the skills and knowledge to respond to child protection issues and know where to seek help.

This Child Protection Policy has been developed by the Council's Child Protection Subgroup with expert advice from Down Lisburn Trust and the NSPCC [Northern Ireland]. It applies to all employees irrespective of their function, remit or role and combined with the Designated Child Protection Officer will ensure that this Council embraces best practice in this area.




I commend this policy to all employees and would ask that you take the time to familiarise yourself with the contents.

Norman Davidson  
Chief Executive



## 1. Scope of the policy

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This Child Protection Policy is intended to cover all functions of the Council where employees may work with children directly or have contact with children indirectly through the course of their duties. It replaces the Leisure Services Child Protection Policy which was approved by Council in March 2000 and only applied to the Leisure Services Sports Facilities Unit.

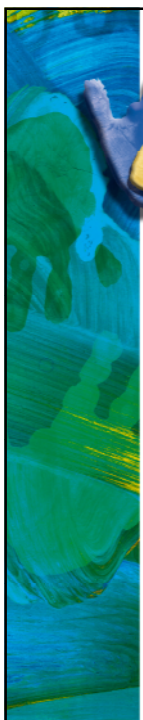
Council Services which may involve contact with children or young people include:

Leisure Services,	Sports facilities, Community services Summer schemes, Museums and arts, Creche and play facilities.
Environmental Services	Technical, Environmental Health, Building Control.
Corporate Services	Central Administration, Human Resources, Marketing and Communications.
Chief Executive's Office	EqualityCommunity Relations.



The Policy applies to all employees who work for the Council, including full time, part time, seasonal personnel, work experience placements and trainees. It is designed to provide a basic foundation under which more specific guidance may be developed to meet the needs of particular functions or circumstances.

Children for the purposes of these guidelines are defined as those aged under 18.

External bodies, clubs and organisations will be made aware of the Council's Child Protection Policy and in the absence of specific guidance developed by their own organisation, will be obliged to follow it as a condition of using Council facilities.



## 2. Background

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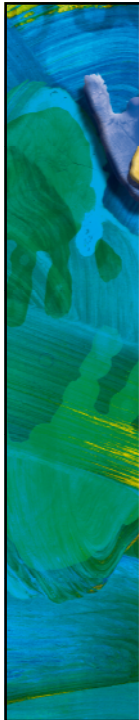
In 1996 the Children (NI) Order was implemented by the Government and was based to a large degree on the philosophy of the UN Convention. This legislation was the most important piece of children's legislation in the 20th Century and set out a number of key principles concerning the rights of children, their parents and the role of the State. It applies to all children under the age of 18 and the Order embodies fivekey principles:

- **Paramourncy of the child** - in all childcare practice and law, the welfare of the child is the overriding consideration in any decisions about them.
- **Parental responsibility** - parents have responsibility for their children rather than rights over them. Where parents have rights in respect of children these only last so long as is necessary given the child's age and understanding. In some circumstances parents will share parental responsibility with others such as other carers or the State.
- **Prevention** - the Children Order recognises the importance of preventing problems such as family breakdown and abuse through supportive measures.
- **Partnership** - this recognises that the most effective way of ensuring that a child's needs are met is through working in partnership with their parents, other professionals and disciplines.
- **Protection** - children should be safe from abuse and should be protected by the State when they are in danger.

In 1991 the UK Government ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which is an international convention signed by all but two countries in the world. The UN Convention sets the minimum standards for children and young peoples' civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights under the interrelated categories of 'participation', 'protection' and 'provision'. For example:

Article 3 - In all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child shall be the primary consideration.

Article 19 - The State has a responsibility to protect children from violent and harmful treatment.  
UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.



## 2. Background



The Children Order sets out the framework for protecting children including legal Powers and responsibilities of agencies like the police, social services and other bodies. It is complemented by other laws and guidance which taken together provides a comprehensive approach to the protection of children. These include specifically:

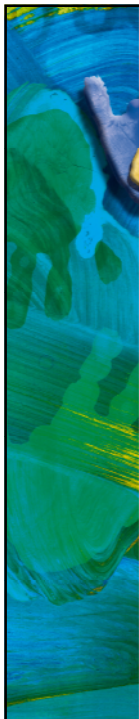
### 1. The Criminal Law Act 1967

Section 5 creates a duty to report arrestable offences and information in relation to the offence to the police.

### 2. Co-operating to Safeguard Children

The Department of Health & Social Services for Public Safety (DHSSPS) sets out the overall procedural framework for the management of child protection. In addition to setting out the roles and responsibilities of agencies Co-operating to Safeguard Children details the process and steps to be followed on the detection, reporting and management of child abuse. In regard to the functions of local government Section 3.80 states:

" Councils carry out a range of functions and services in Northern Ireland that directly and indirectly involve children. Staff employed by councils may become involved in child protection cases either because of suspicions or allegations in respect of their own conduct with children or because, during their duties, they have become aware of the possibility of abuse having been perpetrated by others. It is essential that councils should have clear policies and procedures for dealing with such circumstances..."



## 2. Background



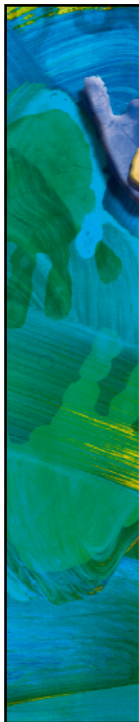
### 3. Protocol for joint investigation by social workers and police officers of alleged and suspected cases of child abuse.

This document sets out the steps and joint actions to be taken by each agency in investigating suspected or actual child abuse.

### 4. EHSSB Handbook of Policies and Procedures Volume 6 Child Protection.

This sets out the duties of Down Lisburn Trust, NSPCC, PSNI, Education and Library Boards and other professional bodies with responsibilities for child protection.





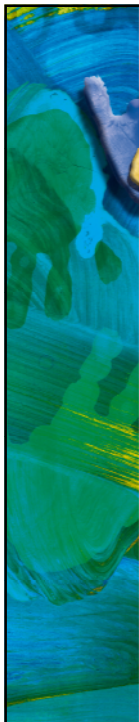
### 3. Aim of this Policy



The protection of children is something that must be a priority for all employees of Lisburn City Council.

This overarching policy will set out the framework for this and ensure that the Council meets all its legal and moral responsibilities to children and families that it directly or indirectly provides a service to. By having a clear written policy for Council employees the Council will ensure that employees are provided with the tools and knowledge to know how to protect children and deal with situations that may cause them concern. The 'arena of safety' diagram expresses this.

Diagram: the arena of safety



### 4. Awareness of Abuse



The abuse and neglect of children is something that can occur within many situations including the home, school, communities and all forms of clubs and societies. Children are much more likely to be abused by someone known to them, or more rarely a stranger. There are different types of abuse and a child may be abused in more than one way.

Types of abuse and their commonly accepted definitions<sup>1</sup> include:

**Physical Abuse**

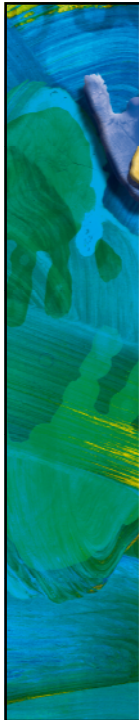
Physical abuse is the deliberate physical injury to a child or the wilful or neglectful failure to prevent physical injury or suffering. This may include hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating, confinement to a room or cot, or inappropriately giving drugs to control behaviour.

**Emotional Abuse**

Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional ill treatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to children that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person. It may involve causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of children. Smothering a child's development through over-protection can also be a form of abuse. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of ill treatment of a child, though it may occur alone. Domestic violence, adult mental health problems and parental substance misuse may expose children to emotional abuse.

<sup>1</sup> Source NSPCC.





## 4. Awareness of Abuse

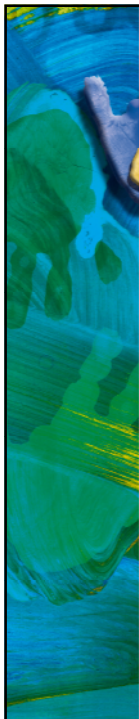


### Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including penetrative or non-penetrative acts. They may include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at or the production of pornographic material or watching sexual activities, or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.

### Neglect

Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in significant harm. It may involve a parent or carer failing to provide adequate foods, shelter and clothing, failing to protect a child from physical harm or danger, failing to ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment, lack of stimulation or lack of supervision. It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.



## 4. Awareness of Abuse



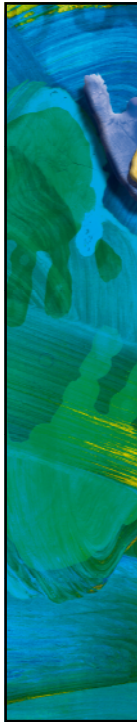
### Inappropriate Behaviour

It is vital that employees are able to recognise various types of inappropriate behaviour which can occur between an adult and a child, such as:

- Petting or Fondling
- Inappropriate physical contact between an adult and a child
- Sexually explicit behaviour in games etc.
- Adults behaving suspiciously e.g. watching children in changing area/cubicle/toilet when no obvious reason for their presence there
- Those who are spending an inordinately long time in changing area/cubicle/toilet area
- Adults who have strayed into an area restricted for children only
- Those who are seen looking over/under cubicles
- Those who appear to have an interest in more than one cubicle
- Adults whose behaviour is causing distress to children e.g. rough play, horse play
- Use of inappropriate language in the presence of children.

<sup>1</sup> Source: NSPCC.





## 5. Some facts about abuse

Our knowledge of child abuse and the reasons and causes behind why children are abused is developing and listed below are some of the accepted facts about child abuse<sup>2</sup>:

- Most children are abused by someone they know.
- Much abuse goes unreported and therefore unrecognised.
- Disabled children are more vulnerable to abuse.
- Children are far more likely to be physically abused by their parents than sexually abused.
- Children rarely make false accusations that they have been abused and in fact frequently deny the abuse or take back an accusation after they have made it.
- Children who have been abused are often very good at hiding their unhappiness and distress.
- Abuse has serious long-term consequences and if untreated, the effects can be devastating and last into adulthood.
- Child sexual abuse is equally common among all social classes, cultures and ethnic groups.
- In most reported incidents of sexual abuse the abuser is someone known to the child.
- A child is never to blame for abuse.
- It is not only men who sexually abuse children – it is estimated that 10% of abuse is sexual abuse carried out by women.

<sup>2</sup> Source 'Our duty to care' DHSSPS.

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## 6. Indicators of abuse

It is important for employees to have some awareness of the signs of child abuse and neglect. However even for those experienced in working and dealing with child abuse it is not always easy to recognise a situation where abuse may occur or has taken place.

Likewise it is very important to remember that the responsibility for investigating and dealing with child abuse lies with experts in Social Services, the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the NSPCC who all have legal powers and responsibilities. It is the Council's responsibility to provide a safe environment for children and to have effective and clear procedures to assist employees to have an awareness of child abuse and any suspicions or concerns must be referred by the Designated Child Protection Officer to Down Lisburn Trust or PSNI.

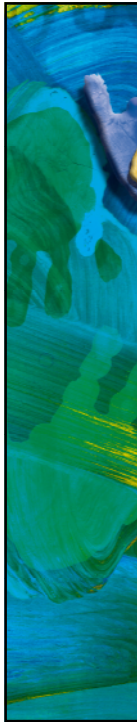
When children are abused there are sometimes [but not always] some common indicators which can be divided into 'behavioural' and 'physical signs'.

Some of these include:

- Unexplained or suspicious injuries such as bruising, cuts or burns, particularly if they are on a part of the body not normally prone to such injuries.
- An injury for which the explanation appears inconsistent.
- The child describing what appears to be an abusive act involving themselves.



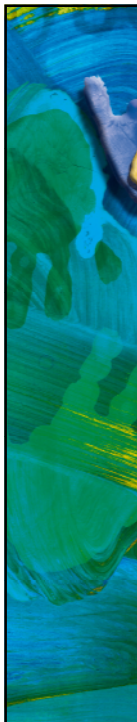
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## 6. Indicators of abuse



- Concerns expressed by a third party about a child.
- Unexplained changes in a child's behaviour over time e.g. becoming withdrawn or very quiet, attention seeking behaviours or sudden outbursts of temper.
- The child showing inappropriate sexual awareness or explicit behaviour in games.
- Distrust of adults particularly those with whom the child has previously had, or would normally be expected to have a close relationship.
- Reluctance to participate in physical activity or to change clothes for physical education, games or swimming.
- Loss of weight for no apparent reason.
- The child is unable to make friends or inappropriate indiscriminate attachments.
- Increasingly unkempt appearance.
- The child is prevented from mixing with other children.



## 7. The role of the Council's designated Child Protection Officer



Key to the Council's ability to protect children in its care and enable its employees to provide a safe environment the Council has identified a Designated Child Protection Officer. This is a very important role since the expertise and experience of child protection is focused on one person who in turn will act as a pivotal point for all child protection matters.

Specifically the role and responsibilities of the Designated Child Protection Officer will include:

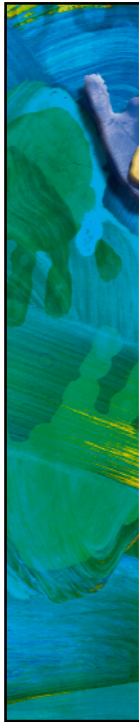
### Referral of child protection concerns

- Monitoring the implementation of the Council's Child Protection Policy and procedures and specifically to inform Social Services/PSNI within the appropriate Trust area of any concerns about a child or children.
- Ensuring that any referral made by telephone is confirmed in writing and any documentation relating to concerns is passed to Social Services or the PSNI.
- Securing the safekeeping of any case material and keeping Senior Management of the Council apprised of any developments.

### Relationship with Down Lisburn Trust

- Providing a link through regular liaison with senior members of Down Lisburn Trust and to participate in any appropriate training.





## 7. The role of the Council's designated Child Protection Officer

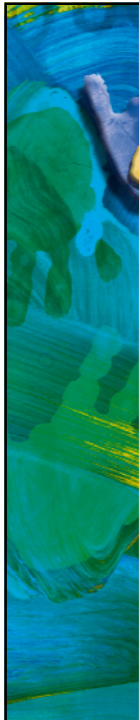
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### Within the Council

- Taking the lead role in raising and maintaining awareness about child protection in the Council.
- Acting as source of advice and assistance on child protection matters in the Council.
- Assisting functions within the Council to develop additional and supplementary child protection procedures and the promotion of good practice.
- Advising the Council in conjunction with the Training Officer of any child protection training needs.



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## 8. Reporting procedures

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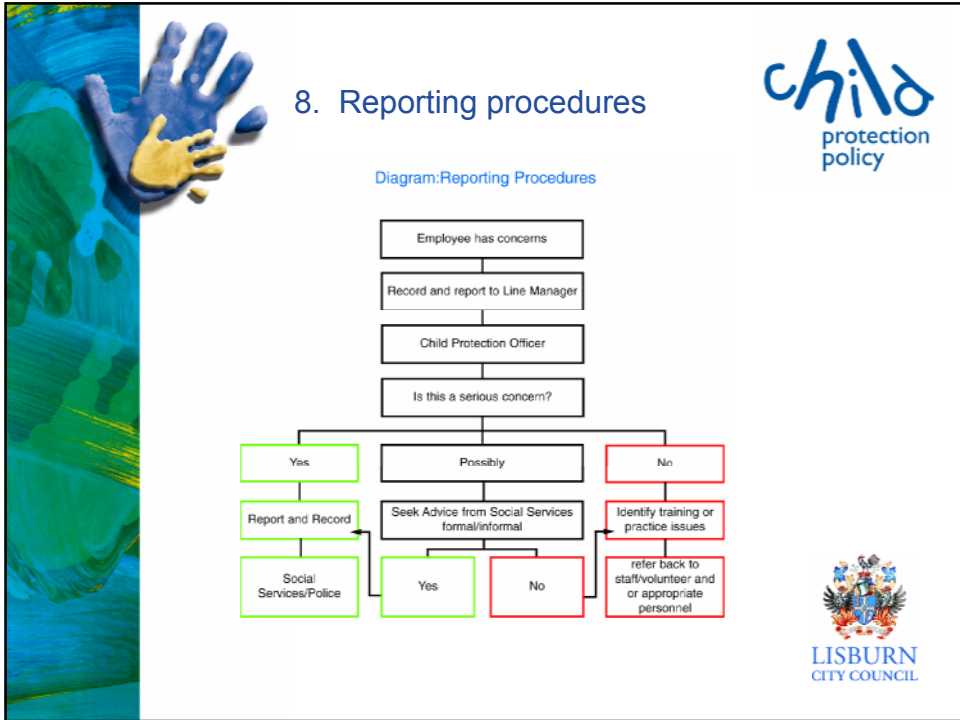
It is fundamentally important that if any employees have concerns about a child that they seek to report these concerns to the Designated Officer and follow the steps laid down in this policy and procedure. This will help protect employees and the well being of any child concerned.

Investigating child abuse is a very complex and detailed process. Employees must remember that they are not responsible for deciding whether or not abuse has taken place, rather they are responsible for reporting their concerns to the relevant person. The flow chart outlined below sets out the procedure for the reporting of child protection issues. In the event of a Senior Officer and/or the designated Child Protection Officer not being available, the employee should proceed to the next stage of the reporting procedure. A Senior Officer and the Child Protection Officer should be advised of such actions as soon as practical.

Note: If there is a complaint about a member of staff consideration should also be given to use of the Council's disciplinary procedures. If a complaint is being dealt with under disciplinary procedures consideration may have to be given to also following the child protection procedures.



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## 9. Common Do's and Dont's in reporting suspected child abuse/neglect





Coming across possible child abuse and neglect can be a stressful time for employees, particularly where they may be unfamiliar in this area or unsure or uncertain of what is happening. If a child should report something to one of the Council's employees, or they observe something happening that gives them cause for concern, there are a number of common Do's and Dont's that are helpful to remember.

Do ✓

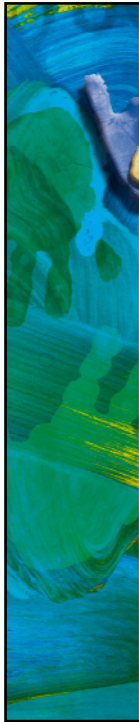
- Stay Calm
- Listen and hear what the child or adults is saying
- Reassure the child that they have done the right thing in telling you
- Record in writing what was said as soon as is possible and keep this record safe and secure. These may be required by the police or social services
- Report your concerns to your line manager
- Report the matter to the Designated Child Protection Officer.

Don't ✗

- Panic
- Ask leading questions [questions that influence a person to give a particular answer]
- Promise to a child or adult that you can keep a secret
- Ask for details of the abuse - this is not your job and will be undertaken by the Police and Social Services
- Advise the suspected abuser of your suspicions or any information that has been passed to you
- Require the child to repeat the story unnecessarily.

IF IN DOUBT - REPORT IT





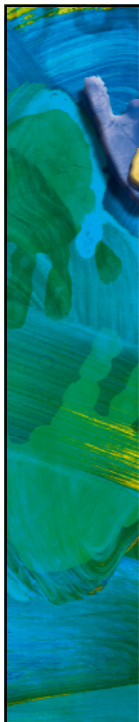
## 10. What happens next...?



If concerns are passed to the Council's Designated Officer and in turn to Social Services or the Police- what happens next?

The investigation of child abuse and neglect is governed by strict guidance that has been agreed by all the agencies concerned and can be found in the Eastern Area Child Protection Procedures<sup>4</sup>. In addition the PSNI and Social Services have agreed a Joint Protocol for the investigation of child abuse. This sets out in considerable detail the steps that will be taken in investigating complaints of child abuse and neglect.

It is important to remember however that referrals to the Police and Social Services may not involve all the steps outlined below- particularly where the abuse occurs outside of the family. In relation to abuse that occurs within a family context the Children (NI) Order and best practice requires that where problems can be dealt with through support and practical assistance that this is the approach that will be adopted by the agencies concerned. Sometimes however, where there are more serious concerns, it is necessary to follow some of the processes below.



## 10. What happens next...?




These may include:


- Information gathering from a number of sources such as health visitors and teachers and a check of previous records about a family or child.
- Joint decisions between the agencies about the information available, the content of the referral and how best to proceed in the light of available evidence.
- Advising or interviewing parents or carers and the child where appropriate.
- Making sure other children affected are safe and protected also.
- Conducting any medical examinations where this is deemed appropriate.
- Agreeing immediate next steps to protect a child.
- Conducting a multi-agency 'Case Conference' which will look at how to best protect a child by devising a 'child protection plan' and setting in place services and measures to protect the child and to support its family.



<sup>4</sup> Published by the EHSSB Linenhall Street Belfast.



## 11. Code of conduct


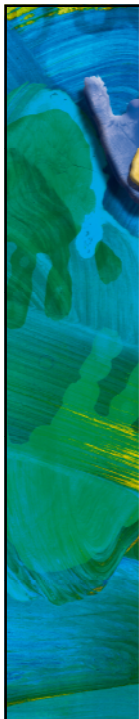


It is important for all Council employees to have a clear statement as to what is expected in any dealings with children.


**Underlying principles and philosophy**

Lisburn City Council recognises that children should be listened to, taken seriously and have a right to the safe use of Council premises and services. Council employees have both a moral and legal responsibility to protect children through following these procedures and adhering to this policy.

Children have a valuable role to play as customers and users of Council services. As an organisation the Council, through its policies, procedures and dealing with children, will involve them as much as possible in decisions that affect them. The Council will promote a culture in the organisation where children's participation is both encouraged and promoted.





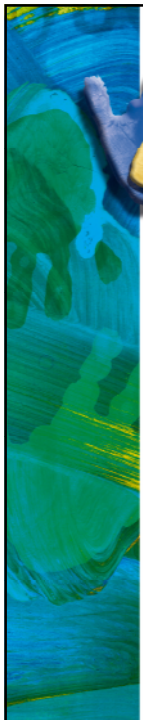
## 11. Code of conduct




**Some points of guidance**


- Employees and volunteers should not spend excessive amounts of time alone with children away from others. Any contact with an individual child should take place as openly as possible. If privacy is needed for any reason, doors should be left open and other employees informed where possible.
- Employees and volunteers are advised not to make unnecessary or inappropriate physical contact with children and young people. There may be occasions when physical contact is unavoidable such as providing comfort and reassurance to distressed children or physical support in contact sports such as gymnastics. In all cases physical contact should only take place with the consent of the child or the young person.
- Where it is necessary and unavoidable to take children alone in a vehicle on journeys this should be with the full consent of the parents and a more senior member of management.
- Employees and volunteers should not meet with children outside of the Council without the consent or knowledge of parents and line managers.








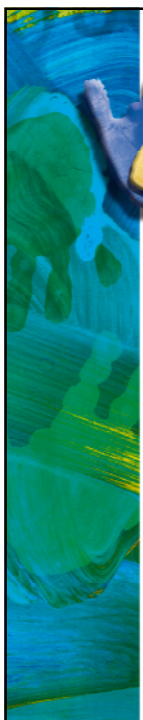
## 11. Code of conduct




**Employees should never-**

- Engage in sexually provocative or rough physical games including horse play.
- Allow children to use inappropriate language or behaviour unchallenged.
- Make sexually suggestive comments about, or to a child, even in fun.
- Let allegations a child makes go without being recorded and reported to the Child Protection Officer.
- Do things of a personal nature for children that they can do themselves.







## 12. Recruiting and vetting of Personnel, supervision and adult child ratios

**Recruitment Practices**

It is important that the Council follows its recruitment policy for employees where there is substantial unsupervised contact with children and young people.

All recruiting should be in liaison with the Human Resources Unit which will follow established procedures established by the DHSSPS Pre-Employment Consultancy Service [PECS] and outlined in 'Making the Right Choice'.<sup>5</sup>


**Supervision**

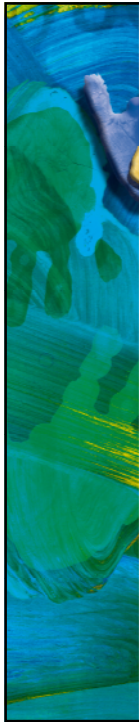
Employees who have substantial contact with children and young people should also have regular supervision from line managers where any child protection concerns should be raised and discussed.

**Adult/Child Ratios**

Services which require employees to supervise children should comply with requirements over the appropriate adult/child ratios and these situations should be subject to any specific legal requirements e.g. registration with the local Trust or in-house good practice guidance.

<sup>5</sup> Published by The Employment Consultancy Service DHSSPS





## Useful contact numbers

**Down Lisburn Trust**  
028 9266 5181

**Police Service for  
Northern Ireland  
Grosvenor Road Care Unit**  
028 9065 0222

**NSPCC Child  
Protection Helpline**  
0800 800 5000

**Emergency Duty Social  
Work Service [Eastern Board Area]**  
028 9056 5444  
[For evenings after  
5pm and weekends]

**Lisburn City Council**  
028 9250 9250

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