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# CHILD PROTECTION AND WELFARE POLICY

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COTTAGE AUTISM NETWORK  
CHY18103

**Why do we need a Policy?**

Children First National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children states that all organisations working in direct contact with children should have procedures and guidelines derived from and consistent with the current Children First National Guidance and Our Duty to Care: the Principles of Good Practice for the Protection of Children and Young People. This policy has been developed to comply with our responsibilities to safeguard the children in our care.

We in Cottage Autism Network Ltd. are committed to practice which protects children from harm and to full compliance with the Children First National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children and Our Duty to Care.

We recognise the rights of children to be protected from harm, treated with respect, listened to and to have their views taken into consideration in matters that affect them.

Cottage Autism Network Ltd has compiled this Child Welfare Policy (the "Policy") and it aims to set out guidelines and procedures to assist those working with children and young people within the organisation. It is the responsibility of all adults involved to actively promote best practice standards whilst being ever vigilant and aware of their responsibilities. This policy has been formulated in line with Children First – National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (2011).

**Who is the Policy aimed at?**

The Policy is aimed at all those working and engaged in activities in the name of Cottage Autism Network Ltd.

Cottage Autism Network Ltd. (CAN Ltd.) is committed to following the principles and practice guidelines contained in the Policy by:

- Recognising that the safety, protection and welfare of children and young people is of paramount importance;
- Obliging all relevant persons engaging directly or indirectly with children and young people to be Garda vetted;
- Providing appropriate training and education in the area of child welfare;
- Providing guidance and assistance to all who work directly or indirectly with children and young people;
- Appointing Designated Child Welfare Officers in CAN;
- Providing a clear pathway for the investigation of complaints and appropriate disciplinary Procedures;
- Providing codes of practice and templates for all members.

**What is contained within the Policy?**

In particular the Policy outlines;

- the various types of abuse which can arise;

- the recommended reporting procedures;
- guidance on confidentiality;
- the role of Designated Child Welfare Officers;
- principles of safe record keeping;
- the role of Statutory Authorities;
- safe recruitment and management practices;
- procedures for handling allegations and complaints relating to children and young people;

### **Who approves the Policy?**

The Policy is approved by the Board of the CAN Ltd. and reviewed on an annual basis.

### **What are the underlying principles of the Policy?**

The Policy follows the principles outlined in relevant guidelines and legislation provided by Statutory Authorities. The Policy is established on a number of core principles:

#### **(i) Safe Environment**

The safety and welfare of children is of paramount importance and children must feel safe in their surroundings. Those working with children should be suitable for their positions, i.e. all should be Garda vetted and should be aware of the principles of Children First (2011) and the requirements of the Policy.

#### **(ii) Integrity and Respect**

Adults interacting with children and young people should do so with integrity and respect.

#### **(iii) Equality**

All children should be treated in an equitable and fair manner regardless of age, ability, gender, religious, social, or ethnic background or political persuasion.

## **CHILD WELFARE POLICY**

Child Abuse can be categorised into four main types: neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse. Other forms of abuse include bullying. 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 have his or her needs met in terms of necessary supervision and safety.
- a child whose height or weight is significantly below average may be deprived of adequate nutrition.
- a child who consistently misses school may be 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 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 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;
- 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, modelling 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.

### **Other forms of 'Abuse'**

#### **Bullying**

- Anyone can be the target of bullying but no one deserves to be the victim of bullying. Everyone has the right to be treated with respect. Bullying can take place anywhere, but is more likely to take place where there is inadequate supervision. Examples of Bullying include:
  - physical: hitting, kicking and theft;
  - verbal: name calling, constant teasing, sarcasm, racist or homophobic taunts, threats and gestures;
  - emotional: tormenting, cyber, ridiculing, humiliating and ignoring;
  - sexual: unwanted physical contact or sexually abusive comments.

#### **Cyber, text and social media bullying**

Cyber bullying can involve unwanted text messages, phone video recordings or web posts being used to threaten abuse or harm someone. It is similar to physical or verbal bullying, but it uses technology instead. Cyber bullying, like all bullying, is difficult for the victim. It can be hard to prove and difficult to get the courage to report it. Text bullying or harassment can be texts that frighten, insult, threaten or make the recipient feel uncomfortable. Email, social networks like Facebook/Twitter and phone calls can be used to harass in the same way.

### **Recognising Child Abuse**

Child abuse can often be difficult to identify and may be present in many forms, therefore it is necessary to follow some general guidelines.

There are commonly three stages in the identification of child abuse:

1. Considering the possibility;
2. Looking out for signs of abuse;
3. Recording of information.

#### **Stage 1: Considering 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.

### **Stage 2: Looking out for signs of abuse**

Signs of 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 likely to be more indicative of abuse. Children who are being abused may hint that they are being harmed and sometimes make direct disclosures. Disclosures should be believed.

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

- Disclosure of abuse and neglect by a child or young person;
- Age-inappropriate or abnormal sexual play, language or knowledge;
- Specific injuries or patterns of injuries;
- Absconding from home or a care situation;
- Self harm
- Attempted suicide;
- Underage pregnancy or sexually transmitted disease;
- Signs in one or more categories at the same time may together indicate a pattern of abuse.

### **Stage 3: Recording and reporting of information**

If abuse is suspected, it is important to establish the grounds for concern by obtaining as much detailed information as possible. Observations should be accurately recorded and should include dates, times, names, locations, context and any other information that may be relevant. Please refer to the reporting procedures section of the Policy for more information.

Points to remember;

- The severity of a sign does not necessarily equate with the severity of the abuse. Severe and potentially fatal injuries are not always visible. Emotional and/or psychological abuse tends to be cumulative and effects may only be observable in the longer term.
- Neglect is as potentially fatal as physical abuse. It can cause delayed physical, psychological and emotional development, chronic ill-health and significant long-term damage. It may also precede, or co-exist with other forms of abuse and must be acted upon.
- Child abuse is not restricted to any socio-economic group, gender or culture. All signs must be considered in the wider social and family context.
- Challenging behaviour by a child or young person should not render them liable to abuse. Children in certain circumstances may present management problems. This should not leave them vulnerable to harsh disciplinary measures or neglect of care.
- It is sometimes difficult to distinguish between indicators of child abuse and other adversities suffered by children and families. The advice of professionals should always be sought.

Distinguishing between 'Child abuse' and 'Poor Practice'

Concerns identified as child abuse will fall within the following categories:

1. Physical Abuse
2. Neglect
3. Sexual Abuse
4. Emotional Abuse
5. Bullying

The role of the CAN Ltd. is to report any allegations of abuse to the Statutory Authorities.

### **Designated Liaison Officers**

CAN Ltd shall appoint a Designated Child Welfare Officer.

The Designated Child Welfare Officer and/or Liaison Officer shall

- Be responsible for all matters pertaining to the protection and welfare of children
- Be informed and knowledgeable about child protection and welfare including the provisions of the Policy and undertake any training considered necessary to keep themselves updated on new developments.

The role includes:

- Promoting best practice and procedures within the organisation.
- Receiving reports and being familiar with and able to carry out reporting procedures.
- Communicating with parents and/or authorities as appropriate.
- Assisting with the ongoing development and implementation of the organisation's child protection training needs.
- Being aware of local contacts and services in relation to child protection, i.e. principal and duty social workers and their contacts.
- Informing Statutory Authorities of relevant concerns about individual children.
- Reporting poor practice to the Board having ensured that any concerns regarding child protection issues have been reported to the relevant statutory authority.
- Advising Board members and volunteers on issues of confidentiality, record keeping and data protection.

### **Criminal Record Checks / Garda Vetting**

Garda vetting is a process which involves an individual giving consent for An Garda Síochána to furnish CAN Ltd. with a statement that there are no convictions recorded in the Republic of Ireland or elsewhere or a statement of all convictions and / or prosecutions, successful or not, pending or completed in the State or elsewhere as the case may be.

Garda vetting should be completed prior to the commencement of any position for those who will be working with children and/or vulnerable persons in any capacity. Garda vetting is not a substitute for safe recruitment but provides another element in determining a person's suitability to work with children.

### **CAN Ltd. Vetting Obligations**

- a) All those engaging with persons under the age of 18 and vulnerable persons shall be Garda Vetted.
- b) All Designated Child Welfare Officers/ Designated Child Welfare Liaison Officers
- c) Any other person working or volunteering with children in any capacity on behalf of the CAN Ltd. shall be Garda Vetted or provide evidence of Garda vetting approval from their own organisation. A copy of this evidence shall be retained by CAN Ltd.

Applications for vetting may be made by contacting the Designated Child Welfare Officer and/or THE designated member of the Board of Director's.

All persons shall complete their vetting application in good faith and shall ensure all information provided is accurate, complete and up to date.

All matters disclosed as part of the Garda vetting application shall remain confidential to CAN Ltd. authorised personnel, the applicant and Statutory Authorities. However, approvals and rejections shall be notified to all relevant personnel in accordance with the Policy.

#### **Step 1 – No disclosures**

Should the Garda vetting form disclose no convictions recorded against an individual, correspondence shall be sent to the applicant advising them of this.

#### **Step 2 - Disclosures**

In some instances disclosure of convictions and/or other information will be provided to the Designated Child Welfare Officer of the CAN Ltd. by the Gardaí. In many cases these disclosures may not prevent an individual from working with children.

Applicants will be given an opportunity to comment on any disclosures before any decision is made by the Board Welfare Committee to ensure fairness and transparency at all times. In some cases it may be necessary to meet and interview the applicant before a decision is made. Applicants will then be advised of the decision which has been made in respect of any vetting disclosures.

### **Safe Recruitment Practices**

#### **CAN Ltd. Recruitment of Volunteers/ Facilitators/Other Personnel**

CAN Ltd. shall ensure that all persons working directly with children are vetted and have received the relevant training. The Designated Child Welfare Officers shall ensure that independent contractors, volunteers and external personnel are aware of and adopt best practice at all times.

The following principles shall be adopted by the CAN Ltd. in recruitment for positions involving work with children;

- Roles shall provide a clear description to ensure independent contractors and volunteers understand the extent and nature of their role.

- Advertisements for a role involving work with children shall stipulate that Garda vetting shall be required.
- Persons applying for a role or for an event shall complete an application form which shall include a section allowing the individual to self declare any convictions.
- At least two written references, one of which should include someone who can comment on their previous work with children, shall be requested and shall be contacted to confirm.
- Those roles shall involve an interview or meeting with at least two representatives of the organisation face to face or otherwise.
- All offer of work shall be dependent on Garda vetting and persons will be advised of the process pending record checks being completed.

### **CAN Ltd. Induction and Training**

The recruitment and selection process for those engaged by CAN Ltd. shall be followed up with relevant training for those working with children. In particular new volunteers, independent contractors and those engaged to work with children should be;

- Brought through the policy and made aware that child abuse can occur.
- Made aware of how to recognise abuse.
- Made aware of the reporting procedures.
- Made aware of the importance of listening to children and taking their concerns seriously.
- Complete a basic awareness training course.

### **Conduct and Behaviour towards Children**

All adults involved in CAN Ltd. have an important role to play in promoting good practice. Their first priority has to be the children's welfare, safety and enjoyment of the game. Adults should be aware of the emotional, physical and personal needs of children and should ensure that children are treated with integrity and respect. The trust implicit in adult child relationships places a duty of care on all adults, voluntary or professional to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of the child while engaged in activities organised by CAN Ltd.

In particular all adult-child relationships should be:

- open, positive and encouraging;
- defined by a mutually agreed set of goals and commitments;
- respectful of the creativity and autonomy of children;
- carried out in a context where children are protected and where their rights are promoted;
- free from any abuse or any threat of such abuse;
- respectful of the needs and developmental stage of the child;
- aimed at the promotion of enjoyment and individual progress;

### **General Supervision of Children**

It is important to create a safe and enjoyable environment. Children need to be supervised at all times as the likelihood of accidents happening increases when adequate supervision is not in place.

In particular the following should be adhered to;

- Ensure adequate Adult: Child ratios.
- There should be at least one adult of each gender with mixed parties.
- Children should be supervised at all times.
- Adults should avoid being left alone with children.
- If a child suffers an injury or accident the parents/guardians should be informed and necessary reports completed.
- Activities being undertaken should be suitable for the ability, age, and experience of the participants.
- Equipment and facilities should meet the highest possible standards and be appropriate to the maturity of the participants.
- Where protective equipment is deemed necessary it should be used.
- First Aid should be available.

### **Accidents/Incidents**

Any accidents or incidents involving children should be reported in full to the Designated Child Welfare Officer by completion of the appropriate report in Appendix 3 and/or Appendix 4.

If a child is referred for medical treatment contact should immediately be made with the child's parent/ guardian and the relevant consent form located for medical treatment. The child should be accompanied by the person in charge of the child, if for any reason enquiries should be made regarding any diagnosis or treatment. An incident report form should be completed in all cases whether medical treatment is required or not. In all cases insurers should be notified of the incident and the report form submitted for their records.

### **Insurance**

Appropriate Insurance should be in place to cover organised activities and programmes undertaken with children.

### **Complaints regarding the Policy**

Should any person wish to make a complaint regarding the application of the Policy by CAN Ltd. the complaint should be made in writing and addressed to the Chairperson. All relevant information should be included regarding the subject of the complaint. On receipt, the complaint shall be reviewed and a response shall be issued as soon as possible.

### **Child Welfare Complaints**

Complaints relating to child welfare matters should be reported in accordance with the Reporting Procedure as outlined above.

**Confidentiality**

All matters relating to the welfare and protection of children shall be managed in accordance with the Policy and the following principles shall be adhered to;

- a) All complaints, concerns and allegations shall be handled in the best interests of the child concerned and in a careful and sensitive manner. It is a matter for the Designated Child Welfare Officers to determine the relevant persons to be advised in such circumstances. No undertakings regarding secrecy shall be given to any party.
- b) All information regarding concerns relating to child protection and welfare shall be shared on 'a need to know' basis in the interests of the child. This shall not be deemed a breach of confidentiality.
- c) The exchange of information with the Statutory Authorities for ensuring the protection of children is not a breach of confidentiality.
- d) Any information gathered for one purpose will not be used for any another purpose without consultation with the persons who provided that information.
- e) All breaches of confidentiality shall be considered extremely serious and dealt with accordingly.

**Record Keeping**

All information gathered by CAN Ltd. shall be stored in a secure location with access only by Designated Child Welfare Officers, Statutory Authorities and where necessary Authorised Signatories.

All records shall be maintained in an accurate manner so as to ensure the protection of children and all information shall be recorded.

Records shall be presented so that clear information may be accessed by the Statutory Authorities if necessary.

**Data Protection**

CAN Ltd. holds all information in accordance with data protection legislation. Information shall not be passed to third parties unless by consent or deemed necessary for the protection and welfare of children or otherwise in line with the Policy.

**Appendix 1 - Parent/Guardian Medical Consent Form**

Parent/Guardian Medical Consent Form

Name of Child: .....

Address:

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Date of Birth: .....

Parent/Guardian Contact Tel. Number: .....

Parent/Guardian Alternative Tel. Number: .....

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Medical Information:

Any specific medical requirements?

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Allergies

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Medications

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In the event of a medical emergency, I/We authorise CAN Ltd's nominated  
Event Leader to consent to emergency medical treatment as may be deemed necessary on  
appropriate professional medical advice.

Signed (Parent/Guardian): .....

Please print name: .....

Date: .....

**Appendix 2 - Accident Report Form**

Accident Report Form (Please use block capitals or type this form)

Name of person completing this Form:

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Title/Role: .....

Address: .....

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Tel: (H) ..... (Mobile) .....

Accident Details (Please give details of any witnesses:)

Date & Time of Incident: .....

Venue: .....

Full description of accident: PLEASE WRITE IN BLOCK CAPITALS

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Name of injured person: .....

Details of injuries:

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How did the accident occur?

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Any further comments?

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Witness/Witnesses

Please List Names and Contact details of all Witness/es (Statements should be sought from witnesses as soon as is practical while the accident is still fresh in their minds):

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Signature: .....

Date: .....

**Appendix 3 - Incident Report Form**

Activity/ Event.....

Incident Report Form (Please use block capitals or type this form)

Name of person completing this Form:

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Title/Role: .....

Address: .....

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Tel: (H) ..... (Mobile) .....

Incident Details (Please give details of any witnesses:)

Date & Time of Incident: .....

Venue: .....

Full description of incident: PLEASE WRITE IN BLOCK CAPITALS

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Any further comments?

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Witness/Witnesses

Please List Names and Contact details of all Witness/es (Statements should be sought from witnesses as soon as is practical while the incident is still fresh in their minds):

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Signature: .....

Date: .....

### Application Form for Activity Facilitators

Cottage Autism Network Company Limited by Guarantee (CAN Ltd.) is a registered charity that offers families/children impacted by Autism the opportunity to participate in a range of activities.

We are committed to ensuring that all activities are organised and facilitated to the highest standards possible.

If you feel that you would like to be involved in creating new experiences/ learning opportunities for the young people that we work with, then please complete the following information and return to:

Volunteer Child Welfare Officer(s)

CAN Board of Directors

#### Personal Details

<b>Name:</b>
<b>Address:</b>
<b>Contact Number:</b>
<b>Email:</b>

#### Details of Experience/ Qualifications

<b>Please outline your experience and / qualifications relevant to the work that you are proposing to do with CAN Ltd.</b>
<b>Please list any organisations that you are affiliated with / or a member of:</b>

