



CHILD AND VULNERABLE ADULT SAFEGUARDING POLICY

This document sets out the Viatores Christi's Child Safeguarding Policy and Procedures. It is for all members and staff and is available also to all supporters. The Policy and Procedures are also available to others outside Viatores Christi who want to know how Viatores Christi works in relation to child safeguarding.

Viatores Christi does not work *directly* with children. We do however, occasionally have indirect contact through our school, parish and public promotion work. We have undertaken to implement this policy in relation to any member (including staff) working overseas or here at home who come into contact with children or vulnerable adults, in the course of their work. We do not seek to impose our policy verbatim on the partner agencies but we expect them to have in place and actively to implement a child safeguarding policy consistent with our own and with the law of the country in which they work. The Policy applies to all members and staff as part of their obligations to Viatores Christi.

Viatores Christi has become aware of the need to make explicit and visible our determination that our work and activities must promote the safety and security of children, young people and vulnerable adults.

Child Safeguarding Policy: Core Statements

Viatores Christi and all its staff and members, undertake to do all in our power to create a safe environment for children, young people and vulnerable adults and to prevent their physical, sexual or emotional abuse. Viatores Christi is committed to acting at all times in the best interests of children and vulnerable adults, seeing these interests as paramount. We will do this by:

- a).- Setting in place, implementing and regularly monitoring and reviewing procedures to protect children young people and vulnerable adults. These procedures cover Viatores Christi's recruitment practice, staff training, and management responsibilities.
- b). - Adopting a **code of behaviour** for all staff and members.
- c). - Ensuring that any allegations of abuse about a staff member, volunteer (member) working overseas or a member here at home (carrying out VC work) are promptly and properly dealt with, victims supported and perpetrators held to account. All allegations of abuse of a child will be reported to the statutory bodies.
- d). - Ensuring that Viatores Christi works in close liaison with Church child safeguarding structures at all levels and with statutory agencies when necessary so that risk to children and vulnerable adults is minimised.
- e). - Aiming to be an example of best practice in the prevention of child abuse and in responding to it.

For the purposes of this policy, Viatores Christi regards children and young people as those who are under the age of 18. The Viatores Christi's policy applies to all children and vulnerable adults with whom Viatores Christi has contact regardless of gender, religion or ethnicity.

Viatores Christi recognises that vulnerable adults may also be in need of particular safeguarding, and recognises that the needs and concerns of this group may be different from those of children. Viatores Christi will extend this policy to include specific commitments relevant to this group.

Viatores Christi intends that its child Safeguarding procedures will ensure a safe and protected environment for vulnerable adults in regard to Viatores Christi's work and activities.

Viatores Christi intends that our commitment to the safeguarding of children in our international work should reflect the same values and principles that underpin our organisational policy commitments at home.

Viatores Christi's context and work: principles of child safeguarding

Viatores Christi has an organisational office base in Dublin. Indirectly we come into contact with children. We work through schools, churches and other organisations to organise events, activities for fundraising and/or campaign purposes, in which children may be involved alongside Viatores Christi staff and members.

Viatores Christi believes that all staff and members need to be aware of our policy and commitments in relation to child safeguarding even though the majority of our staff and many members may never have any unaccompanied contact with children, young people or vulnerable adults through their work.

Definition of Abuse

Abuse occurs when adults or other children hurt children or young people under the age of 18 or vulnerable adults, either physically or in some other way. In the majority of cases, the abuser is someone the child or young person knows well, such as a parent, friend or relative. There are four main kinds of abuse:

Physical abuse is actual or likely physical injury to a child or vulnerable adult, such as hitting, kicking or shaking, where there is definite knowledge, or reasonable suspicion, that the injury was inflicted or knowingly not prevented.

Emotional abuse is harm done by persistent or severe emotional ill-treatment or rejection, such as degrading punishments, threats, not giving care and affection and bullying, resulting in adverse effects on the behaviour and emotional development of a child or young person or vulnerable adult.

Neglect occurs when basic needs such as food, warmth and medical care are not met, or when there is failure to protect a child or vulnerable adult from exposure to any kind of danger, resulting in serious damage to their health or development.

Sexual abuse occurs if a child, young person or vulnerable adult is used for the sexual gratification of the adult – whether or not they are pressured or forced. Sexual abuse includes incest, rape and fondling. It may also include non-contact activities such as showing pornography or internet based activity. Sexual abuse may involve siblings or other family members, or persons outside the family.

Abuse may be current or recent, or in some cases, historical, i.e. an adult may disclose sexual abuse that took place when he/she was a child. Abuse may be carried out by adult men or women, or by siblings or other young people.

There are some groups of children and young people who are particularly vulnerable; children with disabilities are among these, and children from ethnic minority communities who may be particularly vulnerable if their communities suffer from discrimination. Children who are refugees or asylum seeking, and children living in residential care are also among these groups. Abuse may also take place in families in which there is alcohol or drug abuse, domestic violence or mental health problems.

Although the statutory protection defines children and young people as those under the age of 18, care should also be taken of adults who are vulnerable through disability or other factors.

The Viatores Christi's Child Safeguarding Procedures

Recruitment of Staff and Members

- If applicable, candidates will be asked to describe their previous experience of working with children, young people or vulnerable adults and to provide a referee who can comment on their work in this context.
- Job offers made in relation to assignments will be subject to satisfactory verification of qualifications and the candidate's CV.
- Candidates (whether staff members or volunteers) will sign a declaration stating that there is no reason why they might be deemed unsuitable for working with children or vulnerable adults and being in their company.
- Garda vetting will be undertaken for all members taking up an assignment with Viatores Christi.

Ensuring Awareness and Prevention

Viatores Christi's commitment to child safeguarding will be stated in appropriate corporate documents and on our website. Viatores Christi will make its policy and procedures available to anyone who requests them.

Viatores Christi will ensure that all staff and members are aware of the Child Safeguarding Policy and have access to a copy. This will also form part of our training programme for prospective members.

Viatores Christi expects all staff and members to follow the code of behaviour (see pages eight and nine). Viatores Christi staff and members should make every effort to avoid situations in which they are lone adults working with one or more children. If urgent or practical circumstances result in such a situation occurring, staff and members should resolve it as soon as possible and note it to their managers. In any Viatores Christi activity involving children or vulnerable adults, their parents, teachers or other relevant responsible adults should be present.

All managers have the responsibility for ensuring that the staff they manage are aware of the Policy and for reminding them of its provisions when the need arises.

Any Viatores Christi staff or member planning events should ensure that child Safeguarding issues are considered as part of the risk analysis and/or health and safety arrangements.

In planning or coordinating multi-agency or coalition or network organised events and activities, Viatores Christi will ensure that child Safeguarding considerations have been taken into account if relevant.

Dealing with Disclosures and Suspicion

Viatores Christi recognises that disclosures (i.e. when a specific allegation of abuse is made against a named individual) and suspicion (i.e. when concern is expressed about abuse that may have taken place or be in prospect) should always be reported to the statutory authorities who have sole responsibility for investigating complaints. While the matter is being investigated by the statutory authorities the Viatores Christi member or volunteer may be asked to step aside from the activities of the organisation. Any information offered in confidence should be received on the basis that it will be shared with relevant people in authority. Parents or carers will also be informed if appropriate. Apart from this, careful confidentiality will be observed.

If a child, young person or vulnerable adult tells you they are being, or have been, abused:

- Listen to and accept what they are saying.
- Do not investigate, and do not inform, question or confront the alleged abuser.
- Take the alleged abuse seriously.
- Reassure the child, young person or vulnerable adult that they have done the right thing by telling you.
- Let them know you need to tell someone else. Do not promise total confidentiality.
- Let the child, young person or vulnerable adult speak freely but do not press for information.
- Let the child, young person or vulnerable adult know what you are going to do next and that you will let them know what happens.
- Record carefully (on the form below) what you have heard whilst it is still fresh in your mind. Include the date and time of your conversation and any incident disclosed.
- If any staff or member suspects abuse, or if a child, young person or vulnerable adult makes a disclosure, or if a person external to Viatores Christi reports a suspicion or allegation relating to Viatores Christi staff, members or activities, the following steps should be taken:
 - Avoid any delay.
 - Report this to the person designated as the Child Safeguarding Officer
 - If the suspicion or allegation relates to activities or persons working in a school or parish or diocesan setting, ensure that the relevant Child Safeguarding Officer or other appropriate authority is also informed.
 - The Child Safeguarding designated officer will ensure a report is made and given to the appropriate Social Services Department (of the HSE, here in Ireland) and Police Station. However, if urgent action is required to protect children this should be done immediately.
 - No staff or other member will prejudice their own standing or position within Viatores Christi by responsibly reporting potential or suspected child abuse.

Viatores Christi's Responsibilities and How We Will Act

If a member of staff is the subject of an allegation of child abuse, that staff member will be asked to take leave from their duties on full pay until an investigation has been completed. If a Viatores Christi member (on assignment, either overseas or on home mission or involved in Viatores Christi here at home) is the subject of an allegation of child abuse, that member will be asked to withdraw from their work until an investigation has been completed. In all cases, it should be made clear that suspension does not imply guilt but rather protects all parties whilst an investigation is undertaken.

If a disclosure of abuse takes place in which the alleged abuser is staff or a member of Viatores Christi, or the incident has taken place on Viatores Christi premises or in connection with Viatores Christi activities, Viatores Christi will see that the statutory authorities are informed, in conjunction with our overseas partner, should this occur overseas.

If an allegation of child abuse is made involving Viatores Christi staff or a member, this allegation, together with a record of the investigation undertaken and the outcome, will be recorded in their personnel files. Confidentiality regarding these records will be scrupulously maintained and information will only be released to those in positions of authority.

If a member of Viatores Christi staff or anyone closely associated with Viatores Christi work in some recognisable capacity is found to have committed acts in relation to children which are criminal or which contravene in a serious way the principles and standards set out in this policy, Viatores Christi will take disciplinary action and/or any other action which may be appropriate to the circumstances. If members are found to have committed such acts, the membership relationship will be ended.

Reviewing this policy and reporting to Viatores Christi's Council.

Viatores Christi will ensure that this policy is reviewed every two years and that an annual report on any incidents relating to child safeguarding is made to Council.

Code of Behaviour

There are some simple rules and procedures that will minimise the risk of an incident occurring or being alleged. Most of these are common sense and will already be followed, but it is important that staff and members specifically check that they are being implemented in any event which involves children, young people or vulnerable adults.

- Treat everyone with respect, recognising their right to personal privacy.
- Be aware of situations which may present risks and manage these.
- Plan and organise the event so that risks are minimised.
- Recognise that caution is required in all one-to-one situations.
- If it is a residential event, ensure that adults and children have separate sleeping accommodation.
- Provide access for children, young people and vulnerable adults to talk to others about any concerns they have.
- Encourage young people and adults to feel comfortable enough to point out attitudes and behaviour they do not like.
- Remember that someone else may misinterpret your actions, no matter how well intentioned.
- Do not spend time alone with children – plan activities so that more than one adult is present or, at least, other people are within sight and hearing.
- Do not take children alone in a car, even for short journeys, unless this is unavoidable for safety reasons. If this is unavoidable, make sure an adult carer or another member of staff is aware it is happening.
- Avoid inappropriate physical or verbal contact with others.
- Avoid being drawn in to inappropriate attention-seeking behaviour, such as tantrums or crushes
- Avoid showing favouritism to any individual.
- Never make suggestive remarks or gestures, even in fun.
- Do not trivialise or exaggerate child abuse issues.
- Do not rely on just your good name to protect you.
- Do not believe "It could never happen to me"