

Diocese of Ossory - Whistle-Blowing Guidelines

What is whistle blowing:

Whistle blowing is a term used to describe the action of someone who reveals/discloses wrongdoing within an organization to the public or to those in positions of authority. It enables them to report concerns in a way that will not be seen as disloyal to their settings and colleagues. All staff and volunteers within the context of the Diocese of Ossory must acknowledge their individual responsibility to bring matters of concern to the attention of their parish priest. Although this can be difficult to do, it is particularly important where the welfare of children may be at risk.

You may be the first to recognise that something is wrong, but you may not feel able to express your concerns out of a feeling that this would be disloyal to colleagues, or you may fear harassment or victimisation. These feelings, however natural, **must never result in a child or young person continuing to be unnecessarily at risk**. Remember, it is often the most vulnerable children or young people who are targeted. These children need an advocate to safeguard their welfare.

Don't think, 'what if I'm wrong?' Think, 'what if I'm right!'

Principles:

- The Diocese of Ossory is committed to the highest possible standards of openness and accountability.
- Employees and volunteers are expected and encouraged to voice any concerns about activities involving children and young people to the appropriate person i.e. activity leader, parish safeguarding representative, parish priest or to the diocesan designated person.
- All people have the right to raise concerns about perceived unacceptable practice or behaviour.
- All concerns will be treated as far as possible in the strictest confidence and every effort will be made not to reveal the identity of the complainant, if requested. However, if the concerns require further action, the complainant may at some future date have to act as a witness and/or provide evidence.
- It is recognized that whistle blowing can be difficult and stressful. Advice and support will be made available in the first instance by the designated liaison person or by the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland. (See Diocesan Safeguarding Children Contact Details).
- No action will be taken against the complainant if the concern proves to be unfounded and was raised in good faith. This is in line with the Protection for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act 1998.
- Malicious allegations will also be treated in line with the Protection for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act 1998.

What stops people from whistle blowing:

- Fear of starting a chain of events which spirals out of control.
- Disrupting the work or project.
- Fear of getting it wrong.
- Fear of repercussions or damaging carers.
- Fear of not being believed.

What the law says:

There is legislation related to whistle blowing; and this applies to employees of Church bodies, as well as to agency workers in certain circumstances; to contractors and consultants engaged on contract by the Church body; and to trainees, temporary workers and those on work experience with the Church body. It does not apply to volunteers.

The legislation is the *Protected Disclosures Act 2014*, a guide to which can be accessed electronically at [Easy Guide to Protected Disclosures Act 2014](#)

How to raise a concern:

If the issue appears to be of a relatively minor and straightforward nature and clearly does not involve a formal child protection investigation, it may be dealt with at local level. It is important to:

- Voice your concerns, suspicions or uneasiness as soon as you feel you can. The earlier a concern is expressed, the easier and sooner action can be taken.
- Try to pinpoint exactly what practice is concerning you and why.
- Approach the activity leader, parish safeguarding representative, (who will give you a copy of the General Complaints Form SG-08), parish priest or diocesan designated liaison person as appropriate.
- Make sure you get a satisfactory response – don't let matters rest.
- Put your concerns in writing, using the General Complaints Form SG-08, which outlines the concerns and issues, dates etc.

What happens next:

- You should be given information on the nature and progress of any enquiries within ten days of submitting the General Complaints Form.
- You are not expected to prove the truth of an allegation but will need to demonstrate sufficient grounds for the concern.
- No action will be taken against you if the concern proves to be unfounded and was raised in good faith.
- You are entitled to be protected from harassment or victimization following a complaint.

Self-reporting:

- There may be occasions where a member of staff, paid or volunteer has a personal difficulty, perhaps a physical or mental health problem, which they know to be impinging on their professional competence. That person has a responsibility to discuss such a situation with their group leader or parish priest so that professional and personal support can be offered.
- Whilst such reporting will remain confidential in most instances, this cannot be guaranteed where personal difficulties raise concerns about the welfare or safety of children.

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