Policy History

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1. Purpose

The objective of this document is to outline Barretstown’s Key Child Welfare Policies and Procedures, to promote child safeguarding and outline our safe practices in our work with children and families. The policy and procedures take into consideration that Barretstown provides both family and child/teen only camps and must support safe practices in both these arenas.

2. Scope

Our child welfare policy is based on the legal framework provided primarily by the Child Care Act 1991, the Children Act 2001, and the Children First Act 2015. We have also used Children First; National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017. This has been the national guidance for social workers, professionals, organisations, and individuals to help keep children safe and protected from harm.

3. Policy Statement

3.1 Vision, Mission Statement & Therapeutic Recreation

Vision

We believe that every child with serious illness should enjoy their childhood.

Mission

To rebuild the lives of children affected by serious illness, and their families, through a life changing Therapeutic Recreation programme in a safe, fun and supportive environment.

What is Therapeutic Recreation?

Barretstown’s Therapeutic Recreation programme is designed to engage and empower each child, enhance self-esteem, confidence, hope, friendship, trust, social skills and independence in an atmosphere of emotional, physical and medical security. In our Therapeutic Recreation programme, each child is brought through a journey commencing with an activity where they choose the level of challenge they are comfortable with, through guidance and support of the
staff team, success is achieved and later in the day’s routine this success is reflected upon which leads to the individual discovery that you can achieve beyond your perceived limitations.

These programmes are informed by several theoretical frameworks and disciplines, including recreational therapy, occupational therapy, psychology, experiential education, and adventure-based counselling. Recreational experiences focus on exploring new territory, enhancing self-awareness, and learning in various forms. The benefits tend to be long-term, often permanent, and lead to positive changes in perception, attitudes, self-esteem, and confidence.

3.2 Values Statement
Barretstown is guided by its core values in everything it does, in the programmes and services it offers, and in its relationships with children and families, donors, board, clinics, professionals, other camping programmes, childcare organisations and the wider community. The welfare of the child is the first and paramount consideration and underpins each of our core values.

Professionalism
We believe in always achieving professional excellence and working to continually improve the quality of our experience for children and their families.

Leadership
We believe in working together to bring about positive change in caring for children affected by serious illness and achieve this by being flexible to changing environments and in implementing responses in a dynamic and progressive manner.

Caring
We believe our primary concern is the care of children and their families. We are always responsive to their needs and expectations and always engage in open and honest dialogue.

Fun
We believe that fun should be an integral part of what we do. Fun and laughter are key ingredients in improving the lives of those affected by serious childhood illness.

3.3 Philosophy of Care
Barretstown’s philosophy of care is predicated on the belief that Therapeutic Recreation engages children socially, emotionally, and physically, challenges them to grow beyond perceived limits, thus enhancing self-esteem, confidence, trust and friendship.

Fundamentally, childcare is based on enhancing and focusing on the qualitative presence of adults to young people which enables the child safely and positively to experience relationships, respect, dignity, uniqueness, individuality, co-operation, sensitivity, independence, self-respect, honesty. The growth to mature living and decision-making ability, being cared for and comforted, contributing to the subtle and complex network of growth experiences that are a life-long process.

4.1 Child Protection Policy Statement
Barretstown recognises that the welfare of the children and young people under its care is the first and paramount consideration and, as such, is fully committed to protecting their welfare. It recognises its responsibility to take all reasonable steps to promote safe practice and to protect children from harm, abuse, and exploitation. In law a child is defined as someone under the age of 18 years, who is not or has never been married (Child Care Act 1991, the Children Act 2001.) Barretstown’s Childcare Policies & Procedures are designed to protect children and young people from neglect, physical, sexual, and emotional harm, or abuse.

This document through the sections outlined below endeavours to provide clear policies, procedures, and guidelines to support the welfare of children and young people through:

- Safeguarding against Abuse (this Section) – this section outlines our policies and practices with regard to the recruitment of staff and volunteers, how we provide for appropriate training and induction to our programme, how campers are referred and how consent is given by parents with regard to aspects of participation.

- Codes of Behaviour (Section 3) – outlining the appropriate behaviours between staff/volunteers & Children and between staff/volunteers & parents.

- Policies & Procedures - Child Abuse (Section 4) – outlining our specific reporting procedure and staff allegations procedure.

4.2 Children’s Rights
Barretstown is committed to protecting and promoting children’s rights through:

- Creating an environment, in which children are valued, encouraged, and affirmed, have their rights respected and are treated as individuals.

- Accepting that the welfare of the child is the most important consideration in providing our Therapeutic Recreation programme to children.

- Adopting our child welfare policy and associated practices, policies, and guidelines to keep children as safe as possible.

- Adopting the safest possible practices to minimize the possibility of harm or accidents happening to children and protect staff from the necessity to take risks and leave themselves open to accusations of abuse or neglect.

- Consistently applying our clearly defined methods of recruiting staff and volunteers.

- Ensuring that all staff and volunteers are trained and understand their responsibility to adhere to and implement Barretstown’s Childcare Policies & Procedures.

- Ensuring that children and young people are empowered to express their ideas and views on a wide range of issues and have access to Barretstown’s complaints procedure.

- Ensuring that parents/guardians have access to our policies and understand our commitment to safeguard children whilst attending our family and child/teen camps.

- Respecting and valuing the diversity of children and young people and treating all in an equitable and fair manner.

- Working closely with our Childcare Advisory Committee in all areas of our work with Children.

4.3 Staff/Volunteer Recruitment Policy
Barretstown prides itself on ensuring that the best person is chosen for the job and that this is achieved in a fair and equitable manner. To ensure that best practice is followed for the recruitment of all staff and volunteers our Recruitment and Selection policy has been devised to guide and inform recruitment staff in this process.

This policy is contained in Appendix 1.

It is important to mention that two critical elements of this policy include obtaining references both written and verbal and obtaining a Background Police Check/ International Police Check from appropriate Law Enforcement Agency /Garda check for all staff and volunteers who apply for a position at Barretstown.

4.4 Staff/Volunteer Induction & Training
As contained in our Recruitment and Selection policy (Appendix 1) we aim to fully equip the staff/volunteer with the necessary skills and knowledge to perform their role in a positive way through a thorough induction and training programme. This programme places emphasis on promoting good childcare practices including the Child Protection Policy in advance of training, working through the policy with staff/volunteers with an element of role play to ensure full understanding of the policy. Following training staff/volunteers acknowledge their understanding of the Child Protection Policy by signing that all elements of the policy were understood.

Staff working with the children have daily group meetings where programme of work, issues and concerns are raised and discussed. Each staff member has a line manager who during camp sessions will hold regular check in meetings. External support is provided by a Family & Relationship Counselor to ensure that the issues raised through working with children and families affected by serious illness are given an opportunity to discuss and work through the feelings this will evoke.

The Designated Liaison Person participates in DLP Training from Tusla, The Child and Family Agency. All camp staff complete the Tusla e-learning programme, ‘Introduction to Children First’ available online through www.tusla.ie before arriving to camp for staff training. During Volunteer orientation, one of the DLP’s will facilitate a session on child safeguarding and introduce themselves as a DLP onsite. They will also highlight other DLP’s onsite and any mandated person available that session.

4.5 Child Referral Procedure
All children who participate in the Barretstown programme are either nominated through the hospital they attend by a member of that team and approved by the Consultant or are self-referred. In the case of a self-referral, which refers to where a parent initiates direct contact with Barretstown, the consultant will also need to give consent outlining that the camper is medically fit to participate in the programme. Guidelines are provided to the Hospital teams outlining how children would be eligible to attend the programme. (These are contained in Referral Criteria - Appendix 2)

The Consultant and his or her team are best placed to recommend who would benefit most from the programme as they have a complete understanding as to the stage of the child’s illnesses.

Through the Consultant’s completion of our Physical Exam form Barretstown ensures that it has full consent and up-to-date medical information on the camper and the camper subsequently signs a camper contract (contained in Appendix 3).

4.6 Supervision of Children – Our Two Adult Policy (Appendix 4)
Barretstown operates a strict policy regarding the supervision of children taking into consideration the family and child/teen camps. The family camp schedule has a mix of parental/guardian supervision and staff/volunteer supervision. Supervision responsibility during family camp is highlighted on the schedule and explained to parents. Supervision during children/teen camps is the responsibility of Barretstown staff/staff/volunteers. Where staff or volunteers are responsible for children/teens a two adult policy is adopted regarding the number of staff or volunteers to children ratio. A child or group of children should not be left alone with a single staff member or volunteer. To ensure this is the case very clear schedules are drawn up for supervision in the cottages, dining hall, bathroom activities, and programme areas both during the day and in the evening.

4.7 Visitors on Site
Barretstown has a policy which clearly outlines how we manage visitors on site during the programme activities. They will always be accompanied by a staff person and will not be left alone to wander the site. This policy is contained in Appendix 5.

4.8 Dealing with Challenging Behaviour
It is our policy that all children be treated as individuals, and all behaviours are supported in a way that is in line with Barretstown’s Therapeutic Recreation model.

It is important to focus on the root of behaviour to best support that camper and to help them develop a repertoire of constructive behaviours.

Barretstown provides comprehensive training to assist staff and volunteers in dealing with challenging behaviour. This policy is contained in Appendix 6.

4.9 Medical Policies and Practices
Barretstown provides a fully staffed Medical Centre (MedShed) while the children are on-site. Appendix 7 provides a full list of these policies and practices.

5. Codes of Behaviour
5.1 Between Staff/Volunteers and Children and Families
Staff and Volunteers have a responsibility to protect and promote children’s rights by:

- Treating them with dignity, sensitivity, and respect. Being positive in conversation and keeping conversation at the appropriate level for the age of the child.

- Making time to listen, talk to and get to know the children.

- Making sure that children and young people know the organization’s rules about behaviour.

- Encouraging children to have an input into how things are run.

- Helping children to be safe, happy and have as much fun as possible.

- Never tolerating favoritism, exclusion, or harsh disciplinary regimes.

- Never contacting children or families after they have left camp.

- Never befriending or communicating with children and families on any social networking sites.

- Never use your mobile phone or personal camera to take photographs of children or remove from Barretstown any photography (including electronic copies) of children without prior permission.

- Enabling children to regard their bodies as their own property.
• Encouraging them to express feelings, fears, and experiences openly.

• Knowing about the principles and practices of child protection as outlined in this document and discussing any uncertainties with the Designated Person (for more see section 4.4)

• Acting in an open and visible manner and ensuring that an adult is not left in a position where they are alone with a child.

• Never engaging in sexually provocative games, making jokes of a sexual nature, or making suggestive comments in the presence of young people, even in fun.

• Respecting children’s privacy in bathrooms or changing rooms.

• Sensitively ensuring that children and families know about the Child Welfare Policy. Staff explain our Child Welfare Policy in cottage groups on the first day of camp using child friendly language and an interactive approach to explain the limits of confidentiality, camp rules to ensure physical and emotionally safety whilst at camp. Children often contribute to a large rules/agreement poster which is displayed in their cottage.

• Always responding to complaints or allegations. Encouraging children to report cases of bullying or any other concerning behaviour to either the Designated Liaison Person or an Activity Leader/Cara of their choice.

• Helping children realize the difference between confidentiality and secrecy.

• Being sensitive to the fact that some children are more vulnerable and have special needs.

• Never using physical punishment with children.

• Providing mixed gender leadership for mixed gender activity groups.

• Identifying challenging behaviour, to appreciate the cause of this behaviour, and to support campers in their behaviour so they can have a positive experience at camp. It is important to focus on the route of the behaviour to best support that camper and to help them develop a repertoire of constructive behaviour.

• Implementing our Visitors on Site policy which clearly outlines how we manage visitors on site during the programme activities.

5.2 Staff and Parents

Depending on the role of the staff person within Barretstown they may speak to parents either through the recruitment of children, whilst they are at camp or following departure of the child or young person. Staff and Volunteers have a particular responsibility to protect and promote parents’ rights by:

• Appreciating the trust which parents place in staff and volunteers.

• Listening carefully to what parents say about their children.

• If parents are expressing a concern, not being defensive, trying to see a situation from the parents’ perspective and seeking to establish a common ground.

• Inform parents of any accidents and how they happened.

• Ensuring Parents are aware of the Childcare Policies and Procedures.

A positive relationship between staff and parents should be nurtured and maintained through open communication in both directions. Ongoing good communication with parents develops a better understanding by parents of the positive benefits of our Therapeutic Recreation programme and of what is expected of both their child and they to improve their experience.

Ensuring that parents feel comfortable to talk with Barretstown staff will provide the opportunity to get a better insight into the child or young person as well as allowing parents to openly voice any concerns or queries that they may have.

5.3 Some Do’s and Don’ts

**Do’s**
- Ensure that the two adult policy is strictly observed, and you are never left alone with a child.
- Be aware of what is appropriate physical contact and engage in this contact only. (see below).
- Respect the personal boundaries of others.
- Discuss any uncertainties with the Designated Liaison Person.
- Use Camp Camera’s only to take photographs of children.

**Don’t**
- Spend time alone with a camper.
- Contact campers once you have left camp.
- Make jokes of a sexual nature in the presence of young people even in fun.
- Become over involved with any young person.
- Tolerate favouritism, exclusion, or harsh disciplinary regimes.

5.4 Safe Touch

All staff and volunteers participate in training at Barretstown which includes keeping themselves and campers safe in relation to physical contact. Key Do’s and Don’ts for safe touch as include:

- Do not have a child sit on your knee. Do gently move the child away from sitting on your knee to sitting next to you.
- Do not give a child a hug when you are not on their level or initiate physical contact with a child. Do, if campers initiate a hug or physical reassurance get on their level, try to stay side by side to the child allowing them to put an arm around your shoulder.
- Do not give a child a piggyback or shoulder ride. Do walk slower or rest with a child if they are tired, call for buggy assistance when necessary.
- Do not initiate holding the child’s hand; always try other alternatives such as verbal encouragement, a fun group conga line or both holding on to the hand of a teddy bear.
- Do not help a child to get dressed/undressed when they can do it on their own. Do support children to get dressed/undressed where they are struggling adhering to the 2:1 policy always.
- Do not encourage or congratulate children by picking them up or hugging them. Do use high fives, fun handshakes.

5.5 Meeting the needs of the Camper

Meeting the needs of the child is very important to Barretstown. Information is received prior to the child’s arrival and Barretstown ensures each child’s needs are met in relation to dietary requirements, hygiene, and medical attention. Barretstown trains staff to maintain a physically
and emotionally safe environment and all activities use Therapeutic Recreation ‘challenge by choice’ encouraging children to set their own challenges and celebrate individual successes.

6. Policies and Procedures – Child Abuse Reporting Procedure

Barretstown is committed to ensuring the safety of children is always of paramount importance. These policies and procedures are drawn up in accordance with the Children First; National Guidance for protection and welfare of children 2017. All staff and volunteers in Barretstown are expected to adhere to these childcare policies. As per the Child Care Act, 1991 and the Children Act 2001 a child means a person under the age of 18 years who has not married.

The purpose of this procedure is to outline what a staff member or volunteer should do if they have a child welfare or child protection concern. This concern may arise in the context of a complaint/disclosure made to them by a child or it may arise from observing a child or observing the behaviour of a colleague. Concerns may also arise in the context of family or sibling camps as a result of observing the interaction between camp and a family member.

6.1 Confidentiality

Confidentiality is about managing sensitive information that arises in a trusting relationship and doing so in a manner that is respectful, professional, and purposeful. In matters of child protection and welfare concerns a worker can never promise to keep secret any information that is divulged. All information regarding concern or assessment of child abuse should be shared on “a need to know” basis with the relevant professionals and always in the best interest of the child. The giving of information to relevant others, for the protection of the child, is not a breach of confidentiality. It must be clearly understood that information, which is gathered for one purpose, must not be used for another without consulting the person who provided that information.
This chapter outlines Barretstown’s policies and procedures for dealing with child abuse.

6.2 Definition of Child Abuse

Child abuse as defined in “Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (2017)” is categorised under four headings:

a) Neglect

Neglect occurs when a child does not receive adequate care or supervision to the extent that the child is harmed physically or developmentally. It is generally defined in terms of an omission of care, where a child’s health, development or welfare is impaired by being deprived of food, clothing, warmth, hygiene, medical care, intellectual stimulation or supervision and difficulties. Neglect is associated with poverty but not necessarily caused by it. It is strongly linked to parental substance misuse, domestic violence, and parental mental illness and disability. Neglect is the most frequently reported category of abuse, both in Ireland and internationally.

A reasonable concern for the child’s welfare would exist when neglect becomes typical of the relationship between the child and the parent/carer. This may become apparent where you see the child over a period, or the effects of neglect may be obvious based on having seen the child once.

b) Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is the systemic emotional or psychological ill-treatment of a child as part of the overall relationship between a caregiver and a child. Abuse occurs when a child’s basic need for attention, affection, approval, consistency and security are not met due to incapacity or indifference from their parent or care giver. Emotional abuse can also occur when adults responsible for taking care of children are unaware of and unable (for a range of reasons) to meet their children’s emotional and developmental needs. Emotional abuse is not easy to recognise because the effects are not easily seen. Once-off and occasional difficulties between a parent/carer and child are not considered emotional abuse.

A reasonable concern for the child’s welfare would exist when the behaviour becomes typical of the relationship between the child and the parent or carer.

c) Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is when someone deliberately hurts a child physically or puts them at risk of being physically hurt. It may occur as a single incident or as a pattern of incidents.

A reasonable concern exists where the child’s health and/or development is, may be, or has been damaged as a result of suspected physical abuse.

d) 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. It includes the child being involved in sexual acts or exposing the child to sexual activity directly or through pornography. Child sexual abuse may cover a wide spectrum of abusive activities. It rarely involves just a single incident and, in some instances, occur over several years.
A reasonable concern is any concern over the possibility of sexual abuse.

6.3 Recognising Child Abuse (ref: Children First National Guidance 2017, Chapter 2)

Child neglect or abuse can often be difficult to identify and may present in many forms. A list of indicators of child abuse is contained in Appendix 1.8. No one indicator should be conclusive of abuse. It may indicate conditions other than child abuse. All signs and symptoms must be examined in the total context of the child’s situation and family circumstances.

The following factors should be taken into consideration:

a) Guidelines for recognition

The ability to recognise signs of neglect or abuse can depend as much on 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 abuse:

(i) Considering the possibility
(ii) Looking out for signs of neglect or abuse
(iii) Recording of information.

b) Indicators of 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 likely to be more indicative 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 possible physical or behavioural signs of abuse. See Appendix 1.8 for a full list of the signs and symptoms of abuse.

c) Reasonable Grounds for a child protection or welfare concern

As outlined in Children First, the statutory authorities i.e. Tusla or An Garda Síochána, should always be informed when a person has reasonable grounds concern that a child may have been abused, or is being abused, or is a risk of abuse (see section 4.5 on how this is done).

The following examples would constitute reasonable grounds for concern: (Ref: Children First; National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017)

- Specific indication from the child that s/he was abused.
- An account by the person who saw the child being abused.
- Evidence such as injury or behaviour which is consistent with abuse and unlikely to be caused in any other 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, other indications of abuse, dysfunctional behaviour.
- Consistent indication, over a period that a child is suffering from emotional or physical neglect.
1. Admission or indication by someone of an alleged abuse.
2. Any concern about possible sexual abuse

The guiding principles on reporting child abuse or neglect may be summarised as follows:
1. The safety and well-being of the child must take priority over concerns about adults against whom an allegation may be made.
2. Reports of concerns should be made without delay to Tusla.

6.4 Designated Liaison Person

a) Role of Designated Liaison Person

The role of the Designated Liaison Person will be to:

- Promote adherence to this safeguarding policy.
- Act as a liaison with the statutory services in matters relating to safeguarding.
- Act as a resource person to staff and volunteers, providing support and guidance in matters relating to safeguarding.
- Take the lead in ensuring the reporting and follow up of referrals to Tusla / Gardaí, ensuring that Barretstown procedures are followed systematically and thoroughly.
- Facilitate the provision of support to the staff making a referral or against whom an allegation has been made.
- Ensure proper records are kept on any interventions/decisions made during the process.
- Seek appropriate Line Management and Support during the process.
- Liaise with the CEO, throughout the process.
- Ensure all reports regarding safeguarding from staff or volunteers are first discussed with them and then counter-signed by them.

b) Designated Liaison Person Actions

If the Designated Liaison Person is concerned/unsure they may consult Tusla Social Work Department for advice not naming the child - see Appendix 9 to access the National Contacts for Tusla. If the child lives outside the national jurisdiction contact the local Child and Family Agency or an Garda Síochána for advice. Members of the Childcare Advisory Committee are also available for support however the role of this committee is not to discuss individual concerns. If satisfied there are reasonable grounds for concern report in person/writing/phone to Tusla. (see Appendix 10) In emergency contact An Garda Síochána. Reporting should include all information sought on a Standard Reporting Form. A phone report should be followed by a written form.

c) Who is the DLP?

We currently have 4 staff members who can act as a DLP. They are;

John Mitchell (Camp Director) 045 863 117 or Ext 217
Keith O’Rourke (Assistant Camp Director) 045 863 142 or Ext 242
Who are Mandated Persons? (Ref: Children First National Guidance 2017, Chapter 3)

Mandated persons are people who have contact with children and/or families and who, because of their qualifications, training and/or employment role, are in a key position to help protect children from harm. As per the Children First Act 2015, mandated persons have two legal obligations;

- to report the harm of children above a defined threshold to Tusla;
- to assist Tusla, if required, in assessing a concern which has been subject of a mandated report.

All the Barretstown medical team are mandated persons as well as our Staff Support Psychologist Lynne Forrest. As they are not all on site during each camp, a list of Mandated Persons for each session will be kept in the Camp Director’s office.

**6.5 Reporting Procedures in Respect of Suspected or Actual Child Abuse**

A staff or volunteer who knows or suspects that a young person has been or is at risk of being harmed has a duty to:

1. Record the concern.
2. Discuss with the Designated Liaison Person
3. Designated Liaison Person will ensure that most appropriate person will speak to the parents of the child unless it puts the child at further risk.
4. The Designated Liaison Person must decide to:
   a. Contact Tusla where the child lives (if the child lives outside the national jurisdiction contact should be made with Tusla for advice) for an informal discussion (as soon as practicable of becoming aware of a concern being raised); or
   b. Refer to Tusla where the child lives (as soon as possible). They will, in turn report to the Gardaí. In an emergency and you cannot contact the duty social worker in Tusla then a report should be made directly to An Garda Síochána. Allegations should always be handled in a sensitive and discreet manner and should follow the organisations reporting procedures as outlined below; See Appendix 1.10 for the Standard Reporting form used when making a report; or
   c. Not refer concerns to Tusla or to An Garda Síochána where there are no reasonable grounds for concern and record the reasons for taking this action.
5. Any professional who suspects child abuse or neglect should inform the parents/carers if a report is to be submitted to Tusla or to An Garda Síochána, unless doing so is likely to endanger the child.
6. In the event of retrospective disclosure of abuse the report is made to Tusla and the duty social worker where the child lives. When a child comes from a different country, then the local social work team should be contacted for advice and depending on the concern they may contact the social work service in the child’s home country.

It is Barretstown’s policy to record all concerns/disclosures and to forward these to the Designated Liaison Person who will follow the procedure as outlined above. In cases of emergency the Gardaí will be contacted immediately. When reporting concerns/disclosures they should do so immediately. Ignoring the signals or failing to intervene could result in ongoing or further harm to the child. If needs be, concerns can be initially reported verbally to Tusla and then followed up in writing using the Standard Reporting Form contained in Appendix 10. These records are stored in the Designated Liaison Person’s office where only the CEO and Childcare Advisory Committee will have access to them on request. Alternatively, you can now use the Tusla online web portal to report a concern. The portal can be found on the Tusla website at [http://www.tusla.ie/children-first/web-portal/](http://www.tusla.ie/children-first/web-portal/).

In a situation where Barretstown decides that it should not refer concerns to Tusla or to An Garda Síochána, 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 An Garda Síochána. The provisions of the Protections for Person Reporting Child Abuse Act, 1998 apply once they report “reasonably and in good faith”.

During training, staff are also made aware of both the Criminal Justice Act 2006 - Reckless Endangerment and Criminal Justice (Withholding of Information on Offences against Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012 under which people can be charged if they withhold information. Both Acts are also referenced below in section 6.

6.6 Dealing with a Disclosure of Abuse

It is important that a child who discloses child abuse feels supported and facilitated in what, for him or her, may be a frightening and traumatic process. A child may feel perplexed, afraid, angry, despondent and guilty. It is important that any negative feelings that the child may have are not increased by the kinds of response which the disclosure elicits. A child who divulges an allegation of child abuse to a member of camp staff, (whether a volunteer or paid staff member), makes a profound act of trust and must be treated with respect, sensitivity and care.

**How to respond**

When responding it is of utmost importance that allegations are handled in a sensitive and discreet manner and any response to a child making an allegation should take the following into consideration:

- Take what the child says seriously.
- React in a calm manner as over-reaction may intimidate the child and increase any feelings of guilt and that he/she may have.
- Reassure the child that it was right to tell somebody what happened.

- Use language that the child understands: for example, when naming different parts of the body adopt the child’s words rather than substituting your own. It is important not to ask the child or young person leading questions and to avoid conjecture or supposition.

- Listen carefully and attentively to the child.

- Be careful when seeking clarification. Conversation should be supportive and for the purpose of clarification only. Never ask leading questions such as, whether specific acts not mentioned by the child occurred or whether a specific person not named by the child carried out the abuse. Do not seek intimate details beyond those volunteered by the child. Such questions and suggestions could complicate an official investigation by Tusla / Gardaí.

- Do not express any opinions about the alleged abuser to the person reporting to you.

- Do not confront the alleged abuser.

- Write down immediately afterwards what was said, including where, when any other significant factors noting marks and signs observed. All reports should be signed, timed and dated by the person recording the event.

- Trust yourself that you have heard the child or young person correctly. Don’t ask them to repeat the story unnecessarily as this may cause further stress or doubt in their mind that they are being believed.

- Make no promises that cannot be kept.

- Do not promise to keep secrets. Explain to the child/young person as clearly, calmly and supportively as you can that because they and possibly other children are at risk you need to tell others about what they have said.

- Explain and make sure that the child understands what will happen next, that you will record the conversation and discuss this with the Designated Person.

7. Allegations against a Staff Member/Volunteer

Child Abuse can be a serious criminal offence. As a staff member with responsibility of caring for children, employees or volunteers may be placed in sensitive situations. The purpose of this section is to outline the process which should be followed, should an allegation of abuse be made against an employee or volunteer.

7.1 Scope and Principles

This document applies to all staff (temporary and permanent) and volunteers of Barretstown and all are required to adhere to its terms and conditions.

Where an allegation of abuse is made against a staff member / volunteer, there are two procedures that will be activated:

- The reporting procedure—see section 4.5 Childcare Policies and Procedures in relation to making a report to the statutory authorities and Appendix 10 for Reporting Form;
- The procedure for responding to the staff member / volunteer regarding an allegation or concern of abuse/neglect.
This document exists for the protection of campers, staff, and volunteers and is accessible to both campers and staff and parents.

The employee or volunteer is entitled to be accompanied by an employee representative to all meetings.

In the case of an allegation being made against an employee /volunteer, the same person will not be responsible for both the child and the alleged abuser. Employment/contractual issues will be dealt with separately. The Designated Liaison Person, the Camp Director will follow the normal reporting procedure as outlined in the Childcare Policies and Procedures section 4. It will be the responsibility of the HR Director to deal with a staff member/volunteer against whom an allegation is made where the child is a camper.

If an allegation is made against the Designated Liaison Person, (Camp Director), the Operations Director will take over their role and if there is an allegation against the HR Director the CEO will take over their role.

7.2 Procedure for dealing with an allegation made against a staff member/volunteer

▪ The first consideration is to ensure that no child is exposed to risk. The welfare of the child is the first and paramount consideration.
▪ All allegations/concerns should be recorded in writing and passed to the Designated Liaison Person and HR Director without delay.

Procedure for dealing with the employee/volunteer:
▪ The HR Director will meet with the person against whom an allegation is made and advise them of the nature of the allegation. An appropriate copy of the allegation will be given to provide the opportunity to respond. It may not be appropriate for the accused person to receive the full notes/records from the person who has the original concern.
▪ Barretstown will take protective action proportionate to the level of risk for the duration of the investigation period. This can vary from increased supervision to full suspension.

7.3 Reporting Procedure in respect of the child

▪ The parents of the child will be advised of the allegation and kept informed of the process/action taken by the Designated Liaison Person.
▪ Where there are reasonable grounds for concern a report needs to be made by the Designated Liaison Person to Tusla using the standard reporting form as outlined in Appendix 1.10 or via the Tusla online portal.
▪ An assessment/investigation will be carried out as to whether the abuse happened by Tusla in conjunction with the Gardai. Tusla and the Gardai will liaise with Barretstown in relation to their findings.
▪ If the allegation against the employee or volunteer is not upheld they will be re-instated immediately in their role and informed in writing that they have been cleared of all allegations made against them without prejudice and any other re-integration steps necessary to support the persons return to work.
▪ If the allegation is found to be upheld – Disciplinary action will be taken up to and including Dismissal and a formal follow up report will be made to Tusla, An Garda Síochána and CAC.
8. Protection for Persons Reporting Child Abuse

The Protection for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act, 1998 provides immunity from civil liability to persons who report child abuse “reasonably and in good faith” to Tusla or An Garda Síochána. This means that even if a reported suspicion of child abuse proves unfounded a plaintiff who took an action would have to prove that the reporter had not acted reasonably and in good faith in making the report.

8.1 Criminal Justice Act 2006 – Reckless Endangerment

The Criminal Justice Act 2006 provides for a new offence of reckless endangerment of children. This came into effect on August 1\textsuperscript{st}, 2006. This offence may be committed by a person who has authority or control over a child or an abuser and who intentionally or recklessly endangers a child by:

- Causing or permitting any child to be placed or left in a situation which creates a substantial risk to the child of being a victim of serious harm or sexual abuse or;
- Failing to take reasonable steps to protect a child from such a risk while knowing that the child is in such a situation.

The offence may be prosecuted only by the Director of Public Prosecutions. The penalty is a fine (no upper limit) and/or a maximum of 10 years imprisonment.

8.2 Criminal Justice (Withholding of Information on offences against Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012

- This act came into force on 1st August 2012. It is now an offence to withhold information on certain offences against children and vulnerable adults from the Garda Síochána.
- An offence is committed when a person who knows or believes that one or more of these offences has been committed by another person against a child or vulnerable adult, and the person has information which they know or believe might be of material assistance in securing apprehension, prosecution or conviction of that other person for that offence, and fails without reasonable excuse to disclose that information as soon as it is practicable to do so to a member of the Garda Síochána.
- The offence applies to a person acquiring information after the passing of the Act on 18th July 2012 and it does not apply to the victim. The offence exists even if the information acquired is about an offence which took place prior to the Act being enacted, and even if the child or vulnerable adult is no longer a child or vulnerable adult.

The offences are punishable by fine and/or up to 14 years imprisonment.