



Document Name	Child Protection Policy
Version reference	1.2
Document Owner	Interim CEO
Governance Code Principle	
Approved by and date	10/06/2025
Next review date	June 2027

About Bodywhys

Founded in 1995, Bodywhys – The Eating Disorders Association of Ireland - is the national voluntary organisation supporting people affected by eating disorders and their families. Bodywhys provides a range of non-judgemental listening, information and support services, as well as school talks, training, literature and webinars. Other aspects of the organisation's work include developing professional resources and collaborating with social media companies to respond to harmful online content and working with the mainstream media to create awareness about eating disorders. Bodywhys develops evidence-based programmes to promote positive body image and social media literacy in children and adolescents and provide relevant supports and guidance for parents and education professionals on same. Bodywhys is the support partner to the HSE's National Clinical Programme for Eating Disorders (NCP-ED).

About this policy

The Board of Directors are responsible for ensuring that this policy is approved and adhered to.

This policy reflects the organisation's Child Protection Policy and provides guidance and applies to Bodywhys staff and volunteers. The policy has been developed with the aim of ensuring, that those availing of the support services we provide, including children and vulnerable adults, are safe from 'harm', as defined in the Children First Act 2015. This policy is informed by National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (Tusla, 2017) and Child Safeguarding: A Guide for Policy, Procedure and Practice (Tusla, 2019). Our policy is subject to review and will be amended and updated as by relevant developments in policy and legislation.

We commit to ensuring that when and where child protection issues become apparent that Bodywhys staff and volunteers will respond swiftly, professionally, and appropriately. We ensure that all staff and volunteers are vetted and checked in accordance with the law, that our recruitment processes follow best practice, and that staff and volunteers receive clear child protection-related training and information. Child protection is the responsibility of all, be they staff or volunteers.

Support Services

The services provided by Bodywhys are non-directive and non-judgemental and underpinned by the organisation's Child Protection Policy.

Helpline

The helpline service is open to anyone with concerns about an eating disorder. Callers speak to a trained Bodywhys volunteer when they contact the service.

Email Support

Our email support service alex@bodywhys.ie is open to anyone with concerns about an eating disorder.

Online Support Groups (Chat-based)

Bodywhys has online support groups for people experiencing eating disorders, BodywhysConnect for those aged 18+ and YouthConnect for those aged 13-18. For adults, BodywhysConnect also includes online support groups for men and college students. All groups are facilitated by trained volunteers and involve text-based communication housed within the online support groups system on www.bodywhys.ie Volunteer facilitators explain the ground rules and monitor the chat to keep the space safe for everyone. Users cannot instant message each other at any time.

Virtual Support Groups

Bodywhys has a virtual support group for adults experiencing eating disorders. This takes place over video call format. The groups are facilitated by trained volunteers and involve verbal communication. Volunteer facilitators explain the ground rules and monitor the group to keep the space safe for everyone.

Family Support Package

The Bodywhys Family Support Package (FSP) consists of the PiLaR programme, post-PiLaR support group, New Maudsley carer skills training and workshops and New Maudsley groups.

The PiLaR Programme is a free, evidence-based 4-week psychoeducation support programme for family members, carers, parents, and friends.

Training talks

Bodywhys delivers training to a range of training talks, for example in the health and education sector and to allied health professionals and other community and voluntary organisations.

School talks

Currently, Bodywhys delivers talks to second level students, following requests from teachers and schools.

Social media

Sometimes Bodywhys receives private or direct messages from individuals on social media. The organisation's social media presence is for signposting and information sharing publicly and not for individual support.

Other calls and correspondence

Support queries sometimes reach through the main office phone line, or the contact and registration forms on the Bodywhys website and body image website. Support email queries are directed to alex@bodywhys.ie

Webinars and conferences

Bodywhys attends, participates in, or organises conferences and webinars, to learn from, share and collaborate with researchers and clinicians.

Duty of care

Bodywhys has a responsibility and duty of care to protect any child, anyone under the age of 18 years, and vulnerable adults that may be at risk of harm, who comes to the attention of the organisation. In every aspect of our work, it is expected that both employees and volunteers will treat every person with respect and positive regard. We

aim to listen and respect the feelings, opinions and ideas of children and young people and vulnerable adults.

Purpose

This policy has been developed to outline clear policy and procedures in dealing with child protection concerns which may arise in children and vulnerable adults who contact Bodywhys, and to clarify protocols for Bodywhys staff and volunteers.

This policy endeavours to ensure clear policies and procedures in dealing with allegations of child abuse and risk of harm in children and vulnerable adults both within the organisation and externally, as well of employees and volunteers.

This policy applies

- To anyone under the age of 18 or vulnerable adults who contacts Bodywhys and who is deemed currently at risk of neglect, physical, emotional or sexual abuse, self-harm or suicide
- Where the organisation has identifiable information (see appendix 2) for the person aged under 18 years or vulnerable adult deemed at risk. The organisation recognises a duty of care for that person and must ensure that information is passed on to the relevant authorities to help protect that person
- It is the responsibility of **everyone** within the organisation to be aware of and implement the child protection policy. As such, the policy is also there to inform Bodywhys staff and volunteers by giving clear guidance on procedures to follow and responsibilities that their position incurs.

Our child protection policy is a support policy. As an organisation, we have a supportive role, rather than an investigative role. If you share information with us which identifies a child or vulnerable adult at risk who is suffering abuse or harm, after discussion with you, we may contact other relevant services such as Tusla (Child and Family Agency), the Health Service Executive (HSE) or An Garda Síochána. Bodywhys will cooperate

with Tusla, the HSE and An Garda Síochána to share information, where a child protection or welfare issue arises.

Dos and don'ts for dealing with a disclosure – applicable to all services.

<u>Dealing with a Disclosure - Do</u>	<u>Dealing with a Disclosure – Don't</u>
<p>Stay calm and act as natural as possible. Remember you have a supportive role, and you are supported in your work. Remember that you have been approached because you are trusted and possibly liked.</p>	<p>Panic</p>
<p>Inform of policy</p> <p>As soon as possible, (which may involve interrupting at the beginning), inform the person speaking of your duty of care and the child protection guidelines you are bound to.</p>	<p>Promise to keep secrets</p> <p>Where a concern is raised, you will be sharing this information only with people who understand this area and whose job it is to protect them..</p>
<p>Listen</p> <p>Listen to what the person has to say. Give them the time and opportunity to tell as much as they are able to wish. Be aware that disclosures may be very difficult for the child.</p>	<p>Ask leading questions</p> <p>Avoid questions such as whether a specific person carried out the abuse. Also avoid asking about intimate details or suggesting that something else may have happened other than what you have been told.</p>
<p>Accept</p> <p>Accept what the person has to say – false disclosures are very rare. Remember the person may initially be testing your reactions and may only fully open up over a period of time.</p>	<p>Make the person repeat the story unnecessarily</p>

<p>Reassure</p> <p>Reassure the person that you have heard what they have said, that you have recorded your concern, and will have to pass that information on to your supervisor. Reassure that they will be made aware of any further action that may be taken. Signpost on to specialised services as further reassurance.</p> <p>It may be necessary to reassure the person that your feelings towards him or her have not been affected in a negative way as a result of what they have disclosed.</p>	<p>Delay</p> <p>Always report any concerning information as soon as possible to the designated person. Never delay in passing the information on to the designated person.</p>
<p>Record in writing</p> <p>record the date, time and any information that is causing you concern. Make sure to pass all this information, no matter how small, on to the designated person. Information should be factual not judgemental.</p> <p>Record in a factual manner what the child has said including as far as possible the exact words used.</p>	<p>Start to investigate</p> <p>This is <u>not</u> your role.</p>
<p>Discuss</p> <p>Discuss what will happen with the person, giving the person the contact details of the services coordinator for further discussion.</p>	<p>Pressure the person</p> <p>Allow him or her to disclose at their own pace and in their own language.</p>
<p>Report</p> <p>Pass on all information to the designated person.</p>	

What happens when I pass the information on to the Designated Liaison Person (DLP)?

Usually, the DLP will make the referral with the staff/volunteer to the HSE and/or Garda Síochána. The HSE social worker will consider your information and will assess the situation. If they feel it needs to be followed up they may look for more information from other sources and may contact the service user and their parent/s (guardian, trusted adult). They will try to establish what is going on, and will act to protect the child whatever way is necessary. Physical abuse, sexual abuse and wilful neglect are crimes and must be reported by the HSE to An Garda Síochána. Likewise, An Garda Síochána must report any child abuse that comes to their attention to the HSE. The gardaí and the HSE will work together as sensitively as possible and take any action necessary to protect the child, or any other children from future harm.

Bodywhys best practice guidelines for staff and volunteers working with people aged under 18 years. – Code of behaviour for staff and volunteers.

- Staff and volunteer should never be alone with children and young people, away from others
- Staff and volunteers should not meet with children or young people outside organised activities
- Staff and volunteers, particularly those undertaking school and youth group visits must not give a young person a lift or should always have another person with them while in the company of a young person
- Staff and volunteers must remain vigilant to any form of bullying which might occur during group work i.e. school workshop, a support group session. Volunteers are expected to promote the principles of respect, equality and participation in their work
- Staff and volunteers must never make sexually suggestive comments about, or to, a child or young person, even in fun

- Staff and volunteers should be sensitive to the possibility of developing favouritism, or becoming over involved or spending a great deal of time with any one child
- Language appropriate to the age of the child or young person should be used. Avoid complicated jargon
- Scare tactics should never be used when explaining the consequences of an eating disorder to children or young people
- If someone approaches you directly to discuss abuse, ensure that a second person joins you and/or remains in the room throughout the conversation
- Do not give out your personal phone number
- Do not offer to drive a young person in your car.

Bodywhys endeavours to ensure the implementation of the child protection policy by ensuring the following structures are in place and strictly adhered to:

1. From the beginning of the recruitment process the Child Protection Policy is implemented by ensuring that
 - a. Clear role descriptions are given
 - b. Garda vetting forms and declaration forms are completed
 - c. Applicants are interviewed
 - d. Two references are required and always taken up
 - e. Identification is checked
 - f. A probationary period is in place
 - g. Contracts are agreed between management and staff and volunteers
 - h. Supervision and support structures are also in place for staff and volunteers.

2. Bodywhys ensures a code of behaviour is in place and adhered to by all staff and volunteers
3. A complaints procedure and an anti-bullying policy is in place for all staff and volunteers
4. All policies are reviewed on a regular basis
5. There is a named DLP and Deputy DLP within the organisation.
6. Each Bodywhys support service has a service specific Child Protection Policy outlining practicalities and procedures for dealing with child protection concerns specifically within that service. Each service specific Child Protection Policy is in line with this general organisational policy.

Practicalities of this policy

1. What information concerning a person under 18 years should be passed on to the organisation's Designated Liaison Person (see appendix 1. for explanation of who is and role of Designated Liaison Person)?

- a. **Neglect:** Where the child's needs for food, warmth, shelter, nurturance, and safety are not provided, to the extent that the child suffers significant harm
- b. **Emotional Abuse:** Where a child's needs for affection, approval and security are not being met and have not been met for some time by their parent or carer.
- c. **Sexual Abuse:** Where a child is used for the sexual gratification of an adult
- d. **Physical Abuse:** Where a child is assaulted or injured in some way that is deliberate.

2. What are reasonable grounds for concern?

- a. **Direct disclosure:** Specific indication from the person under 18 years that (s)he was abused

- b. **Admission or indication** by an adult or a child of an alleged abuse that's been committed
 - c. **Witness account:** An account by a person who saw the person under 18 years being abused. (See section on policy for dealing with people aged over 18 years also.)
 - d. **Evidence**, such as illness, injury or behaviour consistent with abuse and unlikely to be caused in another way.
 - e. An injury or behaviour which is consistent both with abuse and an innocent explanation but where there are **corroborative indicators** supporting the concern that it may be a case of abuse
 - f. **Consistent indication**, over a period, that a child is suffering from emotional or physical neglect
3. **Suicide and self-harm.** If a person is actively suicidal, has a suicide plan, have self-harmed or is at risk of self-harm.

What happens when information is passed on to the Designated Liaison Person?

If you share information with us which identifies a child or vulnerable adult at risk who is suffering abuse or harm, after discussion with you, we may contact other relevant services.

Appendix 1. Designated Liaison Person

- The Designated Liaison Person is responsible for dealing with any concerns about the protection of children that arise within any area of the organisation's work.
- **In Bodywhys, the Designated Liaison Person is the Interim CEO**, Harriet Parsons, email: harriet@bodywhys.ie, phone: 01-2834963 / 0871335417. If a situation arises that the **Interim CEO** is not available, the responsibility for the role of Designated Liaison Person passes Kathy Downes, Support Services Manager, email: kathy@bodywhys.ie, phone: 01-2834963 / 0877214839

The Designated Liaison Person's role is to:

- Establish contact with relevant authority where necessary e.g. childcare manager, principal social worker, An Garda Síochána
- Provide information and advice on child protection within the organisation
- Ensure the organisation's child protection policies and procedures are implemented and followed
- Keep relevant people within the organisation informed
- Ensure written records of concerns/cases are kept
- Advise the organisation of child protection training needs.

Appendix 2: What is identifiable information?

The following details are deemed identifiable information:

- The **first name and address of a perpetrator** i.e. Sally, No 1 Cow Lane, County, Eircode.
- The **full name of a perpetrator** i.e. Sally Dunne.
- The **surname and address of a perpetrator** i.e. Dunne, No 1 Cow Lane, County, Eircode.
- The **first name and telephone number of a perpetrator** i.e. Sally 01 123456
- The **name and relationship with the caller** i.e. an aunt, granny, uncle, etc.
- The **email address** of the person under 18 years.
- Someone's exact location at the time.

Response

If we determine you are at risk, your details may be passed to an agency who'll be able to get help to you, such as an emergency service.

Confidentiality is a key part of our work. However, we will consider speaking to someone else if we are really worried about what you have told us and if we feel that you are unable to make decisions and are at risk.

Data protection

Data protection legislation does not prevent the Designated Liaison Person or organisations from reporting a concern about child protection.