



This booklet was produced by representatives of:

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Department of Education
Education & Library Boards
Health and Social Services Boards
Volunteer Development Agency
Community Sector Training
NSPCC
Barnardo's

The Department would like to thank all those involved for their contribution

New Legislation

In this booklet the section dealing with the Pre-employment Consultancy Service (PECS) sets out the current position in Northern Ireland in relation to carrying out checks on those seeking work with children.

However, a new law, the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults (Northern Ireland) Order 2003, which will in effect place PECS on a statutory basis, has been brought forward.

Until this new law takes effect, the system for carrying out pre-employment checks on those seeking work with children remains unchanged.

The changes, which will be brought about as a result of the new legislation and the impact that it may have on an organisation like your own, will be covered in guidance which will be issued by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

This booklet can be made available in other formats / languages if requested.

a culture of safety

All organisations which work with children have a very important and invaluable role to play in the lives of those children.

Organisations like your own can help our children to gain social confidence, skills or knowledge or to engage in leisure or sporting activities. Your organisation may be providing children with accommodation, arranged or supervised activities or perhaps you offer a counselling or advice service.

Whatever your contribution, we would like to help you create a culture of safety within your organisation by identifying a number of practical steps which you can take to help you protect children from coming to any harm whilst they are in your care.



Good child protection practice offers protection not only to children entrusted to your care but also to the staff with responsibility for them. It is hoped that by following the procedures outlined, you will also be able to reassure the community you serve that you are taking all reasonable steps to safeguard the welfare of the children with whom you work.

maximising safety, minimising risk

An organisation that has actively developed a culture of safety will deter people from trying to abuse children within, or through, that organisation. How far does your organisation measure up against this list of essential safeguards?

- There should be a written **Child Protection Policy and Procedure**. Make sure all staff/volunteers know what it says. The procedure should state exactly what needs to be done if there are concerns about a child's welfare.

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- Organisations should have a **Child-Centred Ethos** where children are listened to by adults and taken seriously. Organisations should be open and welcoming and be prepared to share information about themselves and their activities.
- There should be a **Culture of Vigilance** which means that staff, volunteers and other individuals should be aware of who is accessing the organisation's premises and activities. They should be alert to anyone who is spending excessive time alone with children or paying excessive attention to particular children, and to any changes or anxieties about a child's behaviour.
- Adults should know who to contact in order to voice concerns or complain about intrusive or unethical behaviour and, if appropriate, have access to an independent person. **Information** should be provided for children and for parents and carers about the child protection policy and procedures and where they can go for help.
- There should be a **Designated Person** who can deal with concerns or allegations of abuse. It is essential that the designated person is properly trained and supported so that they know what to do in the event of concerns being expressed or allegations being made.
- A rigorous **Recruitment and Selection** process is needed for **all paid staff and volunteers** who work with children.



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- **Induction and Training.** All those in contact with children should learn and understand the essentials about child protection and about health and safety. This should be regularly updated to ensure staff/volunteers are kept informed of changes in legislation and that the safety and welfare of children is of paramount importance. It is the responsibility of the employing organisation to provide the necessary child protection training at induction and to ensure that this is regularly updated. Child protection training is available from the **Our Duty to Care** and **Community Sector Training Projects**. The contact addresses and numbers for both projects can be found under **Useful Contacts**.
- It is essential that organisations provide effective **Support and Supervision** for all staff and volunteers so that their work can be monitored and so that they have a safe place to voice their own concerns and anxieties.
- There should be a **Written Code of Behaviour**, which provides guidelines on positive behaviour promoted by the organisation, as well as an outline of acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. This should include clear guidance where personal and intimate tasks are carried out, for example, with disabled or very young children.
- As far as possible, the work of the organisation should be planned in a way that minimises situations where abuse can take place. Opportunities for anyone to have unsupervised access to children should be minimised.
- For further information contact **Our Duty to Care** Project Team at Volunteer Development Agency or **Community Sector Training** (See **Useful Contacts List**).

recruitment and selection

All organisations, regardless of the work they do, will want to employ the best person for the job. For organisations working with children, selecting an unsuitable candidate could have grave consequences for both children and the organisation itself. It is essential, therefore, that your organisation undertakes rigorous pre-employment screening of preferred job applicants for all paid and volunteer posts. Organisations should:

- Access all relevant sources of information to help determine an individual's suitability, including information which can be provided by the **Pre-Employment Consultancy Service**. See page 7.
- Define the role. Know exactly what the organisation considers the role of the new employee or volunteer to be. Identify the skills required and be clear about the kind of person required to fill the post.
- Use written application forms. A written application form should be completed for all posts including those for volunteers.
- Ask for a written declaration that they have no past convictions (including spent convictions), cautions or bind-overs and no pending cases. You may also want to ask if they have had reprimands, final warnings or complaints of abuse made about them.
- Take up at least two written references, one of which should have knowledge of the applicant's work with children. Do not necessarily rely on them. It is unlikely that an abuser would identify a referee who has knowledge of their abusive behaviour.



recruitment and selection

- If there are any doubts, follow-up written references with a personal call.
- Verify qualifications wherever possible. Be conscious of, and follow up on, gaps or inconsistencies in employment history.
- Always ask for proof of identity, preferably something which contains a photograph, such as a passport or driving licence. Consider requesting a National Insurance Number which when used along with a name and date of birth, for example, will help to uniquely identify an individual.
- When interviewing new staff and volunteers, include an exploration of their attitudes towards children and childcare. Find out their views regarding acceptable and unacceptable behaviour with children.
- It is important that all staff and volunteers have child protection awareness training as part of their induction. There are a number of organisations in Northern Ireland which offer awareness training. (See Useful Contacts List).



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The Pre-Employment Consultancy Service (PECS) is operated by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and was established to help organisations working with children (or adults with a learning disability) to make the right choices when appointing staff or volunteers. It is designed to provide an **additional safeguard which complements and strengthens staff recruitment and selection procedures**. PECS should never be relied upon to screen out all abusers. PECS provides a means of accessing any information held by the police, the Department of Health, Social Services & Public Safety and the Department of Education, which might have a bearing on an individual's suitability.

Which organisations can access PECS and how?

PECS is available to any statutory, voluntary, community or private sector organisation working with children. Any organisation wishing to use PECS must first apply to use the service. See the PECS contact address and telephone number under Useful Contacts.



Can all posts within a child care organisation be checked?

No. The preferred applicant must have actual access to children, not potential or unauthorised access. The level of access should also be substantial and in many cases may mean unsupervised access. Remember that good childcare practice within your organisation should mean that, as far as possible, management and supervisory arrangements are such that substantial, unsupervised access to children should be limited or preferably removed. The criteria for checking are clearly outlined in Making The Right Choice, the guide to the Pre-Employment Consultancy Service (See Useful Publications list).



Can checks on existing staff be requested?

Checks on existing members of staff should not normally be requested. However, if an individual takes up new duties within your organisation or, indeed, if serious allegations about an individual are made or new information comes to light, then a check through PECS may be requested.

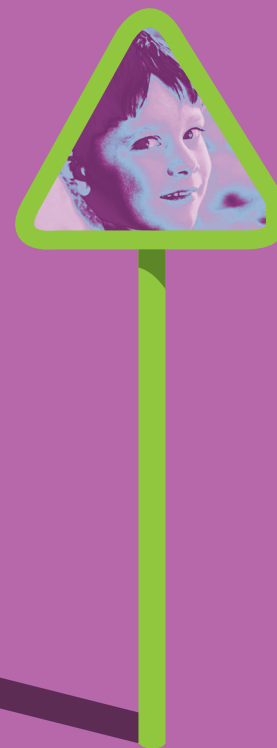
How can I find out more about PECS?

Additional information and PECS training is available from the Our Duty to Care and Community Sector Training Projects. The contact addresses and numbers for both projects can be found under Useful Contacts.

possible indicators of inappropriate behaviour

People who pose a threat to children can be very skilled at avoiding detection. Continued vigilance is important and there are some behaviours which may alert you to the possibility of abuse. You should be particularly vigilant if someone:

- Pays an unusual amount of attention to children and provides them with presents, money, or 'favours';
- Seeks out vulnerable children;
- Seeks opportunities to spend significant amounts of time alone with a single child or a small group of children on a regular basis;
- Encourages secretiveness about their activities and time spent with children;
- Takes a child or children to his/her own home;
- Is vague about previous employment;
- Has an unusual amount of physical contact with a child or children;
- Touches children in an inappropriate manner;
- Talks to children in an inappropriate manner;
- Avoids close supervision and management of work.



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A member of your staff or volunteer may have concerns about a child's behaviour or something a child has told them. These may only be vague concerns and not evidence that abuse has occurred. It is important that these are taken seriously. It is essential that:

- A written record is made of concerns which result from observations made or information received. That record may be made jointly with the organisation's Designated Officer after discussion;
- The Designated Officer may need to seek further advice from Social Services;
- The organisation's child protection procedures should be followed. These should give clear guidelines about how and when to refer to Social Services.

If a member of staff/volunteer feels that concerns are not being taken seriously, this should again be discussed with the Designated Officer or a more senior colleague. If necessary contact:

- The local Social Services Office. Record the number here.
- NSPCC Helpline on **0808 800 5000**
- The local Police station. Record the number here.



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What NOT to do

If there are concerns that a child is perhaps being abused -

- **Never** do nothing and assume someone else will do something;
- **Never** question or push the child for more information or explanation. This could affect any subsequent criminal investigation;
- **Never** discuss the concerns with the suspected abuser. This could have implications for criminal proceedings. In addition, there is always a possibility that the suspected abuser might threaten the child to make them deny anything has happened.



dealing with concerns about a colleague dealing with concerns about a colleague

The vast majority of people who work with children are well motivated and would never harm a child. Unfortunately a few do and it is essential that the organisation creates a culture that makes staff/volunteers willing and comfortable to voice their concerns, particularly those about someone with whom they work or whom they know. Again, the organisation's child protection procedures should be followed.

During an investigation, support should be given both to the individual who voices concerns and to the suspected abuser. Once the investigation is completed, the organisation must decide what action, if any, is necessary to prevent a similar situation arising again.



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Staff working with children may feel vulnerable to accusations of child abuse. There have been occasions when false allegations have been made against staff. This may be because of a misunderstanding of what has happened or a genuine mistake. If allegations are made, it is important to:

- Stay calm;
- Co-operate with the investigation;
- Seek advice and support from a manager or, if appropriate, a professional organisation, union, family or friends;
- Ensure that clear records are kept of any meetings attended, discussions or correspondence about the allegations;
- Avoid discussing the allegations with the person who made them.

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Making The Right Choice

A Guide to Using the Pre-Employment Consultancy Service (PECS)

- Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

The Pre-Employment Consultancy Service

A Simple Guide

- Our Duty to Care
Volunteer Development Agency

Our Duty to Care

Principles of Good Practice for the Protection of Children & Young People

- Our Duty to Care
Volunteer Development Agency

Getting it Right

Developing your Child Protection Policies & Procedures

- Our Duty to Care
Volunteer Development Agency

Training Resource Directory

Child Protection Training for Voluntary Organisations and Community Groups

- Our Duty to Care
Volunteer Development Agency

Pastoral Care in Schools

Child Protection

- Department of Education

Code of Ethics & Good Practice for Children's Sport

- Sports Council Northern Ireland/The Irish Sports Council



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Protecting children from sexual abuse in the community

A guide for parents and carers

■ NSPCC

www.nspcc.org.uk

Choosing with Care

The Warner Report

■ HMSO 1992

Code of Practice for the Employment of Residential Care Workers

Support Force for Children's Residential Care (1995)

Circular HSS (Gen 1) 2/1999

Children's Safeguards Review: Choosing with Care

Have Fun & Be Safe

A guide to help parents and carers choose children's activities

■ NSPCC and Volunteer Development Agency

Safer Recruitment and Selection for Staff Working In Child Care

A tool kit

■ Scottish Executive



Pre-Employment Consultancy Service

Child Care Unit
Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Room D1.4
Castle Buildings, Stormont
Belfast
BT4 3SQ

Tel: **028 9052 2559**
Email: pecs@dhsspsni.gov.uk

Our Duty to Care

Volunteer Development Agency
58 Howard Street
Belfast
BT1 6PG

Tel: **028 9023 6100**
Email: odtc@volunteering-ni.org

Community Sector Training

11a Dobbin Street
Armagh
BT61 7QQ

Tel: **028 3752 8012**
Fax: **028 3751 2001**
Email: comm.sector.training@cinni.org

NSPCC

Jennymount Court
North Derby Street
Belfast
BT15 3HN

Tel: **028 9035 1135**

Childline - 0800 1111

(24hr telephone counselling and advice service for children and young people in trouble or danger)



PlayBoard

59-65 York Street
Belfast
BT15 1AA

Tel: **028 9080 3380**
Email: **kidsplay@playbrd.dnet.co.uk**
Web: **www.playboard.org**

NIPPA

6c Wildflower Way
Apollo Road
Belfast
BT12 6TA

Tel: **028 9066 2825**
Email: **mail@nippa.org**
Web: **www.nippa.org**

NICMA

16-18 Mill Street
Newtownards
BT23 4LU

Tel: **028 9182 3350**
Email: **info@nicma.org**
Web: **www.nicma.org**

Coaching Northern Ireland

Queen's PEC
Botanic Gardens
Belfast
BT9 5EX

Tel: **028 9068 6940**
Web: **www.coachingni.net**

