



CODE OF GOOD PRACTICE

FOR

**VOLUNTEER ADULT LEADERS,
OTHER VOLUNTEERS AND
STAFF IN WORKING WITH
YOUNG PEOPLE**

January 2013

Introduction

Foróige aims to create a safe setting for young people in which their dignity is both respected and promoted and where they can grow into more confident, caring and creative human beings. This document outlines a code of good practice that is designed to ensure this safety and protect young people from abuse of any kind. This code of good practice will also reduce the risk of exposure to allegations or suspicions of abuse.

The purpose of this document is to:

- (a) recommend good practice that promotes the wellbeing of young people and protects them from abuse of any kind.
- (b) affirm voluntary adult leaders/mentors and staff in their positive role in relation to young people.
- (c) raise the awareness of voluntary adult leaders/mentors and paid staff regarding situations that could give rise to allegations or suspicions of child abuse.

This Code of Practice is for use by staff, voluntary adult leaders/mentors and other volunteers in:

1. Foróige Volunteer led services including all Clubs and Cafés
2. Mentoring environments such as BBBS and NFTE
3. Foróige operated Services and Projects¹
4. Any other way in which adults interact with young people in Foróige

This document should be read in conjunction with '*Protecting Young People*'². There are a range of other Foróige documents on good practice such as, Foróige Guidelines on Undertaking Overnight Stays Away from Home, Guidelines for Foróige Clubs and Groups Undertaking a Day Trip, Teenage Health Initiative Guidelines and Big Brother Big Sister Guidelines etc.

The National Council of Foróige believes that the protection and welfare of children and young people is of paramount importance. It is the policy of the National Council that the organisation's staff and adult leaders take all reasonable care to ensure that all young people involved in its services are protected from abuse of any kind.

¹ Services and Projects, in this context, are to be interpreted as meaning Foróige Clubs, Local Youth Development Projects and other Services and Projects operated by the Foróige Organisation.

² Foróige's "Protecting Young People - Guidelines for Foróige Staff regarding Child Protection and Welfare Concerns" and "Protecting Young People – Guidelines for Foróige Leaders regarding Child Protection and Welfare Concerns" enables voluntary adult leaders and staff to deal effectively with matters relating to child protection and welfare concerns that they may encounter in their roles.

Code of Good Practice For Voluntary Adult Leaders, Mentors and Staff.

The code of good practice includes the following principles:

- 1. There is a recommended ratio of voluntary adult leaders/staff to groups of young people**
- 2. A code of behaviour based on respect is agreed by all involved**
- 3. Volunteers, mentors and staff understand and practice their role correctly**
- 4. Education programmes operate in accordance with Foróige's philosophy**
- 5. Responses to discipline aim to facilitate learning and development**
- 6. Physical contact must be appropriate and in the interest of the young person.**
- 7. Inappropriate and unacceptable behaviour is avoided at all times**
- 8. One to one work will be conducted in an open manner following the correct procedures**

1. Recommended ratio of voluntary adult leaders and staff to groups of young people

The recommended ratio of voluntary adult leaders and/or staff to young people in large groups is 1:10. However, it is always advisable to have two voluntary adult leaders/staff even with a group of 10 or less. Safety and other specific circumstances may require that these ratios are considerably lower. For day trips and events away from the normal premises the ratio should be at least 1:8. For trips away involving overnight stays away from home the ratio should be 1:5 with a minimum of two voluntary adult leaders or staff. (See also Guidelines for Foróige Clubs & Groups Undertaking a Trip Involving Overnight Stays Away from Home).

In a single sex group it is recommended that one voluntary adult leader or staff person, at least, is of the same sex as the participants. In a mixed group there should be sufficient male and female voluntary adult leaders and/or staff to reflect the ratio of male and female participants.

2. A code of behaviour based on respect that is agreed by all involved

Volunteers/staff and young people should agree a code of behaviour for the group/individual work that promotes the dignity of each person and protects their emotional and physical well being. This code outlines both positive behaviours to be practiced and unacceptable behaviours. In a group situation it should be written up on a chart and observed by all. Some non-negotiable rules based on Foróige policies also need to be included (for example in relation to drugs/alcohol).

It is also recommended that groups develop a "Charter of Rights and Responsibilities" to underpin this code of behaviour. This would outline the rights and responsibilities of each adult and young person in the club/group. Young people/staff/volunteers should have the opportunity to express concerns if this code or charter is infringed. Follow up procedures should also be put in place to respond to infringements.

3. Staff/Voluntary Adult Leaders/Mentors understand and practice their role correctly

Voluntary adult leaders/mentors and staff should fully understand their roles and have a clear understanding of the nature of the relationship between themselves and young people. Their role is that of guide, mentor and facilitator of learning.

They can be significant adults in the life of a young person and have a very positive influence on the development of the young person by providing:

- a positive role model
- positive leadership and
- opportunities for development.

The practice of this role involves affirming young people and encouraging them to reach their potential. This includes:

- Listening attentively to what a young people have to say
- Praising members for their achievements and qualities
- Encouraging young people to develop their talents and interests
- Challenging negative perceptions and behaviour in a supportive manner
- Challenging young people to treat each other with respect

Mutual respect, trust, honesty and openness are fundamental to a healthy relationship between the voluntary adult leader/mentor or staff person and young people. This is a unique relationship, whereby adults and young people voluntarily come together to learn and to share values.

4. Education programmes operate in accordance with Foróige's philosophy

Foróige education programmes are designed to empower young people and facilitate their development. Programmes should therefore be operated in such a way that young people:

- Decide and plan activities under guidance of adults
- Discuss issues and contribute ideas
- Take responsibility for activities and behaviour
- Discover and develop new talents
- Evaluate activities to see what they learned and achieved

Voluntary adult leaders and staff should also:

- Work in a way that ensures the positive and healthy development of young people.
- Ensure that programme content and materials of a sensitive nature are appropriate to the age and maturity of the young people involved.
- Avoid using content and materials that are not conducive to the positive healthy development of young people, for example, issues of violence or subversion.
- Seek the permission of parents/guardians where matters being dealt with are of a sensitive nature, for example, matters relating to health or sexuality E.g., Real U Sexual Health Programme. (See also Foróige's Teenage Health Initiative Guidelines).
- Use language that is appropriate to the age and ability of the young people.
- Put in place a sign in/sign out system for participants to record attendance, dates, times and venues at any particular club/event/session (the content of all such sessions should also be noted).
- All such records should be stored in a safe place.

5. Responses to discipline that aim to facilitate learning and development

When dealing with a disruptive young person it is important to try to help the young person to learn from the situation and to take charge of and change their own behaviour. It is recommended that where possible more than one voluntary adult leader or staff person be present.

Training is available on this issue of responding to disruptive behaviour, please refer to your Manager, Project Worker or RYO. Although every situation is unique, the following are some general guidelines on how to respond appropriately:

Do:

- Talk to the young person on their own, in a visible location and with knowledge of others
- Be aware of your own feelings
- If you are angry, walk away and say you will deal with it later
- Breathe deeply and calm yourself
- Ask young person what is going on with them
- Listen attentively to what the young person says
- Acknowledge the young person's feelings and point of view
- Describe specifically their behaviour and state your response
- Explain consequences of disruptive behaviour
- Praise and encourage the young person in some way if possible
- Discuss alternative responses and help the young person to try them out
- Consult with parents if necessary

Do not:

- Use sarcasm or hurtful remarks
- Use bad language
- Verbally or physically abuse the young person

Recording an Incident:

Foróige guidelines also require that serious instances of disruptive behaviour, which necessitate the intervention of a voluntary adult leader/mentor or staff person, be documented and kept on file. Appendix I is a sample template that can be adapted to suit a club/mentor or project and the particular incident. This report should be available to Foróige management and where necessary, in confidence, to other voluntary adult leaders and staff involved with the particular group or individual.

The written report should describe:

- a) The programme/activity running at the time
- b) What happened
- c) Who was involved
- d) Where and when it happened
- e) What was said, if significant
- f) Any injury to person(s) or property
- g) How the situation was resolved and what the voluntary adult leader/mentor or staff person did to bring about its resolution
- h) Any follow-up or consequences to the situation.

If you have any queries regarding this procedure contact your Youth Officer/other staff person or Line Manager.

6. Physical contact must be appropriate and in the interest of the young person

As part of a normal healthy relationship between a voluntary adult leader/mentor or a staff person and a young person, socially acceptable physical contact will occur from time to time. This will include a handshake, a pat on the back, an affirmation, a comforting arm on the shoulder in times of distress, etc. These contacts should be made with integrity and respect for the young person, and in response to the needs of the young person. Inappropriate physical contact with the young people must be avoided at all times. Any discomfort or resistance on the part of the young person should be respected.

The most informal physical gestures e.g. putting a hand on a shoulder or arm, could be misconstrued by a young person or an observer, especially if they are continually repeated with the same young person.

There are particular conditions within which appropriate physical contact should properly take place. They include, when in a group situation:

- In open view
- With at least one other adult present
- With other young people present
- When the young person is clearly informed of the process to be followed and freely gives their permission e.g. administering first aid

Voluntary adult leaders/mentors and paid staff should use their discretion and good judgement with regard to necessary physical contact in some activities including swimming, coaching, sports, games etc. Particular care should be taken in the following situations:

- One to One meetings
- For Example; Individual work, BBBS matches and CHART
- Comforting a distressed young person
- Administering First Aid
- Intervening in a physical fight between young people

Physical force should not be used, except in circumstances where such force is the only means of protecting a child, young person or adult from injury.

7. Inappropriate and unacceptable behaviour is avoided at all times

Voluntary adult leaders/mentors and staff need to be aware of particular situations and environments where young people are more vulnerable to abuse and where allegations of child abuse are more likely to occur. This is a matter of using common sense and of being open, as distinct from being secretive, in their dealings with young people (See **Particular Situations of Risk** on page 8).

Where a voluntary adult leader/Mentor or staff person has a concern about the nature of a particular relationship involving himself/herself or another voluntary adult leader/staff person with a young person, he/she should discuss it with a Youth Officer/other staff person or a Manager and take appropriate steps as necessary.

Any form of physical, emotional or sexual abuse of young people by another young person/voluntary adult leader/mentor or staff person is totally unacceptable.

It is also unacceptable to:

- Embarrass or humiliate a young person by the use of sarcastic or hurtful remarks about the young person or his/her family
- Use bad language
- Verbally abuse a young person in order to bully or intimidate him/her
- Physically punish a young person
- To tell jokes of an inappropriate nature or make comments of a sexual nature
- To use electronic media to carry out any of the above
- Use images of young people in Foróige on personal social media sites

8. One to one mentoring/individual work practice's will be conducted in an open manner following the correct procedures

There can be great value to a young person from a relationship with a supportive adult, and this is facilitated in Foróige through BBBS, one to one individual work and other means where there is training support and supervision to support this developmental relationship.

(BBBS mentors should follow the additional guidelines provided by Foróige as part of their training as mentors).

Individual Work Programmes:

Individual work programmes are defined as planned one to one work between a staff member or volunteer and an identified young person for a specific purpose over a specific period of time to achieve agreed outcomes.

Individual work should be carried out with a young person when:

1. The benefit/appropriateness to the young person is greater than that of having them participate in a group programme.
2. A young person, parent or appropriate professional requests a one to one programme for a young person to address a specific issue, i.e. separation, personal development, crisis situation arises, etc and Foróige considers this to be appropriate.
3. It is identified that a young person needs additional support about a topic/ issue.
4. A young person will not attend a group programme but will engage on a one to one level.
5. It is the best way to get to know a young person.
6. It is the best way to enable the young person to develop skills and confidence to participate in a group setting.

Please refer to Foróige Individual Work Guidelines and also refer to Foróige's Child Protection Guidelines regarding any issues that arise during individual work that are of a child protection nature.

Particular Situations of Risk

Voluntary adult leaders/mentors and staff need to be aware of situations and environments where a young person may be at particular risk and where they need to act with special care and consideration. Here are some examples and the corresponding good practice that is required. Inappropriate practice in these situations could leave voluntary adult leaders/mentors/staff open to suspicions or allegations of child abuse.

Meetings with individual young people or a small group of young people

Where possible:

- Such meetings / programmes should be conducted in a room with visual access, or with the door open, or in a room / area where other people are nearby;
- Voluntary adult leaders and staff should advise another adult that such a meeting is taking place, and the reason for it. A record should be kept of participants present, dates, times and content of such meetings/programmes in the project files or club/project log book (see Appendix I). Others in the building could be encouraged to drop in occasionally;
- Voluntary adult leaders/mentors and staff are strongly advised to avoid meetings with individual young people where they are on their own in a building;
- Meetings with young people should take place at an appropriate, planned time with consent from parents;
- Voluntary adult leaders and staff are discouraged from being alone in their car with a young person. However on occasion and in some roles it is necessary to travel in a car with a young person and it is recommended to have the young person travel in the back. In the event of it being necessary to travel alone with a young person in a car this should be recorded and it is best practice that you communicate this with parents and get their consent.

Residential Trips Away

Particular attention should be paid to the following points:

- All voluntary adult leaders and staff travelling away with young people should be carefully chosen.
- Permission of parents/guardians should be obtained for all trips away.
- Special care should be taken by all voluntary adult leaders and staff in the selection of homes/venues for overnight stays.
- Where practicable, more than one young person should be placed with a host family.
- In a residential setting the ratio of voluntary adult leader, mentor or staff person to young people should be 1:5 with a minimum of two voluntary adult leaders and/or staff. (In the event of an emergency at night, for example, if a young person has to be taken to hospital, clearly it is an advantage to have a third voluntary adult leader or staff person).
- In the event of the venue not providing appropriate night supervision, there should be one voluntary adult leader or staff person who remains awake through the night. Should the need arise, the designated adult will call upon other adults (male or female) as appropriate. Voluntary adult leaders/staff should not retire to bed and hand over to the designated night supervisors until they are satisfied that all the participants are in bed and settled.
- When selecting venues for trips away, due consideration should be given to the practicality of implementing these guidelines. (See also Guidelines for Foróige Clubs & Groups Undertaking a Trip Involving Overnight Stays Away from Home).

Dormitory and Changing Room Supervision

Voluntary adult leaders/mentors and staff should be particularly careful in dormitory and changing room supervision of young people. They should always be respectful of the privacy and dignity of young people in such situations.

- Supervision of dormitories and changing rooms should be carried out by voluntary adult leaders, mentors and staff of the appropriate gender.
- Voluntary adult leaders, mentors and staff should avoid situations where they are alone with young people in dormitories and changing rooms. Wherever practicable, there should be two or more voluntary adult leaders or staff present in dormitories and changing rooms. If a voluntary adult leader or staff person must be alone in a dormitory or a changing room with a young person, they must be of the same gender, and another adult should be informed of the situation.
- Voluntary adult leaders and staff should not sleep in rooms/dormitories with young people.
- The voluntary adult leader, mentor or staff person's room/cubicle should be off limits for young people.
- Voluntary adult leaders, mentors and staff should exercise discretion and respect in relation to entering young people's cubicles or sleeping areas.
- In changing rooms and washrooms, ensure that supervision is adequate but be mindful of the privacy of the young person.

Internet and social media

- Leaders/mentors/staff should not be linked to young people through personal social network sites such as the leader's own Facebook page.
- Leaders/mentors/staff should encourage young people to be respectful of other people in their comments and actions online.
- Leaders mentors and staff should ensure that young people in their care are supervised during their use of Internet access.

Foróige is currently developing guidelines on Internet and Social Media; these will be available (on the staff portal) in the near future.

What to do if an allegation is made

Follow the procedures and code of conduct as outlined in 'Protecting Young People, Guidelines for Foróige Leaders regarding Child Protection and Welfare Concerns' and 'Protecting Young People, Guidelines for Foróige Staff regarding Child Protection and Welfare Concerns'.

Appendix I

Template for Club/Café/Project Log Book Recording Incidents/One to One Meetings with a Young Person

Form to be completed for reporting incidents/meetings i.e. disruptive behaviour, administering first aid, fighting, an injury etc

Copy Sent To: _____ (name)
Title: _____ (Regional Youth Officer, Foróige Manager,
Project Worker, BBBS Caseworker)
Date: _____

Details of young person/people:

Name(s): _____
Address: _____

Details Of Incident/Meeting:

Date: _____
Venue: _____
Time: _____
Activity: _____
Present: _____

3. Description/purpose of Incident/Meeting:

4. Follow-up, outcomes and further contact:

Details of Person(s) Reporting Incident/Meeting:

Name(s): _____
Address(es): _____

Telephone Number(s): _____
Signed: _____
Signed: _____
Date: _____