

Guidelines on the Role of Social Workers for Children Placed in Children's Residential Centres



An Bord Comhairleach um Achtanna na Leanaí
Children Acts Advisory Board

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Introduction



These guidelines set out the role of social workers assigned to children and young people placed in children's residential centres. These guidelines were developed by the Health Information and Quality Authority Social Services Inspectorate in consultation with the Health Service Executive (HSE), in response to requests from HSE social workers and residential centre managers for practical guidance in relation to the role of social workers in residential care.

The Children Acts Advisory Board, under its functional remit, was requested by the Social Services Inspectorate to publish these guidelines. The guidelines are not intended to be exhaustive, but are issued to assist social workers, residential centre care staff and other relevant parties in clarifying the role of social workers. Most importantly it is designed to assist social workers in their work with children in care, whether under a care order, a special care order or a voluntary arrangement.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Aid Browne', written in a cursive style.

Aidan Browne
Chief Executive
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Background

The Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA), Social Services Inspectorate (SSI), in the course of carrying out inspections of children's residential centres, received numerous requests from social workers and centre managers to provide a practical set of guidelines in relation to the role of social workers in residential care. This document has been prepared in response to that request and while not intended to be definitive, is issued to assist social workers, residential staff and other relevant parties in clarifying the role of social workers.

The Child Care Act, 1991 and the Children Act, 2001 set out the responsibilities of the HSE to children in need of care and protection. This guidance note is to assist social workers in their

work with children in care, whether under a care order, a special care order or a voluntary arrangement and applies to children placed in residential care.

Social workers have the same responsibilities to children whether the child is placed in residential care provided by the HSE, a voluntary organisation or private company. Equally, children in care who are remanded to an assessment or remand centre, or are sentenced to a detention centre also continue to need the care and protection provided by their HSE social worker.

All young people in care are legally required to have an assigned social worker.



Working in partnership

This guidance note outlines the responsibilities of social workers for children in residential centres, however centre staff and management also have a key function to assist social workers in discharging their responsibilities. Residential centre staff members and social workers should work closely together in caring for a child. This partnership approach is essential in ensuring the child receives the best possible standard of care.

The following practice guidelines should underpin the work of the residential centre staff and management in supporting the social worker in discharging their responsibilities:

- The social worker is made feel welcome by the staff team when visiting and has no difficulty in arranging visits.
- The social worker is facilitated in visiting the child in private.
- The social worker is given full access to review case files and daily logs concerning the child.
- The social worker is promptly informed of all significant events involving the child.
- The social worker is informed of any complaints made by the child.
- The social worker is invited to attend placements reviews.
- The social worker is consulted in advance in relation to any proposed periods of time to be spent by the child away from the centre overnight.
- The social worker is informed of any risks to the child arising from the behaviour of another child.
- The social worker is provided with a procedure for raising concerns and making complaints.
- A main staff member/keyworker is assigned to liaise with the social worker to facilitate effective communication.
- The centre should implement any interventions in relation to the child that have been agreed on an inter-disciplinary basis.
- The centre should implement the relevant actions of the care plan through the placement plan.
- The centre should understand the role of the social worker as an advocate and protector and respect their right to raise questions in relation to practice.
- The residential centre's policies should include a policy, to be developed in consultation with the local social work department, which outlines the role of the supervising social worker and required standards. The social worker should be informed of any new policies or of any changes to current policy in a centre.



Legislation and Regulations governing the role of social workers for young people in residential care

This guidance is based on the Child Care Act, 1991, the Children Act, 2001, regulations (*Child Care Regulations 1995, 1996*) and national standards (*National Standards for Children's Residential Centres 2001, and National Standards for Special Care 2001*). The legislation allows the HSE to delegate its function with regard to children in care to an 'authorised person'. Social workers, as such authorised persons, are responsible for meeting the HSE's legal responsibilities to children in care.

The main duties and responsibilities of a social worker under the *National Standards for Children's Residential Centres* are defined under Standard 5.5.26:

Supervising social workers have clear professional and statutory obligations and responsibilities for young people in residential care. All young people need to know that they have access on a regular basis to an advocate external to the centre to whom they can confide any difficulties or concerns they have in relation to any aspects of their care.

Standard 5 Planning for Children and Young People of the *National Standards for Children's Residential Centres* also emphasises the requirement for a detailed care plan for each child:

There is a statutory written care plan developed in consultation with parents and young people that is subject to regular review. This plan states the aims and objectives of the placements, promotes the welfare education, interest and health needs of young people and addresses their emotional and psychological needs. It stresses and outlines practical contact with families and where appropriate, preparation for leaving care.

For further details on the responsibilities of social workers under these standards see Appendix A.



Key Responsibilities of Social Workers

The key responsibilities of social workers are to ensure that young people are safe, their rights protected and that their care plans are relevant and regularly reviewed. These responsibilities are governed by the aforementioned regulations and government policy and represents a minimum requirement. High quality supervision of social workers by their line managers is an essential part of social work practice which helps to ensure that children are cared for safely and well while also supporting social workers in their role.

The following are practice guidelines designed to assist social workers in discharging these key responsibilities.


Inform yourself about the centre prior to placement:

- Seek a copy of the last inspection and monitoring report where available. Speak with the local monitoring officer to get their view of the centre.
- In non-statutory services establish the registration status of the centre and the function it is registered for, bearing in mind that section 60 of the Child Care Act, 1991 prohibits the operation of a non-registered centre.
- Review a copy of the centre's policy document and its statement of purpose and function.
- Visit the residential centre prior to placement of the child and enquire about pocket money, clothes, contact with friends and family and general rules. See the bedroom.
- Check that the centre is suitable for the child in terms of the other young people already there.

- Be clear about the rights of children in residential care, in particular their right to access their files, including documents provided by the social worker unless otherwise agreed on grounds of data protection or potential harm to the child.
- Seek relevant information on the placement process and procedures for any emergency residential services in your area in case you need to arrange an emergency placement.
- Familiarise yourself with all statutory instruments and legislation governing the placement of children in residential care, in particular the *Child Care (Placement of Children in Residential Care) Regulations 1995 and 1996* and the Child Care Act, 1991.
- Be clear about the Children First reporting procedures for children in care or other local procedures, including notification of high risk behaviour if appropriate under this process e.g. bullying.
- Know what documents should be provided to the residential centre by the social worker in order to facilitate shared planning, for example, the child's birth certificate, medical history, up to date care plan, copy of care order and any other pertinent information.
- If necessary, facilitate the handover of the child's care between professionals, in particular between any medical professionals involved with the child.

Plan effectively for the care of the child:

- Ensure the child has an up-to-date care plan prior to admission. It is essential that this is



regularly reviewed and updated according to *Article 25 (1)-(7) of the Child Care (Placement of Children in Residential Care) Regulations 1995*.

- The first review should occur within two months of placement in residential centre.
- The next reviews should occur within six months intervals for the next two years.
- The next reviews should occur within twelve month intervals.

Please note these are minimum timescales in which reviews should occur. Article 25 (1) states that ‘the care plan should be reviewed by an authorised person as often as may be necessary in the particular circumstances of the case’.

- Ensure that the overall aims of the care plan are reflected in the centre’s placement plan and carried through to the care provided to the child living in the centre.
- Ensure significant decisions which affect the child’s placement occur within the care plan or special care plan review process.
- Ensure the child, parents and significant others are consulted about the plans and are facilitated to attend review meetings and receive copies of the plan.
- Ensure multi-disciplinary planning meetings are arranged where necessary to support and maintain young people in their placements and to manage risks.
- Ensure adequate leaving care plans are incorporated into the care plan when a child is sixteen years of age including consideration of the need for support from social workers, aftercare workers and others as required beyond their 18th birthday.

Monitor practice in the centre as it relates to your child:

- Check that the child is receiving good primary care with enough pocket money, clothes, good meals, contact with friends and a good standard of accommodation especially their bedroom.
- Review all notification of significant incidents and respond as necessary with the staff team but also with the child.
- Be aware of any patterns of behaviour in an individual case or the cumulative impact of certain interventions such as physical restraints or in the special care units, single separations.
- Clarify information with the child.
- Review the child’s case files and daily logs when visiting the centre.
- Request regular updates regarding the child either verbally or in writing.

Be informed:

- Ensure that any therapy the child is engaged with is in keeping with the aims of the care plan.
- Be familiar with models of therapy being used in the centre including the arrangements for supervision/monitoring of therapeutic interventions.
- Be clear about the purpose of the therapy and agree with the therapist the process for evaluating its effectiveness with the child and expected outcomes. Seek their views as to its usefulness as part of the evaluation process.
- Ensure the professional credentials and references for the therapist have been validated prior to their involvement with the child.

- Ensure the child has a good understanding of the therapy and its purpose.
- Be familiar with any model of physical restraint including the monitoring of the use of physical restraint.
- If necessary, raise concerns about practice with the centre manager and if unresolved, address the issue with appropriate line managers until you are satisfied.
- Inform the local monitoring officer of any concerns you may have in relation to practice in a centre.

Listen to the views of the child:

- Keep in regular contact with the child through phone calls and visits.
- Always meet the child or child whose placement you supervise in private, even briefly, to give them an opportunity to express any concerns.
- Make arrangements to visit the child separate from access visits, meetings and reviews.
- When contacting the centre, make sure to speak with the child and not just with staff members alone.

Raise concerns or complain if you are unhappy about any aspects of care:

- Know the local process for making a complaint and seek to resolve complaints in accordance with this process.
- If you have a serious breakdown in your professional relationship with a centre, the line management from both social work and residential services should consider the use of an independent person to ensure professional objectivity is maintained in resolving complaints.

- Discuss with your line management any fears you may have of a child losing their placement due to making you making a complaint.

Advocate for the child:

- Ensure the child is prepared by yourself or by their keyworker for all meetings, so that they know what to expect.
- If a child does not attend meetings explore why and seek to address their concerns.
- Let the child know that you are their advocate outside of the centre and tell them you will help them to deal with any concerns or complaints they may have.
- Ensure that the child has all important phone numbers including your own and respond to messages as soon as possible.
- Keep any promises you make and tell the child if you think you will be unable to keep them.
- Give the child a good understanding of being in care and the wider care system including your role as a social worker and safeguarding responsibilities.
- Clarify the role of the keyworker in the centre and maintain good communication with him/her.
- Check that the relationship between the child and their family is maintained/developed and facilitated by the practice in the centre. Address any difficulties in this regard with the centre manager and family.
- In some circumstances it may be appropriate to request that a child has a guardian *ad litem* appointed, in order to provide an advocate that is external to the HSE.



Feedback to child:

- Check that the child feels listened to and understands any decisions or discussions at review meetings.
- Advise the child if meeting times have changed or meetings are cancelled and let them know if you will be late or absent for an extended period of time.
- Introduce the child to their new social worker if you are leaving or changing posts.
- Ensure that the child is kept informed as to the status of any complaints they have made or assessments of allegations, always having due regard to criminal or legal restrictions to this process. A child should be kept informed and supported throughout as the investigation or assessment of complaints progresses and should be informed in a timely manner of the outcome.



Appendix 1:

National Standards for Children's Residential Centres

Standard 5.5.26

Supervising social workers have clear professional and statutory obligations and responsibilities for young people in residential care. All young people need to know that they have access on a regular basis to an advocate external to the centre to whom they can confide any difficulties or concerns they have in relation to any aspects of their care.

Social work management ensures that supervising social workers:

- provide sufficient background information about the child to the centre;
- prepare a care plan as required as the delegated authorised person under the *Child Care (Placement of Children in Residential Care) Regulations 1995 Article 23 (1)*;
- make arrangements to hold care plan reviews *Child Care (Placement of Children in Residential Care) Regulations 1995 Article 25 (1)-(7)*:
 - First review should occur within two months of placement in residential centre;
 - The next reviews should occur within six months intervals for the next two years;
 - The next reviews should occur within twelve month intervals.

Please note these are **minimum** timescales in which reviews should occur. Article 25 (1) states that 'the care plan should be reviewed by an authorised person as often as may be necessary in the particular circumstances of the case'.

- ensure that young people and parents are invited and their views are represented during the review and are reflected in decisions *Child Care (Placement of Children in Residential Care) Regulations 1995 Article 25 (4) and (5)*;
- visit the child in the centre and see the child privately *Child Care (Placement of Children in Residential Care) Regulations 1995 Article 24 (1)*:
 - First visit should occur within one month of the placement;
 - The next visit should occur within three monthly intervals for the next two years;
 - Thereafter at intervals not exceeding six months.

Please note that these are **minimum** visiting requirements

- are aware of all significant events involving the child and take appropriate action on receipt of written notifications. These would include self-harm attempts, medical assistance required, criminal activity and others;

- receive written notification of all incidents of physical restraint or unauthorised absence of a child;
- are satisfied that the child is safe and well cared for in the centre;
- from time to time read the child's case file and daily diary;
- keep an up to date case file including a record of every visit to the child, *Child Care (Placement of Children in Residential Care) Regulations 1995, Part IV, Article 22 and 24.*

There are also additional criteria under the *National Standards for Children's Residential Centres* which relate to the responsibilities of the social worker in partnership with other professionals involved with the child and these are as follows:

- Consult with the young people and their families about decisions that affect their life and future (*Standard 4.1. and Child Care (Placement of Children in Residential Care) Regulations 1995 Article 25 (4) and (5).*)
- Social worker and centre manager are satisfied that the placement is suitable and will meet the needs of the child and takes account of the need to protect young people of abuse by their peers (*Standard 5.1 and 5.6 and Child Care (Placement of Children in Residential Care) Regulations 1995 Article 25 (5)(ii).*)
- Where a child has lost contact with a parent, family or significant others actively seek to re-establish contact and to identify key people within the extended family to provide support (*Standard 5.19).*)
- Encourage contact with family members taking into account court stipulations and wishes of the children and ensure young people and families are informed of reasons for supervision of visits (*Standard 5.20).*)
- Ensure siblings have a high level of contact with each other when they cannot be placed together (*Standard 5.22).*)
- Inform the child of any reason for no contact with family members (*Standard 5.23).*)
- Access any specialist service required (*Standard 5.29).*)
- Co-ordinate work with other professionals and ensure any interdisciplinary issues are overcome in the best interest of the child (*Standard 5.30).*)
- Any findings and recommendations of specialist professionals are reflected in the care plan and work of the centre (*Standard 5.31 and Child Care (Placement of Children in Residential Care) Regulations 1995 Article 25 (5).*)
- Ensure the preparation for leaving care is including in the care plan for child two years prior to reaching the legal age of leaving care (*Standard 5.35 and Child Care (Placement of Children in Residential Care) Regulations 1995 Article 25 (5) (v).*)
- Endeavour to ensure with centre managers that young people do not leave the centre in an unplanned manner (*Standard 5.37).*)



- Ensure the child has a permanent, private and secure record of his or her history and progress that contains all relevant documentation and is maintained in an appropriate medium in perpetuity (*Standard 5.40 and 5.44 and Child Care (Placement of Children in Residential Care) Regulations 1995 Article 22*).
- Records are maintained in way to facilitate effective care planning, respects confidentiality and shows child's views were sought (*Standard 5.41*).
- See copies of physical restraint (*Standard 6.31*).
- Agree arrangement for bringing allegations of abuse to the attention of parents or guardians (*Standard 7.9*).
- Maintain the original educational placement for the child and ensure educational assessment carried out if needed (*Standard 8.2 and 8.4*).
- Obtain a medical assessment if necessary (*Standard 9.1*).
- Share all relevant information with the general practitioner to ensure optimum care (*Standard 9.5*).



Notes

