



An Ghníomhaireacht um  
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach  
Child and Family Agency

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Meath Enterprise Centre

Trim Road

Navan, Co Meath

Tel: 046 9098500

2<sup>nd</sup> September 2019

Dear Principal,

As we are at the beginning of the school year, I wanted to link with you at this key point in the hope that some of this information below may be of assistance to you. I am conscious that Schools play an essential role in keeping children safe given the unique level of time that children spend in school and the trust that children develop in their teachers.

In the last academic year, referrals from school accounted for the third highest level of referrals from services in Louth & Meath. These referrals encompassed a broad range of issues including Physical Abuse, Neglect, Sexual Abuse, Emotional Abuse and Welfare concerns.

On reviewing the referrals from last year, we have noticed a change in referral types and noted that some may be preventable with increased knowledge and guidance to parents. Obviously your primary role is education but we are conscious some schools have mechanisms for sharing information with parents and therefore you may find it useful to share some of the following if you have mechanism in place -

### **Slapping**

In 2015, the defense of “reasonable chastisement” in cases where a person slapped a child was removed from Irish Law. This means parents can now be charged for hitting a child. As it is now against the law, parents may not realise that if they do slap their child and their child tells their teacher, you are obliged to report this to Tusla and in turn Tusla have a remit to notify the Gardai. If you have a newsletter or webpage in your school, you may choose to include a small note advising parents of this change in the law.

### **Online Safety**

There has been a significant increase in referrals as children are often exposed to danger in their own homes via the internet. The most common areas are –

- **Sexting**: children sharing intimate images on line which are then used as bullying or
- **Online Bullying**: Bullying can take place on any online forum and social media sites. It can also take place on mobile phones and because technology is everywhere. It is more invasive as it continues outside school.
- **Exploitation**: adults contacting children on line.

There are some excellent resources available for schools and parents including -

- Cyber Safe Ireland - <https://cybersafeireland.org>
- Webwise - <https://www.webwise.ie/>
- National Anti-Bullying Website - <http://tacklebullying.ie/>

I have attached a poster that you may want to put up on a notice board and the sites above have many more resources that may assist you and your school. I am aware that some school in Louth and Meath took part in Safer Internet Day in 2019 and may be interested in progressing some initiatives on the 11 February 2020.

### **Signs of Safety**

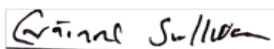
Last year we commenced using the Signs of Safety approach which involves spending more time undertaking what we call "Preliminary Enquiries" and building safety & supports for the child. I am conscious that schools may receive a response to a referral stating that following preliminary screening, a decision has been made that an initial assessment is not warranted. which is misleading as in many cases we will have still met the child and parent and have addressed the concerns. This has been increasingly successful as children are waiting less time for a response and parents have responded positively to this more collaborative and strengths orientated approach.

### **Support for Parents**

The Louth and Meath Children and Young Person's Services Committee recognised that there was not a single site that had information about family supports and parenting courses. Therefore, we have been developing a site for each county which we will be launching later this year.

Finally, I do appreciate how busy you are but as I am conscious of the added pressures that child protection issues present within the school environment. While I have noted two particular areas above, if there are other areas that you would like guidance/ advice on please let us know.

Yours sincerely



**Grainne Sullivan**  
**Area Manager**  
**Louth Meath**