



Sonas Staff Code of Conduct: Working with Children

Sonas staff are committed to keeping children safe, protecting children's rights and maintaining best practice in relation to child protection and welfare. All staff are Garda vetted and have current Children's First training.

Sonas staff will:

- Maintain a commitment to high quality service provision
- Abide by the Sonas policies and procedures
- Respect confidentiality of service users except where this is in conflict with child protection concerns
- Advocate in the best interest of the child
- Remain committed to treating all children equally
- Comply with all relevant legislation

Child and Family Agency Act 2013

Child Care Act, 1991

Child Care (Amendment) Act 2013

Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children (2011)

Children Act 2001

Education Welfare Act 2000

Family Support Agency Act 2001

Ombudsman for Children Act 2002

Protections for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act 1998

Youth Work Act, 2001

Children First National Guidelines for Child Protection and Welfare, 1999

Equal Status Act 2004

How do we interact with children?

- We respond appropriately to child initiated need for comfort
- We keep physical contact to a minimum and only to meet the needs of a child (eg: help a young child to put on a coat, push a child on a swing when asked to do so, give a child physical comfort if they seek it after hurting themselves)
- We provide opportunities for children to interact and develop positive relationships with adults and children

- We act as a positive role model and display pro social behaviour
- We work in partnership with mothers in order to achieve the best possible results for the child
- We treat children and young people as individuals
- We ensure interactions are age and stage appropriate
- We involve children and young people in all decision making where appropriate
- We ensure that children are never alone with a Sonas employee -another Sonas staff member or parent is always present in the building during all sessions and groups, or else meetings are held in a public location. In exceptional circumstances the other staff member may leave the building momentarily to attend to issues within the complex but will never leave the complex and will only be gone for a short period. If it is necessary for the other staff member to leave the building for a longer duration the session will be suspended and rescheduled.
- We respect cultural rules for interactions where appropriate.
- We remain non-judgemental and respect the rights, thoughts and opinions of the mother , while simultaneously advocating for the rights and needs of the child, when planning support for the children
- We encourage parents to use the children's service, suggest recommendations to staff and to avail of the complaints procedure where requested
- Sonas staff will only change nappies of children in exceptional circumstances whereby the mother is not available to do so. There will always be another staff present.
- Sonas staff will maintain professional relationships and boundaries with children and families. There will be no unnecessary contact outside of working hours.

How do we communicate to children?

- We respond to disclosures and observed child protection concerns calmly, respectfully and sensitively. We believe the child and ask no leading questions. We inform them of what our next steps will be. We inform the designated child protection liaison person and report to the Child and Family Agency. Where possible we will always inform the mother that a report is being submitted and discuss the contents of the report with her, except in exceptional circumstances when doing so may place the child at greater risk.
- We encourage children to express their thoughts and opinions
- We support the complaints procedure for children
- We address children in an encouraging, positive and age appropriate way
- We use active listening techniques and respond to children in a supportive and appropriate way
- We attempt to combat communication difficulties, language barriers and learning difficulties
- We keep the mothers informed of the child's progress at all times via regular feedback
- We obtain parental consent for children to attend sessions
- All photographs of children are for internal use only to be displayed on wall and will not be publicised or shared. The photographs will be given to the family at their request or when the family leaves the service. If the family do not take the photographs they will be confidentially shredded. Due to confidentiality reasons, Sonas will strive that only Sonas staff members will take photographs of children participating in a Sonas led activity.
- All Sonas children's rooms in the Long Term Supported Housing service are fitted with CCTV. The footage is stored in line with our Sonas policies and is only accessible to be viewed by Sonas staff. This footage can also be requested by the Gardai if needed for an investigation.

How do we create a child centred and child friendly space?

- We maintain a safe, child centred environment free from discrimination, bullying and harassment
- We create an atmosphere of openness and trust
- We respect the rights of children attending the service
- We support children to engage in activities which support their self esteem
- We encourage and assist children to undertake personal activities themselves
- We acknowledge that children attending our service will have different cultures and values, and will ensure each child is given the opportunity to attend sessions in the playroom appropriate to their stage of development, abilities and interests
- We offer positive guidance and encourage appropriate behaviour
- We remain up to date with relevant child related legislation, policies and research