



Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery

Operational Policy:
Safeguarding Children Under 18

8 April 2024

Introduction

1. This policy sets out the Commission's position in relation to the engagement or presence of children at its premises. For the purpose of this policy, 'children' refers to people under 18 years of age i.e. those who have not yet had their 18th birthday.
2. The policy will set the boundaries for any Commission activity that may bring its staff into contact with children and outline what to do in those situations.
3. The policy is in place to ensure that any activity that the Commission undertakes does not negatively impact on children. Fundamentally, the Commission acknowledges that children's safety and wellbeing is of paramount importance.

Scope of the Policy

4. The policy operates on a Commission wide basis and therefore applies to all activity undertaken by the Commission and its employees. The policy applies to all Commission staff and to all contractors.

Rationale for the Policy

5. The policy operates on the principle that under 18s should not be exposed to any Commission activity that may negatively impact on their wellbeing. Unnecessary or avoidable exposure to information about harmful conduct forming part of the Troubles/Conflict, or the reactions of people to that harm, may be detrimental to the wellbeing of children. The Commission does not habitually adjust its work to be 'age-appropriate' and therefore risk to wellbeing is not mitigated.
6. If a child accompanies an adult who is engaging with the Commission, the child may witness the adult's distress, anger or trauma symptomatology. This also poses a risk to the child's wellbeing. The adult may not be able to parent their child effectively whilst in a heightened emotional state and this potentially places the child in an unsafe environment. This situation also increases the likelihood that Commission staff may be required to attend to the wellbeing or care for the child, something for which they are not trained or vetted.
7. The Commission has a duty to ensure its staff and contractors are not placed in vulnerable positions. Commission staff and contractors should not be put in a position of caring for a child or being responsible for its engagement with the Commission.

Position in relation to under 18s

8. Commission staff and contractors should never allow children under 18 years old to access Commission Offices. If staff are uncertain whether a child is under 18 years old, it is appropriate to request they provide identification to prove this.
9. Commission staff should never look after the child/children of members of the public. If requested to do so, it is appropriate to explain that the Commission has a policy that prevents staff from looking after children and are unable to do so even for a short period of time.
10. Commission staff should immediately inform the Case Support Team Leader if a child has attended a Commission premise and/or been present at a Commission event that was unplanned or where they have had care of a child in their role as employee or contractor at the Commission.
11. Case Support staff who respond to phone calls, emails or letters have no way of knowing the age of those with whom they are communicating. Where there is any doubt, it is appropriate (as at paragraph 9 above) to ask for identification.
12. The Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act 2023 is silent on the required age of anyone who makes a request for an investigation. Where a person under the age of 18 submits a request for an investigation, the Commission will consider whether there is a more appropriate family member to make the request. If there is no appropriate family member to make the request and the young person is aged between 16 and 18, they can make a request, but an appropriate adult should be present to support, advise and assist the young person. The Commission will make arrangements for an appropriate adult if the young person cannot identify one. No requests will be accepted from those aged under 16.
13. The policy will be reviewed annually. The first review will take place one year from the date on which the Commission starts to accept requests.

Version control

Version	Date	Author	Shared with	Key changes since last version
1.1	21022024	JS/KA	Policy and Opps	Created

Approvals

Version	Date	Approved by	Date of next review
1.1	8 April 2024	Executive Committee	8 April 2025
