



## Protected Disclosure Policy

Parentline is committed to maintaining the highest standards of honesty, openness and accountability. This includes a commitment to encourage anybody with knowledge of wrongdoing to come forward.

Parentline takes all malpractice very seriously, whether it is committed by staff, volunteers, suppliers or contractors.

Parentline's existing policies and procedures in relation to disciplinary matters or other complaints (namely the Code of Conduct for Employees) are the appropriate procedures to use where injustices or discrimination affects an individual personally and such matters are therefore outside the scope of this policy.

Parentline's existing structure and system of internal financial control are the normal and correct mechanisms to detect and/or draw attention to irregularities of all kinds.

However, in exceptional circumstances, it is sometimes necessary to have an alternative reporting line available to volunteers and staff as a mechanism of last resort. In such an instance, this Protected Disclosure Policy applies.

Persons making genuine, supported, material allegations should be assured that their concerns will be treated seriously and sensitively. Parentline will provide reasonable support to all persons making genuine, supported, material allegations and will aim to protect them from harassment, retaliation or detriment, provided that at all times the person making the allegation has acted in good faith and that the allegations made are material and are properly grounded.

Action by an employee, volunteer or colleague to inappropriately deter a potential complainant from raising valid concerns about a material irregularity or other significant malpractice may result in the invocation of disciplinary procedures, up to and including dismissal against the employee, volunteer or colleague concerned. Likewise, complainants abusing the process by raising unfounded, unsupported and/or immaterial allegations or repeating allegations previously investigated and found to be false will also be subject to the invocation of disciplinary procedures action, up to and including dismissal. Persons, who make a genuine, supported material complaint in good faith, in ignorance of the fact that the same complaint has already been investigated and proven to be false, need have no concerns in this regard.

## Policy Statement

This policy describes the procedures at Parentline for handling material allegations or irregularities relating to the running of Parentline or to the activities of members of Parentline, management, staff, volunteers, suppliers or service users, where such activities adversely affect the work of these parties with Parentline or have the potential to damage Parentline. Such material allegations may concern, inter alia, questions of financial malpractice, serious breaches of appropriate and agreed on procedures, or significant departures from the statutory or other requirements for good governance. Parentline takes such actual or alleged irregularities very seriously.

Parentline, like other charities, has a duty to conduct its affairs with propriety, having regard for its unique role, and its service commitments to its users and the public alike.

Allegations should be raised and dealt with through one of the routes indicated in paragraphs below, depending on the nature of the allegation.

1. Allegations of injustice, discrimination, bullying or harassment made by one member of staff/volunteer against another should be dealt with under the procedures outlined in Parentline's Code of Conduct for Employees and also covered in the Health, Safety and Wellness Policy.
2. Allegations about an individual's financial conduct should be made to the CEO or Chair of the Board i.e. regarding a materially excessive or fraudulent travel and subsistence claims, inappropriate ordering/financial commitments, misappropriation of assets or fraudulent reporting of financial matters.
3. Allegations about other issues: If staff members or volunteers have serious concerns about perceived material irregularities in relation to the running of Parentline which do not fall within paragraphs 1 and 2 above, they should be reported to the CEO. By way of example (although these examples are by no means exhaustive) these concerns could be regarding the material breach of significant procedures, improper departures from good governance, serious and substantial concerns regarding potential criminal activities.

Where, for any reason, the person making the allegation considers it inappropriate to refer the matter to the CEO, material allegations can be made to the Chair of the Board, who shall decide what action to take having regard to the particular circumstances.

The CEO or Chair may request that the matter be investigated by way of an internal audit or internal review by other appropriate professionals either internally or externally and if appropriate reported to a higher authority.

In all cases, where a material allegation has been made under paragraphs 2 and 3, the CEO or Chair, as appropriate, will make a record of its receipt and of the subsequent action taken. If on preliminary examination, the allegation is judged to be wholly without substance or merit, the allegation may be dismissed. The person making the allegation will be so informed and may re- make the allegation to the Board of Parentline.

If the preliminary investigation finds that there is prima facie substance to a complaint,

(i) The matter may:

- (a) Be considered under the appropriate stage of the disciplinary procedures;
- (b) Be the subject of a formal investigation; and/or
- (c) Be referred to an outside body including An Garda Síochána

(ii) The person or persons against whom a material allegation is made must be informed in writing of the allegation and all the evidence supporting it and must be allowed full opportunity to comment before the investigation is concluded, to comply with the principles of natural justice.

(iii) All material, genuine allegations, including those dismissed after preliminary examination, and the results of their investigation, will be reported to the Board.

Violations or suspected violations may be submitted on a confidential basis by the complainant. Reports of violations or suspected violations will be kept confidential to the extent possible, consistent with the need to conduct an adequate investigation. The identity of any person making an allegation under sections 2 and 3 above may be kept confidential, as appropriate, until a formal investigation is launched and will only be disclosed at that point with the Complainant's knowledge. Thereafter the identity of the person making the allegation may not be kept confidential. In addition, a person may be required to co-operate with investigating authorities and to give evidence to a court or other fora.

Staff or volunteers making allegations may be informed of the general outcome of the investigation, but are not entitled to receive a copy of the report. The report is confidential to the investigator, the CEO, the members of the Board, Parentline's legal advisers, and the appropriate disciplinary authority (if relevant). The person against whom the allegation is made will be informed of the outcome of the investigation and will be entitled to receive a copy of the report if the investigation concludes that a breach has occurred.

### **General**

This policy will be kept under periodic review and any changes will be notified to staff and volunteers.

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