



BARNAHUS
IRELAND

**A Guide for Parents
and Caregivers**

BARNAHUS WEST



What happens at Barnahus West...

At Barnahus West, we know that any form of sexual abuse can affect children, young people, and their families in different kinds of ways. At Barnahus, we want to make sure that children and young people receive the right help and support by coordinating and providing all the services needed. We bring together Tusla, An Garda Síochána, the Health Service Executive (HSE), and Children's Health Ireland (CHI). These agencies will meet as an experienced team to discuss your child's needs and share information to make sure your child is receiving the services and support they may need. You will always be informed throughout your journey, and we will be here to help. **As a parent or carer, we know the importance of your role in supporting your child. Our team will work with you to support you and your family's needs.**

Protecting children...



When someone raises a concern about the safety and welfare of a child, including abuse or neglect, Tusla's job is to work with children, young people, and families to make sure they are safe and well cared for.

It is important that children, young people, and families have an opportunity to talk about their worries and what they would like to see happen to keep the child safe. **After speaking with you, your child, and the important people in your life, Tusla will come up with a plan to keep your child and other children safe.**



Your child's specialist interview...



As part of the evidence collection process and when your child feels ready to speak about what has happened, they can meet with specially trained interviewers. These interviewers are Social Workers and Gardaí who work together in pairs. Specialist interviewers are highly trained to gather the best evidence when speaking with your child. The evidence your child gives will be recorded and may be used in court.

The interviewers will meet with you and your child in normal clothes before the child's interview. These interviews take place in a child-friendly environment and will be at your child's pace. They can choose to stop at any point.

Barnahus aims to prevent or minimise re-traumatisation by limiting the number of times your child is interviewed.



Medical examination...



Some children who come to Barnahus will require a medical examination. The team offer both medical and forensic medical examinations. The purpose of an examination will be discussed with you, and decisions can be made about what is in your child's best interest.

A medical examination may be helpful for the purposes of wellbeing, investigation, and recovery. Forensic examination can provide very important physical evidence to the court. **Supportive, specially trained doctors and nurses carry out these child-friendly medical examinations when it is agreed to be in the child's best interest.**



Therapeutic support...

At Barnahus West, you can speak with therapists who specialise in supporting children and young people who may have experienced sexual abuse.

We know that protective caregivers have an important role in helping your child. We will support you by providing advice about looking after your and your child's emotional wellbeing.

If your child has therapeutic needs, our therapist will get to know them, listen to them, and help them with any questions they have.

We can decide with you what is most suitable for your child. This may be a referral to another support service.



Frequently Asked Questions...

Q. How can my child access Barnahus West?

A. If you have concerns that your child has been sexually abused, Irish law requires that your concern is reported to [Tusla](#). Following this, Tusla will refer your child to Barnahus. **All aspects of this service are free of charge.**

Q What if we have communication needs?

A. If you or your child have communication needs, we will invite a suitable person to assist and be with you.

Q. I am not sure if I want my child to attend Barnahus. Can I find out more?

A. Yes. You can contact us on **087 4638779** If you decide you do not want your child referred to Barnahus, Tusla and An Garda Síochána will continue to work together, and medical care can still be accessed through the HSE/CHI/SATU.¹

Q. How can we avail of Barnahus when we live so far away?

A. While we aim to support your child as locally as possible, some aspects of their care may be provided across various locations. We can explore if online support would work for you and your child.

Q. Can I refuse one part of the service and not the others?

A. Yes, it is your decision what services you choose to avail of at Barnahus West.

Q. What other information will Barnahus West need?

A. Your child may have been involved with other supports and services. It would be helpful if you could share with us any assessments or reports relating to your child.

Q. How will my child's personal information be managed?

A. Your personal data will be processed in compliance with all relevant data protection legislation and other legal requirements to which Tusla, CHI, HSE and An Garda Síochána are obliged to adhere to. Full details of Barnahus West Privacy Policy will be provided to you highlighting how we will use your personal data. Further information regarding your right as a data subject is available [here](#).

¹ SATU stands for **Sexual Assault Treatment Unit**. Barnahus West SATUs are currently located in Donegal and Galway.





- Barnahus West is located at Faustina House, IDA Small Business Centre, Tuam Road, Galway **H91 VW84** . We will inform you should our services require visits to other locations across the Barnahus West region.
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Barnahus is the leading European model of a child-friendly multidisciplinary response and is being established in Ireland to integrate child protection, policing, medical, and therapeutic services for children and adolescents where there is a concern or disclosure of child sexual abuse. Barnahus aims to improve Ireland's interagency response to child sexual abuse.

Barnahus West is available to children, young people and their families across Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Mayo, Galway, Roscommon, Clare, Limerick, and North Tipperary.

What happens at Barnahus West...

At Barnahus West, we know that any form of sexual abuse can affect children, young people, and their families in different kinds of ways. At Barnahus, we want to make sure that children and young people receive the right help and support by coordinating and providing all the services needed. We bring together Tusla, An Garda Síochána, the Health Service Executive (HSE), and Children's Health Ireland (CHI). **By responding in this way, the services can gather the best evidence, help prevent further trauma to the child by limiting the number of times they have to repeat their experience to professionals, and provide the necessary support to children and families to ensure better overall outcomes.**

Background...

The Minister for Children and Youth Affairs prioritised the establishment of regional centres for supporting children who may have suffered sexual abuse, in a way that would avoid retraumatisation while accessing care or health services and engaging with the criminal justice system.

The Barnahus model was chosen as an interagency model of practice, creating a child-friendly environment where agencies collaborate to ensure the best outcomes for children exposed to violence or abuse. Key components of the Barnahus model include child protection services, forensic medical services, specialist interviews based on evidence-based protocols, and therapeutic services.

Child protection...



Under the Child Care Act 1991, the specific role of Tusla is to promote the welfare of children who are at risk of not receiving adequate care and protection. Tusla has a duty to take appropriate action to promote the welfare of the child. This may include supporting families in need of assistance in providing care and protection to their children. The Tusla worker also has a statutory role in the delivery of child protection services under the Children First Act 2015 and 2017.

Tusla's first consideration is always the immediate safety of the child, and if the child safety concerns require an assessment, a Tusla worker will begin the process using the Signs of Safety approach. Tusla workers work collaboratively with families and children to conduct risk assessments and produce safety plans to increase a child's safety and wellbeing. **Through this approach, the Tusla worker ensures the child's safety and works collaboratively as part of the Barnahus team.**



Specialist interviews...



The Criminal Evidence Act 1992, as amended, allows for the submission of pre-recorded video evidence from a child victim under 18 years for sexual and violent offences. The purpose of submission of video recording is to prevent re-traumatisation, gather and present the child's best evidence to court. These interviewers are Social Workers and Gardaí who wear normal clothes and work together in pairs. **Specialist interviewers are highly trained to gather the best evidence when speaking with children and young people.**



Medical examination...

Some children who come to Barnahus will require a medical examination. The team offer both medical and forensic medical examinations. The purpose of an examination will be discussed with the protective caregivers and decisions can be made about what is in the child's best interest.

A medical examination may be helpful for the purposes of wellbeing, investigation, and recovery. Forensic examination can provide very important physical evidence to the court. **Supportive, specially trained doctors and nurses carry out these child friendly medical examinations when it is agreed to be in the child's best interest.**

A forensic medical assessment involves:

- A detailed medical history;
- Top to toe medical assessment;
- Evaluation of health, development and emotional wellbeing;
- Consideration of forensic evidential needs;
- Screening and treatment of sexually transmitted infection.



Therapeutic support...

Children, young people, and protective caregivers will be offered therapeutic screening with our therapy team. Following the screening, if a therapeutic need is identified, children and their caregivers will be informed on how best their therapeutic needs will be met.

Based on the outcome of this assessment, children, young people, and their caregivers may be offered short-term trauma-focused intervention at Barnahus, or they might be referred to another service for longer-term support.

The therapy team will offer the caregiver psychoeducation, support, information, and advice to help them best support their child.



Frequently Asked Questions...

Q. How do I refer to Barnahus?

A. Once Tusla receives a child sexual abuse referral or a Child Protection and Welfare Report Form and subsequent receipt or notification to An Garda Síochána, a referral to Barnahus should be discussed with a caregiver. The Barnahus Parent/Caregiver Information Leaflet and Barnahus Data Protection Notice must be provided to the caregiver. The completed Barnahus referral form is sent to barnahuswest@tusla.ie within 5 working days.

Referrals to Barnahus may also come directly from HSE/SATU Forensic Medical Services, CHI Laurels Clinic and Alders Unit, and An Garda Síochána, with mandated reporting to Tusla also completed and referenced in the referral form. The referral to Barnahus must be discussed with a caregiver and sent to barnahuswest@tusla.ie within 5 working days.

Q. What if a caregiver is unsure about their child attending Barnahus?

A. We can talk to you or the caregiver. Please contact us on **087 4638779**. If a parent decides not to avail of Barnahus, Tusla and An Garda Síochána will continue to work together, and medical care can be accessed through the HSE/CHI/SATU.

Q. How can families avail of Barnahus when they live so far away?

A. While we aim to support children as locally as possible, some aspects of their care may be provided across various locations. We can explore if online support would work for children and families.

Q. What happens if a child's therapy needs cannot be met at Barnahus?

A. As the referrer, you will be provided with an explanation of the reason, and we can talk through our recommendations and the next steps.

Q. Can a caregiver refuse one part of the service and not the others?

A. Yes, it is their decision what services they choose to avail of at Barnahus.

Q. How will Barnahus record the child's information?

A. Once referred, the child's Barnahus details will be recorded and stored in line with all relevant legislation and requirements. Once a child has concluded their journey, Tusla will be provided with a closing letter.



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An interagency model, working towards better outcomes for children

What happens at Barnahus West...

Barnahus West is a safe, friendly place where you can feel comfortable. We are a team of specially trained professionals who work together where sexual abuse is a concern. At Barnahus West, we understand that sexual abuse can be difficult to talk about. It can make you feel afraid, isolated, or confused. Abuse is never your fault. At Barnahus West, we can help you and we are here to listen.

At Barnahus West, you can take things at your own pace and our friendly team will be there to guide you through every step of your journey.

If you or your caregiver have communication needs, an interpreter or signer will be invited to be with you. We aim to support you as locally as possible, but we can explore if online support would work for you too.

Protecting children...

Tusla works with children and young people, and their families when there is a worry that a child or young person has been harmed, is not being well cared for, or may not be safe. **It is important that children, young people, and adults have an opportunity to talk about their worries and what they would like to see happen to keep them safe.** After speaking with you and the important people in your life, a social worker will come up with a plan to keep you and other children safe.



Gathering important information...



When you feel ready to talk, you will meet two specially trained interviewers. They are Gardaí and Social Workers who are responsible for interviewing children and young people and they wear normal clothes. They are experienced in asking questions and helping young people talk about what has happened to them.

They listen carefully and work to gather the best evidence for the investigation. This may also be used should the case go to court.



Health and well-being...



Sometimes you may need to see the doctor or nurse. **It is your choice if you want to see them by yourself or with your parent or carer.** Many children and young people find a check-up helpful and reassuring. You can choose to have part or all of an examination. The doctor or nurse will explain why an examination might be important for you at this time and help with any questions or worries you may have. There will be plenty of time for you, and whoever comes with you, to relax and get to know the team. We hope that a medical check-up will help you feel safe and well.



Helping you feel better...



During this time, it is common for young people to feel overcome by emotions such as anger, sadness, and worry. At Barnahus West, we meet with lots of young people who have had similar experiences. They often find that speaking with someone can help them to feel better. **If you want to meet with us, we are happy to spend time listening and getting to know you.**





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Barnahus West

We are a friendly team who work together. **We call ourselves the Barnahus West team!**

If someone has hurt you, shown you something that upset you, or made you do something with your body that made you feel upset, it can be hard to talk about. **Remember, it's never your fault. At Barnahus West, we can help you.**

If you or your caregiver have communication needs, an interpreter or signer will be invited to be with you. We aim to support you as locally as possible, but we can explore if online support would work for you too.

Protecting children...



Tusla social workers need to make sure that you and other children are safe. To do this, they will talk to you and your family and listen to everything that people say. **Together, they will come up with a plan that will show everyone how to keep you safe.**



Gathering important information...



When Gardaí think you may have been hurt, they will want to talk to your parents or carer about meeting you. Special Gardaí and Social Workers will talk to you to find out if you are worried about something. These special Gardaí and Social Workers meet with children all the time and they wear normal clothes.

They will meet you in a safe place to talk so they can get to know you. They will ask you questions and listen to everything you have to say. **This will help the Barnahus Team do their job.**



Health and well-being...



Sometimes you may need to see the doctor or nurse. This is to make sure that you are in good health. You will be checked by the doctor or nurse. **They will help with any questions or worries you may have about your body.** There will be drinks, toys and colouring books and plenty of time for you, and whoever comes with you, to relax and get to know the team. We hope that a medical check-up will help you feel safe and well.



Helping you feel better...



It is common to have lots of different feelings like sadness, anger, and worry. It may seem scary, but often talking to someone from the Barnahus team can help you to feel better. At Barnahus, we talk to lots of children who have been hurt and we know how to listen to children. **If you want to meet with us, we are happy to spend time getting to know you.**





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