BARNAHUS
IRELAND

A Guide for Professionals

Barnahus West

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.





Barnahus is currently 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.

We have a website **www.barnahus.ie** if you would like to find out more.

We would like to know what you think of Barnahus.

You can fill out a feedback form, or let us know at: **tellus@tusla.ie**

CONTACT US

Telephone:

0874638779