



Introduction to Child Protection Concerns

Should an Age-Grade Player be at risk of harm, it is the duty of those in a position of responsibility to take the necessary steps to minimise and/or help to remove the risk and to ensure that all procedures are undergone in accordance with statutory guidelines.

Harm is defined as the ill-treatment or the impairment of the health or development of a child. Whether it is significant is determined by the child's health and development as compared to that which could reasonably be expected of a child of a similar age.

Categories of abuse are outlined in Children First (ROI) and Cooperating to Safeguard Children (NI). Adults working with young people are not expected to be experts in identifying abuse, however in order to fulfil our duty to care it is necessary to know how to forward a concern that meets reasonable grounds for concern (see Section 4 of the IRFU Safeguarding Policy) and how to respond to a child who raises a concern.

Further details on categories of abuse and Statutory guidelines can be found at <http://www.tusla.ie/children-first>

Sports Leaders should be aware of the sign and types of abuse with the following points being central to the success of this effort:

- Knowledge of the appropriate action and response to be taken
- Vigilance and avoidance of situations conducive to risk
- Open, trusting and cooperative relationships within the club and with parents / guardians and others concerned with children's welfare

Dealing with Concerns

- Complaints or suspicions of abuse¹ relating to an Age Grade Player wherever and whenever arising must be reported to the Club Welfare Officer² (contact details included below) without delay who must take immediate steps to safeguard the Age Grade Player and to refer the complaint or suspicion of abuse to the Statutory Authorities³ and to the National Safeguarding Officer.
- Procedures for making, investigating and determining complaints about abuse (including confidentiality conditions) should be prescribed in writing, published so that they are readily available to everyone and followed as soon as possible upon receipt of a complaint.

- A Sports Leader against whom a complaint relating to abuse of an Age-Grade Player is made to one of the Statutory Authorities may be asked to step aside as a Sports Leader until after the relevant determination has been made. Reasonable steps will be taken to protect Age-Grade Players.
- The National Safeguarding Officer must be notified by the Club Welfare Officer of all allegations of abuse relating to a Sports Leader or Employee and all questions from the National Safeguarding Officer and/or National Protection Officer must be answered immediately.
- It is not the role of the person who conveys a complaint or suspicion about abuse of an Age Grade Player to determine the guilt or innocence of the accused but every complaint must be made and acted upon without delay.

Reasonable Grounds for Concern

A concern should be passed to Statutory Authorities if any of the following criteria are in place:

- Specific indication from a child that s/he has being abused.
- An account by a person who saw the child being abused.
- Consistent indication, over a period of time that a child is suffering from emotional or physical neglect.
- Evidence, such as an injury or behaviour that is consistent with abuse and unlikely to be caused another way.
- Corroborative indicators supporting a concern e.g. pattern of injuries, an implausible explanation, other indicators of abuse, dysfunctional behaviour.

Response to an Age-Grade Player

- Deal with any allegation of abuse in a sensitive and competent manner though listening to and facilitating the Age-Grade Player to tell about the problem.
- Stay calm and do not show any extreme reaction to what the Age-Grade Player is saying and take it seriously
- Permit the Age-Grade Player to speak without interruption, accepting what is said.
- Reassure the Age-Grade Player that he/she was right to tell and that he/she will be helped.
- Alleviate feeling of guilt and isolation, while passing no judgement on the person against whom the allegation is made.
- False promises should not be made such as saying no-one else will be told.
- Indicate what should happen next, such as informing parents, the Club Welfare Officer, or Statutory Authorities, etc.
- Any and all consultations with others should be entirely confidential and should not involve investigative procedures.
- Write a detailed account of any discussion regarding alleged or suspected abuse, as soon as possible after the discussion has taken place.
- Send the details to the National Protection Officer

- Do not trivialise child abuse issues or exaggerate what the Age-Grade Player has told you.

Reporting Concerns / Child Abuse

- Remember that reporting suspected child abuse in good faith is not the same as making an accusation of abuse, i.e., reporting does not mean accusing.
- Responsibility for the investigation of child abuse cases suspected or otherwise lies with the Statutory Authorities.
- Clubs or Branches should not carry out their own internal investigations into cases where child abuse is suspected. Make contact with duty social workers in your local area, <http://www.tusla.ie/get-in-touch/duty-social-work-teams/>
- Any person who knows or suspects that a child is being harmed or is at risk of being harmed has a duty to convey his/her concern to Statutory Authorities and/or IRFU.
- It may be appropriate for a person to discuss concerns they have with another person in the club, e.g. Club Welfare Officer, or should the concern relate to the Club Welfare Officer to the Branch Welfare Officer.
- Within a school, concerns relating to child abuse must be reported immediately to the Headmaster / Principal (DLP).
- In cases where an allegation has been made, then the matter should be reported immediately to the relevant personnel (Branch/National Safeguarding Officer and/or Statutory Authorities)
- Should there be an allegation against a club member – the Club Welfare Officer must be informed so that suspension of the person against whom the allegation has been made, from activities which involve Age-Grade Players, may be carried out until the conclusion of the investigation. This should be done in conjunction with Statutory Authorities so that investigations are not compromised.
- All concerns and allegations made should be carefully recorded and ensure confidentiality is maintained at all stages.

¹ See Children First Guidance and Our Duty to Care for definitions

² Unless the complaint relates to that person in which case the National Child Welfare Officer must be informed.

³ See Para. 5.12.1 and Appendix 12 of the Sports Councils' Code.

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