

Child Abuse and Allegations Policy

It is important to note that the investigation of suspected child abuse is the responsibility of the Statutory Authorities (Tusla and/or the Gardaí) and therefore will not be undertaken by the Club Child Protection Officer, Designated Liaison Person or any other Club personnel.

It is not the role of the person who conveys a complaint or suspicion about abuse to determine the guilt or innocence of the accused but every complaint must be made and acted upon without delay.

All allegations of child abuse **must** be referred to the Child and Family Agency, **Tusla, or in the event of an emergency to the Gardaí**. Referrals to Tusla should be done by completing a **Standard Reporting Form**, available from tusla.ie.

All Club personnel have a duty to report any concerns they may have for the protection or welfare of a child or young person.

When an allegation is received by the Club it will be assessed promptly and carefully. It will be necessary to decide if a formal report should be made to Tusla. This decision should be based on reasonable grounds for concern.

Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children states that “Tusla should always be informed when a person has reasonable grounds for concern that a child may have been, is being, or is at risk of being abused or neglected”.

The following examples would constitute reasonable grounds for concern:

- Evidence of an injury or behaviour, that is consistent with abuse and is unlikely to have been caused in any other way;
- Any concern about possible sexual abuse;
- Consistent signs that a child is suffering from emotional or physical neglect;
- A child saying or indicating by other means that he or she has been abused;
- Admission or indication by an adult or a child of an alleged abuse they committed;
- An account from a person who saw a child being abused.

Wherever appropriate, any issues should be checked with the parents/guardians when considering whether a concern exists, unless doing so may further endanger the child or the person considering making the report.

Abuse is not always committed through personal contact with a child or young person and may be perpetrated through social media or the use of information and communication technology.

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Concerns will be passed on by the Club Child Protection Officer and/or Designated Liaison Person to the Statutory Authorities if we do receive any complaints with reasonable grounds for concern.

Procedure:

Step One

Any allegation of abuse must in the first instance be brought to the attention of the Child Protection Officer of the Club.

Should the Child Protection Officer be unsure whether reasonable grounds for concern exist they can informally consult with the local duty social worker, who will advise whether or not the matter requires a formal report.

The Child Protection Officer will also consult with the Designated Liaison Person.

In cases of emergency, where a child appears to be at immediate and serious risk and the Child Protection Officer is unable to contact a duty social worker, the Gardaí shall be contacted. Under no circumstances should a child be left in a dangerous situation pending intervention by the Statutory Authorities.

Managers/coaches/volunteers may be subjected to erroneous or malicious allegations. Therefore, any allegation of abuse should be dealt with sensitively and every appropriate support should be provided for volunteers including counselling where necessary.

Formal reporting of allegations of abuse will be by submission to Tusla of a Standard Reporting Form.

Step Two

Should Ballinacollig AFC become aware of an allegation of abuse of a child or children by a volunteer during the execution of that volunteers duties, the Child Protection Officer will privately inform the coach/volunteer of the following:

1. The fact that the allegation has been made against him/her;
2. The nature of the allegation;
3. Inform the volunteer that they must step down from all duties within the Club until the investigation has reached its full conclusion.

Step Three

The volunteer should be afforded an opportunity to respond.

The Club will note the response and pass on this information when making the formal report to the Statutory Authorities.

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The report to Tusal should be factual and contain observations, dates, times, locations and contexts in which the incident occurred or suspicion was aroused, together with any other relevant information.

Records on child protection concerns, allegations and disclosures will be kept securely and in line with Data Protection legislation.

Step Four

Our Child Protection Officer/ Designated Liaison Person, if reporting suspected child abuse to the Statutory Authorities, will first inform the family of their intention to make such a report, unless doing so would endanger the child or undermine any statutory investigation.

It should be noted that should a formal notification be made, we are not accusing anyone of child abuse, rather we are passing on concerns for investigation by the appropriate Statutory Authorities in keeping with the principle that “the welfare of the child is the first and paramount consideration”.

Step Five

All subsequent actions following an allegation of abuse against a coach/volunteer will be taken in consultation with the Statutory Authorities and An Garda Síochána. An immediate meeting will be sought with these two agencies for this purpose. The Football Association of Ireland National Children’s Officer is also available to provide support and advice.

Step Six

Under Football Association of Ireland rules, any coach/volunteer/manager who is the subject of a statutory investigation into alleged child abuse, is required to stand down from all soccer activities until the investigation is completed. Therefore the FAI National Children’s Officer must be informed immediately of any formal notification to the Statutory Authorities.

When a person is asked to stand down it should be made clear that it is only a precautionary measure in keeping with standard procedures/guidelines and will not prejudice any later disciplinary proceedings.

The coach/manager/volunteer concerned will be advised that the procedures being undertaken are in accordance with statutory requirements. He or she should be treated with respect and fairness, and also be assured that all information will be dealt with in a sensitive and confidential manner.

Step Seven

The Club will carefully consider the outcome of the statutory investigation and will then assess if there are any outstanding disciplinary issues in relation to their internal rules or infringements of the Football Association of Ireland best practice guidelines. It must be remembered that the fact

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that the alleged abuser has not been prosecuted or been found guilty does not mean that they are appropriate to work with young people in the future.

Internal Club disciplinary proceedings can only be initiated after the Statutory Authorities have completed theirs.

Confidentiality

Where child protection and welfare concerns arise, information must be shared on a 'need to know' basis in the best interest of the child/young person with the relevant Statutory Authorities and with parents/guardians.

No undertakings regarding secrecy can be given. The proportionate provision of information to the Statutory Authorities necessary for the protection of a child is not a breach of confidentiality or data protection.

Parents/guardians and children/young people have a right to know if personal information is being shared, unless doing so could put the child/young person at further risk or may put the reporter at risk.

**Any enquiries can be discussed in confidence with Chairperson, Gerardene McNamara
0852447161**