

Athlone Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy

Athlone Hockey club has written this policy in line with the Hockey Ireland Code of Ethics and Safeguarding Guidance for Children and Young People in Sport. All our adult volunteers should be alert to the possibility that the children with whom they are in contact may be being abused or at risk of being abused. They should know how to recognise and respond to the possibility of abuse or neglect. Child welfare and the protection of young people is the concern of all adults at all times, irrespective of their role within the organisation.

Below are the procedures for dealing with any welfare or protection issue that may arise.

Definitions of the 4 categories of abuse

Neglect – where a child suffers significant harm or impairment of development by being deprived of food, clothing, warmth, hygiene, intellectual stimulation, supervision and safety, attachment to and affection from adults, medical care.

Emotional abuse – occurs when a child's need for affection, approval, consistency and security are not met and is normally found in the *relationship* between care-giver and a child rather than a specific event or pattern of events.

Physical abuse – any form of non-accidental injury or injury which results from wilful or neglectful failure to protect a child.

Sexual abuse – occurs when a child is used by another person for his or her gratification or sexual arousal or for that of others.

More information including examples are available on pages 42-43 Code of Ethics and Good Practice for Children's Sport,

http://www.irishsportsCouncil.ie/Participation/Code_of_Ethics/Downloads/protection.pdf

If there are grounds for concern about the safety or welfare of a young person you should react to the concern. Persons unsure about whether or not certain behaviours are abusive and therefore reportable, should contact the Club Designated Person, unless the concern is about that individual. In that case they should contact the Branch or IHA Designated Person. If they are not happy with the response, they can contact the duty social worker directly. Grounds for concern include a specific indication of physical, emotional, sexual abuse or neglect from a child, a statement from a person who witnessed abuse/neglect or an illness, injury or behaviour consistent with abuse.

A report may be made by any member in the club but should be passed on to the Designated Person, who in turn will pass the concern to the local Statutory Authorities. It is not the responsibility of anyone working within AHC, in a paid or voluntary capacity, to decide whether or not child abuse is taking place. That is the job of the local statutory authorities. However, there is a responsibility to protect children by assisting the appropriate agencies so that they can then make enquiries and take any necessary action to protect the young person.

Everyone should follow both procedures outlined below, firstly the procedure for responding to a child in distress and secondly the procedure for reporting the concern

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Response to a Child Disclosing Abuse/Neglect

When a young person discloses information of suspected abuse/neglect you should:

- (a) Respond in a sensitive way to abuse through listening to and facilitating the child to tell about the problem, rather than interviewing the child about details of what happened.
- (b) Stay calm and not show any extreme reaction to what the child is saying. Listen compassionately, and take what the child is saying seriously.
- (c) Understand that the child has decided to tell something very important and has taken a risk to do so. The experience of telling should be a positive one so that the child will not mind talking to those involved in the investigation/assessment
- (d) Be honest with the child and tell them that it is not possible to keep information a secret
- (e) Make no judgmental statements against the person against whom the allegation is made
- (f) Do not question the child unless the nature of what s/he is saying is unclear. Leading questions should be avoided. Open, non-specific questions should be used such as "Can you explain to me what you mean by that".
- (g) Give the child some age appropriate indication of what would happen next, such as informing parents/guardians, HSE or social services. If you don't know what would happen next, don't say anything. It should be kept in mind that the child may have been threatened and may feel vulnerable at this stage.
- (h) Carefully record the details.
- (i) Pass on this information to the Club Designated Person
- (j) Reassure the child that they have done the right thing in telling you.

Reporting Suspected or Disclosed Child Abuse/Neglect

The following steps should be taken in reporting child abuse/neglect to the statutory authorities:

- (a) Observe and note dates, times, locations and contexts and any action taken in which the incident occurred or suspicion was aroused, together with any other relevant information.
- (b) Report the matter as soon as possible to the Club Designated Person who has responsibility for reporting abuse.
- (c) The most appropriate person should check out the concerns with the parents/guardians before making a report unless doing so would endanger the child.
- (d) If the Designated Person has reasonable grounds for believing that the child has been abused or is at risk of abuse, s/he will make a report to the local HSE/Social Services who have statutory responsibility to investigate and assess suspected or actual child abuse.
- (e) Report can be made verbally initially and then followed up in writing using the standard reporting form (for ROI only)
- (f) In cases of emergency, where a child appears to be at immediate and serious risk and the Designated Person is unable to contact a duty social worker, the police authorities should be contacted. Under no circumstances should a child be left in a dangerous situation pending intervention by the Statutory Authorities.

- (g) If the Designated Person is unsure whether reasonable grounds for concern exist s/he can informally consult with the HSE/Social Services. S/he will be advised whether or not the matter requires a formal report. If a decision is made not to report the concern this should be recorded with reasons for not reporting.
- (h) A Designated Person reporting suspected or actual 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 an investigation.

The **Protection for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act, 1998** provides immunity from civil liability to persons who report child abuse 'reasonably and in good faith' to designated officers of the Health Service Executive (HSE) or the Gardai. The act also covers the offence of 'false reporting'. The main provisions of the Act are:

1. The provision of immunity from civil liability to any person who reports child abuse "reasonably and in good faith" to designated officers of Health Service Executive or any member of An Garda Síochána;
2. The provision of significant protection for employees who report child abuse. These protections cover all employees and all forms of discrimination up to and including, dismissal;
3. The creation of a new offence of false reporting of child abuse where a person makes a report of child abuse to the appropriate authorities "knowing that statement to be false". This is a new criminal offence designed to protect innocent persons from malicious reports.

Responding to adults who disclose retrospective childhood abuse

There are an increasing number of adults disclosing abuse that took place during their childhood. Such disclosures may come to light when people attend counselling or may sometimes arise as a consequence of adult services and services which work with parents/guardians and families.

Where such a disclosure is made it is essential to establish whether there may be a current risk to any child or young person who may be in contact with the alleged abuser revealed in the disclosure and this may necessitate carrying out a risk assessment to establish these facts.

If any risk is deemed to exist to a child/young person who may be in contact with an alleged abuser, and in accordance with our reporting procedures; a mandated person or DLP should report the allegation to Tusla or their local Gateway Team without delay.

Tusla have issued a Retrospective Abuse Report Form which should be used when reporting cases of adults disclosing childhood abuse to them.

Procedures for Responding to Child Abuse

Any member of Athlone Hockey Club who is informed, knows, suspects or is concerned that a child is, has been or may be the subject of child abuse, while engaged in club activities or who has received information regarding any such concerns involving persons who act on

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behalf of the Club, has a duty to convey such concerns as a matter of urgency to the Designated Liaison Persons at Club.

The Designated Liaison Person (DLP), in consultation with the person who raised the concern, will decide if reasonable grounds for concern exist.

If reasonable grounds for concern exist, the Designated Liaison Person will report to a Tusla duty social worker.

If the DLP decides not to report a concern to Tusla, the following steps should be taken:

- The reasons for not reporting should be recorded.
- Any actions taken as a result of the concern should be recorded.
- The employee or coach/volunteer who raised the concern should be given a clear written explanation of the reasons why the concern is not being reported to Tusla.
- The employee or coach/volunteer should be advised that if they remain concerned about the situation, they are free to make a report to Tusla or An Garda Síochána.

The individual employee or coach/volunteer has protections under the Protection for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act 1998, should they report independently.

Athlone Hockey Club DLP will keep a record of concerns which, following consideration, do not initially meet reasonable grounds for concern. Concerns which do not initially meet reasonable grounds for concern may, upon review, show patterns or clusters which may heighten the level of concern.

- Records should be factual and include details of contacts, consultations and any actions taken.
- All agencies dealing with children must cooperate in the sharing of records with the statutory authorities where a child protection or welfare issue arises.
- Ensure that records on child protection concerns, allegations and disclosures are kept securely and safely within the organisation/club.
- Records should only be used for the purpose for which they are intended.
- Records should only be shared on a need to know basis in the best interests of the child/young person.
- These records can only be accessed by the Club Chair and the CCO and DLP.
- They will be stored in an individual sealed envelope and in a locked file cabinet accessible by the CCO/DLP of Athlone Hockey Club.
- This record will be retained.
- Child protection records should be updated as required and reviewed regularly by the Designated Liaison Person (DLP).

Reasonable Grounds for concern

There are many reasons a coach/volunteer may be concerned about the welfare or protection of a child or young person.

Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017 (ROI) states that "Tusla should always be informed when a person has reasonable grounds for

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concern that a child may have been, is being, or is at risk of being abused or neglected". It is important to remember that children/young people are sometimes abused by members of their own family, by peers or by others outside the family environment such as strangers, workers or trusted adults.

Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017 (ROI) lists the following as reasonable grounds for concern:

- Evidence, for example 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 /carers when considering whether a concern exists, unless doing so may further endanger the child or the person considering making the report. The DLP should be able to support this process. It is important to remember that abuse is not always committed through personal contact with a child or young person, sometimes it is perpetrated through social media or the use of information and communication technology.

Where 'Reasonable Grounds for Concern' may not exist

There will be occasions where certain instances of alleged abuse against a volunteer or staff member/ employee may be suspected, or there may be doubts as to the substantive nature of an allegation or suspicion. A suspicion which is not supported by any objective indication of abuse or neglect would not constitute a reasonable suspicion or reasonable grounds for concern. Where there may be insufficient grounds for establishing or substantiating such concerns the following course of action is recommended but should be proceeded with carefully and confidentially while ensuring the welfare of the child remains paramount:

Advice at all times may be sought from the National Designated Person and informal consultation may always be obtained from the relevant statutory authority

In situations where the Designated Liaison Person, following consultations (perhaps with the relevant statutory authority) subsequently decides that an allegation received or concerns related to them will not be formally reported to the relevant statutory authorities, as it has not the threshold for reasonable grounds for concern, the individual who raised the concerns or made the allegations should be given a clear written statement of the reasons why the reported concerns are not being reported to the statutory authorities. The individual should be advised that, if they remain concerned about the situation, they are free to consult with, or report to, the statutory authorities themselves.

Should the person who passed their concerns be a child then the child's parents should be informed of the decision not to formally report to the statutory authorities, unless there are extenuating reasons not to report this to the parents.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality should be maintained in respect of all issues and people involved in cases of abuse, welfare or bad practice. It is important that the rights of both the child and the person about whom the complaint has been made are protected.

The following points should be kept in mind:

- 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. Those working with children/young people and families and in adult services should make this clear to parents /guardians and to the child/young person.
- The proportionate provision of information to the statutory agencies 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

Procedure for dealing with allegations of abuse made against coaches/volunteer

Athlone Hockey Club have agreed procedures to be followed in cases of alleged child abuse against a coach/ volunteer. If such an allegation is made, three steps should be take place:

- Responding to allegations of abuse made against coaches /volunteers.
- Reporting allegations of abuse made against coaches / volunteers to Tusla.
- Internal procedures for dealing with the coach/volunteer should to be clearly outlined

Responding to allegations

An allegation of abuse may relate to a person who works with children who has:

- Behaved in a way that has or may have harmed a child/ young person;
- Possibly committed a criminal offence in relation to a child/young person;
- Behaved towards a child/young person or children/young people in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to a child/young person;
- Behaved in a way that is contrary to the club/sports organisation code of behaviour for coaches & volunteers;
- Behaved in a way that is contrary to professional practice guidelines.

If an allegation is made against a coach/volunteer in Athlone HC the club must ensure that everyone involved is dealt with appropriately and in accordance with the organisation/club

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guiding principles and child safeguarding procedures, the rules of natural justice and any relevant employment law. Athlone HC has a dual responsibility in respect of both the child/young person and the coach/volunteer.

There are two separate procedures to be followed:

- The reporting procedure to Tusla in respect of the child/ young person and the alleged abuser;
- The internal personnel procedure for dealing with a coach/ volunteer.

Special Considerations:

The following points should be considered:

- The safety of the child making the allegation and any others who are/may be at risk should be ensured and this should take precedence over any other consideration. In this regard, the sports club/organisation should take any necessary steps which may be immediately necessary to protect children
- If a Sports Leader is the subject of the concern s/he should be treated with respect and fairness.

Reporting allegations

Where reasonable grounds for concern exist the following steps should be taken by the club/organisation:

- Advice should be sought from the duty social worker with regard to any actions that the club needs to take to protect the child/children that may be at risk.
- In the event that the concern is connected to the actions of a Sports Leader in the club, the Sports Leader involved in the concern should be asked to stand aside pending the outcome of any investigation by the Statutory Authorities.
- It is advisable that this task be undertaken by a senior office holder other than the designated liaison person/club children's officer who takes the responsibility for reporting.

When the Sports Leader is being privately informed by the senior officer of a) the fact that an allegation has been made against him/her and b) the nature of the allegation, s/he should be afforded an opportunity to respond. His /her response should be noted and passed on to the statutory authorities.

All persons involved in a child protection process (the child, his /her parents /carers, the alleged offender, his /her family, Sports Leaders) should be afforded appropriate respect, fairness, support and confidentiality at all stages of the procedure.

Internal procedures for dealing with a coach/volunteer

In the context of an allegation of abuse against a coach/ volunteer, the organisation/club disciplinary procedures should ensure that fair procedure is followed and take account of the employment contract/membership guidelines as well as the rules of natural justice. The following points should be incorporated into the procedure:

- In making an immediate decision about the coach/ volunteer's presence in the organisation/club, the Chairperson should as a matter of urgency take any measures necessary to protect the child/young person. These should be proportionate to the level of risk to the child/young person; 'protective measures' do not presume guilt.
- The Chairperson should privately inform the coach/ volunteer that an allegation has been made against him or her and the nature of the allegation.
- The coach/volunteer should be afforded an opportunity to respond.
- The Chairperson should note the response from the coach/ volunteer and pass on this information if making a formal report to Tusla.
- The coach/volunteer should be offered the option to have representation at this stage and should be informed that any response may be shared with Tusla.
- While Tusla will not provide advice on club matters, advice and consultation with regard to risk to children/ young people can be sought from the local Tusla social work office.
- The Chairperson should ensure that actions taken by the organisation/club do not undermine any investigations or assessments undertaken by Tusla or An Garda Síochána. The organisation/club should liaise closely with the investigating bodies to ensure this.

Once the statutory process is completed, the organisation/club should consider the need to examine whether there are grounds for disciplinary proceedings for misconduct. The fact that the alleged abuser has not been prosecuted or has been found not guilty does not mean that such proceedings are not necessary or feasible

Resources

Hockey Ireland National DLP Contact:
Shirley Moore ndp@hockey.ie

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Hockey Ireland National Children's Officer:

Dwayne Hill National Children's Officer nationalchildrensofficer@hockeyireland.ie

Duty Social worker (dedicated child protection and welfare) tusla.ie Tel: 0873677363