



5 CHILD PROTECTION PROCEDURES

Ladies Gaelic Football Association accepts that organisations, which include young people among its members, are vulnerable to the occurrence of child abuse. Child welfare and the protection of young players 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. A report may be made by any member in the club or County but should be passed on to the Children's Officer who may in turn have to pass the concern to the Local Statutory Authorities.

It is not the responsibility of anyone working within Ladies Gaelic Football Association in a paid or voluntary capacity, or those working in affiliated organisations, to take responsibility or 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 young players by assisting the appropriate agencies so that they can take any necessary action to protect the young person.

All members should follow both procedures outlined below, firstly the procedure for responding to a young player in distress and secondly the procedure for reporting a concern.

5.1 DEALING WITH A COMPLAINT

- 5.1.1. Forming a complaint
- 5.1.2. Appointment of Disciplinary Committee
- 5.1.3. Complaint Procedure
- 5.1.4. Sanctions
- 5.1.5. Appeal Procedure

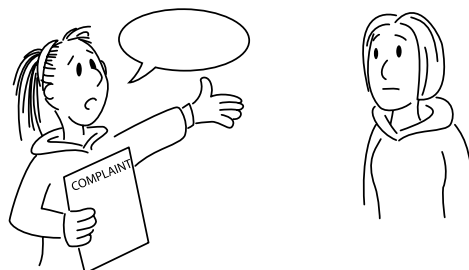
5.1.1 The Complaint

- ☑ All *complaints should be submitted in writing either to the Children's Officer or to the Chairperson
 - No action can be taken on 'hearsay'. 'Hearsay' should be noted in a record book
- ☑ Club/ County Chairperson should be notified of the complaint
- ☑ All complaints should be responded to within 5 working days by the Children's Officer
- ☑ If, in the opinion of the Chairperson/ Children's Officer, there are grounds for concern, the Statutory Authorities should be contacted immediately to receive professional guidance (See section 5.2)

- ☑ Written records of all complaints should be kept safely and confidentially
- ☑ The Mentor/Officer/Player/Parent against whom the complaint has been made should be notified of the complaint and the nature of the complaint, by telephone and also in writing
 - The letter of complaint remains the property of the Body to whom it was submitted i.e. the club/County Board, etc. The letter should be treated as confidential; therefore it is not read at a meeting or distributed to any person, this includes the person against whom the complaint is made.
- ☑ If the complaint is against a Mentor, this Mentor should be asked to temporarily step aside until the complaint has been investigated.
 - This is to protect the players and the mentor
 - A care-taker mentor should be put in place

**If complaint is submitted at Club level it is the responsibility of the Club to deal with the complaint*

**If the complaint is submitted at County Board Level the County Board must take responsibility to deal with the complaint*



5.1.2 Appointment of Investigation Committee

- ☑ The *Investigation Committee should consist of the Chairperson, the Children's Officer and an ordinary registered member of the club.
 - If the Children's Officer, Chairperson or any other member of the Investigation Committee is in any way connected to the complaint they should step down from the Committee
 - If the Children's Officer is involved, the Chairperson should contact the County Children's Officer to seek advice on dealing with the complaint
- ☑ Regular turnover of this committee is recommended.
- ☑ The issue of confidentiality is important. Information is on a need to know basis.

**It recommended that this Committee is put in place at the beginning of the year*



5.1.3 Complaint Procedure

It is the responsibility of the Investigation Committee to resolve problems relating to the conduct of its members. A complaint of any incident of suspected misconduct, including bullying, but does not relate to child abuse should be dealt with by the Investigation Committee.

- ☑ The Investigation Committee should inform the individual with details of the complaint being made against him/ her and afford him/ her the opportunity of providing a response verbally at a meeting with the Investigation Committee
 - If he/she does not attend the agreed meeting, offer him/her the opportunity of providing a response in writing
 - If he/she fails to co-operate with either opportunity the Investigation Committee must continue with the investigation of the complaint and note in their report the opportunities offered and the responses received.
- ☑ It is recommended that the Disciplinary Committee meet with all parties involved, affording each party the same rights and opportunities.
 - An underage player must be accompanied by parents/ guardians
 - If parents/ guardians are involved in the complaint, the underage player should be accompanied by an independent adult of their choice
- ☑ The Disciplinary Committee should form a written report outlining the procedure followed, findings, conclusions and any disciplinary actions or recommendations to be taken.
- ☑ All parties should receive a copy of this report. This report should be signed by all the Disciplinary Committee members and kept on record
- ☑ The Disciplinary Committee should, as soon as possible, inform the Management Committee of the conclusions of the investigation process

5.1.4 Sanctions

- ☑ Where it is established that an incident of misconduct has taken place, the Investigation Committee should notify the member of any sanction being imposed.
- ☑ The notification should be made in writing, setting out the reasons for the sanction.
 - If the member is under 18 years of age, correspondence should be addressed to parents/ guardians.

5.1.5 Appeal Procedure

- ☑ If the member against whom the complaint was made is unhappy with the decision of the Investigation Committee s/he should have the right to appeal the decision to an Appeals Committee (independent of the Investigation Committee).
- ☑ Any appeal should be made in writing within 7 days after issue of the decision of the Investigation Committee. The Chairperson of the Appeals Committee should be a member of the Management Committee or elected by the members at an AGM.
- ☑ The Appeals Committee have the power to confirm, set aside or change any sanction imposed by the Investigation Committee.
- ☑ If any party is not satisfied with the outcome, the matter can be referred to the National Children's Officer
 - However efforts to resolve the issue at local level should be exhausted before the National Children's Officer is engaged in attempts to resolve the matter.
- ☑ The National Management Committee will hear any Appeal submitted at National level, with their decision being final.

5.1.6 Filing of Complaints

- ☑ Written confidential records of all complaints should be safely and confidentially kept
- ☑ Club/County procedures should be defined for the possession of such records in the event of election of new officers.



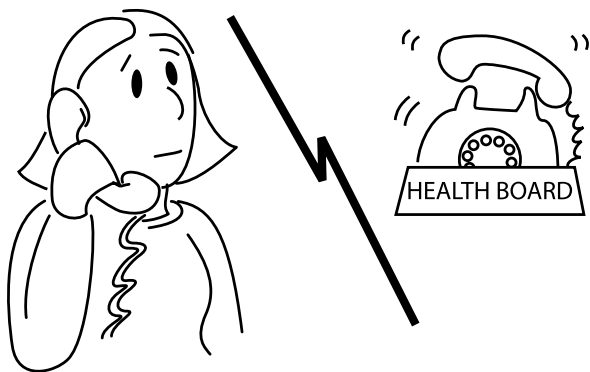
5.2 DEALING WITH SUSPECTED ABUSE

- 5.2.1 Reporting abuse
- 5.2.2 Response to a young player
- 5.2.3 Allegation against Mentors
- 5.2.4 Steps within Organisation
- 5.2.5 False Reporting
- 5.2.6 Confidentiality
- 5.2.7 Anonymous Report
- 5.2.8 Rumours

5.2.1 Reporting Abuse

If there are grounds for concern (Appendix 6.4) about the safety or welfare of a young player you should react to the concern. If unsure about whether or not certain behaviours are abusive (Appendix 6.5) and therefore reportable, you should contact the duty social worker in the Local Health Board or Social Services Department where you will receive advice. Grounds for concern include a specific indication from a player, a statement from a person who witnessed abuse or an illness, injury or behaviour consistent with abuse. Steps for reporting suspected abuse

- (a) Observe and note dates, times, locations and contexts 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 designated officer within the Club/County responsible for reporting abuse, e.g. Children's Officer. If the Children's Officer has reasonable grounds for believing that the player has been abused or is at risk of abuse, s/he will make a report to the Health Board/Social Services who have statutory responsibility to investigate and assess suspected or actual child abuse



- (c) In cases of emergency, where a player appears to be at immediate and serious risk and the Children's Officer is unable to contact a duty social worker, the Garda Authorities should be contacted. Under no circumstances should a player be left in a dangerous situation pending intervention by the Statutory Authorities
- (d) If the Children's Officer is unsure whether reasonable grounds for concern exist s/he can informally consult with the local health board/social services. S/he will be advised whether or not the matter requires a formal report

Any Children's Officer reporting suspected or actual child abuse to the Statutory Authorities should first inform the family of their intention to make such a report, unless doing so would endanger the player or undermine an investigation.

5.2.2 Response to a Young Player

When a young player discloses information of suspected abuse you should:

- (a) Deal with any allegation of abuse in a sensitive and competent way through listening to and facilitating the player to tell about the problem, rather than interviewing about details of what happened
- (b) Stay calm and not show any extreme reaction to what the player is saying. Listen compassionately, and take what the player is saying seriously
- (c) Understand that the player 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 player will not mind talking to those involved in the investigation
- (d) Be honest with the player and tell them that it is not possible to keep this information a secret
- (e) Make no judgmental statements against the person whom the allegation is made
- (f) Not question the player unless the nature of what she 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) Check out the concerns with the parents/ guardians before making a report unless doing so would endanger the player
- (h) Give the player some indication of what would happen next, such as informing parents/ guardians, Health Board or Social Services. It should be kept in mind that the player may have been threatened and may feel vulnerable at this stage
- (i) Carefully record the details
- (j) Pass on this information to the Children's Officer/ designated officer within the Club. Always reassure the player that they have done the right thing in telling you



"Always reassure the player that they have done the right thing in telling you"

5.2.3 Allegations Against Mentors

If an allegation of alleged child abuse is made against a mentor working within the Club/County or Association, the following procedures should be followed:

- The reporting procedure in respect of suspected child abuse. (5.2.1)
- The procedure for dealing with the mentor. (5.2.4)

The safety of the player making the allegation should be considered and the safety of any other players who may be at risk. The club should take any necessary steps that may be necessary to protect its players. The issue of confidentiality is important – the mentor should be treated with respect and fairness.

5.2.4 Dealing with the Mentor

While the designated Children's Officer makes the report to the local Health Board, the Chairperson of the club should deal with the mentor.

- The Chairperson should privately inform the mentor that
 - (a) an allegation has been made against him/her
 - (b) the nature of the allegation
- He/she should be afforded an opportunity to respond
- His/her response should be noted and passed on to the Health Board/Social Services
- The mentor should be asked to step aside pending the outcome of the investigation. When a mentor is asked to step aside it should be made clear that it is only a precautionary measure and will not prejudice any later disciplinary proceedings

The Club/County Children's Officer should inform the National Children's Officer that the mentor has been asked to stand aside.

It is also the duty of all Association members to inform the National Children's Officer of a mentor who is under investigation by a Statutory Authority.

The Ladies Gaelic Football Association can consider disciplinary action on the mentor but should ensure that this does not interfere with the investigation of the Statutory Authorities – the outcome of the investigation and any implications it might have will be considered during the Disciplinary procedure.

It should be noted that the fact 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.

5.3 False Allegations

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 the Health Board or the Gardaí (See 5.13.1 – ISC. Code). 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 Boards or any member of An Garda Síochána.

2. The provision of significant protections 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.

This law does not exist in Northern Ireland, but an individual who reports concerns in ‘good faith’ is not deliberately attempting to slander another person’s name. In Northern Ireland there is legislation, the Criminal Law Act (NI) 1967 which places the responsibility on everyone to report offences or to forward information to the police by emphasising the, ‘duty of every other person, who knows or believes, (a) that the offence or some other arrestable offences has been committed and (b) that he has information which is likely to secure, or to be material assistance in securing, the apprehension, prosecution or conviction of any person for that offence’.

5.4 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 player and the person about whom the complaint has been made are protected.

The following points should be kept in mind:

- A guarantee of confidentiality or undertakings regarding secrecy cannot be given, as the welfare of the player will supersede all other considerations

“Any rumours relating to inappropriate behaviour should be brought to the attention of the Children’s Officer and checked out without delay”

- All information should be treated in a careful and sensitive manner and should be discussed only with those who need to know
- Information should be conveyed to the parents/guardians of the player in a sensitive way about whom there are concerns
- Giving information to others on a ‘need to know’ basis for the protection of a player is not a breach of confidentiality
- All persons involved in a protection process (the player, her parents/guardians, the alleged offender, her family, mentors) should be afforded appropriate respect, fairness, support and confidentiality at all stages of the procedure
- Information should be stored in a secure place, with limited access to designated people
- The requirements of the Data Protection laws should be adhered to
- Breach of confidentiality is a serious manner

5.5 ANONYMOUS COMPLAINTS

Anonymous complaints can be difficult to deal with but should not be ignored. In all cases the safety and welfare of the player/s is paramount. Any such complaints relating to inappropriate behaviour should be brought to the attention of the Children’s Officer. The information should be checked out and handled in a confidential manner.

5.6 RUMOURS

Rumours should not be allowed to hang in the air. Any rumours relating to inappropriate behaviour should be brought to the attention of the Children’s Officer and checked out without delay.

