

Appendix 16 Child Welfare and Protection Procedures

Togher Community Tennis Club

Togher Community Tennis Club accepts that all organisations, which include young people among its members, are vulnerable to the occurrence of child abuse. This Appendix sets out the procedures for dealing with any welfare or protection issue that may arise in the organisation.

Child welfare and the protection of young people is the concern of all adults at all times, irrespective of their role within the organisation.

If there are grounds for concern about the safety or welfare of a young person, the organisation and any member having such concerns must take appropriate steps to address those concerns.

The Designated Person

In certain limited circumstances it may be necessary to report suspected or known child abuse allegations to the HSE or An Garda.

The organisation has in place a Designated Person whose job it is to receive such reports from organisation members. They will then decide if a report should be made to the Health Service Executive (HSE) or indeed in certain circumstances to An Garda Síochána.

The Designated Person has received specific training for this role. In addition the person chosen to fulfil the role will be a senior and experienced member of the organisation.

Role and Responsibilities

- To receive reports from organisation members (Senior or Junior) regarding suspected or known child abuse.
- To assess such reports and to seek advice from the HSE in regard to the particular circumstances.
- To make formal reports to the HSE and/or to the Garda Síochána regarding suspected or known child abuse.
- To inform the Chairperson of the organisation that such a report has been made or advice sought (without disclosing any of the details of the incident).
- To inform the family of an alleged victim of his/her intention to make such a report. (unless doing so would endanger the child or undermine an investigation)
- Assisting the Chairperson/President and other Organisation Officers in relation to any internal procedures where an allegation concerns a Coach, Organisation Employee or Sports Leader.

Minimum Requirements

- • Have attended the Safeguarding 1 – Basic Awareness Workshop in Child Welfare and Protection.
 - • Have attended the Safeguarding 3 – Designated Liaison Person Workshop. Desirable qualities and skills.
- The Designated Person should have good communication and listening skills, be approachable and non-judgmental.
 - He/she should have a good knowledge of child welfare and protection codes and guidelines (which will be acquired through appropriate training).
 - The position will require the person to be trustworthy, discreet, impartial and sensitive as they will be required to handle and manage confidential material.

Details of the organisation's current Designated Person can be got from any member of the Executive Committee or the Leader/Coach at each venue

If in doubt the member should always contact the Designated Person to discuss any child protection matter of concern. The Designated Person who will then deal with the matter as they see fit.

It is important to realise that it is not the responsibility of anyone working within the tennis organisation, in a paid or voluntary capacity, to take responsibility or decide whether or not child abuse is taking place. That is the job of the 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.

Responding to a Child Disclosing Abuse.

In some circumstances a young person may disclose to a trusted adult instances of abuse or other concerns relating to themselves or others.

Any adult finding themselves in this situation should follow the guidelines set out below.

If a young person discloses information of suspected abuse you should:

- Deal with any allegation of abuse in a sensitive and competent way through listening to and facilitating the child to tell about the problem, rather than interviewing the child about details of what happened.
- Stay calm and don't show any extreme reaction to what the child is saying. Listen compassionately and take what the child is saying seriously.
- 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.
- Be honest with the child and tell them that it is not possible to keep information a secret.
- Make no judgmental statements against the person whom the allegation is made.
- Do not question the child unless the nature of what she/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".
- Give the child some indication of what would happen next, such as informing the Designated Person, parents/guardians, social services or the Gardai. It should be kept in mind that the child may have been threatened and may feel vulnerable at this stage.

- Reassure the child that they have done the right thing in telling you.
- Carefully record the details as soon as possible after receiving the report.
- Pass on this information to the organisation’s Designated Person.

Reporting Suspected or Disclosed Child Abuse.

The following steps will be taken by the Designated Person in reporting child abuse to the statutory authorities:

- Details such as dates, times, locations and contexts in which the incident occurred or suspicion was aroused, together with any other relevant information will be recorded by the Designated Person. These notes will be retained by the Designated Person and destroyed when no longer required.
- If the Designated Person has reasonable grounds for believing that the child has been abused or is at risk of abuse, she/he will make a report to the HSE which has a statutory responsibility to investigate and assess suspected or actual child abuse.
- 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 Gardai will be contacted. Under no circumstances will a child be left in a dangerous situation pending intervention by the statutory authorities.
- If the Designated Person is unsure whether reasonable grounds for concern exist she/he can informally consult with the local social services. She/he will be advised whether or not the matter requires a formal report.
- A Designated Person reporting suspected or actual child abuse to the Statutory Authorities will first inform the family of the alleged victim of his/her intention to make such a report, unless doing so would endanger the child or undermine an investigation.

Protection for the Person Reporting possible Child Abuse.

It is important to reassure anyone who is in the position of receiving information or directly becoming aware of possible child abuse that in making a report they won’t be subject to litigation. In this regard 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 Services Executive or the Gardai (directly or via a Designated Person). 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 the Health Service Executive 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.

Allegations against Coaches/Organisation Employees/Sports Leaders

The following are the agreed procedures to be followed in cases of alleged child abuse complaints concerning a Coach, Organisation Employee or Sports Leader. If such an allegation is made against a Coach/Organisation Employee/Sports Leader working within the organisation, two separate procedures will be followed in tandem:

1. The reporting to the statutory authorities by the Designated Person in respect of suspected or disclosed child abuse. (see above for details).
2. The organisation will also follow its own internal procedure in dealing with the Coach/Organisation Employee/Sports Leader from a organisation perspective.

The Internal Procedure will be as follows.

– As soon as the Designated Person is made aware of allegations which concern a Coach/Organisation Employee/Sports Leader within the organisation he/she will make the Organisation Chairman/President aware of the situation. If the allegations concern the Chairperson/President then the Designated Person will convene a meeting of the other officers of the organisation and brief them on the situation.

– The first thing to consider at this stage is the safety of the child making the allegation and the safety of any other children who may be at risk. The organisation will immediately take any steps considered necessary to protect children in its care.

– The next step will be to appoint a senior member of the organisation to deal with the matter. Under normal circumstances this person will be selected by the Designated Person together with the Chairperson. Where the allegations concern the Chairperson/President the person will be selected by the Designated Person and the other organisation officers.

– The senior Organisation member will privately inform the Coach/Organisation Employee/Sports Leader that (a) an allegation has been made against him/her (b) the nature of the allegation. He/she will be afforded an opportunity to respond and informed that any response will be noted and passed on to the statutory authorities.

– The Coach/Organisation Employee/Sports Leader will be suspended from their position pending the outcome of the Organisation's investigation. Any investigation of the allegations by the statutory authorities will take precedence over any separate investigation by the Organisation into the allegations.

The senior Organisation member will clarify that this suspension is only a precautionary measure and will not prejudice any later disciplinary proceedings.

– The Organisation will retain the right to take disciplinary action against the Coach/Organisation Employee/Sports Leader on foot of the allegations.

Confidentiality

Given the sensitive nature of the issues covered by this appendix confidentiality will be a very important consideration. The Organisation will be guided in this regard by the following.

- Appropriate but not absolute confidentiality will 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 alleged victim and the person about whom the complaint has been made are protected.

- A guarantee of confidentiality or undertakings regarding secrecy cannot be given, as the welfare of the child will supersede all other considerations.
- All information will be treated in a careful and sensitive manner and will be discussed only with those who need to know.
 - Information will be conveyed to the parents/guardians of the child in a sensitive way.
 - Giving information to others on a 'need to know' basis for the protection of a child is not a breach of confidentiality.
- All persons involved in a child protection process will be afforded appropriate respect, fairness, support and confidentiality at all stages of the procedure.
- Information will be stored in a secure place, with access to it limited to the Designated Person and appropriate personnel as decided by the Designated Person.
- The requirements of Data Protection laws will be adhered to.

Anonymous Complaints/Rumours

Anonymous complaints can be difficult to deal with but will not be ignored. Rumours will not be allowed to persist and will be dealt with by the Executive Committee as soon as it becomes aware of such rumours. All concerns relating to inappropriate behavior will be brought to the attention of the Designated Person in order that they may be dealt with as soon as possible. It is the responsibility of every member who becomes aware of such concerns to report them to the Designated Person. The information will be checked out and handled in a confidential manner. In all cases the safety and welfare of the child/children will be paramount.

Contact details for the relevant Dublin local statutory agencies are Dublin City Sports & Well Being Partnership, Fingal Sports Partnership, Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown Sports Partnership, South Dublin Sports Partnership. A list of all other statutory authorities' contacts are available on Tennisireland.ie

DESIGNATED PERSON 2022

The current Togher Community Tennis Club Designated Person is:

John O Rourke Child Protection Officer

Laura O Rourke Designated Liaison Officer

If you have any concerns please contact John or Laura at childprotectiontctc@gmail.com.