



Portrane Hockey Club

Welfare and Protection Policy including Responding to Allegations and Complaints Procedure

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Part 1: Child Welfare and Protection.

Portrane Hockey Club (PHC) accepts that organisations which include young people among its members are vulnerable to the occurrence of child abuse and neglect. All those involved in PHC have a moral duty of care to report child protection concerns to help create a safer environment for children. Our goal in this policy is to implement best practice in protecting the welfare of children and young people. Children's First Guidance (2017) emphasises the importance of keeping children safe from harm.

Below are the procedures for dealing with any welfare or protection issue that may arise within PHC. Child welfare and the protection of children and young people is the concern of all adults at all times irrespective of their role within PHC.

For clarity relating to this policy:

Child or young person: A child or young person is any person under the age of 18.

Club Children's Officer (CCO): Children's Officers are appointed within clubs to act as a resource for children and to represent them at committee level.

Designated Liaison Person (DLP): The DLP is responsible for the reporting of allegations or suspicions of child abuse and welfare issues to Tusla. This person will be a resource to anyone in the club who has a child protection or welfare concern.

Child abuse has been defined into four main categories.

1. **Physical Abuse:** physical abuse is when someone deliberately hurts a child physically or puts them at risk of being physically hurt. It may occur as a single incident or as a pattern of incidents. A reasonable concern exists where the child's health and or development is, may be or has been damaged as a result of physical abuse.
2. **Emotional Abuse:** emotional abuse is the systemic emotional or psychological ill treatment of a child as a pattern of overall relationship between a caregiver and a child. Abuse occurs when a child's basic need for attention, affection, approval, consistency and security are not met due to incapacity or indifference from their parent or caregiver. A reasonable concern for the child's welfare would exist when the behaviour becomes typical of the relationship between the child and the parent or caregiver.
3. **Neglect:** neglect occurs when a child does not receive adequate care or supervision to the extent that the child is harmed physically or developmentally. It is generally defined in terms of an omission of care where a child's health, development or welfare is impaired by being deprived of food, clothing, warmth, hygiene, medical care, intellectual stimulation, supervision and safety. A reasonable concern for the child's welfare would exist when neglect becomes typical of the relationship between the child and the parent or caregiver.
4. **Sexual abuse:** sexual abuse occurs when a child is used by another person for his or her gratification or sexual arousal or for that of others. It includes the child being involved in sexual acts or exposing the child to sexual activity directly or through pornography. Any concerns about possible sexual abuse constitutes reasonable grounds for concern.

Part 2: Responding to Allegations.

It is not the responsibility of anyone in Portrane Hockey Club to decide whether or not a child is being abused. It is the responsibility of anyone in the club to report any reasonable grounds for concern to the DLP in the club. If you are unsure about whether or not certain behaviours are abusive you should approach the DLP and discuss your concerns. Grounds for concern include a specific indication of physical, emotional, sexual abuse or neglect from a child, a report from someone who witnessed abuse or neglect or an illness, injury or behaviour consistent with abuse. The DLP will make a decision whether or not to report to Tusla. It is possible to phone Tusla and speak to the duty Social Worker on a consultation basis to seek advice or direction. Any cases not reported to Tusla should be recorded clearly and the reasons for not reporting.

Responding to Disclosure of allegations of Abuse.

1. Be sensitive and listen carefully to what is being reported to you.
2. Take what is said to you seriously.
3. React calmly when responding as over reacting may alarm the young person and compound the feelings of anxiety and guilt.
4. Emphasise that the discussion while confidential will have to be shared with the DLP so as to respond appropriately. Ensure that they understand the procedure.
5. Do not make false promises particularly regarding secrecy.
6. Reassure the person that they have taken the correct action in making the disclosure.
7. Never make a judgement statement about the allegation or the alleged abuser.
8. If asking any questions do so for the purpose of clarity only.
9. Record the conversation as soon as is practical and in as much detail as possible noting the presentation of the young person.
10. Inform the DLP as soon as is practical.
11. Treat all information as confidential.
12. Remember you are not interviewing the child or investigating the allegation. You are listening and reassuring them.
13. Information should be stored in a secure place with limited access only by the relevant people.

Recording:

- Records should be factual and include details of contacts, consultations and 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.
- All records shall be maintained securely in a safe manner.
- Records should only be used for the purposes for which they are intended.
- Records should only be shared on a need to know basis in the best interests of the child or young person.
- The DLP & CCO will have access to such reports/disclosures.
- Records will be located on a secure laptop with password protection.
- Records will be kept for a minimum of 3 years (Check??).
- Child protection records should be updated regularly by the DLP or CCO.

Reasonable Grounds for Concern:

There are many reasons a coach/volunteer may be concerned about the welfare 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 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 will 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.

Responding to a Child/Young Person who Discloses Abuse:

A child or young person may disclose to a coach/volunteer that they have been or are being harmed or abused. Children/ young people will often have different ways of communicating that they are being abused. If a child or young person hints at or tells a coach/volunteer that he or she is being harmed by someone, be it a parent/carer, another adult or by another child/young person (peer abuse), it should be treated in a sensitive way.

Remember, a child/young person may disclose abuse to you as a trusted adult at any time during your work with them. It is important that you are aware and prepared for this.

- Be as calm and natural as possible.
- Remember that you have been approached because you are trusted and possibly liked.
- Do not panic.
- Be aware that disclosures can be very difficult for the child/young person.
- Remember, the child or young person may initially be testing your reactions and may only fully open up over a period of time.
- Listen to what the child/young person has to say. Give them the time and opportunity to tell as much as they are able and wish to.
- Do not pressurise the child/young person. Allow him or her to disclose at their own pace and in their own language.
- Conceal any signs of disgust, anger or disbelief.

- Accept what the child or young person has to say – false disclosures are very rare.
- It is important to differentiate between the person who carried out the abuse and the act of abuse itself.
- It may be necessary to reassure the child/young person that your feelings towards him or her have not been affected in a negative way as a result of what they have disclosed.
- Reassure the child/young person that they have taken the right action in talking to you.

When asking questions:

- Questions should be supportive and for the purpose of clarification only.
- Avoid leading questions, such as asking whether a specific person carried out the abuse.
- You should also avoid asking about intimate details or suggesting that something else may have happened other than what you have been told.

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. 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.

The DLP may report the allegation of abuse to Tusla. Parents of the child should be informed a referral will be made unless doing so would further endanger the child.

The responsibility of staff and volunteers to report to Tusla using the Report Form (available on the Tusla website: www.tusla.ie) where reasonable grounds for concern exist.

<https://www.tusla.ie/children-first/individuals-working-with-children-and-youngpeople/how-do-i-report-a-concern-about-a-child/>

Out of hours the DLP can phone Tusla Out of Hours Social Work Service on (0818)776315 between 6pm – 6am every night and between 9am – 5pm on Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays.

During working hours for our area you can contact the local Tusla Child Protection Office and ask to speak to the Duty Social Worker in Airside, Swords on 01-8708000.

If you cannot contact Tusla and have an immediate concern about the safety of a child please contact the local Garda Síochána in Swords on 01-6664700.

The Criminal Justice Act 2012 (Withholding of Information on Offences against Children and Vulnerable Persons).

Under this act it is a criminal offence to withhold information about a serious offence against a person under 18 years of age.

The Protections for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act 1998. This act protects you if you make a report of suspected child abuse to Tusla, HSE or to the Gardai as long as the report is made in good faith and is not malicious. It provides immunity from civil liability to people who report in good faith.

Part 3: Poor Practice.

It is important to distinguish between abuse and poor practise.

Poor practice occurs where the needs of the child are compromised. Poor practice may be one off incident or a number of incidents. Examples of poor practice are not limited to but may include the following:

Coach:

1. Giving preferential treatment to individuals and unfairly rejecting others (e.g. Only focusing on the talented children and failing to involve the full squad).
2. Giving preference to winning games over children's development, participation and satisfaction.
3. Using inappropriate language, gestures or comments to motivate children or provoke a reaction.
4. Delivering a coaching session alone without another adult present.
5. Failing to recognise and applaud a child's effort to improve their game.
6. Shouting aggressively at his / her team during a match.

Parent / guardian:

1. Placing too much pressure on their child to perform to a high standard and win games.
2. Criticising their child's performance instead of highlighting the positives.
3. Failing to ensure a child is appropriately dressed for the weather.
4. Failing to bring their child to training on time or failing to collect them on time.

Supporters:

1. Using inappropriate language towards children, coaches, referees or other supporters.
2. Making inappropriate comments about the performance of children, coaches or referees.
3. Entering the pitch during a match or training session without being asked to do so.
4. Shouting loudly or aggressively at their child or other children during a match which may be disruptive.

The Club:

1. Failing to provide adequate safeguarding arrangements for the children in their care.
2. Placing undue pressure on a coach or children to win games.
3. Allowing poor practice to go unreported.
4. Failing to provide an ethos or create an environment that encourages player development and enjoyment.
5. Failing to provide appropriate safeguarding education for their coaches.

Judgement about whether or not an incident is one of child abuse or poor practice may not be possible at the point of referral but only after the collation of all relevant information. Poor practice concerns should be dealt with directly by the club in the first instance.

When alleged poor practice has been identified or reported it must be dealt with in a fair and impartial manner taking into account the rights of the person against whom the complaint has been made. All information should be treated with confidentiality.

When an example of poor practice is reported it should be dealt with on a case by case basis.

1. Alleged poor practice is observed or reported. This information should be passed to the CCO.
2. The CCO should inform the DLP.
3. CCO should collate all information and record what action if any was initially taken.
4. Inform the person against whom the report of alleged poor practice has been made and offer them the opportunity to respond.
5. If information needs to be collected from children this should only be done with their parents present and should only be done if absolutely necessary.
6. If the accused agrees that poor practise has occurred the person may be subject to an appropriate sanction such as a verbal or written warning.
7. The Club Committee should be informed.
8. If the alleged poor practice is disputed the DLP and CCO must ask the committee to review.
9. Should a disciplinary hearing be required the panel should be impartial consisting of at least 3 members.
10. All parties should be informed of the decision of the hearing in writing.

Part 4: Anonymous Complaints.

Anonymous complaints can be difficult to deal with but should not be ignored. These may be complaints where parents wish to make a complaint regarding a coach or the club on behalf of their child where they do not want the coach informed or where they do not want themselves or their child identified. They may be complaints received anonymously regarding a coach or club member.

These complaints should be brought to the attention of the DLP and or the CCO and investigated in full based on the information that has been provided.

There is always a possibility that anonymous complaints may be vexatious or malicious so they should always be followed up discreetly. The anonymity of the complainant does not enable the principles of natural justice and procedural fairness to be upheld. The complainant should be advised that it may not be possible to investigate the complaint as this information may be needed to facilitate a full and proper investigation of the complaint.

In all cases the safety and welfare of the child is paramount. Any complaints relating to possible abuse should be brought to the attention of the DLP and should be investigated discreetly. These complaints should be dealt with as much as possible verbally at source locally. It may be the case where they indicate quality improvements in the club and it is the responsibility of the CCO and DLP with the support of the committee to ensure that all members of the club uphold the highest practice.

Part 5: Complaints Procedure.

PHC operates on the basis of good practice. However, in the event that a complaint is made the following are the procedures in place:

- Complaints should be dealt with as much as possible verbally and at local level.
- Complaints may be made by young people in the club, parents or coaches.
- A complaint must be made in writing to the club secretary or the CCO.

- If the complaint involves suspected abuse or a criminal offence the CCO and or DLP should be consulted and Tusla and or Gardai informed. Keep in mind that it is not the role of the club to investigate such reports. It is our role to report only. It is the role of the statutory organisations to investigate.
- The person to whom the complaint was made should respond to the complainant within 5 days acknowledging the complaint and informing the complainant that a committee will convene to review the complaint.
- A committee will convene. The committee should consist of the club secretary, the CCO, DLP and an ordinary registered member of the club.
- The disciplinary committee should review any relevant paperwork and hold any necessary meeting with all parties to proceed with complaints into any incident of suspected misconduct that does not relate to child abuse. The club committee should be informed of the complaint. This should be done within 10 days of receipt of the complaint.
- The disciplinary committee should furnish the individual with the nature of the complaint being made against him or her and afford him or her the opportunity to respond either verbally or in writing but usually at a meeting with the disciplinary committee.
- Written confidential records of all complaints should be safely and confidentially kept.
- Where it is established that an incident of misconduct has taken place the disciplinary committee should notify the member of any sanction being imposed. This notification should be made in writing setting out the reasons for the sanctions. If the member is under 18 years of age correspondence should be addressed to the parents or guardians of the child.
- If the member against whom the complaint was made is unhappy with the decision of the disciplinary committee, he or she should have the right to appeal the decision to an appeals committee who are independent of a disciplinary committee. Any appeal should be made in writing within 10 – 14 days of the decision of the disciplinary committee. The chairperson of the appeals committee should be a member of the management committee. The appeals committee should consult with the CCO in relation to issues of child welfare and codes of conduct.
- The appeals committee should have the power to confirm, set aside or change any sanction imposed by the disciplinary committee.
- If any party is not satisfied with the outcome the matter may be referred to Hockey Ireland. Efforts to resolve the issue at local level should be exhausted before Hockey Ireland is engaged.