



Child Welfare & Protection Procedures

Muckross Hockey Club accepts that organisations, which include young people among its members, are vulnerable to the occurrence of child abuse and neglect. Below are the procedures for dealing with any welfare or protection issue that may arise. Child welfare and the protection of young people is the concern of all adults at all times, irrespective of their role within the organisation.

Definitions of the 4 categories of abuse:

Neglect – an omission, 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 willful 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.

(examples pages 42-43 Code of Ethics and Good Practice for Children's Sport, www.irishsportscouncil.ie Code of Ethics pgs 42-43)

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 Leinster Hockey Association or Irish Hockey Association 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 may in turn have to pass the concern to the local Statutory Authorities. It is not the responsibility of anyone working within Muckcross Hockey Club, 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.

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 Designated Person within your club/organisation

(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 Designated Person within the club/organisation 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.