



Child Welfare and Protection Procedures

Hockey 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 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.

(examples pages 42-43 Code of Ethics and Good Practice for Children's Sport,
[www.irishsportsCouncil.ie /code of ethics](http://www.irishsportsCouncil.ie/code_of_ethics) page 42-43)

Response to a Child Disclosing Abuse/Neglect

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 may in turn have to pass the concern to the local Statutory Authorities. It is not the responsibility of anyone working within Hockey, 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.

- (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.

Allegations Against Sports Leaders

Hockey has agreed procedures to be followed in cases of alleged child abuse against Leaders. If such an allegation is made against Sports Leaders working within Hockey, two procedures should be followed:

- The reporting procedure in respect of the young person (reported by the Designated Person), see previous page
- The procedure for dealing with the Sports Leader (carried out by the club chair or Children's Officer, or a person not already involved with the child protection concern)
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The safety of the child making the allegation should be the first and paramount consideration and the safety of any other children who may be at risk. Hockey should take any necessary steps that may be necessary to protect children in its care. The protection should be in proportion to the level of risk.

The issue of confidentiality is important. Information is shared on a need to know basis and the Sports Leader should be treated with respect and fairness. Parents should be informed.

The Reporting Procedure

If the Designated Person has reasonable grounds for concern, the matter should be reported to the local HSE / Social Services, following the standard reporting procedure and the parents should be informed.

The Sports Leader

The Designated Person may consult with the local HSE/Social Services informally to seek confirmation that there is reason for concern. Before the Designated Person refers the report to the local HSE/Social Services, the chair of the Management Board of the IHA should deal with the Leader in question. Unless there is an immediate risk to the child and/or other young people in which case the Leader in question will be informed at the earliest opportunity which may be after the concern has been reported to the Statutory Authorities.

- When the concern is connected to the actions of a sports leader in the club/Branch or representing the IHA, the person should be asked to stand aside pending the outcome of any investigation by the Statutory Authorities.
- When the Sports Leader is being privately informed by the chairman of the Management Board / Management Committee 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.
- When a person 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 Leader is entitled to natural justice.

Disciplinary action on the Leader should be considered but this should not interfere with the investigation of the Statutory Authorities. The follow up on an allegation of abuse against a sports leader should be in consultation with the Statutory Authorities. If it is deemed not to be a concern reportable to the Statutory Authorities but instead an incident of poor practice, the complaints procedure as outlined in Complaints and Appeals Procedure on page 12 should be followed. It is important to consider the outcome of the investigation and any implications it might have. The fact that the alleged abuser has not been prosecuted or been found guilty does not automatically mean that they are appropriate to work with young people in the future.

For the procedures see

[Appendix 1 – Procedure for complaint about possible abuse outside the organisation](#)

[Appendix 2 – Procedure for dealing with a concern about behaviour of a member/ volunteer](#)

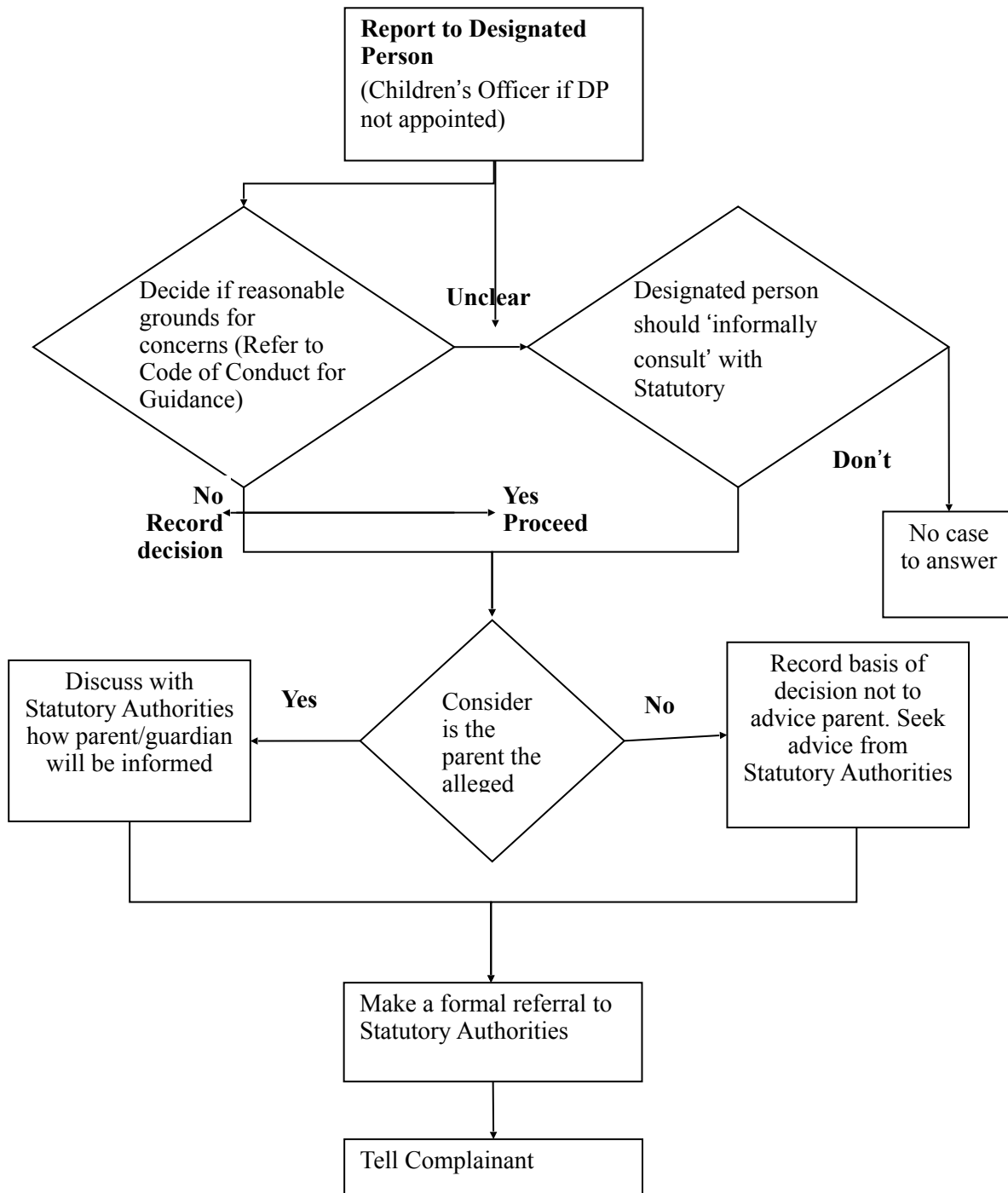
Anonymous Complaints

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

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 or the Designated Person and checked out without delay.

Appendix 1 – Procedure for complaints about possible abuse outside the organisation



Appendix 2 – Procedure for dealing with a concern about behaviour of a member/volunteer in Hockey

