



Dunboyne Tennis Club

Old Kilbride Road, Clonee, Co. Meath. Tel: 085 1537466

Reporting and Protection Procedures Handling Child Abuse Allegations

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

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

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

Designated Liaison Person (DLP)

The club has in place a Designated Liaison Person (DLP) whose role is to receive and assess reports of suspected or known child abuse from club members. The DLP will then decide if the matter should be reported to the Health Service Executive (HSE)/TUSLA or indeed in certain circumstances to An Garda Síochána.

The Designated Liaison Person has received specific training for this role.

Designated Liaison Person - Role and Responsibilities

- To receive reports from club members (Senior or Junior) regarding suspected or known child abuse.
- To assess such reports and to seek advice from the HSE/TUSLA in regard to the particular circumstances.
- To make formal reports to the HSE/TUSLA and/or to the Garda Síochána regarding suspected or known child abuse.
- To inform the Chairperson of the club 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 and other Club Officers in relation to any internal procedures where an allegation concerns a Coach, Club Employee or Sports Leader.

Details of the club's current Designated Liaison Person are displayed on the Club Notice Board or can be got from any member of the Committee.

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



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It is important to realise that it is not the responsibility of anyone working within the tennis club, 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 Liaison Person, parents/guardians, social services or the Gardaí. 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 club's Designated Liaison Person.



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Reporting Suspected or Disclosed Child Abuse.

The following steps will be taken by the Designated Liaison 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 Liaison Person. These notes will be retained by the Designated Liaison Person and destroyed when no longer required.
- If the Designated Liaison 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 Liaison 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 Liaison 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 Liaison 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 Service Executive or the Gardaí (directly or via a Designated Liaison 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.



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Allegations against Coaches/Club Employees/Sports Leaders

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

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

The Internal Procedure will be as follows.

- As soon as the Designated Liaison Person is made aware of allegations which concern a Coach/Club Employee/Sports Leader within the club he/she will make the Club Chairman aware of the situation. If the allegations concern the Chairperson then the Designated Liaison Person will convene a meeting of the other officers of the club 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 club will immediately take any steps considered necessary to protect children in its care.
- A senior member of the club will be appointed to deal with the matter. Under normal circumstances this person will be selected by the Designated Liaison Person together with the Chairperson. Where the allegations concern the Chairperson, the person will be selected by the Designated Liaison Person and the other club officers.
- The senior club member will privately inform the Coach/Club Employee/Sports Leader:
 - (a) that an allegation has been made against him/her; and,
 - (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/Club Employee/Sports Leader will be suspended from their position pending the outcome of the club's investigation. Any investigation of the allegations by the statutory authorities will take precedence over any separate investigation by the club into the allegations. The senior club member will clarify that this suspension is only a precautionary measure and will not prejudice any later disciplinary proceedings.
- The club will retain the right to take disciplinary action against the Coach/Club Employee/Sports Leader on foot of the allegations.



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Confidentiality

Given the sensitive nature of the issues covered by this appendix confidentiality will be a very important consideration. The Club 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 Liaison Person and appropriate personnel as decided by the Designated Liaison 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 Committee as soon as it becomes aware of such rumours. All concerns relating to inappropriate behaviour will be brought to the attention of the Designated Liaison 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 Liaison 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.