

Dealing with Child Abuse Concerns or Allegations



Ballina Town FC is committed to ensuring that children can participate in all football activities in a safe environment. Football provides an excellent opportunity to learn new skills, become more confident and maximise potential as members of teams and as individuals. The safety and welfare of all children is paramount.

It is important to note that the investigation of suspected child abuse is the responsibility of the Statutory Authorities (Gardai, HSE) and should not be undertaken by Children's Officers or any other Club/League. All allegations of child abuse must be referred to the Statutory Authorities.

When an allegation is received it should be assessed promptly and carefully. It will be necessary to decide whether a formal report should be made to the HSE and this decision should be based on reasonable grounds for concern.

The following examples would constitute reasonable grounds for concern:

- a specific indication from a child that (s)he was abused;
- (ii) a statement from a person who witnessed abuse;
- (iii) an illness, injury or behaviour consistent with abuse;
- (iv) a symptom which may not in itself be totally consistent with abuse, but which is supported by corroborative evidence of deliberate harm or negligence;
- (v) consistent signs of neglect over a period of time.

Ref. Children First Act 2015

Step One

Any allegation of abuse must in the first instance be brought to the attention of the Chairperson/Child Welfare officer of the Club. Should the Chairperson/Child Welfare Officer be unsure whether reasonable grounds for concern exist, the local HSE duty social worker can be informally consulted. Advice will be given as to whether or not the matter requires a formal report.

Coaches/volunteers may be subjected to erroneous or malicious allegations. Therefore, any allegation of abuse should be dealt with sensitively and appropriate support should be provided for staff/volunteers including counselling where necessary.

Step Two

Should Ballina Town FC become aware of an allegation of abuse of a child or children by a manager/coach/volunteer during the execution of that manager/coaches/volunteers duty, the Chairperson / Child Welfare Officer will privately inform the manager/coach/volunteer of the following:

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- the fact that the allegation has been made against him/her and the nature of the allegation

Step Three

The manager/coach/volunteer should be afforded an opportunity to respond. The Chairperson \Child Welfare officer will note the response and pass on this information when making the formal report to the HSE.

The report to the HSE should contain observations, dates, times, locations and contexts in which the incident occurred or suspicion was aroused, together with any other relevant information.

In cases of emergency, where a child appears to be at immediate and serious risk and the Chairperson is unable to contact a duty social worker, the Gardai shall be contacted.

Under no circumstances will a child be left in a dangerous situation pending intervention by the Statutory Authorities

Step Four

Our Chairperson Child Welfare Officer , if 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 any statutory investigation.

Step Five

All subsequent actions following an allegation of abuse against a manager/coach/volunteer will be taken in consultation with the HSE and An Garda Síochána. An immediate meeting will be sought with these two agencies for this purpose. The Football Association of Ireland National Children's Officer is also available to provide support and advice.

Step Six

Under Football Association of Ireland rules, any manager/coach/volunteer who is the subject of a statutory investigation into alleged child abuse, is required to stand down from all soccer activities until the investigation is completed. Therefore the FAI National Children's Officer must be informed immediately of any formal notification to the Statutory Authorities.

When a person is asked to stand down it should be made clear that it is only a precautionary measure in keeping with standard procedures/guidelines and will not prejudice any later disciplinary proceedings.

The manager/coach/volunteer concerned should be advised that the procedures being undertaken are in accordance with statutory requirements. He or she should be treated with

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respect and fairness, and also be assured that all information will be dealt with in a sensitive and confidential manner.

Step Seven

Ballina Town FC will carefully consider the outcome of the statutory investigation and will then assess if there are any outstanding disciplinary issues in relation to their internal rules or infringements of the Football Association of Ireland best practice guidelines. It must be remembered that the fact that the alleged abuser has not been prosecuted or been found guilty does not mean that they are appropriate to work with young people in the future.

Internal Club disciplinary proceedings can only be initiated after the Statutory Authorities have completed theirs.

LINKS

FAI Child Welfare Policy

https://www.fai.ie/sites/default/files/atoms/files/FAI_Child_Welfare_Policy_-_2014.pdf

Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children

<https://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/Publications/ChildrenFirst.pdf>

The FAI assures anyone with a concern that these will be handled in the strictest of confidence.

The following contact details are available in such circumstances:

- The FAI Child Welfare Department can be contacted by email at childwelfare@fai.ie
- The Child and Family Agency are available at <https://www.tusla.ie/get-in-touch> or <https://www.tusla.ie/children-first/report-a-concern/>
- To contact the Gardai in an emergency always call 999/112 or visit <https://www.garda.ie/en/contact-us/station-directory>
- The Health Service Executive provides a confidential counselling service to adults who have experienced childhood sexual, physical or emotional abuse via Freephone Number 1800 235 234 (office hours) or www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/national-counselling-service