



Dealing with Allegations Against Leaders

Muckross Hockey Club has agreed procedures to be followed in the case of an allegation of child abuse against a coach/ volunteer, as set out in the Hockey Ireland Code of Ethics.

If such an allegation is made, three steps should be taken:

- Responding to allegations of abuse made against a coaches /volunteers.
- Reporting allegations of abuse made against coaches / volunteers to Tusla.
- Internal procedures for dealing with the coach/volunteer should to be clearly outlined.

Responding to allegations of abuse made against coaches/volunteer:

An allegation of abuse may relate to a person who works with children who has:

- Behaved in a way that has or may have harmed a child/ young person;
- Possibly committed a criminal offence in relation to a child/young person;
- Behaved towards a child/young person or children/young people in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to a child/young person;
- Behaved in a way that is contrary to the club/sports organisation code of behaviour for coaches & volunteers;
- Behaved in a way that is contrary to professional practice guidelines.

If an allegation is made against a coach/volunteer in your organisation/club you must ensure that everyone involved is dealt with appropriately and in accordance with the organisation/club guiding principles and child safeguarding procedures, the rules of natural justice and any relevant employment law. The organisation/club has a dual responsibility in respect of both the child/young person and the coach/volunteer.

There are two separate procedures to be followed:

- The reporting procedure to Tusla in respect of the child/ young person and the alleged abuser;



- The internal personnel procedure for dealing with a coach/ volunteer. Each club/sports organisation should have agreed procedures to be followed in cases of alleged child abuse against Sports Leaders.

If such an allegation is made, two steps should be taken:

- The reporting procedure.
- The procedure for dealing with the Sports Leader.

Special Considerations

The following points should be considered:

- the safety of the child making the allegation and any others who are/may be at risk should be ensured and this should take precedence over any other consideration. In this regard, the sports club/organisation should take any necessary steps which may be immediately necessary to protect children
- if a Sports Leader is the subject of the concern s/he should be treated with respect and fairness.

Steps to be taken within the Sports Organisation

Where reasonable grounds for concern exist the following steps should be taken by the club/organisation:

- advice should be sought from the local duty social worker with regard to any action by the club deemed necessary to protect the child/children who may be at risk.
- the matter should be reported to the local statutory authorities following the standard reporting procedure outlined above
- in the event that the concern is connected to the actions of a Sports Leader in the club, the Sports Leader involved in the concern should be asked to stand aside pending the outcome of any investigation by the Statutory Authorities.
- It is advisable that this task be undertaken by a senior office holder other than the designated liaison person/club children's officer who takes the responsibility for reporting.

When the Sports Leader is being privately informed by the senior officer 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. All persons



involved in a child protection process (the child, his /her parents /carers, the alleged offender, his /her family, Sports Leaders) should be afforded appropriate respect, fairness, support and confidentiality at all stages of the procedure. Once the criminal process is completed, employers should consider the need to examine whether there are grounds for disciplinary proceedings for misconduct. The fact that the alleged abuser has not been prosecuted or has been found not guilty does not mean that such proceedings are not necessary or feasible. Internal procedures for dealing with a coach/volunteer should to be clearly outlined. In the context of an allegation of abuse against a coach/ volunteer, the organisation/club disciplinary procedures should ensure that fair procedure is followed and take account of the employment contract/membership guidelines as well as the rules of natural justice.

The following points should be incorporated into the procedure:

- In making an immediate decision about the coach/ volunteer's presence in the organisation/club, the Chairperson should as a matter of urgency take any measures necessary to protect the child/young person. These should be proportionate to the level of risk to the child/young person; 'protective measures' do not presume guilt.
- The Chairperson should privately inform the coach/ volunteer that an allegation has been made against him or her and the nature of the allegation.
- The coach/volunteer should be afforded an opportunity to respond.
- The Chairperson should note the response from the coach/ volunteer and pass on this information if making a formal report to Tusla.
- The coach/volunteer should be offered the option to have representation at this stage and should be informed that any response may be shared with Tusla.
- While Tusla will not provide advice on employment matters, advice and consultation with regard to risk to children/ young people can be sought from the local Tusla social work office.
- The Chairperson should ensure that actions taken by the organisation/club do not undermine any investigations or assessments undertaken by Tusla or An Garda Síochána.

The organisation/club should liaise closely with the investigating bodies to ensure this. Once the statutory process is completed, the organisation/club should consider the need to examine whether there are grounds for disciplinary



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