



CODE OF ETHICS & GOOD PRACTICE FOR CHILDREN'S SOCCER



*Our Goal is that children's soccer is Safe & Fun
for all participants and conducted in the spirit of Fair Play*





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Foreward



Message from David Blood
President Football Association of Ireland

“ The Football Association of Ireland has demonstrated with the publication of this booklet its commitment to ensuring that children and young people can participate in all soccer activities with their safety and welfare being of paramount importance.

It is essential that the FAI's Code of Ethics and Good Practice for Children's Soccer represents a process of continual improvement in the area of child protection and welfare in football. It is the responsibility of all adults involved in soccer to actively promote safe and best practice standards whilst being ever vigilant and aware of their responsibilities to children and young people in their care.

These guidelines are for the benefit of all involved in children's soccer. This includes any person under the age of 18 years plus everyone involved in the provision of football opportunities for children like parents, guardians, coaches, volunteers, administrators, referees.

In following the principles, policy and practice guidelines contained in this Code, we are all playing our part in providing an enjoyable and safe environment in which children can play, learn and thrive within the soccer family.

As citizens, all adults have a responsibility to protect children from harm and to abide by government guidelines in responding to and reporting child protection concerns. This responsibility exists wherever such concerns might arise, whether inside or outside football.

The FAI's *Code of Ethics and Good Practice for Children's Soccer* is built upon a number of core principles relating to the importance of childhood, the needs of the child, integrity and fair play, and relationships and safety in children's football. It addresses issues relating to the roles and responsibilities of all involved in children's soccer, and underpins the importance of policies and procedures in providing quality leadership for children in football. It outlines our principles of good practice and child protection policy and procedures.

Football provides an excellent opportunity for both children and young people to learn new skills, become more confident and maximise their own potential both as members of a team and individuals. Through participation they can have fun and enjoyment, learn and develop life skills, make new friends and experience life in a way that will enhance their personal growth throughout the course of their lives.

These benefits will occur when we adopt a positive approach to the involvement of young people that places the needs of the child first and winning and competition second. Winning is an important goal but winning at all costs does not meet the needs of young participants.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the countless number of participants many of whom are volunteers who provide football opportunities for children for their commitment, hard work and dedication which has contributed in no small way in making soccer the biggest participation sport in Ireland today with over 450,000 participants.

The work of the Children's Officer at League and Club level is of crucial importance to implementing this Code and their endeavours need to be acknowledged and supported at all levels within the game. Their efforts are deeply appreciated and the full adoption and application of these Guidelines by everyone in football will help ensure the promotion of happy, healthy and successful experiences for both the children who play the game and all adults involved. ”

David Blood
President
Football Association of Ireland



01 Underlying Principles

1.0 Mission Statement

The work of the Football Association of Ireland is based on the following principles that will guide the development of sport for young people. Children and young people's experience of soccer should be guided by what is best for the child or young person. The stages of development and the ability of the child should guide the types of activity provided. Adults will need to have a basic understanding of the needs of young people, including physical, emotional and personal.

1.1 Integrity in relationships

Adults interacting with young people in soccer should do so with integrity and respect for the child. All adult actions in soccer should be guided by what is best for the child and in the context of quality, open working relationships. Verbal, physical, emotional or sexual abuse of any kind is unacceptable within soccer.

1.2 Quality atmosphere and ethos

Soccer for young people should be conducted in a safe, positive and encouraging atmosphere. A child-centred ethos will help to ensure that competition and specialisation are kept in their appropriate place. Too often unhealthy competitive demands are placed on children too early and results in excessive levels of pressure on them and as a consequence, high levels of dropout from sport.

1.3 Equality

All children should be treated in an equitable and fair manner regardless of age, ability, sex, religion, social and ethnic background or political persuasion. Children with disability should be involved in sports activities in an integrated way, thus allowing them to participate to their potential alongside other children.



01 Underlying Principles

1.4 Fair Play

Fair play is the guiding principle of the Irish Sports Councils Code of Ethics and Good Practice for Children's Sport.

It states that "all children's sport should be conducted in an atmosphere of fair play". Ireland has contributed and is committed to the European Code of Sports Ethics, which defines fair play as: "much more than playing within the rules"

It incorporates the concepts of friendship, respect for others and always playing with the right spirit. Fair play is defined as a way of thinking, not just behaving. It incorporates issues concerned with the elimination of opportunities, excessive commercialisation and corruption.

(European Sports Charter and Code of Ethics, Council of Europe, 1993).



1.5 Competition

A balanced approach to competition can make a significant contribution to the development of young people, while at the same time providing fun, enjoyment and satisfaction. Participants should aim to put the welfare of the child first and competitive standards second. A child-centred approach will help to ensure that competition and specialisation are kept in their appropriate place.

1.6 Legislative Basis

This code is intended to provide guidelines for those working with young people in soccer. It is not a definite legal interpretation of the legislation. While it is not a legal document, failure to comply may have legal implications or consequences.

02 Policy and Procedures

Everyone taking part in soccer, irrespective of his or her role, should be able to do so in a safe environment. The purpose of creating and adhering to policies and procedures is to facilitate and encourage best practice. All participants are required to pay particular attention to the following:



2.1 Rules

All clubs, leagues, divisional associations and other football bodies are required to operate on the basis of rules which direct its ethical approach and promotes best practice. These rules should include a policy statement which reflects good practice and also a commitment to providing quality leadership for children by having a safe and clearly defined method of recruiting, selecting and managing coaches and volunteers. It should also make provision for regulations in respect of disciplinary, complaints and appeals procedures. The convening and conduct of an AGM/and EGM should also have a basis under rules. The rules adopted should clearly define the roles and responsibilities of officials. This information should be widely distributed within the club/league.

2.2 Structure

Membership of the management committee/board should be for a fixed period to encourage regular turnover of committee membership. Ideally, each should work out its own system of rotation to ensure that continuity and a level of experience are maintained. Any member of an outgoing committee/Board may be re-elected at the annual AGM. Each should establish and adhere to a system of record keeping in the interests of confidentiality and good practice. A current mailing list and a schedule of meetings including the AGM are the two basis requirements. All participants with child members (persons under the age of eighteen) are bound by guidelines enshrined in FAI policy.

More information in relation to the roles and responsibilities of committees are available at Volunteer Education section of FAI website.

02 Policy and Procedures

2.3 Disciplinary, Complaints and Appeals Procedures

All clubs, leagues, divisional associations and other football bodies are required to ensure that they have adequate disciplinary, complaints and appeals procedures in place. It is important to note that the investigation of suspected child abuse is the responsibility of the statutory authorities and should **not** be undertaken by Children's Officers/Designated persons or any other club/league's personnel.

2.4 Club Disciplinary, Complaints and Appeals Procedure (Covers all matters other than suspected child abuse which has to be referred to the Statutory Authorities See 10.6)

While many concerns can be dealt with in an informal manner to the satisfaction of all concerned, it is advisable that detailed records are maintained in respect of all complaints and that all parties are advised of the formal complaints and appeals procedure. All reasonable efforts to resolve matters should be exhausted at local level before accessing the appeals procedure.

Step One

Any person who has a complaint or concern should bring it to the attention of the secretary under the relevant rules of the body concerned.

The complaint or concern should be in writing and should outline all relevant details and other parties involved in line with procedure.

Step Two

The complaint or concern should then be brought to the attention of the appropriate person in line with club rules who will convene the disciplinary committee/panel (best practice would advise that this committee/panel would consist of three members) unless the complaint or concern relates to a child abuse matter or criminal offence that meets criteria for formal reporting to the statutory authorities. See 11.4.1

Where there are potential contentious issues, due consideration should be given to ensure the independence of the disciplinary committee/panel and therefore, it is advisable that members of the disciplinary committee/panel should not be Offices/Directors of the body concerned as lack of independence is often cited as a ground for appeal.

(The Chairperson of the Club should not sit on the Disciplinary Committee)

Step Three

The disciplinary committee/panel should furnish any participant with details of the complaint being made against them and afford them the opportunity of providing a response either verbally or in writing. In the event of a complaint against a child, the parents/guardians should be informed and advised of the process.

Step Four

The disciplinary committee/panel should then hear the case of all parties involved and decide if a rule or regulation has been infringed.

Step Five

The disciplinary committee/panel should then inform in writing those involved of their decision and any sanctions if any that are to be imposed. This notification should be in writing, setting out the reasons for the sanction. (Written notification should be forwarded to parents if the proceedings involve a participant under eighteen years of age)

Step Six

Any party unhappy with the findings of the disciplinary committee/panel can appeal the decision in writing to their respective superior body as per rules. Clubs, leagues, divisional associations and other football bodies should review their rules to ensure they contain a provision that facilitates an appeals procedure in this respect.

Step Seven

The appeal body should then rehear the case and all evidence, should be considered. The appeals body should have the power to uphold or reject the appeal or to vary, alter or set aside any sanction imposed by the disciplinary committee/panel.

Written confidential records in relation to disciplinary proceedings should be safely and confidentially kept on file (procedures should clearly define the possession of such records in the event of election of new officers)

02 Policy and Procedures

2.5 Anonymous Complaints

Anonymous complaints can be difficult to deal with, however they cannot be ignored. All complaints relating to inappropriate behaviour/poor practice should be brought to the attention of the Chairperson. In all cases the safety and welfare of the child/children is paramount.

All complaints should be checked out and handled in a confidential manner. It is important to record all such complaints and actions taken. Specific advice on dealing with anonymous complaints can be got from your local HSE duty social worker or alternatively the Football Association of Ireland National Children's Officer/Designated Person.

2.6 Rumours

Rumours should not be allowed hang in the air. Any rumour/s relating to inappropriate behaviour/s circulating in the club should be brought to the attention of the Chairperson and checked out promptly. All ensuing information should be handled confidentially and with sensitivity.

2.7 Confidentiality

Confidentiality is about managing information in a respectful, professional and purposeful manner. It is important that the rights of both the child and the person about whom the complaint has been made are protected. Therefore, appropriate confidentiality will be maintained in respect of all issues and people involved in concerns about the welfare of a child or bad practice within the club/league.

The following points will be borne in mind:

- A guarantee of confidentiality or undertakings regarding secrecy cannot be given, as the welfare of the child will supersede all other considerations.
- All information should be treated in a careful and sensitive manner and should only be discussed with those who need to know.
- Information will be conveyed in a sensitive way to the parents/guardians of a child about whom there are concerns.
- Giving information to others on a "need to know" basis for the protection of a child is not a breach of confidentiality.

03 Recruitment Policy

All clubs, leagues, divisional associations and other football bodies are required to take all reasonable steps to ensure that all participants are suitable to work with children and young people.

All participants are required to complete an application/self declaration form, giving the names of two referees who will then be contacted. Written references should then be verified and kept on file.

All participants are subject to Garda vetting (when this service becomes available to sports organisations)

All appointments are subject to approval and ratification by appropriate Committee recruitment personnel.

All participants will be subject to a sign-up procedure in which they undertake to abide by League/Club/FAI rules, codes of conduct and good practice guidelines. Appropriate confidentiality should be maintained in regard to all application and reference forms.

Once recruited, all efforts to support and manage participants ensuring that no person is expected to work alone.

See “Club Template Code of Practice” on the FAI website for assistance in putting appropriate procedures in place.



04 Education and Training

Participant/Volunteer Education & Support Policy

The FAI are indebted to our participants who give freely of their valuable time in providing a stimulating, challenging, supportive and fun soccer experience to children and young people in Ireland.

Clubs, leagues, divisional associations and other football bodies who take responsibility for children in soccer should ensure that personnel are competent to provide a safe and rewarding experience and appropriate training should be provided to support them in this role.

The FAI in conjunction with The Irish Sports Council and the local Sports Partnerships are committed to providing appropriate education opportunities in relation to child welfare in sport.

Education for participants including child welfare training is available through the FAI Education Unit.

All details in relation to this are available at www.fai.ie



05 Safety Policy

All clubs, leagues, divisional associations and other football bodies have a responsibility to ensure the safety of the players with whom they work as far as possible within the limits of their control. Therefore it is important to create a safe and enjoyable environment in which to play and train. (It is advisable to carry out a risk assessment in relation to premises, training facilities and equipment and implement appropriate safety rules)

In general:

- Activities being undertaken should be suitable for the ability, age, and experience of the participants.
- Equipment and facilities should meet the highest possible standards and be appropriate to the maturity of the participants.
- All FAI Goalpost Safety Guidelines must strictly be adhered to and enforced.
- Where protective equipment is deemed necessary it should be used.
- First Aid should be available for all training sessions and matches.
- Injuries should be recorded, with a note of the action taken in relation to each one. It is recommended that each club maintain an accident/incident book with a specific incident form for completion by the coach/manager, with due regard to confidentiality.
- Parents/Guardians should be notified, by the coach/manager, of injuries/illness which their children incur while participating in a sporting activity.
- All clubs/leagues should have a simple and widely known emergency plan to ensure safety procedures.
- Match Officials should ensure that the conduct of games conform to the standards set by the Football Association of Ireland.
- Children should be taught the rules of the game at club/league level and be encouraged to abide by them, keeping in mind that many rules are there for safety.
- It is important that before children participate in a sporting activity, they have learned and agreed personal safety rules.
- Parents/Guardians should know the starting and finishing times of sessions and events.

5.1 Transport

Clubs, leagues, divisional associations and other football bodies should be aware that there are extra responsibilities placed on participants who transport players to events.

05 Safety Policy

They should:

- Ensure there is adequate insurance on their car and that they follow the rules of the road, and ensure the legal use of seat belts.
- Ensure they do not carry more than the permitted number of passengers.
- Avoid being alone with one passenger, put passengers in the back seat, have central drop off locations.
- Seek parental permission when transporting on a regular basis.

5.2 General Supervision

Clubs, leagues, divisional associations and other football bodies are advised that children need to be supervised at all times as the likelihood of accidents happening is increased when adequate supervision is not in place.

- Ensure adequate Adult:Child ratios. Good practice dictates that a coach/manager should try to ensure that more than one adult is present. This will help to ensure the safety of the children as well as protect adults
- Adult:Child ratios will depend on the nature of the activity, the age of the participants and any special needs of the group, a general guide might be 1:8 for under 12 years of age and 1:10 for over 12 years of age
- There should be at least one adult of each gender with mixed parties
- Away trips will need higher rates of supervision and these should be checked out with the governing body or organiser
- Children and young people should be supervised at all times.
- Avoid adults being left alone with young players, if a coach/manager needs to talk separately to a player this should be done in an open environment, in view of others
- Respect the privacy of young people while changing, coaches/managers may only need to enter changing rooms where the participants are very young or require special assistance. When necessary, participants should supervise in pairs or seek assistance, it is the safety and welfare of the participants that is of paramount importance
- Participants should not be left alone with young people at the end of a training session. Clearly state times for start and finish of training and/or competitions. If late collections occur, participants should remain in pairs until all players have left.
- It is the responsibility of parents/guardians to make arrangements for collection of young people, it should be made clear that the club is responsible for club activities only
- If a child suffers an injury or accident the parents/guardians should be informed.

5.3 Overnight/Away Trips/ Hosting

There are additional responsibilities placed on clubs, leagues, divisional associations and other football bodies in relation to the organisation of away trips and overnights.



Overnight/Away Trips

Attention to the following will help to promote safety:

- Written permission of parents/guardians should be obtained for all overnight trips. Parents/Guardians should complete a medical form disclosing any medical conditions or special needs of their child/children.
- A meeting with parents and participants is useful to communicate travel times, competition details, other activities, gear requirements, medical requirements, special dietary needs and any other necessary details. Ground rules and behavioural expectations can also be discussed.
- Young participants should sign a behaviour agreement
- All group socialisation should take place in communal areas (i.e. no boys in girls' rooms and vice versa).
- Alcoholic drink, smoking and other illegal substances/activities are forbidden and adults are expected to act as appropriate role models in this respect.
- Lights out times should be enforced
- All adults who travel on away trips with children should be carefully chosen.
- Participants accompanying or participating in an away trip should complete a medical form disclosing any medical conditions or special needs to the organising body in advance.
- The roles and responsibilities of adults participating in away trips should be clearly defined.

05 Safety Policy

- The organising body should appoint a Team Manager/Head of Delegation for all away trips. He/She should have overall responsibility for the children's well being, behaviour and sleeping arrangements. He/She should be appointed as an official for the duration of the trip. Children should be informed at the outset of whom they can report any concerns they might have to. They should be clearly encouraged to tell anybody if they should have a concern. On no account should they keep secrets.
- On away trips, coaches should be accountable to the appointed Team Manager/Head of Delegation in all non-performance related matters.



- Where there are mixed teams there should be at least one female in the management/coaching structure
- The Team Manager/Head of Delegation should submit a report as soon as possible after the trip.
- As a norm adults should not share a room with a child. Where the presence of an adult is required there should be more than one child in the room with the adult. If children are sharing, it should be with those of the same age and sex. Adults should respect children's privacy and knock before entering rooms
- Avoid being alone with one child-If talking separately do so in an open environment, in view of others.
- Adequate child ratios should always be maintained (This can depend on the ages of the children, the nature of the activity involved or any special needs of the group) Guide 1:8 for children under 12 and 1:10 for twelve and over. Ensure adequate supervision at all times.
- Ensure that there is adequate insurance cover for the trip.
- Special care should be taken by both host and visiting clubs in the selection of homes for overnight stays and where practicable more than one child should be placed with each host family.
- Parents/Guardians should be informed as soon as possible if their child suffers any significant injury or accident.



5.4 Hosting

Being a host family or being hosted is an integral part of many sports and, if handled appropriately, can add to a child's enjoyment and experience at a competition. Hosting can be a challenging role but also very rewarding. Special care should be taken in the selection of homes for overnight stays. A host should be provided with as much information about the child/children staying with them and details of the competition.

Where practicable, more than one child should be placed with each host family. The family in turn should agree to provide references and be vetted when and if this is available. In addition clubs should follow recommended recruitment and selection procedures.

When arranging hosting for events/trips abroad, clubs, leagues, divisional associations and other football bodies will be dependent on the ability of the host organisation to access vetting services and obtain appropriate references. It is the responsibility of the trip organiser to provide the hosts with the relevant information on the child and details of what is expected.

Host families should:

- Agree to abide by Football Association of Ireland best practice guidelines
- Consent to appropriate checks and references
- Attend host family meetings before competitions or events
- Provide a safe and supportive environment for children and young people

Clubs, leagues, divisional associations and other football bodies should

- Provide a travel pack to hosting families
- Check out references with hosting families
- Provide an itinerary of the trip
- Gather information on destination and venue

Children and Young People:

- Should sign an age appropriate behaviour agreement
- Should not be asked to share a bed or a room with an adult
- Should be happy with the arrangements
- Should show respect to the host families

Comprehensive advice on Away Trips is available at www.fai.ie

06 Insurance

All clubs, leagues, divisional associations and other football bodies are required to ensure that appropriate cover is in place to cover all activities and participants. Away trips should be included in such cover. In relation to away trips, parents/guardians should be advised of the need for comprehensive insurance to cover the child (example medical or health insurance). Adults transporting children in cars should be aware of the extent and limits of their motor insurance cover, particularly in relation to acceptable numbers and liability.



06

INSURANCE

07 Registration, Dropout and Club Transfers

Loss of members, including adult transfers (e.g. coaches/volunteers) should be monitored and any unusual or unexpected drop-outs or club transfers of children/participants should be checked out. Any child welfare issue raised should be dealt with under appropriate procedures.

08

Discipline in Children's Soccer

Discipline in soccer should always be positive providing the structures and rules that allows players to learn and set their own goals and strive for them. It should encourage young players to become more responsible for themselves and therefore more independent. Players should be helped to become responsible about the decisions and choices they make within sport, particularly if they are likely to make a difference between playing fairly and unfairly. There is no place in soccer for fighting, bullying, over-aggressive or dangerous behaviour. At all times, players should treat others in a respectful manner. They should never bully, interfere with or take unfair advantage of others.



8.1 The Use of Sanctions

The use of sanctions is an important element in the maintenance of discipline. When using sanctions the age and developmental stage of the player should be taken into consideration. They should never be used as retaliation, or to make participants feel better. Sanctions should always be fair, consistent and applied evenly, and in the case of a persistent offence, should be progressively applied.

It should be remembered that effectively controlled clubs, leagues, divisional associations and other football bodies and successful coaches/managers/ participants are characterised by the sparing use of sanctions.

08

Discipline in Children's Soccer

The following steps are suggested:

- rules should be stated clearly and agreed
- a warning should be given if a rule is broken
- a sanction (for example, use of time out) should be applied if a rule is broken for a second time. The use of green, yellow and red cards are encouraged
- if a rule is broken for the third time the child should be spoken to, and if necessary, the parents/guardians may be involved
- sanctions should not be applied if a participant is not comfortable with them. If an appropriate action cannot be devised right away, the child should be told that the matter will be dealt with later, at a specified time and as soon as possible
- a child should not be sanctioned for making errors when she/he is playing
- physical activity (e.g. running laps or doing push-ups) should not be used as a sanction. To do so only causes a child to resent physical activity, something that s/he should learn to enjoy throughout his/her life
- sanctions should be used sparingly. Constant sanctioning and criticism can cause a child to turn away from sport
- once sanctions have been imposed, it is important to make the young person feel s/he is a valued member of the group again
- where relevant some sanctions may need to be recorded and parents informed



09 Use of Photographic Equipment and Mobile Phones

All clubs, leagues, divisional associations and other football bodies should adopt a policy in relation to the use of images of players on their websites and other publications, as there have been concerns about the risks posed directly and indirectly to children and young people. All participants need to work together to prevent those wishing to cause such harm to young people. Remember having photographic and filming guidelines is not about preventing parents from taking pictures, it is to ensure that only those who have a right to take photographs do so. Anyone concerned about photography taking place at events or training sessions can contact the children's officer/ designated person and ask them to deal with the matter.



The purpose is to reduce the risk of inappropriate, unsolicited attention from people within and outside the sport. Group photographs where the club/league is identified rather than individuals are good for publicity without creating a risk to those in the photographs.

As a guide try to remember the following:

- If the player is named, avoid using their photograph.
- If a photograph is used, avoid naming the player.
- Ask for the player's permission to use their image to ensure that they are aware of the way the image is to be used to represent the sport.
- Ask for parental permission to use the player's image to ensure that parents are aware of the way the image is to be used to represent the sport. A permission form could be used or make an announcement at the start of an event.
- To reduce the risk of inappropriate use, only use images of players in suitable dress. The content of the photograph should focus on the activity not on a particular child
- Talk to children's officer/designated person if you are worried about use of images

Amateur photographers/film/video operators wishing to record an event or practice session should seek accreditation with the children's officer, event organiser or leader of session. Permission forms should be available on site.

To ensure spectators and participants are informed of the policy, the club, league, divisional association and other football bodies should display the following information prior to the start of an event and where possible make an announcement over a tannoy.

09 Use of Photographic Equipment and Mobile Phones

"In line with the recommendation in the _____ (name of club / association's) Code of Conduct, the promoters of this event request that any person wishing to engage in any video, zoom or close range photography should register their details with the organisers. It is not advisable that children are photographed or filmed without their permission and/or the permission of their parent/guardian."

9.1 Working in Partnership to protect young people

Photographs, when used with personal information, can be used as a means of identifying children. This practice can make a child vulnerable to an individual who may wish to "groom" that child for abuse. Furthermore the content of the photo can be used or adapted for inappropriate use. There is evidence of this adapted material finding its way onto child pornography sites. Adults and coaches/managers need to work together to prevent those wishing to cause such harm to young people.

9.2 Mobile Phones

Mobile phones are often given to children for security, enabling parents to keep in touch and make sure they are safe. Young people value their phones highly as it offers them a sense of independence. In addition mobile phones allow quick and easy contact, which can make a safe and efficient way to carry out club/league business. However such technology has also allowed an increase in direct personal contact with young people, in some cases used to cross personal boundaries and cause harm to young people. There is a need to encourage responsible and secure use of mobile phones by adults and young people.

Therefore participants should advise children:

- If you receive an offensive photo, email or message, do not reply, save it, make a note of times and dates and tell a parent or children's officer/designated person within the club.
- Be careful about who you give your phone number to and don't respond to unfamiliar numbers.
- Change your phone number in cases of bullying or harassment.
- Don't use the phone in certain locations; inappropriate use of your camera phone may cause upset or offence to another person, e.g. changing rooms.
- Treat your phone as you would any other valuable item so that you guard against theft .

As a participant remember:

- Use group texts for communication among players and teams and inform parents of this at the start of the season.
- It is not appropriate to have constant communication for individual players.
- Don't use the phone in certain locations; inappropriate use of your camera phone may cause upset or offence to another person, e.g. changing rooms.

10 Child Protection

The FAI is committed to ensuring that all necessary steps will be taken to protect and safeguard the welfare of children and young people who participate in soccer. This Policy document clearly demonstrates the importance placed by the FAI on the protection and safety of children and young people who participate in soccer.

All children and young people who participate in soccer should be able to do so in a safe and enjoyable environment. While doing so they should be protected from any form of abuse be it physical, emotional, sexual, neglect or bullying. The responsibility for protecting children lies with all participants involved in soccer.

Children are defined in Irish Law as being any person under 18 years of age.

The FAI Rulebook in respect of Child Protection and Welfare states:

Rule 76. The Protection and Welfare of Children

In line with recent legislation and Government Guidelines (The Child Care Act 1991 and The Protection for Persons Reporting Abuse Act 1998) in relation to child protection and welfare, it is mandatory that all National Associations, Divisional Associations and Affiliated Leagues should operate to Football Association of Ireland recommended codes of conduct and best practice guidelines.

- (i) Any act, statement, conduct or other matter, which harms a child or children, or poses or may pose a risk of harm to a child or children, shall constitute behaviour which is improper and brings the game into disrepute.*
- (ii) Breaches will become a disciplinary offence.*
- (iii) Any Member or Participant who is the subject of a Statutory Inquiry in relation to any child welfare concern **must** stand down from all soccer activities pending the outcome of that inquiry and any subsequent internal disciplinary proceedings.*

The Football Association of Ireland through confirming this policy document has demonstrated its commitment to ensuring that children and young people can participate in all soccer activities with their safety and welfare being of paramount importance.

It is essential that this document represents a process of continual improvement in the area of child protection and welfare in soccer.

It is the responsibility of all adults involved in soccer to actively promote safe and best practice standards whilst being ever vigilant and aware of their responsibilities to children and young people in their care.

All clubs, leagues, divisional associations and other football bodies are required to adopt these child protection policies and procedures. The central goal for all people involved in children's soccer is to provide a safe, positive and nurturing environment where children can develop and enhance their physical and social skills. Promoting a child-centred ethos should go in hand with identifying and eliminating practices that impact negatively on safe and enjoyable participation in children's soccer.

10 Child Protection

10

CHILD PROTECTION

10.1 Child Protection in Soccer

The prevention and detection of child abuse depends on the collaborative effort of everyone concerned. The following factors are central to effective child protection in sport:

- acceptance by all involved with children that abuse, whether physical, psychological or sexual is wrong, severely damages children and must be confronted.
- awareness of the behavioural and physical indicators of various forms of abuse .
- knowledge of the appropriate response and action to be taken where abuse is revealed or suspected.
- vigilance, and avoidance of all situations conducive to risk.
- open, trusting and co-operative relationships within the club/organisation, and with parents/guardians and others concerned with children's progress or welfare.
- willingness to co-operate with the Statutory Authorities (police authorities, Gardai, HSE or social services), in relation to sharing information about child protection concerns at any time.

10.2 Areas of Risk for Children in Soccer

Awareness of risk to children's happiness and welfare in sport should be seen as central to protection against harm. Such risk could include the following:

- children suffering significant harm by being deprived of proper supervision and safety
- participants, parents/guardians subjecting children to constant criticism, sarcasm, rejection, threatening behaviour or pressure to perform at unrealistic levels
- the infliction of any form of non-accidental injury or other forms of child abuse



10.3 Recognising and Reporting of Suspected Child Abuse Concerns

All clubs, leagues, divisional associations and other football bodies are required to adopt these procedures for responding to reports or concerns relating to the welfare and safety of children. All participants, children, parents/guardians should be aware of how to report and to whom concerns should be reported within the relevant organisation. These procedures should be consistent with Statutory Authority guidelines. Everyone involved in child protection matters should be aware of their responsibility to work in co-operation with the statutory child protection authorities.

The ability to recognise child abuse depends as much on a person's willingness to accept the possibility of its existence as it does on knowledge and information. It is important to note that child abuse is not always readily visible, and may not be clearly observable.

10.4 Responsibility to Report

Any person, who suspects that a child is being abused, or is at risk of abuse, has a responsibility to report their concerns to the HSE/Gardai.

A suspicion, which is not supported by any objective signs of abuse, would not constitute a reasonable suspicion, or reasonable grounds for concern.

In some situations, participants or parents may receive information about adults who are not involved with their own organisation, but who are in contact with children through other organisations. It is important that these organisations should be made aware of any concerns. The statutory agencies will give advice on how this should be handled.

10.5 Informal Consultation

Persons unsure about whether or not certain behaviours are abusive and therefore reportable, should contact the duty social worker in the local HSE or social services department where they will receive advice. Alternately, advice can also be sought from the Football Association of Ireland's National Children's Officer/Designated Person.

10.6 Procedure for dealing with Child Abuse Concerns or Allegations

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 person. 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.

10 Child Protection

10.6 Procedure for dealing with Child Abuse Concerns or Allegations (continued)

The following examples would constitute reasonable grounds for concern:

- (i) 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, (1999, National Guidelines for the Protection & Welfare of Children)

Step One

Any allegation of abuse must in the first instance be brought to the attention of the Chairperson of the club, league, divisional association and other football body concerned. Should the Chairperson be unsure whether reasonable grounds for concern exist s/he can informally consult with the local HSE duty social worker. She will be advised whether or not the matter requires a formal report. The Football Association of Ireland National Children's Officer/Designated Person is available to provide support and advice throughout this process.

Participants may be subjected to erroneous or malicious allegations. Therefore, any allegation of abuse should be dealt with sensitively paying due regard to confidentiality and appropriate support should be provided for participants including counselling where necessary.

Step Two

Should a club, league, divisional association and other football body become aware of an allegation of abuse of a child or children by a participant during the execution of that persons duties, the Chairperson will privately inform the participant of the following:

- (i) the fact that the allegation has been made against him/her;
- (ii) the nature of the allegation.

Step Three

The participant should be afforded an opportunity to respond. The Chairperson 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 should a child be left in a dangerous situation pending intervention by the Statutory Authorities

Step Four

The Chairperson, 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 participant 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.

Step Six

Under Football Association of Ireland rules, any participant who is the subject of a statutory investigation into alleged child abuse, ***must*** stand down from all soccer activities until the investigation is completed.

The FAI National Children's Officer/Designated Person 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 participant concerned should be advised that the procedures being undertaken are in accordance with statutory requirements. He or she should be treated with respect and fairness, and also be assured that all information will be dealt with in a sensitive and confidential manner.

Step Seven

The club, league, divisional association or other football body will then in consultation with the National Children's Officer/Designated Person carefully consider the outcome of the statutory investigation and 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.

As it is standard procedure for any participant who is the subject of a statutory inquiry to stand down from all football activities, internal disciplinary proceedings should only be initiated after the Statutory Authorities have completed theirs.

11 Psychological Stress, Burnout and Dropout of Children in Soccer



Burnout may be defined as a process resulting from an activity that was once a source of fun and personal satisfaction but later becomes associated with progressive physical and psychological distress. There is a range of factors, which may cause this change, some of which are not associated with the child's sporting activities. Burnout itself may result from a combination of the number of hours involved in physical training with high expectations and pressure from coaches/managers and parents/guardians. It represents a loss of energy and enthusiasm for sport and is characterised by anxiety and stress. The child no longer has fun and becomes overwhelmed by the demands of competition and training. She/he may wish to drop out of sport. Within a sporting and soccer context the following practices are harmful to children's health and welfare:

- pressuring a child to perform at a level which is beyond his/her capacity based on age or maturation level
- over-training or the making of demands on a child that lead to burnout
- knowingly permitting an injured child to participate in a sporting activity
- failure to take adequate precautions to protect a child from environmental hazards
- failure to take account of known ailments or relevant weaknesses of a child



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Bullying

The risk of bullying and harassment by adults or children should be anticipated by taking active steps to prevent it occurring. A prompt and decisive response should be made to any indications that it is taking place.

What is Bullying?

Bullying is repeated aggression be it verbal, psychological or physical, which is conducted by an individual or group against others. It is behaviour, which is intentionally aggravating and intimidating and occurs mainly among children in social environments such as schools, sports clubs and other organisations working with children. It includes behaviours such as teasing, taunting, threatening, hitting or extortion by one or more children against a victim. It is the responsibility of participants to deal with bullying that may take place in the club/organisation. Each club/organisation should have a clear policy on bullying which is known to members and implemented by coaches/managers/committee. Incidents of bullying should be dealt with immediately and not tolerated under any circumstances.

Many children are reluctant to tell adults that they are being bullied. Older children are even more reluctant. This underlines the need for constant vigilance and encouragement to report bullying.

Visit www.fai.ie for additional information.

13 Substance Abuse in Soccer

- In soccer the use of drugs, alcohol and tobacco shall be actively discouraged as being incompatible with a healthy approach to sporting activity.
- Participants shall not smoke when taking a session or drink alcohol before taking a session.
- In relation to our under-age teams, it is strongly advised that receptions and celebrations be organized in a nonalcoholic environment and in a manner that is suitable for the age group concerned.
- Where this is not possible, clubs, leagues, divisional associations and other football bodies will comply with the **Football Association of Ireland directive that under no circumstances whatsoever can any person under the age of 18 years consume alcohol and any and all appropriate steps should be taken to ensure that this policy is strictly adhered to.**
- All participants shall act as role models for appropriate behaviour and refrain from drinking alcohol at such functions
- Participants shall promote fair competition through the development of sound training practice and should actively discourage the use of any substance that is perceived to offer short cuts to improved performances or to by-pass the commitment and hard work required to achieve success
- Participants will also try to ensure that those in their charge are aware of the harmful side effects or the illegality of prescribed drugs or other banned performance-enhancing substances
- Children and parents/guardians involved in sport should be aware of the Irish Sports Councils' Anti-Doping Programmes
- Participants are also advised that procuring alcohol for a child or young person is an offence

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SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN SOCCER

14 Promoting Good Practice

All adults involved in soccer have an important role to play in promoting good practice. Their first priority has to be the children's safety and enjoyment of the game. Parents/Participants and Spectators are required to operate to the FAI Codes of Conduct & Good Practice which emphasises enjoyment, equality, fair play and general well-being of young people.

FAI Publications available are

- Code of Conduct and Good Practice for Parents/Guardians
- Code of Conduct and Good Practice for Coaches
- Goalpost Safety Poster
- Best Practice Promotional Posters

These are available for download at www.fai.ie.



15 Clubs/League Children's Officer's

The appointment of Club/League Children's Officers is an essential element in the creation of a quality atmosphere in any club. They act as a resource to members with regard to children's issues and also ensure that children have a voice in the running of the club and can freely talk of their experiences. All affiliated clubs/Leagues are required to have a Children's Officer in place and appropriate training will be made available to them through the FAI in conjunction with the Local Sports Partnerships and The Irish Sports Council. All affiliated Clubs and Leagues are required to appoint Children's Officers.

The Children's Officer should have the following functions:

- To promote the Code of Ethics & Good Practice
- To influence policy and practice and to prioritise children's needs
- To ensure that children know how and whom they can report their concerns to within the club/league. Information disclosed by a child should be dealt with in accordance with the Department of Health and Children's Guidelines "Children First"
- To encourage the participation of parents/guardians in club/league activities
- To co-operate with parents to ensure that each child enjoys his/her participation in soccer
- To act as a resource with regard to best practice in children's soccer
- To report regularly to the Management Committee
- To monitor changes in membership and follow up any unusual dropout, absenteeism or club transfers by children or participants

Children's Officers do not have the responsibility of investigating or validating child protection concerns within the club/league and have no counselling or therapeutic role. This responsibility lies with the HSE and Gardai.



16 League Children's Officer's

In addition to the functions outlined above, all Affiliated League Children's Officers should ensure that all affiliated clubs with members under the age of eighteen have at least one Club Children's Officer appointed. The League Children's Officer should also maintain a database containing contact details and training records of all Club Children's Officer's which should be forwarded to the Football Association of Ireland's National Children's Officer on an annual basis.



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LEAGUE CHILDREN'S OFFICER'S

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17 Club/League Designated Person/Chairperson

The clubs, leagues, divisional associations and other football bodies designated person shall be the Chairperson who will be responsible for dealing with any concerns about the protection of children. The designated person is responsible for reporting allegations or suspicions of child abuse to Health Services Executive or Social Services (NI) and/or An Garda Síochán / PSNI. Support and advice is available from the Football Association of Ireland's National Children's Officer/Designated Person.

The Chairperson of the club, league, divisional association and other football body is the "Designated Person" and he/she shall have the following functions:

- Have knowledge of the Code of Ethics and statutory guidelines.
- Have a knowledge of categories and indicators of abuse.
- Undertake training in relation to child protection.
- Be familiar with and able to carry out reporting procedures.
- Communicate with parents and/or agencies as appropriate.
- Assist with the ongoing development and implementation of child protection training needs.
- Liaise with the League/National Children's Officer in relation to child protection training needs.
- Be aware of local contacts and services in relation to child protection, i.e. principal and duty social workers and their contacts.
- To inform local duty social worker in the Health Services Executive Local Area Board / local Social Services and/or An Garda Síochána/PSNI of relevant concerns about individual children, using the Standard Reporting Form, Keep a copy of this form and ensure acknowledgement of receipt of this form.
- Report persistent poor practice to the National Designated Person.
- Advise administrators on issues of confidentiality, record keeping and data protection.

The Football Association of Ireland is indebted to and would like to acknowledge the work of the countless number of participants/volunteers who give up freely of their time in providing soccer opportunities for children and young people.

The FAI wants soccer to be safe, fun, and to ensure that whatever level children play at, that it takes place in the spirit of Fair Play.

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CLUB/LEAGUE DESIGNATED
PERSON/CHAIRPERSON



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Definitions

In the interpretation of the Code of Ethics & Good Practice for Children's Soccer the following words and expressions shall have the meanings so defined; and words importing the singular shall include the plural, and vice versa, words importing the masculine include the feminine and words importing persons shall include bodies Corporate.

Any Definitions not provided hereunder but contained within FAI rules are incorporated into this code when appropriate.

In addition, the following terms and expressions shall, unless the context otherwise requires, have the following meanings:

"The Association" or "the FAI":	shall mean the Football Association of Ireland.
"The Board":	means the Board of Management of the FAI.
"Participant":	means an affiliated Association, League, Club, Club Official, Club Manager, Club Coach, Player, Official, Match Official, Club Volunteer and all such persons who are from time to time participating in any activity sanctioned either directly or indirectly by The Association.
"Child":	shall mean any person under 18 years of age.
"Official":	means any official, director, secretary, servant or representative of an affiliated body or competition.
"Match":	means a football match sanctioned by the Association or an Affiliated body.
"Match Officials":	means referees and assistant referees and includes reserve officials and fourth officials.
"Divisional Associations":	shall include the Councils of such Divisional Associations.
"Affiliates":	shall mean other affiliated National and Provincial bodies.

The guidelines in this document are based on the national guidelines as outlined in the following documents and as amended from time to time in line with new legislation or guidelines.

Code of Ethics and Good Practice for Children's Sport, Irish Sports Council, Revised 2005

Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children, Dept. of Health & Children 1999

Our Duty to Care, Dept. of Health & Children 2002

All additional information referred to in this document is available on the web at www.fai.ie



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