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	<b>Child Safeguarding and Child Abuse Policy</b>	

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

All those involved in children’s sport have a responsibility to be able to recognise and respond to signs and indicators of child abuse. Netball Ireland (NI) has developed this policy to support the appropriate safeguarding of young people particularly with regards to possible child abuse.

Remember it is not the responsibility of those working in netball to decide that abuse of a young person is occurring, but it is their responsibility to act on any concerns.

### 2.0 PURPOSE

To provide a useful reference for all involved in netball in the Republic of Ireland (ROI), particularly those in roles connected with safeguarding and protecting children, to facilitate recognition and understanding of possible child abuse and the appropriate procedures for dealing with such circumstances.

### 3.0 SCOPE

This policy applies to all persons, NI members and non-members, who have direct contact with young people (i.e. any person under 18 years of age) and vulnerable adults (see 1.1.0 for definition) during any NI activity/event.

### 4.0 ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES


**4.1 Child Protection Officer (CPO):** ensure that children’s interests are kept on the agenda of the NI. The CPO is NI’s Mandated Person and also takes on the role of Designated Liaison Person if this is not otherwise filled.


**4.2 Mandated Person:** people who have contact with children and who are in a key position to help protect children from harm. Schedule 2 of the Children First Act 2015 specifies that a mandated person is a safeguarding officer, child protection officer, or other person who is employed for the purpose of performing the child welfare and protection function of sporting organisations offering services to children. Mandated persons have two main legal obligations under the Children First Act 2015:

- 1) To report the harm of children above a defined threshold to Tusla.
- 2) To assist Tusla, if requested, in assessing a concern which has been the subject of a mandated report.

**4.3 Designated Liaison Person (DLP):** a resource and liaison person to any volunteer/staff member who has a child protection concern. DLP’s are responsible for ensuring that reporting procedures are followed correctly and promptly, and act as a liaison person with other agencies.

The DLP should record all concerns or allegations of child abuse brought to his or her attention, and all the actions taken in relation to them.

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**4.4 Club Children’s Officer (CCO):** act as a resource and liaison point regarding young people’s issues within their club.

## **5.0 DEFINITIONS**

**5.1 Abuse:** a person may be abused or neglected by any person who inflicts harm or fails to act as to prevent harm. Abuse can originate from a family member, or by those known to the victim from an institutional or community setting, or (more rarely) by a stranger. Abuse can come from adults or young people. There is growing evidence to suggest that peer abuse is an increasing concern for children. The effects of abuse can be extremely damaging, particularly if left untreated, and may follow a person into and throughout adulthood.

**5.2 Physical Abuse:** is when someone deliberately hurts a person physically or puts them at risk of being physically hurt. A reasonable concern exists where a young person’s health and/or development is, may be, or has been damaged as a result of suspected physical abuse.


Physical abuse can include the following:

- Physical punishment
- Beating, slapping, hitting or kicking
- Pushing, shaking or throwing
- Pinching, biting, choking or hair-pulling
- Use of excessive force in handling
- Deliberate poisoning
- Suffocation
- Fabricated/induced illness
- Female genital mutilation

**5.3 Emotional Abuse:** is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a person such as to cause severe and ongoing adverse effects on the victim’s emotional development.

Emotional abuse may be seen in the following:

- Rejection
- Lack of comfort and love
- Lack of attachment
- Lack of continuity of care
- Continuous lack of praise or encouragement
- Persistent criticism, sarcasm, hostility or blaming of the child
- Bullying
- Online abuse/Cyber bullying
- Conditional parenting
- Extreme overprotectiveness
- Inappropriate non-physical punishment
- Ongoing family conflicts and family violence
- Serious inappropriate expectations of a child relative to their age and stage of development.

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There may be no physical signs of emotional abuse unless it occurs with another type of abuse. A young person may show signs of emotional abuse through their emotions or actions.

Emotional abuse in netball may occur if a person is subjected to constant criticism, name-calling, sarcasm, bullying, racism or unrealistic pressure to consistently perform to high expectations.

**5.4 Sexual Abuse:** occurs when a young person is used by another person for their own gratification or arousal, or for that of others. It includes the child being involved in sexual acts or exposing the child to sexual activity directly or through pornography.

Examples of child sexual abuse include the following:

- Any sexual act intentionally performed in the presence of a child.
- Consensual sexual activity involving an adult and an underage person.
- Physical contact including sexual touching, or intentional touching or molesting a young person's body for the purpose of sexual arousal or gratification; penetrative or non-penetrative acts; masturbation in the presence of a child or the involvement of a child in an act of masturbation.
- Non-contact activities, such as grooming, involving young people in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images (including online or video), watching sexual activities, or encouraging young people to behave in sexually inappropriate ways (including engagement in prostitution).
- Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can children.


There are situations within all sports, including netball, in which the potential for sexual abuse exists:

- Some perpetrators have deliberately targeted sports activities, in order to gain access to subsequently abuse young people.
- There is evidence that perpetrators have sometimes ignored governing body codes of practice and used physical contact within a coaching role to mask their inappropriate touching of children.
- Some perpetrators have used sporting events as an opportunity to take inappropriate photographs or videos of sports people (including children) in vulnerable positions.

**5.5 Neglect:** is the most frequently reported category of abuse. Neglect occurs when a young person does not receive adequate care or supervision to the extent that they are harmed physically or developmentally.

The following are features of neglect of young people:

- Children being left alone without adequate care and supervision.
- Malnourishment, lacking food, unsuitable food or erratic feeding.
- Failure to provide adequate care for the young person's developmental and medical needs, including intellectual stimulation.
- Inadequate living conditions – unhygienic conditions, environmental issues, including lack of heating and furniture.
- Lack of adequate clothing.
- Inattention to basic hygiene.

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- Lack of protection and exposure to danger, including moral danger, or lack of supervision appropriate to the child's age.
- Persistent failure to attend school.
- Abandonment or desertion.

Neglect in netball could include a teacher or coach not ensuring that young people are safe, exposing them to undue cold or heat or to unnecessary risk of injury. It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a young person's basic emotional needs.

## **6.0 COMMON INDICATORS OF CHILD ABUSE**

All those in netball who work with young people need to be aware of indicators of all types of abuse to ensure that NI provides an effective safeguarding and protection programme.

Physical indications that a child may be being abused may include the following:


- Unexplained or suspicious injuries such as bruising, cuts or burns, particularly if situated on a part of the body not normally prone to such injuries.
- An injury and the explanation for it seem inconsistent.
- Repeated injures, burns or scalds
- Marks from implements/bites
- Engaging in sexually explicit behaviour
- Loses weight for no apparent reason
- Becomes increasingly dirty or unkempt
- Torn or bloodstained clothing

Behavioural indicators that a child may be being abused may include the following:

- Unexplained changes in behaviour (for example, becoming very quiet, withdrawn or displaying sudden outbursts of temper).
- Has difficulty in making friends.
- Distrust of adults, particularly those with whom a close relationship would normally be expected.
- Excessive attachment to adults.
- Excessive fear of making mistakes.
- Stops, or is prevented from, socialising with other children.
- Inappropriate sexual awareness behaviour or language.
- Reluctance to remove clothing.
- The child describes what appears to be an abusive act involving him/her.
- Displays variations in eating patterns, including overeating or loss of appetite.

It should be recognised that these lists are not exhaustive.

The presence of one or more of the common indicators is not proof that abuse is taking place but may be indicative of a need to report concerns. Some changes in behaviour can be caused by changes at home – e.g. a family bereavement. Parents/guardians are strongly encouraged to inform the relevant coach/team management or CPO of any such changes which may affect the behaviour of their child.

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Remember it is not the responsibility of those working in netball to decide that child abuse is occurring, but it is their responsibility to act on any concerns. NI promotes a TELLING culture – it is everyone’s responsibility in netball to report concerns.

**7.0 SAFEGUARDING CONCERNS**

Should a young person be at risk of harm, it is the duty of those in a position of responsibility to take the necessary steps to minimise and/or help to remove the risk and to ensure that all procedures are undergone in accordance with statutory guidelines.

If you believe a young person is at risk the concern should be brought to the attention of the CPO, CCO, or relevant mandated person.

A volunteer may have concerns about a young person’s behaviour or something they have told them. These may only be vague concerns and not evidence that child abuse has occurred, but it is important that these are taken seriously.

A report should always be made if you have reasonable grounds for concern.

With respect to 5.0 to 5.5 and 6.0, such reasonable grounds are considered as abuse, or risk of abuse, when the young person’s health, development or welfare have been, are being, or are likely to be seriously affected (i.e. a mandated concern).


**8.0 PROCEDURE**

If you believe a young person is at risk, the concern should be brought to the attention of the relevant person – CCO, NI’s CPO, or other mandated person/DLP, who will implement the NI reporting procedure. This will establish if the concern is likely to meet the threshold for reporting to Statutory Authorities (mandated concern) or is a concern that may not be in line with NI’s safeguarding policy. See Appendix 1: Summary Procedure when there is suspected abuse external to the organisation.

If the disclosure or concern is about a NI member or volunteer it should be brought to the attention of the CCO, NI CPO, or NI President who will implement the NI reporting procedure. If the disclosure is in respect of any of these role holders, the disclosure should be made to another NI Executive Committee Member or Club Officer. See Appendix 2: Summary Procedure where concerns/disclosure is about a NI Member/Volunteer.

If, as a mandated person, you receive a disclosure of harm from a young person, which is considered a reasonable concern, you must make a mandated report to Tusla. You are not required to judge the truth of the claim/s or the credibility of the young person. If you receive a disclosure from a young person, you may feel reluctant to report this for various reasons – e.g. the young person may not want the disclosure to be reported or you may feel the young person is now safe. However, you need to inform Tusla of all risks to children above the threshold for the safety of all children that may be impacted. You should deal with disclosures of harm sensitively and professionally. The following approach is suggested as best practice for dealing with disclosures:


- React calmly;
- Listen carefully and attentively;

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- Take the young person seriously;
- Reassure the young person that they have taken the right action in talking to you;
- Do not promise to keep anything secret;
- Ask questions for clarification only. Do not ask leading questions;
- Check back with the young person that what you have heard is correct and understood;
- Do not express any opinions about the alleged offender;
- Ensure that the young person understands the procedures that will follow;
- Make a written record of the conversation as soon as possible, in as much detail as possible; and
- Treat the information confidentially, subject to the requirements of legislation.

### **8.1 Reporting Procedure** [Ref: Appendix 1]

- 8.1.1** Make a written record as soon as possible in as much detail as possible.
- 8.1.2** If you are unsure whether or not to report a concern seek advice from your DLP, CCO, NI's CPO, or Tusla.
- 8.1.3** Contact the relevant mandated person (CPO) and inform them of the disclosure in a confidential manner.
- 8.1.4** Under the legislation a mandated person is required to report any knowledge, belief or reasonable suspicion that a child has been harmed, is being harmed, or is at risk of being harmed.
- 8.1.5** Section 14 of the Children First Act 2015 requires mandated persons to report a mandated concern to Tusla 'as soon as practicable' using the required report form.  
[[https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Child\\_Protection\\_and\\_Welfare\\_Report\\_Form\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Child_Protection_and_Welfare_Report_Form_FINAL.pdf)]
- 8.1.6** Under no circumstances should a young person be left in a situation that exposes him or her to harm or risk of harm pending intervention by Tusla. If you think the young person is in immediate danger and you cannot contact Tusla, you should contact An Garda Síochána.
- 8.1.7** As a mandated person, the legal obligations under the Children First Act 2015 to report mandated concerns rests with the mandated person, and not with the DLP.
- 8.1.8** If there is doubt about whether the concern reaches the legal definition of harm for making a mandated report, Tusla can provide advice in this regard.
- 8.1.9** If the concern does not reach the threshold for mandated reporting, but you feel it is a reasonable concern about the welfare or protection of a young person, you should still report it to Tusla.
- 8.1.10** Under the Children First Act 2015 all mandated persons can subsequently be asked by Tusla to provide any necessary and proportionate assistance to aid Tusla in assessing the risk to a child arising from a mandated report.
- 8.1.11** Tusla may be unable to provide feedback on the progress or outcome of the case.
- 8.1.12** The Children First Act 2015 does not require you to inform the family that a report is being made to Tusla. However, it is good practice to tell the family, unless:
- The child will be placed at further risk;

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- The family's knowledge of the report could impair Tusla's ability to carry out a risk assessment;
- You reasonably believe that by doing so it may place you at risk of harm from the family.

**8.1.13** If a DLP decides not to report a concern to Tusla the following steps should be taken:

- The reasons for not reporting should be recorded.
- Any actions taken as a result of the concern should be recorded.
- The employee or volunteer who raised the concern should be given a clear and written explanation of the reasons why the concern is not being reported to Tusla.
- The employee or volunteer should be advised that if they remain concerned about the situation, they are free to make a report to Tusla or An Garda Síochána.

**8.2 Reporting procedure: disclosure/concern about a NI Volunteer** [Ref: Appendix 2]

**8.2.1** Advice to be sought by CPO from local duty social worker (see section 18.0 Useful Contacts, NI-1022 Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy) with regard to any action necessary to protect the child who may be at risk.

**8.2.2** Matter reported to local statutory authorities by CPO.

The President and the Vice President of NI (or any 2 members of the Executive Committee in the event that such an allegation may relate to the President or Vice President) should privately inform the alleged offender that:

- a) an allegation has been made against him or her; and
- b) the nature of the allegation. He or she should be afforded an opportunity to respond, and to be accompanied by another adult.
- c) and an investigation may be opened by relevant statutory bodies and/or NI (as per NI-1015 Complaint, Dispute and Disciplinary Policy).


**8.2.3** The alleged offender must be asked to step aside pending the outcome of the investigation. 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.

**8.2.4** All persons involved in a child protection process (the young person and his or her parents/guardians, the alleged offender and his or her family, team management) should be afforded appropriate respect, fairness, support and confidentiality at all stages of the procedure.

**8.2.5** The CPO will inform the NI Executive Committee Officers that a person has been asked to step aside, and the President/Vice President will inform relevant Executive Committee member/s.

**8.2.6** NI can consider internal disciplinary action but must ensure that this does not interfere with any investigation/s of Statutory Authorities.

**8.2.7** The NI Executive Committee Officers will consider the outcome of the Statutory Authorities investigation/s and any implications it might have. The fact that the alleged offender has not been prosecuted or been found guilty does not mean that they are appropriate to work with young people within the Association in the future.

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## 9.0 DATA PROTECTION

For direction pertaining to data protection within NI, please refer to NI's GDPR Policy (NI-1007).

## 10.0 DOCUMENT HISTORY

Version 01: Netball Ireland Child Protection Policy 2015 (Extract)

Version 02: Child Safeguarding and Child Abuse Policy

## 11.0 ABBREVIATIONS & DEFINITIONS

NI Netball Ireland

ROI Republic of Ireland

DLP Designated Liaison Person

CPO Child Protection Officer

CCO Club Children's Officer

Young people/person: any person under 18 years of age.

Vulnerable people/person: a person, other than a child, who —

- a) is suffering from a disorder of the mind, whether as a result of mental illness or dementia;
- b) has an intellectual disability;
- c) is suffering from a physical impairment, whether as a result of injury, illness or age; or
- d) has a physical disability, which is of such a nature or degree as to (i) restrict the capacity of the person to guard himself or herself against harm by another person, or (ii) result in the person requiring assistance with the activities of daily living including dressing, eating, walking, washing and bathing.

Tusla: the dedicated State agency responsible for improving wellbeing and outcomes for children.

An Garda Síochána: national police service of the ROI, headed by the Garda Commissioner who is appointed by the Irish Government.

## 12.0 REFERENCE

NI-1007 GDPR Policy

NI-1015 Complaint, Dispute and Disciplinary Policy

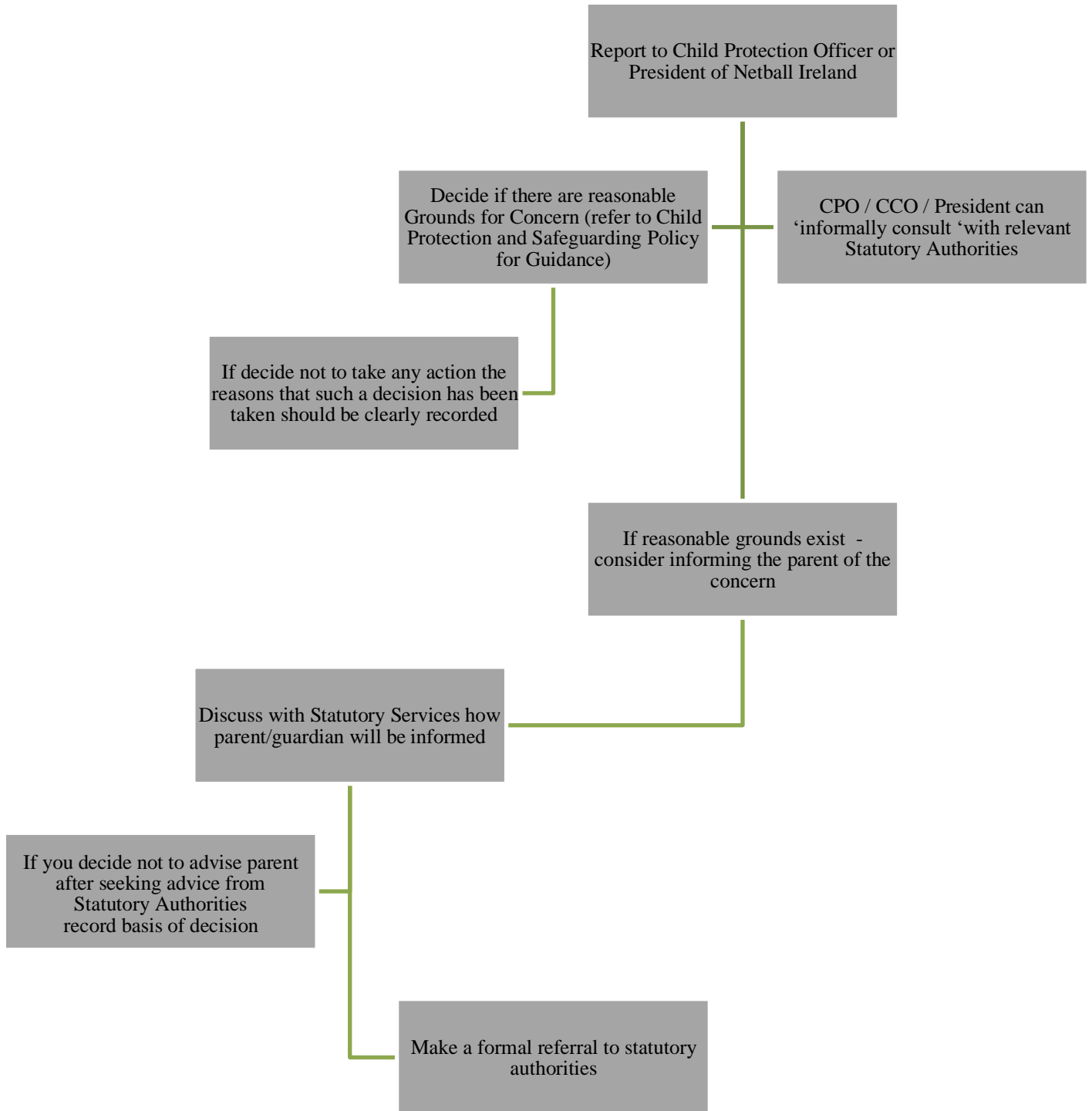
NI-1022 Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy

Children First Act 2015



**Appendix 1:**

Summary Procedure when there is suspected abuse external to the organisation



**Appendix 2:**

Summary Procedure where concerns/disclosure is about a Netball Ireland Member/Volunteer

