

# Irish Table Tennis Association Ltd

## ULSTER BRANCH



### Dealing with reported cases of child abuse

In dealing with any accusation of child abuse it is most important that confidentiality is maintained, partly because the reputation of an innocent person may be destroyed and partly because any public disclosure could compromise an investigation. The rights of all involved should be protected.

If a young person reports information on suspected child abuse to an adult, then the adult should:

- Deal with the matter in a sensitive way, by listening to and helping the child to explain the problem, but not interviewing them.
- Listen compassionately and calmly, and take the report seriously.
- Understand that the act of reporting is important to the child.
- Make no judgemental statements.
- Make it clear to the child that it is not possible to keep the information secret, but reassure them that they have acted correctly by reporting the matter.
- Only question the facts if they are not clear. Leading questions should be avoided, and open questions should be asked such as “Could you explain that more clearly?”.
- Unless to do so could compromise further investigation, check out concerns with parents or guardians.
- Let the child know of the likely steps that will follow. Make no promise that you cannot keep.
- Record details.
- Share the concerns with the Designated Safeguarding Officer/Children’s Officer or an appropriate official.

If a concern is reported about any person, whether it is a coach, an official, a parent or another player:

- The safety and well-being of the young person are paramount.
- If the concern is of poor practice it can be dealt with by a Designated Safeguarding Officer/Children’s Officer who can use internal procedures to deal with the issue.
- In the case of suspected child or disclosed child abuse, the Designated Safeguarding Officer should establish the facts, to ensure the reported concern is grounded and not vexatious or completely erroneous. This should be pursued as neutrally as possible, collecting facts and taking statements without making comments that could be construed as having reached a conclusion. It is most important that everyone involved is treated in a fair manner.

- The DSO/CO should consult with Provincial Child Protection Officer, who in turn should advise the National Children's Officer
- A decision on reporting to the relevant Statutory Body should then be made. All decisions to report should be recorded by the National Children's Officer. Any decision not to report should also be recorded, with the rationale for this outlined. In emergencies, or where they disagree with a decision of the more senior Children's Officer, the DSO/CO has the right to make a report directly to the relevant Statutory Body.
- Written records of statements, reports and actions should be kept securely.
- TTU will set up a Case Management Panel comprising of the President, Chairman and Secretary which will oversee process and act as a support to the Child Protection Officer/ Children's Officer

## **Confidentiality**

The following points should be kept in mind:

- No guarantee of confidentiality or secrecy can be assured, because the welfare of the child overrides all other considerations. In particular any adult who receives a report from a child should make clear that this is the case.
- All information should be treated in a careful and sensitive manner and should be discussed only with those who need to know.
- Giving information to others on a 'need to know' basis for the protection of a child is not a breach of confidentiality.
- Everyone involved in a child protection process or investigation (the child, his/her parents/guardians, the alleged offender, his/her family, officials) should be given appropriate respect, fairness, support and confidentiality at all stages of the procedure. The process should be consistent.
- Information should be stored securely, with access limited only to designated people.
- The requirements of the Data Protection laws should be adhered to.
- Breach of confidentiality is a serious matter.

## **Anonymous Complaints and Rumours**

Anonymous complaints and rumours should not be ignored but dealing with them can be difficult. Those receiving the complaint should consult with the Designated Safeguarding Officer/Children's Officer, Provincial Children's Officer or the TTU Children's Officer about the best way forward. If it is thought appropriate then an investigation should follow.

## **Dealing with the accusation**

Unless it will compromise any investigation, or endanger the child or the accused, the Designated Safeguarding Officer should inform the family before reporting a case to the statutory authorities.

Any adult or young person who is the subject of an accusation that appears to be grounded should be asked to step aside and should be given brief details of the accusation and allowed the opportunity of a reply. This may, in extreme cases, lead to the safety of the child being compromised and every step to protect them should be put in place.

If, after the preliminary facts are established, the Designated Safeguarding Officer/Children's Officer and/or the TTU Children's Officer believe(s) that there may be a serious issue, it should be reported to the relevant statutory body. Where the Statutory Social Services Body has received a report with an allegation of Child Abuse then the TTU's own investigation may need to be suspended to allow the Statutory Body carry out its own investigation. This decision will be made by the Case management Panel. The TTU will seek a report from the Statutory Body on completion of its investigation and will then consider the outcome of the investigation and any implications this may have. Where the person, or his family, prevents the Statutory Body delivering a report then the Case Management Panel can decide to expel that person from the TTU.

Once investigations have been initiated The Code of Ethics and Good Practice in Children's Sport advises that Governing Bodies can consider disciplinary action, but should ensure that this does not interfere with the investigation of the Statutory Authorities. It is important to consider the outcome of the investigation and any implications it might have. *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.*

## **False Accusations**

It is also important to remember that false accusations can be made, and this should always be borne in mind. In a case where an accusation is confirmed as false, then consideration has to be given to the counselling or disciplining of the accuser.

## **Unusual cases**

From time to time, cases may arise that cannot be classified or dealt with in the prescribed manner, and those who find themselves in this position should do their best to resolve the situation in a sensitive way, taking advice as and where required.