Pickleball Ireland

Child Safeguarding Policy

1. Policy Statement

Pickleball Ireland is committed to creating and maintaining the safest possible environment for all young people who participate in our sport. We accept a duty of care to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people and to protect them from harm.

Our policy is underpinned by the principles of:

- The best interests of the child taking priority.
- Children's rights to be heard, listened to, and taken seriously.
- Equality and non-discrimination.
- Working in partnership with parents/guardians, children, coaches, volunteers, and statutory agencies.

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2. Scope

This policy applies to all members of Pickleball Ireland, including:

- Board and committee members
- Coaches, officials, and referees
- Volunteers
- Club members
- Contractors and others engaged in Pickleball Ireland activities

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3. Legal and Regulatory Framework

This policy is guided by:

- *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (Tusla, 2017)

- *Children First Act 2015*
- *National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Acts 2012–2016*
- *Sport Ireland's Safeguarding Guidance for Children & Young People in Sport*
- Cooperating to Safeguarding Children and Young People- Dept of Health 2024

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4. Safeguarding Structures in Pickleball Ireland

- **Designated Liaison Person (DLP):** Responsible for reporting child welfare concerns to Tusla/Health and Social Care Trusts (HSCT) and An Garda Síochána Police Service NI.
- **National Children's Officer:** Promotes the welfare of children and ensures the voice of the child is central to our work.
- **Club Children's Officers:** Each affiliated club with under 18 members must appoint a Children's Officer to implement safeguarding best practice at a local level.

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5. Recruitment and Training

- All staff and volunteers working directly with children must undergo Garda/AccessNI vetting checks as part of the safe recruitment process.
- Roles involving contact with children require references and adherence to Pickleball Ireland's Code of Conduct.
- Coaches and volunteers working with under 18's must complete Sport Ireland safeguarding training (Safeguarding 1; Safeguarding 2/3 where appropriate or Sport NI's Safeguarding Children and Young people in Sport and Designated Safeguarding officer).

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6. Codes of Behaviour

Pickleball Ireland will adopt clear codes of behaviour for:

- **Children and Young People** – respecting themselves, peers, coaches and officials.
- **Coaches and Volunteers** – prioritising child welfare, fairness, and positive coaching.
- **Parents/Guardians** – supporting their child's involvement in a positive way.

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7. Recognising a Safeguarding or Child Protection Concern

- All concerns about a child's welfare must be taken seriously and the welfare of the child remains paramount.

- Concerns should be reported to the Club Children's Officer or the DLP.
- The DLP is responsible for reporting to Tusla/HSCT, in line with *Children First and CtSCY.*
- In an emergency where a child is at immediate risk, concerns must be reported directly to An Garda Síochána Police Service NI.

Recognising: The first challenge for anyone considering reporting concerns about abuse is to begin to accept the possibility that it may be happening in the first place.

Not recognising may mean.

- Not believing it could happen in your association/area or not wanting to believe it could be someone you know.
- Not knowing or noticing the signs of abuse or think it is something else
- Not listening to the signs, a person is giving you or not having enough awareness of the possibility of abuse.

Signs and Indicators of Abuse and Neglect

Abuse can take place in any context and by all manner of perpetrator. Abuse may be inflicted by anyone in a club or physical activity provider who an athlete comes into contact with, or club members, workers, volunteer's or coaches may suspect that an athlete is being abused or neglected outside of the activity setting. There are many signs and indicators that may suggest someone is being abused or neglected, these include but are not limited to:

- Unexplained bruises or injuries – or lack of medical attention when an injury is present.
- Person has belongings or money going missing.
- Person is not attending / no longer enjoying their sessions.
- Someone losing or gaining weight / an unkempt appearance.
- A change in the behaviour or confidence of a person.
- Evidence of self-harm.
- Fear or anxiety of a particular group or individual.
- Person telling you / another person that they are being abused – i.e. a direct allegation.

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8. Responding to a concern

Responding to concern about staff/volunteer member

- Allegations will be dealt with promptly, fairly, and in line with natural justice.
- There will be a clear distinction between child protection investigations and disciplinary procedures.
- Staff/volunteers may be temporarily reassigned or suspended pending investigation, to ensure child safety.

Consider need for suspension without prejudice to any outcome and seek advice before suspension or informing the person the concern is about in case you interfere with a possible

statutory investigation. See CPSU flow chart for example:
https://thecpsu.org.uk/media/zuxhz5v5/reporting-concerns-procedure-flowchart-2025.pdf

Responding to Non-Recent Allegations of Abuse

It is possible that non-recent allegations of abuse can be made a number of years after the actual incident. This may be because of a change in circumstances for either the survivor or the alleged perpetrator. Any non-recent allegations must follow the current NGB safeguarding procedures. If there are grounds for concern, then statutory authorities must be informed (Police or TUSLA/ Gateway Teams).

The following points should also be considered;

- Clearly establish with the adult complainant if there may be any children currently at risk of harm from the person they are saying abused them as a child.
- Advise the person making the complaint that they should inform the Police/An Garda Síochána. Encourage them to do so while acknowledging the brave steps they have already taken in beginning to talk about their experience as a child. It is important that the person knows that there is a likelihood that an abuser will not have stopped abusing after their individual abuse ended and if the person harmed them they could be continuing to cause harm to others. This needs to be done without reinforcing the inappropriate guilt the survivor may already have for not coming forward earlier.
- If the complainant refuses to talk to the statutory authorities but has provided you with enough identifying factors then this information MUST be shared with the police/ An Garda Síochána. This breach of the complainants' confidence is only appropriate if there is any potential that the alleged perpetrator is still a risk to children or could face prosecution (i.e. they are alive). Remember, the welfare of any children currently at risk is paramount. This must take priority over any request of confidentiality from the person providing you with the information/complaint. This should be explained to them at the earliest possible stage
- Offer support to the complainant when they are making a formal complaint to the police/An Garda Síochána.
- Signpost the complainant to support agencies that can provide counselling.

When an adult making a complaint chooses not to report the matter to the police/An Garda Síochána and you have already discussed the possibility of any child still being at risk you must follow NGB's reporting procedures and inform the Police/ An Garda Síochána or TUSLA/Gateway Team immediately of any identifying features of the allegation including the name of the alleged abuser. The person making the complaint should be informed that this is the organisation's moral and legal responsibility. If the individual wishes to remain anonymous this should be respected but again explaining that without any further cooperation, there may be little action the Police/An Garda Síochána can take to protect others. Encourage them to talk directly to the TUSLA/Gateway Teams, if not the Police/An Garda Síochána, in order to enable social services to consider if there is any action they can take to protect children at risk, as their threshold for intervention is lower than the evidence required for any criminal justice prosecution.

Responding to Concerns about Domestic Abuse

To be able to respond to domestic abuse situations we need to firstly understand it is a pattern of behaviour which is characterised by the exercise of control and the misuse of power by one person over another. This can be by using threatening behaviour, physical violence or other controlling behaviours including psychological, sexual, financial, or emotional abuse – often known as coercive control. Domestic abuse can take many forms and is not limited to one form of abuse like physical violence. Abusive relationships can be between intimate partners or family members, irrespective of age, gender, or sexual orientation. It affects all socioeconomic, racial, faith and cultural backgrounds. Domestic abuse is a crime in Northern Ireland/Ireland and the behaviour is never acceptable. All Pickleball Ireland staff/Volunteers must follow our reporting procedures if they become concerned that a child or adult is living in a domestic abusive environment.

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9. Reporting concerns

Responsibility to Report

Colleagues must ensure their response is in line with the procedure set out below:

- All child safeguarding concerns or allegations must be passed to the DLP or deputy at the earliest opportunity, and always within 24 hours of a working week. These individuals will take a lead in relation to all safeguarding/protection issues. If the DLP or deputy is not available and the issue is urgent (a child may be at risk or placed at risk) then the person must contact either TUSLA/ HSCT Gateway Team, or Garda/PSNI.
- Where a child or parent alleges information about abuse, colleagues must listen to the child or young person without questioning. A child should never be stopped if they are freely recalling significant events. But you should at the earliest possible time advise them that you may need to report what they are telling you to someone else to help keep them and possibly others safe. The child should not be asked to repeat their story to a colleague or asked to write it down.
- A 'Safeguarding Report Form' (https://thecpsu.org.uk/resource-library/forms/incident-reporting-form/) must be completed and passed to the DSO at the earliest opportunity, and always within 48 hours during weekdays.
- The Lead or Deputy Lead DLP will decide what further action is required and ensure this is carried out.

In the unlikely event that neither the DLP nor deputy are available, advice should be sought from TUSLA/ HSCT Gateway team or the Garda/Police, about an appropriate response. The Lead or deputy Lead DLP should be subsequently informed at the earliest opportunity, and a Safeguarding Report Form completed.

Reporting the matter to the Gards/Police or TUSLA/HSCT should not be delayed by attempts to obtain more information.

Wherever possible, referrals telephoned to TUSLA/ HSCT should be confirmed in writing within 24 hours (usually by the Lead or deputy lead DLP). A record should also be made of the name and contact details for TUSLA/ HSCT.

Duty to report to Disclosure and Barring Service[1] (NI only)
(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dbs-referrals-form-and-guidance)

Under the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (NI) Order, all organisations have a duty to refer information to the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) in certain circumstances. In all cases there are two conditions, both of which must be met, to trigger a referral to the DBS by a regulated activity provider.

A referral MUST be made to the DBS if PI or a club in Northern Ireland:
a. withdraws permission for an individual to engage in regulated activity, or would have done so had that individual not resigned, retired, been made redundant or been transferred to a position which is not regulated activity; because

b. they think that the individual has:
• engaged in relevant conduct;
• satisfied the criteria set out in the Harm Test; or
• received a caution or conviction for a relevant offence.

If both conditions have been met, PI or the club will refer the information on to the DBS.

The referral must be made to the DBS when PI or the club has (in following with good practice) gathered sufficient evidence as part of its investigations to support its reasons for withdrawing permission for the person in question to engage in regulated activity, consulted with the relevant social services or police if appropriate.

10. Recording

Details of the incident or concerns. Include information such as times, dates, description of any injuries and if any other parties were involved, and whether you are recording this incident as fact, opinion or hearsay. Also include any other relevant information known about the family's/child's/person of concerns circumstances.
Note an under 18's

- D.O.B,
- address,
- contact details.
- Account of the incident

Please provide any witness accounts of the incident

[1] The barring of individuals is managed by
- DBS for England, Wales and Northern Ireland
- PVG in Scotland
- No such scheme in Republic of Ireland

*Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2026 (2007 Order in NI)

Details of any person involved in this incident or alleged to have caused the incident / injury
Please provide details of action taken to date
Has the incident been reported to any external agencies?

11. Safe Practices in Pickleball

- Use of appropriate facilities and equipment.
- Supervision ratios in line with Sport Ireland guidance.
- Avoiding isolated one-to-one situations where possible.
- Appropriate communication methods with children (no private messaging outside group/official channels).
- Safe transport arrangements.

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12. Confidentiality

- Child protection concerns will be shared only on a need-to-know basis.
- Records will be kept securely and in compliance with GDPR.

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13. Review and Implementation

- This policy will be reviewed every three years, or sooner if required by legislative or organisational change.
- Pickleball Ireland commits to ensuring all members are aware of and implement this policy.

14. Supporting Documents

This policy should be read alongside:

- Pickleball Ireland Code of Conduct Policy
- Pickleball Ireland Complaints & Disciplinary Procedures
- Children First: National Guidance
- Child Safeguarding Statement
- Social Media & Media Policy
- Communications Policy
- Underage Player Participation in Adult Tournaments Policy