

SUTTON DINGHY CLUB

Procedure for Reporting Suspected or Actual Child or Vulnerable Adult Abuse

Responding to Disclosure, Suspicions & Allegations

Sutton Dinghy Club accepts that organisations, which include children as members, are vulnerable to the occurrence of child abuse and therefore there is a need for policies and procedures to deal with this issue. The safety of young people is everyone's responsibility. False allegations of abuse can occur. However, if a young person says or indicates that he/she is being abused, or information is obtained which gives concern that a young person is being abused, you should react immediately.

Categories of abuse

- Child neglect
- Emotional abuse
- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse

The Protection for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act, 1998 provides immunity from civil liability to persons who report child abuse "reasonably and in good faith" to Tusla or the Gardai. The act also covers the offence of "false reporting". This Act came into operation on 23rd January 1999.

The main provisions of the Act are:

1. The provision of immunity from civil liability to any person who reports child abuse "reasonably and in good faith" to designated officers of Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, or any member of An Garda Síochána.
2. The provision of significant protections for employees who report child abuse. These protections cover all employees and all forms of discrimination up to and including, dismissal;
3. The creation of a new offence of false reporting of child abuse where a person makes a report of child abuse to the appropriate authorities "knowing that statement to be false". This is a new criminal offence designed to protect innocent persons from malicious reports.

Everyone involved in child protection matters should be aware of their responsibility to work in co-operation with the statutory child protection authorities.

The term "Leader" means all adults, in a paid or voluntary capacity e.g. club instructors, helpers, Club officials, Sailing Course Managers, supervisors.

RESPONSE TO A CHILD REPORTING ANY FORM OF ABUSE

The following Actions should be taken:

- React calmly
- Reassure the child.
- Listen compassionately and carefully
- Keep the questions to an absolute minimum-do not ask leading questions or make suggestions. Do not interview the child.
- If the nature of what the child is saying is unclear, use open, non-specific questions such as "Can you explain to me what you mean by that".
- Facilitate the child to tell about the problem.
- Take what the child is saying seriously.
- Remember the child has decided to tell about something very important and has taken a risk to do so.
- Carefully record the details- Note dates times, locations and contexts in which the incidents occurred
- The child should be given some indication of what happens next – informing the Children’s Officer, John Robinson. It should be kept in mind that the child may have feel threatened and may feel vulnerable at this stage.
- Report the child’s concern to the Children’s Officer who will contact the designated Liaison person, Niamh Dooley

The following actions should be avoided:

- Do not make promises of confidentiality – it may not be possible to keep that promise.
- Do not make a judgement or make negative comments about the alleged abuser
- Do not speculate or make assumptions
- Do not interview the child – do not probe for more information than is offered
- Do not confront or inform any of the parties involved in the disclosure or allegation
- Do not allow your shock or distaste to show.

Reporting allegations of Child abuse

The committee emphasizes confidentiality, sensitivity and the use of common sense at all times in dealing with allegations of a sexual nature.

It also appreciates that its adult members are not trained or qualified in this field and it is not the responsibility of anyone working under the auspices of Sutton Dinghy Club in a paid or voluntary capacity to decide whether or not child abuse is taking place.

It is not the responsibility of Sutton Dinghy Club to initiate or carry out any further investigations with regard to the disclosure or allegations.

We recognise that the investigation of suspected child abuse and action to protect the young person is the responsibility of the statutory Authorities and should not be undertaken by any persons in Sutton Dinghy Club.

Actions to Take:

- The Children's Officer will report the matter as soon as possible to the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) for reporting abuse (at Sutton Dinghy Club Niamh Dooley holds this office).

The DLP will take possession of notes on dates, times, locations and contexts in which the incident occurred or suspicion was aroused, together with any other relevant information.

These records will be held securely by the DLP.

- If the DLP has reasonable grounds for believing that the child has been abused or is at risk of abuse, s/he will make a report to Tusla who have statutory responsibility to investigate and assess suspected or actual child abuse.

The DLP will consult with and seek advice from Tusla Dublin North Tel No. 01 8708000

- In cases of emergency, where a child appears to be at immediate and serious risk and the designated person is unable to contact a duty social worker, the Garda authorities should be contacted.
- If the DLP is unsure whether reasonable grounds for concern exist or not, s/he should informally consult with Tusla. S/he will be advised whether or not the matter requires a formal report;
- A DLP reporting suspected or actual child abuse to Tusla should first inform the family of their intention to make such a report, unless doing so would endanger the child or undermine an investigation;
- A report should be given by the DLP to Tusla in person or by phone, and in writing;
- It is best to report child abuse concerns by making personal contact with the relevant personnel in Tusla.

ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE AGAINST LEADERS

If such an allegation is made, two procedures should be followed:

- The reporting procedure as outlined in "Reporting Child Abuse".
- The procedure for dealing with the Leader (below)

The following points should be considered:

The safety of the child making the allegation and any others who are/may be at risk should be ensured and this should take precedence over any other consideration.

In this regard, Sutton Dinghy Club should take any necessary steps that may be immediately necessary to protect children. If a Leader is the subject of the concern s/he should be treated with respect and fairness.

Steps to be taken within the organisation

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

- Advice should be sought from Tusla with regard to any action by the club deemed necessary to protect the child/children who may be at risk.
- The matter should be reported to Tusla following the standard reporting procedure outlined above
- In the event that the concern is connected to the actions of a Leader in the club, the Leader involved in the concern should be asked to stand aside pending the outcome of any investigation by Tusla.
- It is advisable that an appointed committee member other than the DLP, undertakes this task.

The Leader should be informed, in private

- That an allegation has been made against him/her,
- The nature of the allegation,
- S/he should be afforded an opportunity to respond. His/her response should be noted and passed on to Tusla.
- All persons involved in a child protection process (the child, his/her parents/guardians, the alleged offender, his/her family's Leaders) should be afforded appropriate respect, fairness, support and confidentiality at all stages of the procedure.

Confidentiality

- Every effort should be made to ensure that confidentiality is maintained for all concerned.
- Information should be handled and disseminated on a need to know basis only.
- Information should be stored in a secure place, with limited access to designated people.
- The requirements of the Data Protection laws should be adhered to.
- Breach of confidentiality is a serious matter.

Anonymous complaints

Anonymous complaints can be difficult to deal with but should not be ignored. In all cases the safety and welfare of the child/children is paramount. Any such complaints

relating to inappropriate behaviour should be brought to the attention of the DLP. The information should be checked out and handled in a confidential manner.

Rumours

Rumours should not be allowed to hang in the air. Any rumours relating to Inappropriate behaviour should be brought to the attention of the DLP and checked out without delay.



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Stephen Boyle, Commodore