



# FAI Concern/Complaint Policy

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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## Glossary

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**Affiliated Member** of the Association shall mean all National Bodies, Provincial Associations, leagues, clubs and AGM Members who have affiliated directly to the FAI or to their respective governing body.

**Children** or **Child** shall mean individuals under the age of 18.

**Designated Child Welfare Officer** shall mean the person who is responsible for child welfare in accordance with the rules of the FAI and deals with outside agencies, including Statutory Authorities, as well as being a resource person to any employee or volunteer who has child protection concerns.

**Designated Child Welfare Liaison Officer** (if one is appointed) shall mean the person who the child welfare day to day functions is delegated to by the Designated Child Welfare Officer.

**Executive Committee** shall mean the Committee of the Affiliated Member responsible for the day to day running of the Affiliated Member.

**National Body** shall mean the Colleges Football Association of Ireland (CFAI), Defence Forces Football Association (DFFA), Football Association of Ireland Schools (FAIS), Football For All (FFA), Irish Soccer Referees Society (ISRS), Irish Universities Football Union (IUFU), Junior Council and the Schoolboys Football Association of Ireland (SFAI).

**Provincial Associations** shall mean the Connaught Football Association (CFA), Leinster Football Association (LFA), Munster Football Association (MFA) and Ulster Football Association (UFA).

**Safeguarding Report Form** shall mean the document which should be completed when making a report of poor practice or child abuse.

**Stand Down Order** shall mean an order which is issued to any person who is the subject of a complaint or inquiry by a Statutory Authority in relation to any child welfare concern. A Stand Down Order is issued to an individual to immediately refrain from particular activities within the FAI for a specified or indefinite period pending the outcome of an enquiry or investigation in accordance with FAI Rules.

**Statutory Authorities** shall mean those state bodies which promote the welfare and protection of children and young people and have a legal responsibility for the investigation and/or validation of suspected child abuse, and these include An Garda Síochána, the Health Service Executive and the Child and Family Agency (Tusla) and any other authority as may be appropriate from time to time.

**The Policy** shall mean this FAI Concerns / Complaints Policy.

**Vulnerable Person** means 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—

- (i) as to restrict the capacity of the person to guard himself or herself against harm by another person, or
- (ii) that results in the person requiring assistance with the activities of daily living including dressing, eating, walking, washing and bathing.

# 1

## Introduction

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- 1.1** This document is written to provide clear and unambiguous procedures for responding to cases of suspected poor practice and/or abuse. It aims to set out guidelines and procedures on how to take action if there are any concerns about a Child's safety and welfare, for those working in a paid or voluntary capacity with Children within the game.
- 1.2** Where appropriate, these guidelines may be also be used for those working in a paid or voluntary capacity with Vulnerable Persons within the game.
- 1.3** There is a responsibility on all staff / volunteers within the game of Association football in Ireland to protect Children and report suspected abuse so that the Statutory Authorities can investigate. However, it is important to distinguish between poor practice and child abuse.

# 2

## What is Poor Practice?

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- 2.1** Incidents of poor practice occur when the needs of Children are compromised. Examples of poor practice are likely to be once off incidents and these might include but are not limited to:
- 2.2 Coach**
  - (i) Giving preferential treatment to individuals and unfairly rejecting others (e.g. singling out and only focusing on the talented Children and failing to involve the full squad).
  - (ii) Giving preference to winning games over Children's development, participation and satisfaction.
  - (iii) Encouraging Children to play while injured.
  - (iv) Using inappropriate language, gestures or comments to motivate Children or provoke a reaction.
  - (v) Delivering a coaching session alone, without another responsible adult present.
  - (vi) Not paying due care and attention to the Children taking part in the training session or game.
  - (vii) Failing to recognise and applaud a Child's efforts to make improvements to their game.
- 2.3. Parent / Guardian**
  - (i) Placing too much pressure on their Child to perform to a high standard and win games.
  - (ii) Criticising their Child's performances instead of highlighting the positives of their game and where improvements were made.
  - (iii) Failing to ensure that their Child is appropriately dressed for the weather conditions.
  - (iv) Making derogatory comments about their Child, or another Child during a game or training session.
  - (v) Failing to bring their Child to training on time, or collect them promptly at the end of the session.
- 2.4. Supporters**
  - (i) Using inappropriate language towards Children, coaches, referees or other supporters.
  - (ii) Making inappropriate comments about the performance of Children, coaches or referees.
  - (iii) Entering the field of play during a match or training session without being asked to do so.



## 2.5. The Club

- (i) Failing to provide adequate safeguarding arrangements for the Children in their care.
- (ii) Failing to implement FAI Rules on the protection and welfare of Children, the FAI Child Welfare Policy and other supporting documents.
- (iii) Placing undue pressure on a coach or team of Children to win games or competitions.
- (iv) Allowing poor practice to go unreported (e.g. a coach who ridicules and criticises Children who make a mistake during a match).
- (v) Failing to create an environment that encourages player development and enjoyment over winning games and trophies.
- (vi) Failing to provide appropriate safeguarding education for their coaches and members.

## 2.6. General

- (i) Shouting at or ridiculing Children when they make a mistake. Children should be given the opportunity to learn from their mistakes and develop.
- (ii) Allowing Children to use inappropriate language unchallenged.
- (iii) Placing Children in potentially compromising and uncomfortable situations with adults.
- (iv) Ignoring health and safety guidelines (e.g. allowing Children to set up goal posts unsupervised by adults).
- (v) Failing to adhere to the club's codes of practice.

## 2.7. Points to remember

- (i) Judgement about whether an incident is one of Child abuse or poor practice may not be possible at the point of referral, but only after the collation of relevant information.
- (ii) The majority of poor practice concerns should be dealt with directly by the club in the first instance. Please refer to Section 3 for guidance on how to deal with an example of Poor Practice.

# 3

## How to Deal With Alleged Poor Practice

- 3.1. Where alleged poor practice has been identified or reported, it must be dealt with in a fair and impartial manner. All information should be treated in the strictest of confidence, in accordance with procedures concerning confidentiality outlined in the FAI Child Welfare Policy.
- 3.2. When an example of alleged poor practice is reported, it should be dealt with on a case by case basis. The following steps provide guidance as to how a complaint of poor practice could be handled:
  - (i) Alleged poor practice is observed and/or reported. This information is then passed on to the Designated Child Welfare Officer and / or Designated Child Welfare Liaison Officer.
  - (ii) Initial assessment is carried out by the Designated Child Welfare Officer and / or Designated Child Welfare Liaison Officer who should collate all information / reports and record what action has been or will be taken by the club.
  - (iii) Inform the person(s) against which the report of alleged poor practice has been made and offer them the opportunity to respond.
  - (iv) If the accused agrees that poor practice has taken place, they may be subject to an appropriate sanction. The matter should be referred by the Designated Child Welfare Officer and / or Designated Child Welfare Liaison Officer to their Executive Committee for review. On assessment the Executive Committee may refer the matter to an appropriate disciplinary body. This should be the body to

which the matter was reported and if investigated in full no referral to a higher body is warranted.

- (v) If the alleged poor practice is disputed, the Designated Child Welfare Officer and / or Designated Child Welfare Liaison Officer must refer the matter to their Executive Committee for review. On assessment the Executive Committee may refer the matter to an appropriate disciplinary body. This should be the body to which the matter was reported and if investigated in full no referral to a higher body is warranted.
- (vi) Should a disciplinary hearing be required, the panel should be impartial consisting of at least 3 members. All parties should be provided with the opportunity to make oral and / or written submissions.
- (vii) Should the alleged poor practice relate to an individual that is under 18 years of age, no meetings should be held with that person without the presence or permission of a parent / guardian.
- (viii) All parties should be informed of the decision of any such investigation or disciplinary hearing in writing as soon as possible on completion of same.

**Note:** If a party feels that the alleged Poor Practice has not been investigated in full, they should refer the matter to the appropriate Affiliated Member as outlined in the FAI Concern / Complaint Procedure (please see Appendix 1), for example, Club to League, League to National Body / Provincial Association, National Body/Provincial Association to FAI.

## 4

## Possible Sanctions Involving Poor Practice

- 4.1.** If there is cause to believe that poor practice has occurred, a sanction proportionate to the offence should be applied. Some examples of possible sanctions are likely to be, but are not limited to:

**4.2. Coach**

- (i) Issued with a verbal and / or written warning and warned as to their future conduct.
- (ii) Required to re-attend an FAI approved Safeguarding course.
- (iii) Required to step aside from duties for a specified period of time, or permanent removal.
- (iv) Asked to work alongside a more experienced coach to ensure best practice is followed at all times.
- (v) Monitored by a nominated person as directed by the appropriate Committee.

**4.3. Parent / Guardian and Supporters**

- (i) Issued with a verbal and / or written warning and warned as to their future conduct.
- (ii) Asked not to attend training sessions and / or games for a period of time, or permanent removal.
- (iii) Required to attend an FAI approved Safeguarding 1 course.
- (iv) Suspended from club and have club membership removed.

**Note:** Any suspension / removal of a parent / guardian should not impact the involvement of the Child. Drop off and collection of their Child should be facilitated to allow the Child attend training and matches.

**4.4. The Club**

- (i) Issued with a verbal and / or written warning and warned as to their future conduct.
- (ii) Required to attend an FAI approved Safeguarding 2 or 3 course as appropriate to the role.
- (iii) If a complaint of poor practice concerns a member of the Executive Committee, they may be asked to step down from their role for a specified period of time, or permanent removal.
- (iv) Required to comply with recommendations concerning safeguarding practices from a higher body.

**5.1.** Concerns identified as child abuse will fall within the following categories:

- (i) Physical Abuse
- (ii) Neglect
- (iii) Sexual Abuse
- (iv) Emotional Abuse
- (v) Bullying

**5.1.1.** Further information on each form of abuse can found in the FAI Child Welfare Policy.

## **5.2. Grounds for Concern**

**5.2.1.** There are a number of indicators of abuse / suspected abuse, which include but are not limited to:

- (i) A direct disclosure / indication from a Child that they are / have been abused.
- (ii) An account or report by a person who saw the Child being abused.
- (iii) Consistent indication, over a period of time that a Child is suffering from abuse as defined in the FAI Child Welfare Policy.
- (iv) Evidence, such as an injury or behaviour which is consistent with abuse and unlikely to be caused another way.
- (v) A sudden change of temperament and / or personality in the Child.
- (vi) Corroborative indicators supporting a concern e.g. pattern of injuries, an implausible explanation, other indicators of abuse, dysfunctional behaviour.

**5.2.2.** If you have any concerns you should discuss these with the Designated Child Welfare Officer and / or Designated Child Welfare Liaison Officer in your organisation. At any time, you can consult informally with Tusla (Child & Family Agency) if you have a concern.

**Note:** For more information on recognising child abuse, please refer to the FAI Child Welfare Policy.

## **5.3. How To Respond to a Disclosure From a Child**

**5.3.1.** Should a Child make a disclosure, the following points should be considered:

- (i) At all times, take the Child seriously.
- (ii) Questions should be kept to a minimum. Your role is to listen, not to interview.
- (iii) Praise the Child and assure them they have done the right thing.
- (iv) Stay calm and do not react emotionally.
- (v) Do not make any judgemental statements about the alleged abuse or abuser.
- (vi) Do not promise to keep the information a secret, but reassure the Child that any sharing of information will be to protect them.
- (vii) Record exactly what has been said as soon as possible in line with recording procedures (Please see Appendix 2).
- (viii) Explain to the Child what will happen next.
- (ix) All information should be treated in the strictest of confidence, in accordance with procedures concerning confidentiality outlined in the FAI Child Welfare Policy.



- 6.1.** If a report of poor practice or child abuse is made it should be recorded using the Safeguarding Report Form in Appendix 2. This report should be submitted to the Designated Child Welfare Officer and / or Designated Child Welfare Liaison Officer where appropriate. A record should be kept of when the report was made, to whom and any response(s) received. For the avoidance of doubt, the person completing the Safeguarding Report Form may in fact be the Designated Child Welfare Officer and / or Designated Child Welfare Liaison Officer.
- 6.2.** In cases which are deemed to be poor practice, they should be dealt with in accordance with Section 3 of the Policy.
- 6.3.** In cases which are deemed child abuse they should be dealt with as follows:
- (i) Anyone can report a concern about a child. If you have any concerns about a child you should report it to the Child and Family Agency (Tusla).
  - (ii) A report can be made in person, by telephone or in writing to the Child and Family Agency (Tusla).
  - (iii) The Safeguarding Report Form should also be completed and submitted immediately to the Designated Child Welfare Officer and / or Designated Child Welfare Liaison Officer for your organisation, where appropriate.
  - (iv) This report must also be forwarded to a Duty Social worker in the Child and Family Agency (Tusla) in the area where the child lives.
  - (v) To access the contact details of a Duty Social worker you will need to log onto: [www.tusla.ie](http://www.tusla.ie) <<http://www.tusla.ie>>, select 'Get in Touch', select 'Duty Social Work Teams' and select County where the child lives.
  - (vi) If the Designated Child Welfare Officer and / or Designated Child Welfare Liaison Officer is unsure whether reasonable grounds for concern exist, they should informally contact the Child and Family
  - (vii) Agency (Tusla) who will advise whether or not the matter requires a formal report.  
If a child is in danger outside of office hours for the Child and Family Agency (Tusla) you need to contact the Gardaí.

**Note:** In the event that the Designated Child Welfare Officer and / or Designated Child Welfare Liaison Officer decides that they do not have reasonable grounds for reporting any concerns - individuals are free to consult with, or make a report (formal or informal) to the Statutory Authorities themselves.

# 7

## Stand Down Order

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- 7.1. Any persons under investigation by a Statutory Authority must be issued with a Stand Down Order in accordance with the FAI Child Welfare Policy.

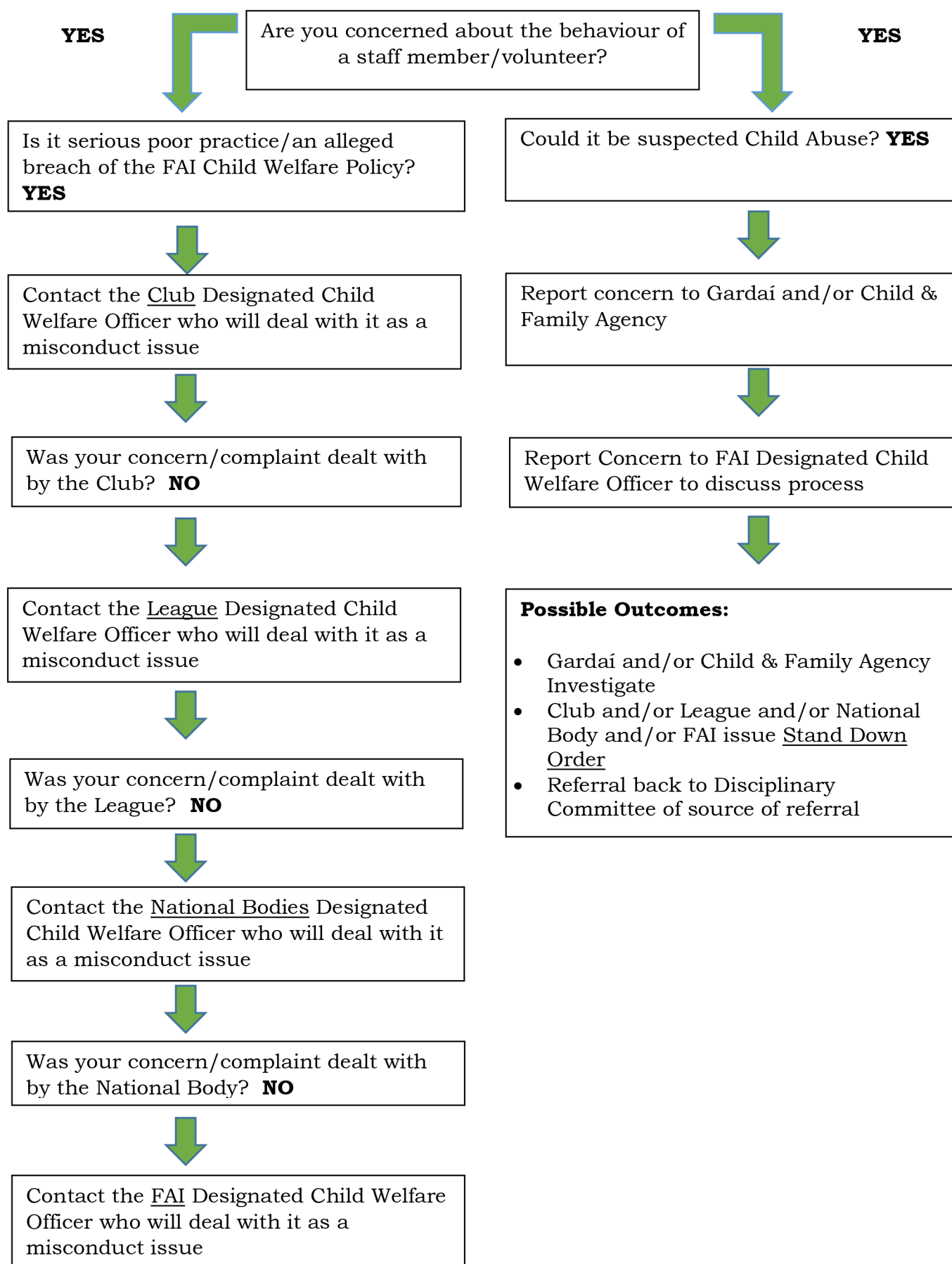
# 8

## Anonymous Complaints

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- 8.1. Whilst difficult to pursue, anonymous complaints should not be ignored. Anonymous complaints should be brought to the attention of the Designated Child Welfare Officer and / or Designated Child Welfare Liaison Officer and investigated in full based on the information that has been provided. The investigation should be completed without prejudice to any person and it should be explained to all parties that there is an obligation to investigate all matters reported. Where necessary, having carefully considered all of the facts, a report to the Statutory Authorities may be submitted.

## Appendix 1 - Concern/Complaint Procedure





## Appendix 2 Safeguarding Report Form

Organisation Name: \_\_\_\_\_

### Section 1: Details of the Child / Alleged Victim

Name:	
Address:	
Age:	
Sex:	<input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female
Parent / Guardian Name(s):	

### Section 2: Your Details

Name:	
Role within the club (e.g. coach):	
Address:	
Email Address:	
Phone Number:	

### Section 3: Accused Details

Name:	
Address:	
Age (if known or please state approximate):	
Sex:	<input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female
Role within the Club / Organisation (e.g. coach):	

## Section 4: Details of the Report

<b>Date of Alleged Incident:</b>	<b>Time of Alleged Incident:</b>
<b>Location and Context of Alleged Incident (E.g. In the club grounds during a training session):</b>	
<b>Please provide a detailed account of what was observed and / or reported. This reports must be based on facts, please refrain from stating opinions in your report.</b>	
<b>Please provide names and details of any witnesses:</b>	
<b>Other relevant information:</b>	
<b>I consider this report to be a matter of:</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Child Abuse <input type="checkbox"/> Poor Practice <b>(Please refer to the FAI Concern / Complaints procedure for guidance)</b>	

## Section 5: Action Taken

<b>Please indicate if the following parties have been informed.</b> <b>Note who was spoken to, the date and time of the conversation and what advice was received.</b>	
<b>Parents / Guardians:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No  <b>Date:</b> _____ <b>Time:</b> _____  <b>Note:</b> _____
<b>Alleged Victim(s):</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No  <b>Date:</b> _____ <b>Time:</b> _____  <b>Note:</b> _____
<b>Accused:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No  <b>Date:</b> _____ <b>Time:</b> _____  <b>Note:</b> _____
<b>Executive Committee:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No  <b>Date:</b> _____ <b>Time:</b> _____  <b>Note:</b> _____
<b>Statutory Authorities:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> An Garda Siochána <input type="checkbox"/> Tusla  <b>Date:</b> _____ <b>Time:</b> _____  <b>Note:</b> _____

☐ I understand that all information included in this Safeguarding Report form must be treated in the strictest of confidence, in accordance with procedures concerning confidentiality outlined in the FAI Child Welfare Policy.

<b>Print Name:</b>	
<b>Signature:</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	

<b>Submitted to:</b>	<b>Date:</b>
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Football Association of Ireland

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