



Paralympics Ireland Recognising and Reporting Child Abuse Policy

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1. Introduction

Under the Children First legislation it is a requirement to report any knowledge, belief, or reasonable suspicion that a child has been harmed, is being harmed, or is at risk of being harmed, to the statutory authorities. As Paralympics Ireland may work with children or young people it is duty of care to keep them safe from harm. The statutory authorities have a threshold of harm for intervention of abuse; this is the level at which a concern must be reported.

As defined in the Children First Act, 2015, “harm” means, in relation to a child¹

- (a) assault, ill-treatment, or neglect of the child in a manner that seriously affects or is likely to seriously affect the child’s health, development, or welfare, or
- (b) sexual abuse of the child, whether caused by a single act, omission or circumstance or a series or combination of acts, omissions, or circumstances, or otherwise.

[¹TUSLA Harm Definition](#)

2. Policy Statement

This policy is created with lead from *Safeguarding Guidance for Children and Young People in Sport* as produced by Sport Ireland and Sport NI, as well as alignment with principles of the “*Children’s First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children*”. Paralympics Ireland requires all employees and volunteers to report any knowledge, belief or reasonable suspicion that a child has been harmed, is being harmed, or is at risk of being harmed, to the designated persons or statutory authorities.

3. Application

This policy applies to all Paralympics Ireland employees (including those on permanent or fixed term contracts and work placement) and volunteers. We all have a duty of care to report any allegation, disclosure or concerns of abuse.

4. Types/Definitions of Abuse²

Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017 (ROI) defines four categories of abuse: neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse, and sexual abuse. A child/young person may be subjected to one or more forms of abuse at any given time. When working with children/young people it is important to be aware of the four categories of abuse these are as follows:

- **Neglect:** Occurs when a child does not receive adequate care or supervision to the extent that the child is harmed physically or developmentally. It is generally defined in terms of an omission of care, where a child’s health, development or welfare is impaired by being deprived of food, clothing, warmth, hygiene, medical care, intellectual stimulation or supervision and safety. Child neglect is the most

frequently reported category of abuse, both in Ireland and internationally. Ongoing chronic neglect is recognised as being extremely harmful to the development and well-being of the child and may have serious long-term negative consequences.

- **Emotional Abuse:** Is the systematic emotional or psychological ill-treatment of a child as part of the overall relationship between a caregiver and a child. Once-off and occasional difficulties between a parent/carer and child are not considered emotional abuse. Abuse occurs when a child's basic need for attention, affection, approval, consistency, and security are not met, due to incapacity or indifference from their parent or caregiver.
- **Physical Abuse:** Physical abuse is when someone deliberately hurts a child physically or puts them at risk of being physically hurt. It may occur as a single incident or as a pattern of incidents. A reasonable concern exists where the child'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.
- **Sexual Abuse:** Occurs when a child is used by another person for his or her gratification or arousal, or for that of others. It includes the child being involved in sexual acts (masturbation, fondling, oral or penetrative sex) or exposing the child to sexual activity directly or through pornography. An Garda Síochána will deal with any criminal aspects of a sexual abuse case under the relevant criminal justice legislation.

[TULSA Abuse Definition](#)

5. Recognition of Abuse

Signs of abuse can be physical, behavioural, or developmental. A cluster or pattern of signs is the most reliable indicator of abuse, indicators should be noted. It is important, however, to realise that all of these indicators can occur in other situations where abuse has not been a factor. A child may be subjected to one or more forms of abuse at any given time. Abuse and neglect can occur within the family, in the community or in an institutional setting. The abuser may be someone known to the child or a stranger, and can be an adult, or another child. The important factor in deciding whether the behaviour is abuse or neglect is the

impact of that behaviour on the child rather than the intention of the parent/carer.

Abuse	Physical	Behavioural
Physical	Unexplained bruising in soft tissue areas Bites, burns and scalds	Becoming withdrawn or aggressive Reluctance to change clothing
Emotional	Drop in performance Crying	Regressive behaviour Excessive clinginess
Neglect	Weight loss Untreated fractures	Changes in attendance Reluctance to go home
Sexual	Torn or bloodstained clothing Inappropriate sexual awareness behaviour or language	Distrustful of adults Sudden drop in performance

NB: The above is only a sample list and not exhaustive.

6. Grounds for Concern³

Reasonable grounds for concern exist when there is:

- a specific indication from a young person that they have been abused.
- an account by a person who saw the young person being abused
- evidence, such as an injury or behaviour which is consistent with abuse and unlikely to be caused another way.
- an injury or behaviour which is consistent both with abuse and with an innocent explanation but where there are corroborative indicators supporting the concern that it may be a case of abuse. An example of this would be a pattern of injuries, an implausible explanation, other indications of abuse, dysfunctional behaviour;
- consistent indication, over a period of time, that a young person is suffering from emotional or physical neglect.

³[TUSLA Grounds for Concern](#)

7. Responding to Disclosure⁴

The following steps are suggested for dealing with a disclosure of abuse from a child:

- React calmly
- Listen carefully and attentively
- Take the child seriously
- Reassure the child 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 child that what you have heard is correct and understood
- Do not express any opinions about the alleged abuser
- Ensure that the child understands that you must tell someone who understand this area and who can help
- Make a written record of what the child has told you as soon as possible, in as much detail as possible
- Treat the information confidentially
- Contact TULSA's [Duty Social Work Department](#) without delay and report the disclosure made to you

[TUSLA Disclosure Advice](#)

8. Reporting Suspected or Disclosed Abuse

The DSO is the trained DLP for Paralympics Ireland. The designated liaison person is responsible for ensuring that reporting procedures within your organisation are followed, so that child welfare and protection concerns are referred promptly to TUSLA.

The following steps should be taken in reporting abuse to the statutory authorities:

- (a) observe and note dates, times, locations and contexts in which the incident occurred, or suspicion was aroused, together with any other relevant information.
- (b) The DSO will inform the Paralympics Ireland Designated Team – this consists of relevant organisational personnel (e.g. Management, CEO, Board etc.), and escalate where appropriate. The DSO along with those relevant personnel will establish if there are reasonable grounds for concern (believing that the young person has been abused or is at risk of abuse).
- (c) They will make a report to TUSLA/HSCT or the organisation in that jurisdiction who has statutory responsibility to investigate and assess suspected or actual abuse. Reporting is done through Child Protection and Welfare Report Forms (CPWRFs) which are submitted TUSLA's web portal (*see Appendix 1*).
- (d) in cases of emergency, where the young person appears to be at immediate and serious risk, section 14(7) of the Children First Act 2015, allows you to alert TUSLA of the concern in advance of submitting a written report. You must then submit a mandated report to Tusla on the Web Portal or by using the Child Protection and Welfare Report Form (by registered post) within 3 days. The police authorities should also be contacted. Under no circumstances should a young person be left in a dangerous situation pending intervention by the Statutory Authorities (*see Appendix 1*).
- (e) if the DSO is unsure whether reasonable grounds for concern exist s/he can informally consult (*see Appendix 1*) with the local statutory agencies (TUSLA/HSCT) seeking advice as to threshold of harm and if official reporting is required (*see Appendix 1*). They will be advised whether the matter requires a formal report. If no formal report

is required, the relevant organisational personnel will be informed. Paralympics Ireland should ensure they have out of hours contact numbers for training events they are organizing within Ireland for their local area.

- (f) it is good practice to tell the family that a report is being made and the reasons for the decision. It is not necessary to inform the family that a report is being made if by doing so the child will be placed at further risk or where the family's knowledge of the report could impair TULSA's ability to carry out a risk assessment.

NOTE: if concerns/disclosures arise from other Paralympics Ireland staff, please report the matter as soon as possible to the Paralympics Ireland Designated Safeguarding Person Officer (DSPO) with responsibility for reporting abuse.

9. Guidelines about responding to an allegation about a staff member/volunteer

Should Paralympics Ireland become aware of an allegation of abuse of a child or children by a coach/volunteer during the execution of that coaches/volunteer's duties, a senior member of staff, following consultation with the DLP and statutory services, will privately inform the coach/volunteer of the following:

- the fact that the allegation has been made against him/her;
- the nature of the allegation.

The coach/volunteer should be afforded an opportunity to respond following advice from statutory services. The Designated Safeguarding Officer will note the response and pass on this information when making the formal report to the relevant authority. All subsequent actions following an allegation of abuse against a coach/volunteer will be taken in consultation with the TULSA, HSCT, PSNI and An Garda Síochána. An immediate meeting will be sought with these agencies for this purpose. The Paralympics Ireland Designated Safeguarding Person is also available to provide support and advice.

Under Paralympics Ireland rules, any coach/volunteer/manager who is the subject of a statutory investigation into alleged child abuse, is required to stand down from all Paralympics Ireland activities until the investigation is completed. Therefore, the Paralympics Ireland Designated Safeguarding Person must be informed immediately of any formal notification to the Statutory Authorities, by another party. When a person is asked to stand down it should be made clear that it is only a precautionary measure in keeping with standard procedures/guidelines and will not prejudice any later disciplinary proceedings.

The coach/volunteer concerned should be advised that the procedures being undertaken are in accordance with statutory requirements. They should be treated with respect and fairness

and be assured that all information will be dealt with in a sensitive and confidential manner. Paralympics Ireland will carefully consider the outcome of the statutory investigation and will then assess if there are any outstanding disciplinary issues in relation to their internal rules or infringements of the Paralympics Ireland best practice guidelines. It must be remembered that 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. Internal Paralympics Ireland disciplinary proceedings can only be initiated after the Statutory Authorities have completed theirs.

10. For Northern Ireland Only

Paralympics Ireland are aware of their duty under the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (NI) 2007 Order to refer information to the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS). In all cases there are two conditions, both must be met to trigger a referral to the DBS by a regulated activity provider. A referral must be made to the DBS when a regulated activity provider, such as an employer or volunteer coordinator 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:

- they think that the individual has:
- engaged in relevant conduct;
- satisfied the Harm Test; or
- received a caution or conviction for a relevant offence.

An employer or voluntary club/organisation is breaking the law if they don't refer someone on the DBS for any of the above reasons. If you want help referring someone to the DBS, contact the DBS referrals helpline. If both conditions have been met the information must be referred to the DBS. The referral should be made to the DBS when the regulated activity provider has gathered sufficient evidence as part of their investigations to support their reasons for withdrawing permission to engage in regulated activity and in following good practice, consulted with their Health and Social Care if appropriate.

11. Designated Safeguarding Officer/Person Details

The Designated Safeguarding Person for Paralympics Ireland is; **Tara Evans**

She may be contacted at (01) 6251175 or at tara@paralympics.ie Emergency no: 087 202 5507

Appendix 1

Useful Contact Details

- **Duty Social Worker Details:** If you are in doubt whether your concern reaches the legal definition of harm for making a mandated report, TUSLA can provide advice in this regard. TUSLA's social work departments can be contacted through Dedicated Contact Points – details can be found here [Dedicated Contact Points - Duty Social Worker Contact Details](#)
- **TUSLA Reporting Portal Details:** Section 14 of the Children First Act 2015 requires mandated persons to report a mandated concern to TUSLA “as soon as practicable”. TUSLA's Web Portal allows users to securely submit child protection and welfare concerns – details of portal can be found here [TUSLA Online Portal](#)
- **Health and Social Care Trust (HSCT) Details:** The Health and Social Care Trust (HSCT) can provide advice via their gateway teams to those who have a concern of abuse. A template report form can be requested from the HSCT team during consultation – details for gateway teams can be found here [HSCT Gateway Teams Contact Details](#) Out of hours the Emergency Social Work service is available by phone on **0044 28 9504 99**.

