



## **Procedure for Responding to Concerns**

Set procedures ensure that everyone is clear on what action to take in the event of suspected abuse or inappropriate behaviour. It gives coaches and volunteers clear, important steps to follow, ensuring action is taken quickly and in the best interests of the child.

### **Procedures:-**

These procedures apply to all coaches and volunteers involved in Syngenta Juniores F.C. ("the Club").

### **1. Concerns about the General Welfare of a Child (NOT involving concerns about child abuse).**

The Club is committed to working in partnership with parents/carers whenever there are concerns about a child. Parents/carers have the primary responsibility for the safety and well-being of their children.

Where the concern does not involve the possibility of abuse, worries may be discussed with parents/carers. For example, if a child seems withdrawn, he/she may have experienced an upset in the family, such as a parental separation, divorce or bereavement. Common sense is advised in these situations.

Any significant, untoward or unusual incidents which cause concern about the welfare of a child/children should be reported to the Club's Child Wellbeing and Protection Officer ("CPO") and will be recorded on the Protection Recording Form as soon as possible. Parents/carers should also be informed of the circumstances as soon as possible.

Advice should be sought from the Club's CPO if there is any uncertainty about the appropriate course of action where there are concerns about the general welfare of a child.

## **2. Concerns about the Abuse of a Child.**

### **What to Do if a Child Tells You about abuse:-**

No club official or volunteer shall investigate allegations of abuse or decide whether or not a child has been abused.

Allegations of abuse must always be taken seriously. If a child says or indicates they are being abused or information is obtained which gives concern that a child is being abused, the information must be responded to on the same day in line with the following procedure:-

#### **Response should be:-**

- React calmly so as not to frighten the child.
- Listen to the child and take what they say seriously. Do not show disbelief.
- Reassure the child they are not to blame and are right to tell someone.
- Be aware of interpreting what a child says, especially if they have learning or physical disabilities which affect their ability to communicate, or English is not their first language.
- Do not assume that the experience was bad or painful - it may have been neutral or even pleasurable.
- Avoid projecting your own reactions onto the child.

#### **The CPO's procedure for responding to concerns:-**

- Avoid asking any questions. If necessary only ask enough questions to gain basic information to establish the *possibility* that abuse may have occurred. Only use open-ended, non-leading questions e.g. Who? Where? When?
- Do not introduce personal information from either your own experiences or those of other children.

#### **Avoid:-**

- Panicking.
- Showing shock or distaste.
- Probing for more information than is offered.
- Speculating or making assumptions.
- Making negative comments about the person against whom the allegation has been made.

- Approaching the individual against whom the allegation has been made.
- Making promises or agreeing to keep secrets and giving a guarantee of confidentiality

### **Observation/Information from an individual or agency:-**

A concern or possible abuse of a child may be observed by another child or adult and information can come from an individual or another agency/organisation.

Where there is uncertainty about what to do with the information, directly from a child's disclosure or from someone else, the Club's CPO must firstly be consulted for advice on the appropriate course of action.

If the Club's CPO is unavailable, or an immediate response is required, the police and social work services must be consulted for advice. They have a statutory responsibility for the protection of children and they may already hold other concerning information about the child. Record any advice given.

### **If you are concerned about the *immediate* safety of the child:-**

- Take whatever action is required to ensure the child's immediate safety.
- Pass the information immediately to the police and seek their advice.

### **Record:-**

The CPO, or relevant party, should make a written record of the information as soon as possible using the Protection Incident Record form, completing as much of the form as possible. The following information will help the police and social work department decide what action to take next:-

- Child's name, age and date of birth.
- Child's home address and telephone number.
- Any times, dates or other relevant information.
- Whether the person making the report is expressing their own concern or the concerns of another person.
- The child's account, if it can be given, of what has happened and how any injuries occurred *using the child's own words*.
- The nature of the concern (include all of the information obtained during the initial account e.g. time, date, location).
- A description of any visible (when normally dressed) injuries or bruising, behavioural signs,

indirect signs (do not physically examine the child).

- Details of any witnesses.
  - Whether the child's parents/carers have been informed.
  - Details of anyone else who has been consulted and the information obtained from them.
  - If it is not the child making the report, whether the child has been spoken to, if so what was said *using the child's own words*.
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- Write things down as soon as possible.

If completing the form electronically, do not save copies to the hard drive, disk or pen drive for confidentiality purposes.

Print a copy, sign and date and then delete immediately.

Pass the record to social work services or the police and to the SYFA NPO that same day, if possible.

### **Sharing Concerns with Parents/Carers:-**

Where there are concerns that the parents/carers may be responsible for or have knowledge of the abuse, sharing concerns with the parents/carers may place the child at further risk. In such cases advice must always firstly be sought from the police or social work services as to who informs the parents/carers.

### **Concerns about the Conduct of an official or coach or volunteer:-**

This section relates to the procedure to be followed where the concern is about the conduct of Club official, coach or volunteer.

These procedures aim to ensure that all concerns about the conduct of an official, coach or volunteer are dealt with in a timely, appropriate and proportionate manner. No official, coach or volunteer in receipt of information that causes concern about the conduct of another official, coach or volunteer towards children shall keep that information to himself or herself, or attempt to deal with the matter on their own.

In the event of an investigation into the conduct of an official, coach or volunteer:-

- Club official, coach or volunteer will be made aware of the nature of concern or complaint.
- Where the concern is about possible child abuse, advice will firstly be taken from the police as to what can be said to the official, coach or volunteer.

- The official, coach or volunteer will be given an opportunity to put forward their case.
- The Club will act in good faith, and will ensure the matter is dealt with impartially and as quickly as possible in the circumstances.

In all cases where there are concerns about the conduct of a Club official, coach or volunteer towards children, the welfare of the child will be the paramount consideration.

### **Initial Reporting of Concerns:-**

Any concerns for the welfare of a child arising from the conduct of a Club official, coach or volunteer must be reported to the Club's CPO on day the concern arises, or as soon as practically possible.

Where the concern is about the Club's Child Protection Officer, it should be reported to the Club's Secretary and the SYFA's NPO immediately.

### **Responding:-**

All subsequent actions taken and reasons for decisions shall be recorded (in the order in which they happened) on the Protection Incident Record Form.

This should be signed and dated by the Club's CPO, or the person appointed to manage the response to the concerns.

Where disciplinary procedures are invoked, a written record will be made of all actions and reasons for decision. Guidance on the storage, sharing and retention of such records is contained in the relevant procedure.

### **Establishing the Basic Facts:-**

Once the concerns have been reported, the Club's CPO will:

- Establish the basic facts.
- Conduct an initial assessment of the facts in order to determine the appropriate course of action.
- Consult another Club official, coach or volunteer and/or external agencies such as the police and social work services, for advice at any time. This is important because they may hold other important information which, when considered alongside the current concerns, builds a significant picture of concern.

### **Conducting the Initial Assessment:-**

The Club's CPO will conduct the initial assessment and may approach SYFA NPO at this point for advice and guidance.

The purpose of the initial assessment is to clarify the nature and context of the concerns. It should determine whether there is reasonable cause to suspect or believe that a child or young person has been abused/ harmed or is at risk of abuse or harm. Every situation is unique so guidance cannot be prescriptive.

- Where the established facts support a concern about possible breaches of the Club's code of conduct/abuse, the initial assessment will not form part of the disciplinary investigation. The SYFA should be notified at this point.
- Subject to the nature and seriousness of the situation, if it is not clear at this stage whether a criminal offence may have been committed, the Club official, coach or volunteer may be approached as part of the information gathering process.
- Where the nature and seriousness of the information suggests that a criminal offence may have been committed, or that to assess the facts may jeopardise evidence, advice will be sought from the police before the Club official, coach or volunteer is approached.
- An initial assessment of the basic facts may require the need to ask a child(ren) some basic, open-ended, non-leading questions solely with a view to clarifying the basic facts. It may also be necessary to ask similar basic questions of other children, or other appropriate individuals.
- Interviewing children about possible abuse and criminal offences is the sole remit of specially trained police officers and social workers. Questioning of children by those conducting an initial assessment should always be avoided as far as possible. If it is necessary to speak to the child in order to clarify the basic facts, best practice suggests that consent from the parent be obtained.

Possible outcomes of initial assessment:-

- (i) No further action (facts do not substantiate complaint)
- (ii) Situation is dealt with under the Club's disciplinary procedures
- (iii) Child protection investigation (jointly by police and social work services).
- (iv) Criminal investigation (by the police). The results of a criminal investigation may well influence the disciplinary investigation, but not in all cases.

(v) Civil proceedings (by the child/family who alleged abuse).

**Initial assessment supports concerns about poor practice and/or misconduct (but not possible child abuse):-**

The Club's Executive Committee and CPO will deal with the situation in line with the Club's disciplinary procedures.

Pending the outcome of any investigation conducted under the Club's disciplinary procedures, precautionary suspension will be considered in all cases where there is significant concern about the conduct of an official, coach or volunteer towards children. The welfare of children will be the paramount concern in such circumstances.

Where the circumstances meet the referral criteria set out in the Protection of Vulnerable Groups (Scotland) Act 2007, the Club must notify the SYFA who will assist with the fulfilment of the Club's legal duty to make a referral to Disclosure Scotland.

**Initial assessment supports concerns about possible child abuse:-**

Where the initial assessment of information gives reasonable cause to suspect or believe possible child abuse, the Club's CPO will refer the concerns to the police and/or social work services as soon as possible on the day the information is received.

The Club's CPO will make a written record of the name and designation of the social worker or the police officer to whom the concerns were passed together with the time and date of the call, in case any follow up is required.

Referrals to the police/social work services will be confirmed in writing by the Club's CPO within 24 hours. A copy of the Protection Incident Record Form will be provided to the police/ social work services upon request.

Appropriate steps will be taken to ensure the safety of the child(ren) or who may be at risk. The parents/carers of the child(ren) involved will be informed as soon as possible following advice from the police/social work services.

Advice will firstly be obtained from the police/social work services about informing the Club official, coach or volunteer involved in the concerns. If the advice is to inform the official, coach or volunteer, they will be told that information has been received which may suggest an allegation of abuse. As the matter will be under judicial consideration, no details will be given unless advised by the police. All actions will ensure the best evidence is preserved for any possible criminal proceedings, while at the same time safeguarding the rights of the official,

coach or volunteer.

### **Precautionary Suspension:-**

Suspension is not a form of disciplinary action. The Club official, coach or volunteer involved may be suspended whilst an investigation is carried out.

Suspension will be carried out in accordance with the Club's disciplinary procedures. At the suspension interview, the Club official, coach or volunteer will be informed of the reason for suspension (within the confines of sharing information) and given the opportunity to make a statement – which will be recorded – should they wish to do so.

Notification of the suspension and the reasons will be conveyed in writing to the Club official, coach or volunteer in accordance with the Club's disciplinary procedures.

### **Disciplinary Investigation:-**

An ongoing criminal investigation does not necessarily rule out disciplinary action. However, any action taken must not jeopardise the criminal investigation. Advice must be taken from the police on this. Sufficient information should be available to enable the club's CPO and Executive Committee to make a decision whether to go ahead with disciplinary action.

### **False or Malicious Allegations:-**

In exceptional circumstances where an investigation establishes an allegation is false, unfounded or malicious:-

- The Club official, coach or volunteer involved will receive an account of the circumstances and/or investigation and a letter confirming the conclusion of the matter. They may wish to seek legal advice.
- All records pertaining to the circumstances and investigation should be kept in accordance with the Club's data retention policy.
- The Club will take all reasonable steps to support the individual in this situation.
- In these circumstances, the SYFA will review the child's participation in football. It may be appropriate to have a discussion with the child (with parental/carer permission).
- Data collected for the investigation will be destroyed in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998.

### **Historical Allegations of Abuse:-**

Allegations of abuse may be made some time after the event, e.g. an adult who was abused as a child by someone who is still currently working with children. These procedures will be



followed in the event of an allegation of historical abuse.

Protection of Vulnerable Groups (Scotland) Act 2007:-

The club, in partnership with the SYFA will refer to Disclosure Scotland the case of any Club official, coach or volunteer who (whether or not in the course of their role within the organisation) has:-

- harmed a child
- placed a child at risk of harm
- engaged in inappropriate conduct involving pornography
- engaged in inappropriate conduct of a sexual nature involving a child, or
- given inappropriate medical treatment to a child.

**AND** as a result:

1. The Club has advised the Club official, coach or volunteer that their services are no longer required (“dismissed”).
2. The Club official, coach or volunteer would have been dismissed as a result of the incident had they not resigned.

The Club will also refer the case of a Club official, coach or volunteer where information becomes available after the Club official, coach or volunteer has:-

- been dismissed by the Club
- resigned,

If Disclosure Scotland informs the Club that an individual is barred, that Club official, coach or volunteer will be removed from working with children immediately in line with the Protection of Vulnerable Groups (Scotland) Act 2007.