**Purpose And Aim**

The aim of this procedure is to provide detailed guidance to Irish American Football Association (IAFA) members, as well as to children and young people who may experience bullying, so that they will know what to do if an incident of bullying occurs between children and young people.

The procedure also aims to ensure that the IAFA responds fairly and consistently to incidents of bullying, recognising that those who bully often have needs too.

This procedure applies to all children and young people who attend association events and association member events who may be bullied, behave in a bullying way towards others or observe someone being bullied.

It also applies to all staff and volunteers who observe bullying between children and young people within the IAFA, who may have incidents of bullying reported to them or who may be concerned that a child/young person is showing signs of being bullied.

If an adult is bullying a child/young person, this should be reported under the child protection procedures.

If a child or young person is bullying another child to the extent that it may cause significant harm, then it will also need to be dealt with under child protection procedures.

**Definition**

Bullying has been recognised and defined as deliberately hurtful behaviour usually repeated over a period of time, where it is difficult for those bullied to defend themselves. It can take many forms, but the three main types are physical (e.g. hitting, kicking, theft), verbal (e.g. racist or sectarian remarks, threats, name-calling) and emotional (e.g. isolating an individual from the activities and social acceptance of his peer group). The damage inflicted by bullying can frequently be underestimated. It can cause considerable distress to children, to the extent that it affects their health and development or, at the extreme, causes them significant harm (including self-harm).

*Co-Operating To Safeguard Children Chapter 9.48*

It can include:

* Verbal teasing or making fun of someone
* Excluding children from games and conversations
* Pressurising other children not to be friends with the person who is being bullied
* Spreading hurtful rumours or passing around inappropriate photographs/images/drawings
* Cyberbullying (i.e. using computers or mobile phones to bully someone)
* Shouting at someone
* Stealing or damaging someone’s possessions
* Making threats
* Forcing someone to do something embarrassing, harmful or dangerous
* Harassment on the basis of race, gender, sexuality or disability
* Physical or sexual assault (although all sexual incidents and all but very minor physical incidents constitute abuse and must be dealt with in accordance with child protection procedures).

**The Signs And Symptoms Of Bullying**

If someone is being bullied, they might not tell anyone directly. This could be because they have been threatened and are afraid to say anything or because they believe that nothing can be done about it and that telling someone will only make it worse. It could even be because they don’t recognise that what is happening to them is bullying.

Signs that someone may be being bullied could include:

* Being unhappy, withdrawn and unwilling to spend time in a group, especially during unstructured periods e.g. break time
* Being without friends
* Missing meetings and activities at their club/IAFA and/or expressing a reluctance to attend
* Being clingy with adults
* Appearing to lose possessions or money (things that may have really been stolen by or given away to bullies)
* Unexplained injuries
* Uncharacteristic illness or aggression.

Some of these signs might also indicate abuse at the hands of adults or other negative experiences, so they should be treated with caution.

**What To Do If You Are Being Bullied**

If you are being bullied, you should never keep it to yourself. Tell someone you trust. This could be a club coach, the club/IAFA child protection officer, any member of your club/IAFA board or someone else. It could also be your parent or carer. You may prefer to tell another young person first and ask that person to help you tell an adult.

**What To Do If You Observe A Child Or Young Person Being Bullied Or If Someone Tells You He/She Is Being Bullied**

If you are a child or young person and someone tells you that he or she is being bullied, don’t try to deal with it yourself. Talk to the person about getting help from an adult. Try to persuade him or her to go with you to explain the situation to a club coach, the club/IAFA child protection officer, any member of your club/IAFA board or someone else you trust. If he/she won’t do this, the best way to help is to explain that you will have to tell an adult yourself - and then go ahead and tell someone.

If you are an adult and a child tells you that he or she is being bullied, take the child seriously. Do not tell him/her to stop being silly or to keep out of the way of the bullies. This will not help and will make the child feel let down and less inclined to tell anyone else. Listen to the child’s full account of what is going on and take appropriate action – report the incident to your club/IAFA child protection officer.

If you observe the bullying directly, act assertively to put a stop to it. Explain to all concerned that the incident will have to be reported properly to stop it happening again. Unless the incident is minor and can be dealt with informally, the child’s parent or carer should be informed within one working day by the club/IAFA child protection officer. If possible, there should be a three-way meeting between the child, the club/IAFA child protection officer and the parent/carer.

If the bullying is taking place in another environment (e.g. school), the club/IAFA child protection officer should ask what support the parent and child would like, in order to engage with whoever the responsible agencies might be. The club/IAFA child protection officer should aim to work in partnership with both parent and child and any other people who may be involved.

If the bullying is taking place within the IAFA, at club or national level, the parent and child should be reassured that it will be dealt with as a priority and should be asked for their views on what would be helpful to deal with the situation.

The club/IAFA child protection officer, having spoken to the child who has been bullied and the child’s parent/carer, should also speak to the bully (or bullies) and obtain their account of what has happened or is happening. This should be noted in writing and the parents/carers of the bully (or bullies) should be informed. The bully and his or her parents/carers should be asked for their views on what should be done to put a stop to any further bullying and to repair the damage that has been done.

Apart from very minor incidents that have been directly observed and dealt with at the time, all bullying that takes place should be discussed within the club/IAFA staff group within five working days. At the meeting, the bullying incident should be discussed, and the details of a draft plan drawn up to address the situation, taking into account any suggestions made by the children involved and their parents/carers.

The following areas should be covered:

* Details of any apology that has been or should be offered by the bully (or bullies)
* Details of any support for the person who has been bullied e.g. use of buddy scheme, extra input from the club/IAFA, referral to another service
* Details of any consequences for the bully in addition to making an apology
* Details of any support for the bully, with reference to the behaviour code
* Details of any further discussions or work to be done with others in the group, including children who may have observed or encouraged the bullying
* Details of any changes in how the staff group may handle issues of bullying in future.

The plan should be shared with the children concerned and their parents and should be reviewed regularly.

This procedure should be reviewed every two years.

Date of last review:

Date of next review:

The person responsible for reviewing it is: