

IRL SAFEGUARDING (CHILDREN & VULNERABLE PEOPLE) POLICY

1. INTRODUCTION

IRL is committed to the safeguarding of children and vulnerable people. Rugby league strives to create an environment where all children, young and vulnerable people can enjoy, achieve, feel safe, learn important values such as tolerance and fair-play, develop a healthy way of life, as well as contributing to their social inclusion, education and personal development. They have a right to protection, safety and respect. At all times the welfare of these groups is paramount. A child's rights are enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

This policy has been developed based on research and reports published by several leading organisations in the field of safeguarding children and vulnerable people, including UNICEF, the UK National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children's 'International Safeguards for Children in Sport' framework and the European Commission's Expert Group on Good Governance's guidelines on safeguarding children's rights in sport, and following structured workshops involving IRL members. IRL recognises that the most effective safeguarding policies will be developed by its Members in line with national legislation but contends that the following guidelines should be respected by all organisations involved in children's and vulnerable people's rugby league activities. They reflect international declarations, the 1989 UNCRC, national and international legislation, government guidance, existing child protection / safeguarding standards and good practice developed by the sports sector.

2. DEFINITIONS

- **Abuse** refers to the acts of commission or omission (including neglect) that lead to a child experiencing harm including but not limited to:
 - Emotional: the on-going emotional maltreatment of a child. This includes humiliating, shouting or threatening a child
 - Physical: actual or potential physical harm perpetrated by another person, adult or child. It may involve hitting, shaking, drowning and burning. Physical harm may also be caused when a child is given an inappropriate training programme or is forced to participate with an injury
 - Sexual: involves any sexual activity where consent is not or cannot be given. It involves forcing or coercing a child to take part in sexual activities. The activities may involve physical contact (e.g. penetrative or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, inappropriate behaviour via social media (e.g., sexting), watching sexual activities, or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways
 - A failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, which is likely to result in the impairment of a child's healthy physical, spiritual, moral and mental development. It includes the failure to properly supervise and protect children from harm





- **Child** refers to anyone who has not reached the age of eighteen years [as per UNCRC article 1]
- **Harm** refers to the negative psychological, physical or social impact or consequences upon the child of those actions
- **Member** refers to a national governing body which has been accepted as a Full Member, Affiliate Member or Observer Member of the IRL and is in compliance with the IRL Membership Policy
- **Safeguarding** refers to the actions we take to ensure all children and vulnerable people are safe from harm when involved in our clubs, teams and activities
- **Violence** refers to “all forms of physical or mental violence, injury and abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse” [UNCRC article 19]
- **Vulnerable People** refers to those without protection, who as a result can be easily hurt physically or emotionally

3. POLICY AIMS

- (i) Help create a safe rugby league environment for children and vulnerable people wherever they participate and at whatever level.
- (ii) Provide a benchmark to assist the IRL and IRL Members – their staff, volunteers, players and officials - to make informed decisions.

4. UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES

- (i) All children and vulnerable people have the right to participate, enjoy and develop through sport, in a safe and inclusive environment, free from all forms of Abuse, Violence, neglect and exploitation.
- (ii) Children and vulnerable people have the right to have their voices heard and listened to. They need to know who they can turn to when they have a concern about their participation in sport.
- (iii) Everyone, organisations and individuals, service providers and funders, has a responsibility to support the care and protection of young and vulnerable people.
- (iv) The IRL and its Members, in providing sports activities to children, young and vulnerable people, have a duty of care to them. This duty of care is to ensure the safety and welfare of anyone involved in IRL or related activities, to safeguard them and protect them from foreseeable forms of Harm.
- (v) There are certain factors that leave some children more vulnerable to abuse, and steps need to be taken to address this.
- (vi) Children have a right to be involved in shaping safeguarding policy and practice.
- (vii) The IRL and its Members should always act in the best interests of the Child.
- (viii) Everyone has the right to be treated with dignity and respect and not be discriminated against based on gender, race, age, ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation, beliefs, religious or political affiliation.
- (ix) The processes and activities for the creation, development and implementation of safeguarding measures should be inclusive.





5. RECOGNISING AND RESPONDING TO SAFEGUARDING CONCERNS

(i) Roles and responsibilities:

- The IRL staff and relevant tournament director are responsible for implementing this policy
- Any Member, including all individuals, clubs, leagues, societies, associations and other agencies involved with that Member, without its own safeguarding policy is expected to adhere to this policy
- The IRL and its Members shall listen to children and respect and promote their rights, wishes and feelings
- Members should seek to develop their own safeguarding policies in line with national legislation and guidelines

(ii) Step by step operational processes to implement policy:

- Ensure children know their rights and are encouraged to report any incidents
- Prior to any youth or vulnerable people rugby league event the policy will be disseminated to all participants and their parents / carers either directly or through the relevant Member
- Empower children and vulnerable people through regular consultations, both individually and part of a group.
- Following any event children and vulnerable people will be asked if they felt safe, both in terms of the people involved in the event and the activities

(iii) Processing complaints:

- Contact details of the safeguarding officer (see below) made available to children and parents / carers
- The complainant will complete the "reporting an incident" form registering the incident or allegation. If the complaint is reported verbally by a child, the child should be re-assured and believed
- Complainants should have the option to report an incident to an officer of the same sex if requested
- If a complaint is of a sexual nature do not let the child or vulnerable person wash until the incident has been passed onto the police as evidence may be destroyed
- The IRL records the complaint on the case management system
- Assess the allegation and its seriousness. This assessment should be made initially by the case management group, consisting of an IRL staff member and other colleagues, as quickly as possible following the receipt of the complaint
- Interviews conducted, preferably face to face. At this stage, any witnesses should be asked to personally sign any statements for the record
- Depending on the assessment, consider contacting external organisations or public authorities (child protection agencies, police etc.) to inform them, seek specialist advice or hand the case over to them
- The burden of proof will be up to the IRL to establish, and the standard of proof in all cases is greater than a mere balance of probability but less than proof beyond a reasonable doubt
- Consider issuing a temporary suspension order in the form of a letter to the individual or individuals concerned and the parent organisation while the investigation is taking place. The parent organisation should not be informed of





- the details behind the temporary suspension order at this time, to preserve confidentiality
- Any measure or sanction taken should respect proportionality. The following factors should be taken into consideration when determining proportionality: the nature and severity of the violations; the number of violations; any other relevant circumstances
 - Any suspension (temporary or permanent) will be open to appeal. Appeals process will follow the process detailed in the Misconduct section of the IRL Operational Rules
- (iv) Support victims at all times.
- (v) Provide children and vulnerable people with info on their rights and safeguarding:
- The policy is publicly available on the IRL website
 - The policy will be disseminated to all participating organisations who will be required to inform children participating in rugby league events
- (vi) Information is made available to children and parents / carers about the steps following disclosure / complaints etc.
- (vii) Organise awareness literature highlighting various forms of physical and mental violence that may happen.
- (viii) All incidents, allegations and complaints are recorded and stored correctly
- (ix) Consult with children, carers and parents on response system and investigation.
- (x) Providing support to staff involved in incidents.
- (xi) Contact established at national level with child protection agencies or NGOs.

6. MINIMISING RISKS

- (i) Some people pose a risk to children, vulnerable people, employees or volunteers.
- (ii) People appointed to manage children should have the relevant clearance issued by their national safeguarding authority. This will prevent unsuitable people from working with vulnerable groups, including children.
- (iii) No Child should be left alone:
- After training or a match, or at any meeting point
 - No adult should enter a child's room unaccompanied or accompany a Child alone
- (iv) Age-inappropriate activities, over-training, unrealistic or inappropriate expectations etc. should be prevented:
- Children, parents / carers and medical practitioners consent to participation where some level of risk is perceived i.e. a child playing against adults
- (v) Risk assessment conducted for activities, transport, accommodation:
- Develop risk assessment for tournament environments, including medical arrangements
 - Ratio of supervising adults to children in their care – one adult is not acceptable. Minimum of two adults for a group of up to 16 children, then one adult per eight children thereafter
 - Implement the safeguards described below
- (vi) Guidance around overnight stays and trips:
- Attending staff and their roles clearly identified
 - All travel arrangements concluded and communicated clearly well in advance
 - Subsistence has been arranged including nutritious foods





- Emergency contacts for children and vulnerable people [with parents / carers] have been collated
- Room allocation properly considered [see 7(v)], including prevention of children sharing with over 18s, including young adults where possible
- Member officials must refrain from drinking alcohol until they are off duty

7. BEHAVIOUR

- (i) Codes of conduct developed for all participant levels:
 - Youth and physical disability events include specific codes of conduct for players and staff
 - The code will clearly state that discrimination, oppression, inappropriate intimate touching is unacceptable; outline what constitutes a 'breach of trust' and acceptable levels of physical contact; and conduct expected between children, including information on bullying.
- (ii) Standards of behaviour set the benchmark of acceptability. Job descriptions, even for volunteers, should include statements about treating people with dignity, respect, sensitivity and fairness.
- (iii) No phones switched on or devices with cameras in dressing room when children are present.
- (iv) Adults should not have friends on social media sites who are children or maintained social media contact, such as texting or instant messaging with children unless they are family members or it can be justified, such as a team page or specifically related to an appropriate event; or post videos of children on any social media platform without the child's and parent's / carer's express permission.
- (v) No adult should ever share a room or shower / bath with a child, allow or engage in inappropriate touching; make sexually suggestive comments to a child; engage in physical horseplay with a child or vulnerable person.
- (vi) Assume positive ways of managing the behaviour of children that do not involve physical punishment or any other form of degrading or humiliating treatment, and are age and gender appropriate.
- (vii) Monitor acceptable behaviour between children, including identifying bullying.
- (viii) Staff and volunteers demonstrate clear commitment to expectations.
- (ix) There are clear consequences for inappropriate behaviour.
- (x) Everyone involved in IRL activities is aware of this policy, have been background checked:
 - In the case of international events, the relevant child protection agency has been informed and any relevant national legislation considered

8. MONITORING / EVALUATION

- (i) Regular consultation with children, parents / carers on the effectiveness of measures:
 - After each event children and parents / carers will be invited to complete a questionnaire in which they can highlight how safe they felt
 - Children will be asked what suggestions they might have to improve IRL practices surrounding safeguarding
- (ii) Practical systems to monitor response to safeguarding concerns, minimizing risk, written guidelines on acceptable behaviour, recruitment and training of staff and volunteers.





9. DELIVERABLES

	Pillar	Description
C	Cultural sensitivity	Adapt safeguards to your context
H	Holistic	Are the safeguards integrated into everything you do?
I	Incentives	Are there clear reasons for people to work towards the safeguards?
L	Leadership	Do the leaders in your organisation publicly support the safeguards in this policy?
D	Dynamic	Do you review your safeguards regularly?
R	Resources	Are you effectively using available resources?
E	Engaging stakeholders	Do you work effectively with all groups in your organisations?
N	Networks	Are you building relationships with organisations who can help you work towards safeguards?

While international events will be governed by territorial jurisdiction, and members' own safeguarding policies should include national advice and emergency contacts, as a UK company the IRL recommends that any expert guidance necessary should be sought through the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children:

help@nspcc.org.uk

Helpline: [0808 800 5000](tel:08088005000)

For safeguarding concerns within the IRL please contact danny.kazandjian@intrl.sport

