



ADULT SAFEGUARDING POLICY- for Vulnerable Adults with a Disability

2025-2027



Irish Rugby Football Union

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www.irishrugby.com   



This policy of the Irish Rugby Football Union will be updated every 2-years.

IRFU Adult Safeguarding Policy

For this policy “Adult safeguarding” is working with adults with care and support needs to keep them safe from abuse or neglect.

The IRFU adult safeguarding policy applies to an adult who:

- is a person with a disability aged 18 or over and
- is experiencing, or is at risk of, abuse or neglect
- is unable to protect themselves from either the risk of, or the experience of, abuse or neglect, as a result of care and support needs

*A glossary of terms and useful contact number are on pages 8,9 & 10

Adult Safeguarding Statement

The IRFU recognises that health, well-being, ability, disability and need for care and support can affect a person’s resilience. We recognise that some people experience barriers, for example, to communication in raising concerns or seeking help. We recognise that these factors can vary at different points in people’s lives.

The IRFU recognises that we have a duty of care to safeguard vulnerable adults with a disability that have needs for care and support and for protecting those who are unable to take action to protect themselves. IRFU will act in accordance with the relevant safeguarding adult legislation and with local statutory safeguarding procedures.

The Irish Rugby Football Union is committed to creating and maintaining a safe and positive environment and accepts our responsibility to safeguard the welfare of “adults at risk” involved in rugby.

The IRFU believes everyone has the right to live free from abuse or neglect regardless of age, ability or disability, sex, race, religion, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, marital or gender status.

The IRFU is committed to creating and maintaining a safe and positive environment and an open, listening culture where people feel able to share concerns without fear of retribution.

The IRFU acknowledges that safeguarding is everybody’s responsibility and is committed to prevent abuse and neglect through safeguarding the welfare of all involved.

Actions taken by the IRFU will be consistent with the principles of adult safeguarding ensuring that any action taken is prompt, proportionate and that it includes and respects the voice of the adult concerned.

The IRFU expects those involved within all adult rugby to adopt and supervise the implementation of these safeguarding principles and standards. The IRFU recognises that implementation is an ongoing process. It is committed to the implementation of this Adult Safeguarding Policy to keep “adults at risk” involved in rugby safe from harm.

Information is based on guidelines from Safeguarding Vulnerable Persons at Risk of abuse - HSE (Ireland), Adult Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults - DHSSPSNI (Northern Ireland) and Safeguarding Adults in Sport and Activity - Ann Craft Trust (UK).

This Adult Safeguarding Policy will be reviewed in August 2027, or as soon as practicable after there has been a material change in any matter to which the statement refers. For queries, please contact David McKay, david.mckay@irfu.ie

IRFU is committed to this policy adult safeguarding and, by working under the guidance of our staff, both volunteers and employed, working with “adults at risk”, throughout the organisation, seek to create a safe environment for all adults to grow and develop within sport. The following set of principles should be adhered to:

Safeguarding Objectives

- Meet the required standards for safeguarding for adults with disabilities in Ireland & Northern Ireland.
- Maintain a robust case management system and disciplinary process for rugby.
- Ensure well trained and informed staff and volunteers in relation to safeguarding topics and issues.
- Ensure “adults at risk” are listened to, ensuring their experiences of rugby are safe and enjoyable.

Compliance with Safeguarding Policy & Guidance

- The IRFU’s Disability Chair, who shall be appointed on an annual basis to the Spirit Committee, oversees this policy. They will be assisted by the Spirit of Rugby team, including the National Disability & Inclusion Officer and Branch Welfare Officers.
- The IRFU will monitor compliance with and alleged breaches of this policy and will discuss same when necessary for the benefit, protection and information of adults at risk, Players and where appropriate their legal guardian where it is permissible and reasonable.
- The IRFU will implement its ‘Case Management Policy’ to review breaches of the policy and ensure adults at risk protection and welfare issues are correctly reported. It will also ensure existing disciplinary, complaints and appeals procedures of the IRFU will be regularly reviewed to accommodate the implementation and enforcement of this Code.
- The IRFU will review its Adult Safeguarding Policy every 2-years and/or as legislative changes occur in Ireland and/or Northern Ireland
- It is the role and responsibility of all those working with adults at risk to make sure this policy implemented and monitored successfully.

Types of Abuse or Neglect

Defining abuse or neglect is complex and rests on many factors. The term “abuse” can be subject to wide interpretation. It may be physical, verbal or psychological, it may be an act of neglect, or occur where an adult is persuaded to enter into a financial or sexual transaction to which they have not or cannot consent to.

Abuse or neglect may be the result of deliberate intent, negligence or ignorance. Exploitation can be a common theme in the experience of abuse or neglect. Whilst it is acknowledged that abuse or neglect can take different forms, below are examples of abuse or neglect:

Physical abuse

- Including assault, hitting, slapping, pushing, misuse of medication, restraint or inappropriate physical sanctions.

Sexual abuse

- Including rape, indecent exposure, sexual harassment, inappropriate looking or touching, sexual teasing or innuendo, sexual photography, subjection to pornography or witnessing sexual acts, indecent exposure and sexual assault or sexual acts to which the adult has not consented or was pressured into consenting.

Emotional abuse

- Including threats of harm or abandonment, deprivation of contact, humiliation, blaming, controlling, intimidation, coercion, harassment, verbal abuse, cyber bullying, isolation or unreasonable and unjustified withdrawal of services or supportive networks.

Neglect and acts of omission

- Including ignoring medical, emotional or physical care needs, failure to provide access to appropriate health, care and support or educational services, the withholding of the necessities of life, such as medication, adequate nutrition and heating.

Self-neglect

- This covers a wide range of behaviour neglecting to care for one's personal hygiene, health or surroundings.

Other forms of abuse not covered in this policy can be found here:

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/socialcare/safeguardingvulnerableadults/safeguardingvuladts.html>
and <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/recognising-adult-abuse-exploitation-and-neglect>

Signs and indicators of abuse and neglect

Abuse can take place in any context and by any type of person. Abuse may be inflicted by anyone in the organisation who an individual comes into contact with. Additionally club members, workers, volunteers or coaches may suspect that an individual is being abused or neglected outside of a club setting. There are many signs and indicators that may suggest someone is being abused or neglected. These include but are not limited to the below examples:

- Unexplained bruises or injuries – or lack of medical attention when an injury is present.
- Person has belongings or money going missing.
- Someone losing or gaining weight / an unkempt appearance.
- A change in the behaviour or confidence of a person.
- Evidence of self-harm.
- Fear or anxiety of a particular group or individual.
- Person telling you / another person that they are being abused – i.e., a disclosure.

These concerns can be one off events or repeated behavior over period of time and any staff or volunteers witnessing the above should report their concerns.

REMEMBER you are not accusing or making a decision. It is not the responsibility of staff/volunteers to decide whether or not abuse has taken place. It is important however, that they report any concerns/suspensions to the appropriate person.

What to do with your concerns

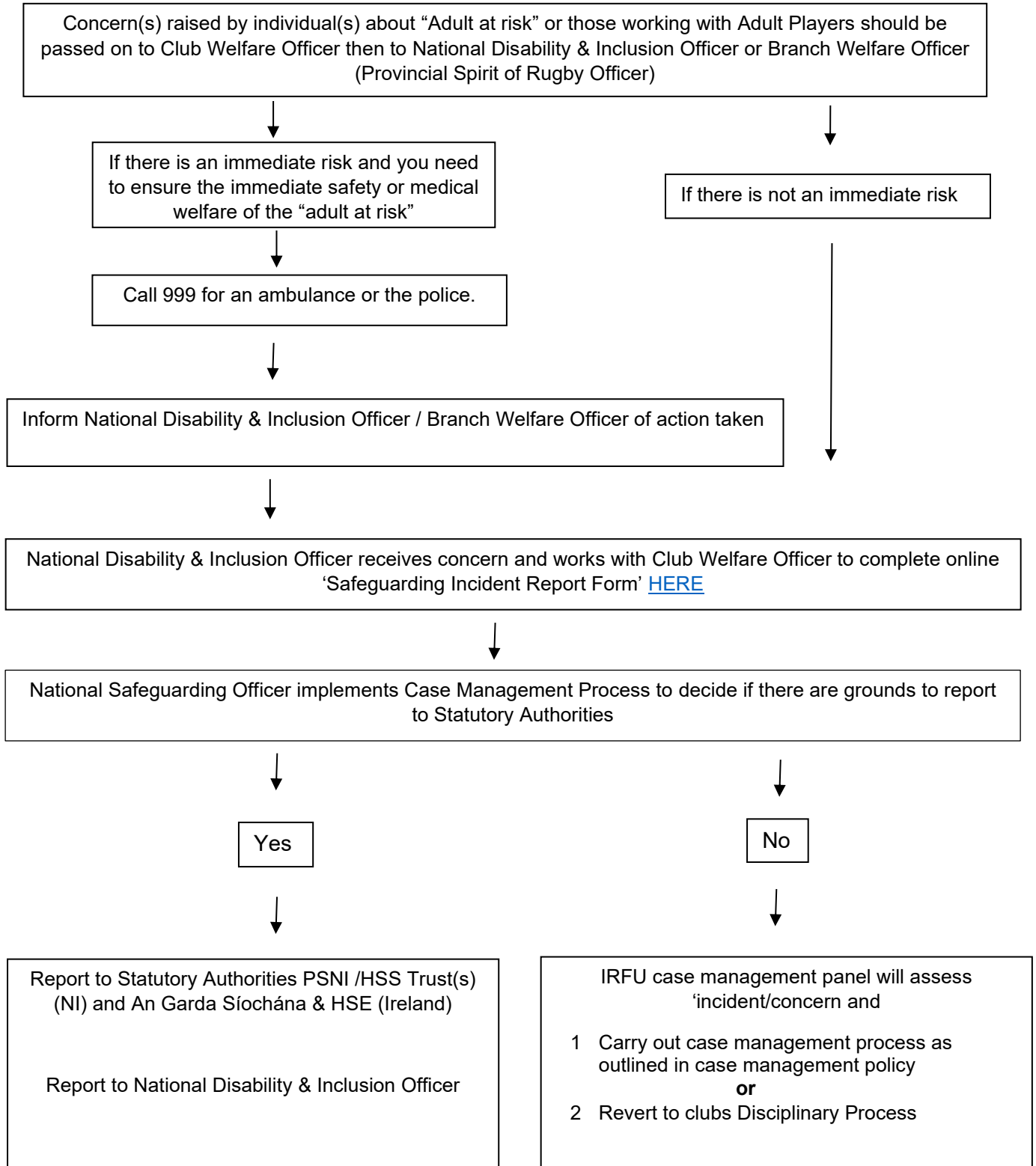
Organisation members, staff and volunteers are not expected to be an expert in recognition of a safeguarding concern; however, all adults working, volunteering and participating have a duty of care to be vigilant and respond appropriately to suspicions of poor practice, abuse or bullying. They should also respond to any indication of abuse that may be occurring outside of the organisational setting.

This does not mean that it is your responsibility to decide if a situation is poor practice, abuse or bullying, but it is your responsibility to report your concerns to the Club Welfare Officer who will use the safeguarding reporting form.

Do you have concerns about an adult?

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.

If you have concerns about an adult's safety and or wellbeing in your care you must act on these, It is not your responsibility to decide whether or abuse has taken place. It is important however, that you report any concerns/suspicions to the appropriate person.



Responding to Adult Safeguarding Concerns

There are some key responsibilities and actions for anyone who identifies the possibility of abuse or neglect. These responsibilities must be addressed as soon as the concern is raised.

- Immediate protection - Take any immediate actions to safeguard anyone at immediate risk of harm, including summoning medical assistance.
- Speak to the adult wherever it is safe to do so – get the views of the adult on the concern or incident and see what they would like to happen next. Listen to what they have to say, and ensure they are given the support they need from local help system in the area e.g., Adult Safeguarding Team
- Detection and prevention of crime - Where there is evidence a criminal offence has taken place, or a crime may be about to be committed, contact the Police or Garda Síochána immediately.
- Report and inform - Report to Adult Protection Gateway Services (NI) or safeguarding and protection Teams (ROI) and National Disability & Inclusion Officer as soon as possible, and in all circumstances on the same day as the concern is raised.

Dealing with a concern in the club

Some concerns may not involve Statutory Authorities; however, the complaint may require a response. In such cases all adults have a responsibility to protect at risk adults from harm. Should you witness or receive information that leads you to believe that a serious breach of this Safeguarding Policy has occurred, you should bring the matter to the attention of the Club Welfare Officer.

- You are not to discuss the matter with people not already involved.
- The IRFU Case Management process will be implemented.
- Complete online safeguarding incident report form and submit it to National Safeguarding Officer.
- Club Welfare Officer with support from the National Disability Officer will in some cases deal with the concern using a safeguarding disciplinary panel to decide if codes of conduct have been breached.
- National Safeguarding Officer will work with National Disability Officer to share details of concerns and actions where appropriate.
- Clubs or Branches should not carry out their own internal investigations until directed by IRFU case management panel.

Data Protection

All safeguarding documents will be kept according to, or each case of any amending legislation, the requirements of the Irish Data Protection Act 1988, the amended act 2003, and the UK Data Protection Act 1998; and the Privacy and Electronic Communications Directive 2009/136/EC and the General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679 ("GDPR"). This includes requirements for the collecting, storage and requests of personal data. For general information on Data Protection consult the Data Protection Commissioner's Irish web site on www.dataprotectionact.ie or the UK Information Commissioner's web site www.ico.gov.uk

Exclusion in data protection includes:

Information about a data subject, which would be likely to affect the way crime is detected or prevented, catching or prosecuting offenders, the assessment of taxes or duty, need not be made available. There are also specific rules on information, which reveals the name of a third party (i.e., any other person mentioned in the data such as, for example, the name of a spouse or dependent).

Contacts for All Concerns

National Disability & Inclusion Officer

David McKay: david.mckay@irfu.ie

Branch Welfare Officer(s)

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- Connacht - Laura Scuffil: laura.scuffil@connachtrugby.ie
- Leinster – Billy Phelan: billy.phelan@leinsterrugby.ie
- Munster – Emily O’Leary: emilyoleary@munsterrugby.ie
- Ulster – Kerry Spence: kerry.spence@ulsterrugby.com

National Safeguarding Officer

Stephen Gore: stephen.gore@irfu.ie

Useful Contact

If you are in Northern Ireland (NI): Adult Protection Gateway Services

Health and Social Care Trust

Telephone: (Monday to Friday between 9.00am and 5.00pm)

Email: (Monitored Monday to Friday – 9.00am to 5.00pm)

Belfast	028 9504 1744	adultsguarddutydesk@belfasttrust.hscni.net
Northern	028 94413659	randal.mchugh@northerntrust.hscni.net
South Eastern	028 9250 1227	adultprotectiongatewayteam@setrust.hscni.net
Southern	028 3756 4423	adultsafeguard.team@southerntrust.hscni.net
Western	028 7161 1366	adultsafeguarding.referral@westerntrust.hscni.net

HSC Trust Regional Emergency Social Work Services - Out of Hours

Telephone – 028 9504 9999

Police Service Northern Ireland (PSNI)

In an emergency call: 999

To report your concerns, call: 101

If you are in Republic of Ireland (ROI): Safeguarding and protection Teams.

HSE Information Line

Monday to Saturday, 8am-8pm

Call Save: [1800 700 700](tel:1800700700)

Email: info@hse.ie

Regional Safeguarding & Protection Teams (by CHO / HSE Area)

https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/socialcare/safeguardingvulnerableadults/safeguardprotectteams.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Garda Síochána

In an emergency call: 999 or 112

For non-emergency or general enquiries, contact your nearest and/or local Garda Station.

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Glossary of terms for this Policy

“Abuse” includes physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, self-neglect and sexual abuse

“Branch”. “Branch Welfare Officer” is the spirit of rugby officer based in your province the person appointed by a Branch to implement the directions of the “National Safeguarding Officer”. This position will be held by the Spirit of Rugby Officer in each Branch.

“Club” means a club (including a school) affiliated to the IRFU.

“IRFU” means the Irish Rugby Football Union.

“National Disability Officer” is an employee of the IRFU with responsibility for adult safeguarding in relation to this Policy .

“National Safeguarding Officer” is the senior employee with responsibility for safeguarding within the organisation and who leads the implementation of the safeguarding directions of the Spirit Committee.

“Parents” includes legal guardians.

“Statutory Authorities” means in Ireland Health Service Executive (HSE) and An Garda Síochána (“Gardaí”) and in Northern Ireland the Health and Social Care Trust (HSCNI) and the Police Service of Northern Ireland (“PSNI”).

“Adult” is anyone aged 18 or over.

“Adult at Risk” is a person with a disability aged 18 or over

“Capacity” refers to the ability to make a decision at a particular time, for example when under considerable stress. The starting assumption must always be that a person has the capacity to make a decision unless it can be established that they lack capacity.