



FACT SHEET 28

A CLUB HEALTH CHECK

Every club involved with children and young people has a responsibility for their protection and well being – a duty of care. There are a number of measures that organisations should put in place to safeguard children from harm. Parents are encouraged to check when they are entrusting their children to the care of others that these essential safeguards are in place. How ready is your organisation to answer these questions?

Does your club have the following:

- A **child protection policy** and a **procedure** for what to do if there are concerns about a child's welfare. This should include having a **children's officer** for dealing with concerns or allegations of abuse and step by step guidance on what action to take.
- A rigorous **recruitment and selection** process for paid staff and for volunteers who work with children. This should include application forms, interviews, references and self-declaration forms. In Northern Ireland the Ulster Branch will use the Access NI Service and administer this service for clubs. (Please contact the U.B.T.I. for further information). In the Republic of Ireland Tennis Ireland will use the Garda Vetting service and administer this service for clubs.
- Adopt Tennis Ireland's **written code of conduct** which outlines good practice when working with children. An environment which allows bullying, shouting, sectarianism, racism, or sexism is not acceptable. There should be clear guidance about what behaviour is inappropriate in a relationship of trust between an adult and a young person. Specific guidance should be given where personal or intimate care tasks are carried out, for example with very young or disabled children.
- A **training** plan and regular opportunities for all those in contact with children to learn about child protection and about health and safety. Unless all staff have an awareness of cruelty to children, the harm it can cause and how to act on concerns, policies, however good, will not be acted upon. See Fact Sheet 1 for contact/course details.
- A **"Whistleblowing"** policy, that is, an open and well publicised way in which adults and young people can voice concerns about abusive or unethical conduct. It takes courage to challenge inappropriate behaviour by colleagues. When abuse occurs in organisations there is usually someone who had concerns, but may not have felt able to act on them.
- **Information** for young people and for parents about the child protection policy and where to go for help.
- **Ways of making sure** that the safeguards that have been put in place are working. This can be through the day to day supervision of staff and volunteers, periodic monitoring and reviews or consulting the children.
- A **protective culture** that puts children's interest first. Children must feel confident that if they have concerns someone will listen and take them seriously.

Your club should also have policies on bullying and on health and safety. You will need processes for dealing with complaints and for taking disciplinary action where necessary.

Clubs that have put these safeguards in place are taking their responsibilities seriously and are doing what they can to minimise the risks of children suffering harm while in their care.