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SAFEGUARDING POLICY

Every effort has been made by the RFL to ensure the accuracy of this information at the time of publication. This Policy is binding and forms part of the RFL Operational Rules. For guidance the reader is advised to contact the RFL Safeguarding team or take further advice if necessary. Where a synopsis of the Operational Rules is given the full Operational Rules as published by the RFL from time to time take precedence.

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INTRODUCTION

Sport can and does have a very powerful and positive influence on people – especially children. Not only can it provide opportunities for enjoyment and achievement; it can also develop valuable qualities such as self-esteem, leadership and teamwork. These positive effects can only take place if sport is in the right hands – in the hands of those who place the welfare of all children first and adopt practices that support, protect and empower them.

The reality is that abuse, not only sexual abuse but physical and emotional abuse, as well as bullying, does take place in sport; and in some cases, coaches and other trusted adults in sport including Rugby League have been convicted of such offences through the courts or found guilty of Misconduct by the RFL.
The RFL is committed to working in partnership with all agencies to ensure that information and training opportunities are available to ensure and promote best practice when working with children. Adopting best practice will help to safeguard these participants from potential abuse as well as preventing any unfounded allegations of abuse being made against coaches and other adults in positions of responsibility. The RFL Safeguarding Policy allows children to excel in a safe environment and transmit a reassuring signal to parents that positively impacts on participation.

This document is binding for the game as a whole to everyone in Rugby League, whether involved in either a professional or voluntary capacity or as a parent, spectator or participant.

Everyone in Rugby League has a duty of care towards children and other vulnerable players and officials and must help to protect them from abuse.

1 SAFEGUARDING POLICY

1.1 INCORPORATION

The RFL Safeguarding Policy and associated policies and procedures have been adopted by the whole game. All individuals involved in Rugby League in England and those from outside England that participate in a Competition that fall under the jurisdiction of the RFL at every level, including but not limited to players, match officials, coaches, administrators, club officials, parents, agents and spectators are all bound to abide by this Policy, by the RESPECT Code of Conduct, by the Tackle It Policy, by the Rugby League Coaches' Code of Conduct and by any other applicable Code of Conduct published by the RFL. All such individuals by participating or being involved in Rugby League are deemed to have assented to and as such recognise and adhere to the principles and responsibilities embodied in this Policy & the Codes.

1.2 RFL SAFEGUARDING POLICY STATEMENT

The RFL recognises and embraces its responsibility to safeguard children and sets out this commitment below:

1.2.1 The RFL mandates that it is the responsibility of every adult involved in rugby league to ensure that every child who plays or otherwise participates in Rugby League should be able to take part in an enjoyable and safe environment and be protected from abuse.

1.2.2 The RFL recognises its responsibility to safeguard the welfare of all children involved in the game by protecting them from physical, emotional or sexual harm and from neglect or bullying as far as is possible.

1.2.3 The RFL is committed to working to provide a safe environment for all children to participate in the sport to the best of their abilities for as long as they choose to do so.

1.2.4 The RFL recognises that all children have a right to be protected from abuse irrespective of their age, gender, culture, disability, race, faith, religious belief, sexual orientation, all other protected characteristics and any other physical or other characteristic.

1.2.5 The RFL believes that the child's welfare is paramount and will be put before other considerations such as winning matches or the success and achievement of adults or clubs or representative teams.

1.2.6 The RFL recognises that abuse and poor practice does take place in sport and that raising awareness and understanding of the main forms of abuse and poor practice and requiring reporting if abuse or poor practice is suspected, will further safeguard children participating in Rugby League.

1.3 KEY PRINCIPLES OF THE SAFEGUARDING POLICY

All those bound by this Policy should be conversant with the entirety of this Safeguarding Policy but for easy reference the key principles of the Policy are set out below. A breach of any of the following is a breach of the Safeguarding Policy and therefore Misconduct under Operational Rules Section D4.

1.3.1 Every adult has a moral and statutory duty for the care, custody and safety of any child under the age of 18 under their supervision

1.3.2 The child's welfare is paramount and will be put before any other considerations such as winning matches or other competitive success.

1.3.3 All children, irrespective of age, disability, faith, gender, race or sexual orientation have the right to be protected from abuse (including but not limited to sexual abuse, grooming, breach of position of trust, physical abuse, neglect, bullying or undue pressure from any source) or poor practice.

1.3.4 Children must not be subjected to discrimination and/or abuse from any person, including spectators, based on their age, disability, faith, gender, race or sexual orientation and/or references to ability, height, weight or any other characteristics

1.3.5 All participants have a duty to report incidents, allegations or suspicions of poor practice or abuse or other breaches of the Safeguarding Policy and failure to do so is a breach of the Policy.

1.3.6 All participants have a duty to co-operate with and tell the truth to any RFL or Statutory Body's safeguarding investigation.

1.3.7 All incidents, allegations or suspicions of poor practice or abuse must be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately in confidence where possible

1.3.8 All children have a right to play or otherwise participate in the game of Rugby League in a safe and enjoyable environment.

1.3.9 All children must be allowed access to the game in a way that is appropriate for their age and ability and must be coached and trained by appropriately qualified coaches who abide by the Coaches' Code of Conduct and set a good example of behaviour, both on and off the pitch.

1.3.10 Children must not be required to play in too many games, or to attend training sessions, as to become a threat to their physical or emotional well-being and must not be allowed or encouraged to play when injured and/or concussed or potentially concussed.

1.3.11 Children must be allowed and encouraged to participate for fun and enjoyment rather than results on the pitch and must be given a fair share of playing time.

1.3.12 Children should be encouraged to achieve their potential and allowed to compete at the level at which they feel comfortable. This may not always be the highest level at which they could play.

1.3.13 Children will be provided with appropriate management, support, personal and social development with regard to their involvement in the game of Rugby League, whether they are playing, volunteering or officiating in the community or professional game.

1.3.14 All will comply with the Mandatory Safeguarding Requirements.

1.3.15 All those involved in Rugby League will ensure that they are adequately trained and understand the appropriate policies to ensure they are able to implement this policy. Where specialist training sessions are planned then the coach taking the session and in overall responsibility of the session must be qualified in the type of activity being undertaken.

NB All children in the context of this Policy includes, but is not limited to, players, officials & volunteers, match officials, ball crews, cheerleaders and dancers, pre-match entertainment participants, spectators and/or visitors.

1.4 SAFEGUARDING VULNERABLE GROUPS RULES

The Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Rules have been adopted by the RFL, its Members and any other relevant body in England and participation, officiating, spectating or any other involvement in the game in England is dependent on acceptance of the Rules and this Policy. To ensure clarity and consistency in the matter of issues relating to Safeguarding, all Members of the RFL have delegated responsibility to the RFL.

1.5 DEFINITIONS & ASSUMPTIONS

This Policy is based on the following principles:

- Child - This policy recognises and builds on the legal and statutory definitions of a child. The distinction between ages of consent, civil and criminal liability are recognised but in the pursuit of good practice in the delivery and management of Safeguarding in Rugby League, a child is recognised as being under the age of 18 years (Children's Act 2004 definition).
- Adult at Risk – "any person aged 18 years and over who is or may be in need of community care services by reason of mental health issues, learning or physical disability, sensory impairment, age or illness and who is or may be unable to take care of him/herself or unable to protect him/herself against significant harm or serious exploitation". The RFL has an Adults at Risk Policy.
- Confidentiality should be upheld in line with the Data Protection Laws and the Human Rights Act 2000 with the rider that the welfare of the child is paramount.
- The term "parents" used throughout this document is a generic term to represent parents, carers and guardians.
- The term "club" is used throughout this document as a generic term to represent any Rugby League agency in charge of players under the age of 18 years and includes, but is not limited to, Leagues, schools, festivals, tournaments, representative sides and Match Officials Societies.
- "Members" shall mean those organisations which are members of the RFL from time to time.

- The term 'Club Welfare Officer' is used throughout this document. A club welfare officer is the person within a sports club with primary responsibility for managing and reporting concerns about children and for putting into place procedures to safeguard children in the club. In the elite game they may also be referred to as Safeguarding Lead.

1.6 LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The RFL's approach to Safeguarding is based on the principles recognised within UK and international legislation and Government guidance. The following has been taken into consideration:

- The Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006
- Protection of Freedoms Act 2012
- Working Together to Safeguard Children (DOH) 2023
- The Children Act 1989
- The Children Act 2004
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- The Sexual Offences (Amendments) Act 2000
- The Sexual Offences Act 2003
- The Police Act 1997
- The Protection of Children Act 1999
- The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974
- The General Data Protection Regulations 2018
- The Equalities Act 2010
- Information Sharing Advice for Safeguarding Practitioners 2015
- Children and Social Work Act 2017

2 RESPONSIBILITY FOR SAFEGUARDING IN RUGBY LEAGUE

2.1 WHO HAS RESPONSIBILITY FOR SAFEGUARDING IN RUGBY LEAGUE?

The RFL and all individuals, clubs, leagues, societies, associations and other agencies involved in Rugby League will:

- Accept the moral and legal responsibility to implement safeguarding procedures and to provide a duty of care for children, safeguard their wellbeing and protect them from abuse and poor practice
- Listen to children and respect and promote their rights, wishes and feelings
- Recruit, train and supervise its employees and volunteers to adopt best practice to safeguard and protect children from abuse
- Require all staff and volunteers to adopt and abide by this Safeguarding Policy, the RESPECT Code of Conduct and the Rugby League Coaches' Code of Conduct
- Respond to any allegations appropriately. Should any urgent statutory referrals or reports be made by a club they must be reported to the RFL Safeguarding Department as soon as possible either by phone or email.
- Report all concerns, allegations or disclosures to the RFL.
- Should a statutory agency such as but not limited to, the police, Social Care or the Local Authority Designated Officer make contact with a club directly, then the club must advise them to make contact with the RFL Safeguarding Department.
- Recognise that it is the responsibility of the RFL Safeguarding Case Management Group, experts and agencies to determine whether abuse has taken place but it is everyone's responsibility to report any concerns.
- Recognise that working in partnership with children, their parents and other agencies is essential for the protection of children.
- Co-operate fully and promptly with the statutory bodies and/or the RFL in any investigation.
- Recognise the statutory responsibility of the Designated Officers (also known as Local Authority Designated Officer) to ensure the welfare of children and work with them to comply with procedures.

2.2 RFL SAFEGUARDING MANAGER

The role of the RFL Safeguarding Manager is to:

- Take the lead role in the development and establishment of the RFL's approach to safeguarding children, including reporting to the RFL Board and producing the RFL's Safeguarding Policy
- Manage cases of poor practice and/or abuse reported to the RFL and keep suitable records in accordance with General Data Protection Regulation
- Manage referrals to Designated Officers and/or Children's Social Care and/or Police and/or other agencies as appropriate
- Be a central point of contact for internal and external agencies
- Represent the RFL at external meetings related to Safeguarding
- Co-ordinate dissemination of policy, procedures and resources throughout the organisation

- Provide advice and support to the League and Club and Match Officials' Society Welfare Officers
- Advise on the RFL's Safeguarding training needs and develop a training strategy
- Maintain confidentiality in cases except where to do so would put a child at risk
- Maintain, roll out & review the RFL Safeguarding Plan
- Ensure adherence to CPSU standards
- Attend CPSU National Lead Officers' meetings and training.

2.3 LEAGUE WELFARE OFFICER

Each League should appoint a League Welfare Officer who has been DBS checked at an enhanced level and attended training as required by the RFL from time to time. The League should consult with the RFL Safeguarding Manager who will support them in the recruitment of this position to ensure they have the relevant experience and qualifications to be appointed to the role.. The role of the League Welfare Officers is to provide the following service within their League:

- Ensure that all Clubs have met the Mandatory Safeguarding Requirements as set out from time to time
- Encourage and promote best practice
- Promote the RFL's education opportunities
- Act as an initial point of contact should a member of a club have a concern or query
- Refer all concerns or queries to the RFL in line with the reporting procedures below on to the Globocol Case Management System
- Act as a link between the RFL and the League
- Receive confidential information from the RFL SCMG about cases on a need to know basis

2.4 CLUB WELFARE OFFICER

All clubs must identify a designated person to take the role of Club Welfare Officer (CWO) who will lead on Safeguarding within the club. Before this person takes up their role they must be registered with the RFL, a process which includes undertaking an enhanced DBS check and attending such training as is required from time to time.

The CWO must have a formal role on the club's management committee, play an active part in decision-making and be supported by the management committee. The CWO will require support from the club, and designated training and support will be provided by the RFL. Clubs running a number of teams may need to appoint more than one CWO to ensure sufficient cover.

The role of the Club Welfare Officer is to:

- Ensure that the RFL Safeguarding Policy is adhered to within the Club
- Ensure all roles are assessed for eligibility for DBS checks and ensure checks are carried out
- Ensure safe recruitment procedures are followed
- Attend 'Safeguarding and Protecting Children' course and 'Time to Listen' course and keep the qualifications up to date

- Attend the RFL Safeguarding Conference at least every two years or as required and requested by the RFL
- Ensure that Coaches have completed the 'Safeguarding and Protecting Children' course
- Act as first point of contact for coaches, parents or children who may have concerns (contact details must be included on the club website and noticeboard)
- Report any concerns to the RFL
- Ensure that information from the RFL is disseminated to relevant club personnel.

The CWO should also be:

- Appointed and supported by Club Committee.
- Able to identify poor practice and abuse – behaviour that is harmful to children.
- Aware of the RFL's role and responsibilities to safeguard the welfare of children.
- Aware of the boundaries of the CWO role, e.g. it is not the CWO's role to investigate allegations; it is the duty of the CWO to report concerns in line with the RFL reporting procedures.
- Able to comply with confidentiality requirements.
- Well versed in working within the RFL Safeguarding Policy and associated procedures
- Aware of Equality and Diversity issues and additional Safeguarding vulnerability.

All the above can be obtained through attending Safeguarding & Protecting Children training, RFL 'Time to Listen' training and via the regular RFL updates and conference.

2.5 MATCH OFFICIALS SOCIETY WELFARE OFFICER

All Match Officials Societies must identify at least one designated person to take the role of Match Officials Society Welfare Officer (MOSWO) to handle Safeguarding issues. Before this person takes up their role they must be registered with the RFL, a process which includes undertaking an enhanced level DBS check and attending such training as required from time to time.

The MOSWO must have a formal role on the Match Officials Society Committee, play an active part in decision-making and be supported by the Committee. The MOSWO will require support from all members of the Society, designated training and support will be provided by the RFL.

The MOSWO has the same role and requires the same knowledge as a CWO as set out above. Throughout this Policy where the term CWO is used the same applies to a MOSWO where applicable.

3 BEST SAFEGUARDING PRACTICE IN RUGBY LEAGUE

3.1 DUTY OF CARE

Every person, club, league or other organisation in Rugby League has a legal duty of care to ensure the safety and welfare of any child involved in Rugby League or related activities, to safeguard them and protect them from foreseeable forms of harm.

Safeguarding involves all involved in Rugby League acknowledging that this duty of care exists and putting practical measures in place throughout the game to minimise the likelihood of foreseeable harm arising.

In order to ensure that all children are safe there must be sufficient adults present to provide an appropriate level of supervision at all times.

The RFL has adopted the NSPCC guidelines, which are detailed below:

0-2 years – one adult to three children

2-3 years – one adult to four children

4-8 years – one adult to six children

9-12 years – one adult to eight children

13-18 years – one adult to ten children.

For the avoidance of doubt, each adult above must be appropriately DBS-checked by the RFL and must be operating in an official capacity with the team or group in question unless special dispensation is granted by the RFL.

3.2 MANDATORY SAFEGUARDING REQUIREMENTS

It is essential that every club complies with the Mandatory Safeguarding Requirements set out below. Having these policies and procedures in place is essential. The following is a list of the fundamental duties of every Club to demonstrate this duty of care. Other organisations such as Leagues, schools, festivals, tournaments, representative teams and Match Officials Societies must take the appropriate and relevant steps for their circumstances – the RFL is available to offer advice as required.

All clubs must:

- Recruit, appoint, register and arrange for the training of a CWO who is the designated contact for Safeguarding issues
- Display their Club's own Safeguarding Policy Statement prominently at the club house where possible and in all cases on the website
- Ensure that all coaches and other volunteers who are engaged in Regulated Activity hold a current RFL DBS
- Follow the RFL reporting procedures by reporting all concerns, allegations and disclosures to the Safeguarding Case Management Group (SCMG)
- Comply with Do Not Deploy, Temporary or Permanent Suspension Orders and inform the SCMG if they believe a person is breaching such an Order
- Work within Safeguarding Principles including a commitment to RESPECT and Anti-Bullying

- Listen to children to ensure they feel empowered and ensure there is an open and listening environment
- Display CWO contact details around the club and on the website
- Have a Safeguarding policy which everybody at the club understands and puts into practice on a daily basis
- Ensure that children are appropriately supervised at all times including, at training, on match day and at any club organised events, festivals and tours
- Ensure that the following policies & procedures exist within the Club:

Policies

- Safeguarding Policy
- Selection & Recruitment Policy
- Whistle Blowing Policy
- First Aid Standards
- Dressing Room Policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Equality Policy
- RESPECT
- 100% ME Anti-Doping Policy
- Confidentiality and Data Protection
- Managing Challenging Behaviour & the Use of Force
- Photography Policy
- Travel Policy
- Social Media Policy
- Live Streaming Policy
- Escalation Policy
- Touring with Children Guide.

Procedures

- Procedures for reporting concerns of abuse or poor practice
- Complaints & disciplinary procedures
- System for collecting player information and parental consent
- A Listening Club forum for children to express their views
- Information for parents and children
- Transport & away game/tour procedures
- Safer Recruitment and Selection procedures.

These policies and procedures are available on request from the RFL either as completed documents or as templates for clubs to adapt to their own circumstances.

3.3 RECRUITMENT, EMPLOYMENT AND DEPLOYMENT OF STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

Anyone may have the potential to abuse children and some sex offenders use sport as a means to access and groom children in preparation for abuse, therefore all reasonable steps must be taken to ensure that people who are potential perpetrators of abuse or are otherwise unsuitable to work with children and young people due to their sexual or other behaviours are prevented from doing so.

It is also important to ensure that individuals who have a record of violence or an inability to control their temper or a record of domestic or animal abuse or abuse of drugs are appropriately risk assessed and where appropriate do not have access to children.

However, having a criminal record does not necessarily prohibit an individual from working with children. The RFL are obligated to conduct thorough risk assessments on any DBS disclosures that include relevant information. All staff involved in the risk assessment process are trained and carry out risk assessments in line with their training and the provisions of the RFL Policy on the Rehabilitation of Offenders. It is essential that the same procedures are used consistently for all posts whether staff or volunteers are full time or part-time.

Under this Policy all individuals working on behalf of, or otherwise representing, an organisation are treated as employees whether working in a paid or voluntary capacity.

All Clubs at all levels must use the recruitment procedures set out in detail on the RFL website and these must be followed for all relevant recruitment whether staff or volunteers. Clubs should remember that these procedures should be applied to people who are already involved in the club and subsequently take on a role which gives them greater access to children. Clubs should ensure that those staff and volunteers already involved in the game undergo the appropriate parts of the recruitment procedures in particular DBS checks, although these are only part of a safe and effective recruitment and selection procedure.

In particular, pre-appointment checks should be made including carrying out Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) checks through the RFL and taking up references. DBS checks must be completed every three years for existing staff or more frequently if instructed to do so by the SCMG. Coaching staff must have their qualifications checked and their coaching licence must be inspected and the number recorded. Coaches must also be reminded that they have agreed to abide by the Coaches' Code Conduct and the RESPECT Code of Conduct. Coaches (and other volunteers where relevant) should be given copies of these documents

In addition, clubs should be clear about their club's aims and philosophy and whether a coach or volunteer is a good match for that club. Carrying carry out interviews, taking up references and criminal record checks are an important part of safe recruitment but also help to check that individuals meet the club ethos.

Once volunteers and staff are in place it is essential that they go through an induction process and that their behaviour and performance is monitored and feedback given. Club Management should be vigilant and look out for any concerns about poor practice or abuse and act on them at an early stage following the guidelines in this document. The Club management should also offer appropriate support, through liaison with the RFL Safeguarding Manager to those who report concerns/complaints and those accused.

3.4 GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

The following is a non-exhaustive list of the general principles of good practice with children:

- Treating all children equally, and with respect and dignity
- Promoting a culture which ensures children are listened to and those views acted on (see RFL Listening Club Initiative)
- Respecting all children as individuals
- Always putting the welfare of each child first, before winning matches or achieving goals or supporting coaches
- Making rugby league fun, enjoyable and promoting fair play
- Ensuring that all disciplinary sanctions are fair, proportionate to the issue and the child's age, and do not involve violent or physical punishment or humiliation
- Communicating with parents to promote positive outcomes for children
- Physical exertion, e.g. running around the pitch should not be used as a method of punishment
- Always working in an open environment (e.g. not having private or unobserved situations and encouraging an open environment (e.g. no secrets)
- Maintaining a safe and appropriate distance, both physical and emotional, with children
- Building balanced relationships based on mutual trust which empowers children to share in the decision-making process
- Not having sexual relationships with children at the club including 16 or 17 year olds - this includes all coaches and other staff or volunteers at a club
- Being an excellent role model – this includes not smoking, vaping or drinking alcohol in the company of children whilst undertaking any role within an RFL setting, promoting a healthy diet and condemning the use of illegal and performance enhancing substances.

Policies covering best practice guidelines for working with children can be found on the RFL website Resources (rugby-league.com)

3.5 EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

The RFL endorses the principle of equality, diversity and inclusion and will strive to ensure that everyone who wishes to be involved in Rugby League:

- Has a genuine and equal opportunity to participate to the full extent of their own ambitions and abilities, without regard to age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation; and
- Can be assured of an environment in which their rights, dignity and individual worth are respected, and in particular, that they are able to enjoy their engagement with Rugby League without the threat of intimidation, victimisation, harassment, bullying or abuse.

The RFL is committed to avoiding and eliminating discrimination of any kind and will under no circumstances condone unlawful discriminatory practices. Rugby League has a zero-tolerance approach to discrimination, intimidation, harassment, victimisation, bullying and abuse.

Diversity is recognising, valuing and respecting the diversity of everyone. Diversity encompasses visible and non-visible differences which may include, but are not limited to, differences protected by the Equalities Act 2010.

Why is a commitment to Equality and Diversity essential?

1 It is morally the right thing to do – both in terms of everyone's wellbeing and the wider reputation of the club as a safe and welcoming environment
2 It will grow the sport of Rugby League – if a club is seen to be inclusive, to challenge inequality and discrimination and to ensure the safety and well-being of all participants – there will be increased participation particularly among underrepresented groups and a greater likelihood that participants will stay involved
3 Legal responsibility – if a child experiences discrimination, victimisation or harassment based on their gender, race, disability, religious beliefs, faith, age or sexual orientation the club could face legal proceedings which are costly in terms of possible fines as well as a damaging loss of reputation
4 Certain groups can be more vulnerable to abuse.

3.6 EDUCATION

It is essential that a sufficient number of individuals within the club have a basic level of Safeguarding training to ensure that this Policy is adhered to throughout the club. The current course which gives this knowledge is 'Safeguarding and Protecting Children' (SPC.) This course is an Activefirst course which is required for the RFL L2 Coaching Licence and is also a mandatory qualification for all those working with children. For those who have previously attended this course a refresher is available online.

The RFL will only accept SPC completed by Activefirst as this qualification has been accredited by The Chartered Institute For The Management of Sport and Physical Activity (CIMSPA) which forms part of the CPSU Accreditation.

CWOs need more knowledge than other volunteers in order for them to be as effective as possible in fulfilling their role and responsibilities. This knowledge is imparted through the 'Time To Listen' (TTL) course. This course was designed by the NSPCC Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU) and has been amended by the RFL (with CPSU approval) to reflect practices within the game. Although this course is primarily aimed at CWOs, other volunteers are more than welcome to attend in order to increase their knowledge.

3.7 LIVE STREAMING

Clubs, Leagues and other organisations are regularly making use of live streaming to showcase their matches and events in Rugby League. It is important that those involved in youth and junior Rugby League are aware of the RFL's Live Streaming Policy which can be obtained by contacting the RFL.

This Policy sets out the mandatory requirements when providing a live stream in Rugby League and is intended to encourage good practice and ensure that streaming is carried out in a safe and appropriate manner.

Further guidance is available from the Safeguarding Manager at the RFL.

3.8 MANAGING CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR

Coaches & other volunteers may have to deal with challenging behaviour from the children or young people in their care. It is important that those involved in youth and junior Rugby League are aware of the RFL's Policy for Managing Challenging Behaviour which can be found on the RFL website or can be obtained by contacting the RFL.

This Policy aims to encourage good practice, suggest some strategies and sanctions which can be used and identify unacceptable sanctions or interventions which must never be used.

The Policy is based on the following principles:

- The welfare of the child is paramount
- All those involved in the sport including children, coaches & volunteers should have clear guidelines about the standard of behaviour which is expected and the processes for dealing with behaviour which is unacceptable
- Children must never be subject to any form of treatment that is harmful, abusive, humiliating or degrading
- Some children's behaviour may be caused by medical or psychological conditions. Coaches & volunteers may need additional help including discussing the child's needs with parents and/or carers and possibly from external agencies that already support that child
- Rugby League can be a beneficial experience for all children and children should only be excluded from the sport in exceptional cases.

4 ABUSE &/OR POOR PRACTICE

4.1 RECOGNISING ABUSE &/OR POOR PRACTICE

It is essential that all adults involved with children in Rugby League understand what constitutes abuse and/or poor practice, how to recognise it and how to respond to disclosures and allegations (see Section 5). Abuse and poor practice can be very emotive and difficult subjects; however, it is important that they are discussed openly at clubs as this helps create an environment where people are more aware of the issues and sensitive to the needs of children. This open environment also gives people more confidence in recognising abuse and /or poor practice and reacting to it.

Abuse can and does occur outside the family setting. Even for those experienced in working with child abuse, it is not always easy to recognise a situation where abuse may occur or has already taken place. The staff and volunteers in Rugby League, whether in a paid or voluntary capacity, are not experts at such recognition. However, they do have a responsibility to act if they have any concerns about the behaviour of someone (an adult or another child) towards a child and to follow the procedures set out in Section 5 of this document.

4.2 DEFINING ABUSE

Any person may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm or by failing to act to prevent harm. Children may be abused in a family or institutional or club environment by people known to them or more rarely by a stranger. Children can be abused by adults or by other children and some forms of abuse may be carried out through social media.

The effects of abuse can be extremely damaging and if allowed to continue or left unacknowledged may follow a person into adulthood. For instance, a person who has been abused as a child may find it difficult to maintain stable or trusting relationships, may suffer from low self-esteem or self-harm, may become involved in drugs or prostitution, may attempt suicide and may inflict the same behaviour on to other children in future.

4.2.1 Categories of Abuse

i) Physical Abuse

Physical abuse occurs if people physically hit, burn, poison, shake or in some way hurt or injure children and young people, or fail to prevent these injuries from happening. In Rugby League, physical abuse could happen where training methods are inappropriate for the developmental age of the child or young person, where they are allowed to play with an injury or when concussed or potentially concussed or before the appropriate Graduated Return To Play has been completed or where inappropriate drugs or alcohol are offered or accepted. It would clearly happen if a child or young person is hit or physically restrained or manhandled by those supervising the game or training session.

ii) Neglect

Neglect takes place if adults fail to meet a child or young person's basic physical needs, e.g. for food, warmth and clothing, or emotional needs such as attention and affection. It occurs if children or young people are left alone or inadequately supervised or where they are exposed to danger, injury or extreme weather conditions. In Rugby League, neglect could occur if children or young people do not have proper supervision, clothing or are allowed or encouraged to play whilst injured or the concussion rules are not followed. It could occur if a child or young person's particular health needs are disregarded before, during, or after a game.

iii) Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse occurs if children or young people are used to meet another person's sexual needs. This includes any form of sexual behaviour with a child or young person (by an adult or another child or young person), the use of sexually explicit language and jokes, inappropriate touching and exposure to pornographic material. It also includes 'sexting' an increasingly common activity among children and young people, where they share inappropriate or explicit images on-line or through mobile phones. 1 in 4 children have received unwanted images on the subject of sex according to the NSPCC 2014. Creating an indecent image of someone under 18 or sending such images is against the law. Sexual abuse can occur in Rugby League. For example, where there is inappropriate touching, or where sexually-explicit jokes occur between adults and children or young people or if indecent images are taken or adapted and placed on pornography sites.

iv) Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse includes frequent threatening, taunting or sarcastic behaviour, along with holding affection or being extremely overprotective. It includes racist or sexist behaviour and demeaning initiation ceremonies. It can be inflicted by other children and young people as well as by adults. Children and young people who are being abused or bullied in any way will also experience emotional abuse. In Rugby League, coaches or parents emotionally abuse children and young people if they constantly criticise, abuse their power, or impose unrealistic pressure to perform to a high standard. It may also occur if a club allows members to deride people with disabilities or from minority cultures and use derogatory language about them.

v) Bullying

Although anyone can be the target of bullying, children and young people who are perceived as "different" from the majority may be at greater risk of bullying. This includes children and young people from minority cultures or children and young people with disabilities. Bullying can be defined as:

- Physical: hitting, kicking and theft
- Verbal: name calling, constant teasing, sarcasm, racist or homophobic taunts, threats and gestures
- Emotional: tormenting, mobile text messaging, ridiculing, humiliating and ignoring
- Sexual: unwanted physical contact or sexually abusive comments.

Bullying can take place anywhere but is more likely to take place where there is inadequate supervision. In Rugby League it is more likely to take place in the changing rooms or on the way to and from the Rugby League pitch - but can also take place at a training session or in a competition. Rugby League's competitive nature can create and even support an environment for the bully if individuals and clubs are unaware.

In an NSPCC survey of young people (2000), bullying was reported to be the most common source of distress and anxiety.

The bully in Rugby League can be:

- A parent who pushes too hard
- A coach or manager who has a win-at-all-costs philosophy
- A coach who excludes a player or does not give them game time
- Allowing other children or parents to make decisions on excluding a child
- A child or young person intimidating another
- An official who places unfair pressure on a child or young person.

Bullying includes Cyber-Bullying which is using on-line spaces to spread rumours about someone or exclude them. It can also include text messaging, including video and picture messaging.

vi) Child Trafficking &/or Modern Day Slavery

Child Trafficking and/or Modern Day Slavery involves the taking of children out of their protective environment and preying on their vulnerability for the purpose of exploitation. Any concerns about the possibility of a child or young person being trafficked or enslaved should be reported via the statutory agencies.

Although no precise figures exist, the International Labour Organization (in 2005) estimated that between 980,000 to 1,225,000 children - both boys and girls - are in a forced labour situation as a result of trafficking internationally.

vii) Female Genital Mutilation

Female genital mutilation is a form of child abuse common to some African, Asian and Middle Eastern communities in the UK. This illegal and life-threatening initiation ritual can leave young victims in agony and with physical and psychological problems that can continue into adulthood. Carried out in secret and often without anaesthetic it involves the partial or total removal of the external female genital organs. The NSPCC Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) helpline offers specialist advice, information and support to anyone concerned that a child's welfare is at risk because of female genital mutilation. Though callers' details can remain anonymous, any information that could protect a child from abuse will be passed to the Police or Social Care services. Clubs should be mindful if a regular attender goes missing from a club or if a child, their peer or relative starts expressing worries about a trip abroad. If you are worried that a child may be at risk of FGM, you can contact the 24 hour helpline anonymously on 0800 028 3550 or email fgmhelp@nspcc.org.uk. If you wish to find out more about FGM then you can access the NSPCC's fact sheet: https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-abuse-and-neglect/fgm

viii) Forced Marriage

A forced marriage is where one or both people do not (or in cases of people with learning disabilities, cannot) consent to the marriage and pressure or abuse is used. It is recognised in the UK as a form of violence against women and men, domestic/child abuse and a serious abuse of human rights. The pressure put on people to marry against their will can be physical (including threats, actual physical violence and sexual violence) or emotional and psychological (for example, when someone is made to feel like they're bringing shame on their family).

The Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) operates a public helpline to provide advice and support to victims and those being pressurised into forced marriages. Of the 1,300 plus cases dealt with in 2012 40% of victims were under 18. If you are worried that a child may be at risk of forced marriage, you can contact FMU via the helpline on 020 7008 0151 or email fmu@fco.gov.uk . For more information on forced marriages go to www.gov.uk/forced-marriage

ix) Honour Based Violence

The term 'Honour Based Violence' (HBV) is the internationally recognised term describing cultural justifications for violence and abuse. It justifies the use of certain types of violence and abuse against women, men and children. The Association of Chief Police Officers defines HBV as: 'A crime or incident, which has or may have been committed, to protect or defend the honour of the family and/or community'. HBV cuts across all cultures, nationalities, faith groups and communities and transcends national and international boundaries. HBV is also a Domestic Abuse issue, a Child Abuse concern and a crime. If you are worried that a child may be at risk of HBV contact Children's Social Care for further advice and guidance or speak to the RFL Safeguarding Manager.

x) Radicalisation

Protecting children from the risk of radicalisation should be seen as part of an organisation's wider safeguarding duties and is similar in nature to protecting children from other forms of harm and abuse. During the process of radicalisation, it is possible to intervene to prevent vulnerable people being radicalised.

Radicalisation refers to the process by which a person comes to support terrorism and/or forms of extremism. There is no single way of identifying an individual who is likely to be susceptible to an extremist ideology. It can happen in many different ways and settings. Specific background factors may contribute to vulnerability which are often combined with specific influences such as family, friends or online, and with specific needs for which an extremist or terrorist or racist or supremist group may appear to provide an answer. The internet and the use of social media in particular has become a major factor in the radicalisation of young people. As with managing other safeguarding risks, staff/volunteers should be alert to changes in children's behaviour which could indicate that they may be in need of help or protection.

xi) Child criminal (CCE) and sexual exploitation (CSE)

Child Criminal and Child Sexual Exploitation are complex issues that everyone who works with children, young people and/ or their families should have a good understanding of. They both involve hidden crimes and young people often know their abuser.

When a child is being exploited in either of these ways, they may be given things such as gifts, drugs, money, status and affection, in exchange for performing sexual activities or taking part in criminal activities.

If a child reports either of these forms of abuse to you or you suspect a child is involved in criminal or sexual exploitation you should report this to the RFL Safeguarding manager as soon as possible

4.2.2 Poor Practice

Poor practice is the term used to describe practice which falls below the standards expected to such an extent that a child's welfare is compromised and is where an adult's or another child's behaviour is inappropriate and may be causing concern to a child. In application of this Policy, poor practice includes any behaviour of a Safeguarding nature which contravenes the RESPECT Code of Conduct or Coaches' Code of Conduct, infringes an individual's rights and/ or is a failure to fulfil the highest standards of care. Poor practice is unacceptable in Rugby League, should never be sanctioned and will be treated seriously with appropriate actions taken.

Some examples of Poor Practice are:

- Insufficient care is taken to avoid injuries e.g. by excessive training or inappropriate training for the age or maturity, experience and ability of players;
- Giving continued and unnecessary preferential treatment to individuals and regularly or unfairly rejecting others e.g. singling out and focusing on the talented players or the coach's own children or not having a fair team selection policy;
- Having a win at all costs mentality
- A club supporting a coach so that it appears that this overrides the principle that the welfare of the child is paramount
- Placing children in potentially compromising and uncomfortable situations with adults
- Allowing abusive or concerning practices to go unchallenged and unreported e.g. failing to deal with or report a coach who ridicules or swears at players who make a mistake during a match

- Failing to adhere to the game's RESPECT or other codes of conduct including the use of foul and abusive language
- Issuing disciplinary sanctions which are not proportionate to age and/or involve violent or physical punishment or humiliation
- Excluding a child from a club without working with the child and parents to improve behaviour
- Permitting a child to be identified by virtue of either social media or inappropriate naming on shirts
- Adults participating in training sessions or drills including other variants of the sport. E.g., The holding of tackle shields and the participation in touch and pass with children under the age of 14.

4.2.3 Practice Never to be Sanctioned

No one involved in the game should ever:

- Engage in rough, physical or sexually provocative games, including horseplay
- Share a room with a child
- Shower with a child
- Allow or engage in any form of inappropriate touching
- Using or allowing children to use inappropriate language unchallenged
- Make sexually suggestive comments to a child, even in fun
- Reduce a child to tears as a form of control
- Allow allegations made by a child go unchallenged, unrecorded or not acted upon;
- Do things of a personal nature for children, young people or disabled adults, that they can do for themselves
- Take a child or children to their home where they will be alone with them
- Invite or allow a child or children to stay with them at their home unsupervised
- Contact a child directly by telephone or social media
- Allow or encourage children to drink alcohol, take drugs, smoke or vape
- Ignoring Health & Safety Rules

N.B Personal Care

It should be clear to everyone at the club (including young people and their parents/carers) that sports coaches and other volunteers should not be involved in providing intimate personal care for young or disabled participants. This should always be the responsibility of the parents, carers or other identified chaperones, care staff or volunteers. The reasons for this include:

- It puts the child in a potentially vulnerable position
- The potential negative impact on the young person's privacy and dignity
- Sports staff are unlikely to be trained to carry out this role and it isn't their role – they are there to facilitate and supervise sports activities • It can impact on the level of adult supervision for the remainder of the group
- There may be health and safety considerations around manual handling procedures
- The adult may be vulnerable to others misinterpreting their behaviour or motivation, and may result in concerns or allegations arising

- It can reinforce the child's vulnerability and lack of autonomy
- It models and may help to perpetuate poor practice.

If any of the following incidents should occur to staff or volunteers they should be reported immediately to another colleague/CWO and make a written note of the event. This action should be taken as soon as possible for the protection of all individuals concerned. Parents should also be informed of the incident:

- If you accidentally hurt a player
- If he/she seems distressed in any manner
- If a player appears to be sexually aroused by your actions
- If a player misunderstands or misinterprets something you have done.

4.3 INDICATORS OF ABUSE

Children and young people may be reluctant to tell someone when they are being abused or may be bullied out of disclosing or be forced to retract their concerns, so it is essential that every adult is aware of the possible signals that a child and young person's welfare or safety is being threatened. However, there is rarely a clear sign, and you may often have to piece together various snippets of information and rely on your instinct that something does not seem quite right. You may have one piece of information that, when added to that of others, forms a clear picture of abuse. This is often compared to fitting pieces of a jigsaw together. Only when you have a few pieces can you start to see the true picture.

It is not the responsibility of those working in Rugby League to decide that child abuse is occurring, but it is their responsibility to act and pass on suspicions and/or information to the RFL SCMG and/or appropriate statutory agencies.

The list below gives some possible physical and behavioural signs of abuse. Some are very explicit and specific, others are much more general. You need to be careful as any one of these signs might have another very plausible explanation, such as a death in the family, loss of a pet, an absent family member or problems at school. However, you should remember to raise your concerns if there is a combination of unexplained changes over a period of time. Never allow a child or young person's disability or cultural difference to explain away concerns. This is not a judgement for you to make.

Indications that a child may be being abused include the following:

Physical Abuse	Fear of contact, aggression, temper, running away, fear of going home, reluctance to change or uncover body, depression, withdrawal, bullying or abuse of others. Unexplained and unusual bruising, finger and strap marks, cigarette burns, bite marks, fractures, scalds, missing teeth.
Neglect	Always being tired, early or late, absent, few friends, regularly left alone, stealing, no money, parents or carers not attending or supportive. Constant hunger, dirty, ill-fitting clothes, inappropriate clothing, weight change, untreated conditions and continual minor infections.
Sexual Abuse/Female Genital Mutilation	Apparent fear of someone, nightmares, running away, sexually explicit knowledge or behaviour, masturbation, bedwetting, eating problems, substance abuse, unexplained money or gifts, acting out with toys, self-harm. Distress or anxiety on reading texts, being withdrawn, anger, moodiness, reduced performance. Genital pain, itching, bleeding, bruising, discharge, stomach pains, discomfort, pregnancy, incontinence, urinary infections, STDs, thrush, pain on passing motions.
Emotional Abuse	Unable to play, fear of mistakes, low self-esteem, fear of telling parents, withdrawn, unexplained speech & language difficulties, few friends. Weight change, lack or growth or development, unexplained speech disorders, self-harm.
Bullying	Difficulty making friends, anxiety over school, truancy, withdrawn, anger, moodiness, suicide attempts, reduced performance, money and possessions lost, stealing, distress and anxiety on reading texts Weight change, unexplained injuries and bruising, stomach and headaches, bedwetting, hair pulled out.
Forced Marriage/Female Genital Mutilation	A regular attender goes missing from the club or a child, their peer or relative starts expressing worries about a trip abroad.
Radicalisation	Showing sympathy for extremist causes, glorifying violence, especially to other faiths or cultures, making remarks or comments about being at extremist events or rallies outside school, intolerance of difference, including faith, culture, gender, race or sexuality or attempts to impose extremist views or practices on others.
Child Criminal Exploitation	Children who are being criminally exploited may be recruited to gangs to commit crimes. There are many signs to look out for which may indicate a child is being criminally exploited which include but not limited to them going missing, hanging out with older peers, being angry, violent or aggressive. Having unexplained items and buying new things and self-harming or feeling emotionally unwell.
Child Sexual Exploitation	Sexual exploitation can be difficult to spot and sometimes mistaken for 'normal' teenage behaviour. However, you may notice sharp changes in mood or character, the child may have money or other things they can't or won't explain.

The RFL website https://www.rugby-league.com/governance/safeguarding/reporting-a-concern contains detailed information about how to report any concerns.

4.4 AWARENESS OF INCREASED VULNERABILITY TO ABUSE

All those involved in rugby league need to be aware that some children can be more vulnerable to abuse because of their needs and background.

4.4.1 Disability

Disabled Children may be more vulnerable to abuse because they may:

- Require intimate personal care
- Experience negative attitudes and abuse due to their disability
- May be ignored and excluded from activities if people fail to recognise that it is the barriers that society puts up which prevent their involvement not their disability *per se*
- May be dependent on their abuser for care
- Be less able to resist either verbally or physically
- Have a smaller network of friends to support and protect them
- Lack access to peer groups to discover what is acceptable behaviour
- Have significant communication difficulties including the use of sign language
- Be more likely to have their verbal or non-verbal communication misinterpreted as relating to their disability rather than abusive experiences
- Have medical needs which may be used to explain abuse.

4.4.2 Race

Children from ethnically diverse communities may be more vulnerable to abuse because they may:

- Experience racism and racist attitudes
- Expect to be ignored by people in authority due to experience of institutionalised racism
- Be afraid of further abuse or racist abuse if they challenge others
- Be subjected to myths based on racial stereotyping
- Want to fit in and not want to make a fuss
- Be using or learning English as a second language and therefore find it more difficult to communicate.

4.4.3 Religion or Faith

Children from various religions and faiths may be more vulnerable to abuse because they may:

- Experience religious intolerance, fear or hatred based on their religious beliefs
- Be subjected to myths based on stereotypes
- Suffer bullying or assumptions about their commitment to the game due to their religious beliefs and practices
- Be discriminated against, harassed or bullied based on their actual or perceived religious beliefs due to fear of religious extremism.

4.4.4 Sexual Orientation and Gender Reassignment

Children are often aware of their sexual orientation from an early age and many children may already identify as being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBTQ+). LGBTQ+ children may be more vulnerable to abuse because they may:

- Be subjected to homophobia – which includes bullying abuse or physical attacks
- Have their experiences as LGBTQ+ children rendered invisible by heterosexist attitudes and assumptions which assumes that everyone is heterosexual and that this is preferable to being gay.

4.4.5 Match Officials

A considerable proportion of the match officials at youth and junior games are children and their role makes them particularly vulnerable to abuse in all its forms. Many young officials face verbal, emotional and even physical abuse whilst carrying out the role and many become disillusioned at best or suffer a significant and lasting loss of confidence when faced with abuse of this nature.

In addition to abuse from coaches and spectators match officials are vulnerable to abuse from other match officials. It is important that Leagues and Match Officials Societies implement all the safeguarding principles to protect young match officials.

4.4.6 Players on an Elite Pathway

Research shows that players who are on an elite performance pathway may be subject to burn out, increased focus on win at all costs, excessive training regimes. Due to the culture of sport, an authority system may be created which facilitates power, obedience and potentially the rationalisation of abuse which can be more prevalent at the elite level. This abuse can take any form including physical, sexual and bullying. The elite environment can also be used to suggest that suffering, poor practice or abuse is part of the requirements to succeed in that environment.

For many young people, reaching a scholarship or academy or representative level has been their focus for a number of years, and they will have trained hard to achieve this. Some parents will also have made a significant contribution and often considerable sacrifices to support their child's progress and success. In these circumstances it can be difficult for children, young people and parents to report abuse.

The RFL have support systems in place for players on the elite pathway and their parents. In addition to the Club Welfare Officer there is a separate Player Welfare Manager at each club.

4.4.7 Children who take on Leadership Roles

More and more children are taking on leadership and volunteering roles within Rugby League. This should be an enjoyable and positive experience. Unfortunately, some adults (coaches, parents, volunteers and spectators) lose sight of the fact that an individual in a leadership role who is under 18 is still legally a child.

Many children suffer verbal, physical and emotional abuse in leadership roles. This is unacceptable in Rugby League and the harm that is caused to these children needs to be recognised by adults within the game.

4.4.8 Economic Deprivation

Children who come from families suffering short or long term economic deprivation may be more susceptible to abuse through neglect (which may be unintentional), lack of purchase power making them an easier target to a groomer using gifts and bullying by peers.

4.5 REDUCING THE POTENTIAL FOR VULNERABILITY

Children in Rugby League may be subjected to bullying by children of the same or opposite sex and may have assumptions made relating to their sexuality or sexual orientation because of their involvement in playing a competitive contact sport such as Rugby League. Such assumptions or stereotypes are wholly inappropriate and should not be condoned as they may increase the vulnerability of some children to abuse.

It is important that both girls and boys are accorded the same levels of respect by all those working with them and should not be treated unequally because of their gender.

Given the increased vulnerability of some groups of children it is important that clubs (match officials societies) create a safe culture including:

- Finding ways of understanding and communicating with all children
- Maintaining best practice at all times in physical and health care
- Considering and responding to the diverse cultures within which a club is based
- Respecting and valuing diversity
- Building positive relationships with parents and carers and include them in club activities
- Observing changes in mood, appearance and behaviour and discuss those concerns with families, carers, the CWO, or RFL Safeguarding Manager if suspicions or concerns are significantly raised about the care or welfare of the child
- Acknowledging that disabled children are additionally vulnerable, and that vigilance is essential
- Having systems in place that ensure there is no abuse of match officials from anyone connected with the club
- Taking a zero-tolerance approach to abusive behaviour directed towards a child who is carrying out a leadership role is not acceptable
- Reporting inappropriate behaviour to the RFL Safeguarding Manager as abuse or poor practice
- Ensuring that the RESPECT code of conduct is enforced and actively promoted at the club
- Making sure that all club officials set good examples of behaviour at all times
- Ensuring that CWO and others are aware of the dangers of radicalisation
- Seek advice from RFL Safeguarding Manager.

4.6 POSITIONS OF TRUST

The power and influence that a coach (or other member of staff/volunteer) has over a child involved in sport cannot be under-estimated. If there is an additional competitive aspect to the activity and the coach/staff member/volunteer has some responsibility for the child's success or failure, then the power and influence of that person is increased. It is therefore vital for coaches/staff/volunteers to recognise these issues and to ensure that they do not abuse their positions of trust.

Whilst young people aged 16 or 17 can legally consent to some types of sexual activity, the Sexual Offences Act 2003 states that "It is an offence for a person aged 18 or over to involve a child under that age in sexual activity where he or she is in a specified position of trust in relation to that child. This includes those who care for, advise, supervise or train children and young people". The RFL's policy is based on the principles within that Act.

Any person who has any direct and/or indirect power or influence over a Child within the Game (including, but not limited to coaches, team managers, match officials, CWOs, club officials, professional and semi-professional Players) are in a position of trust with that Child. Each such person shall:

- act within appropriate boundaries in relation to all forms of communication with any such Child;
- not have intimate, sexual or inappropriate relationship with any such Child

Any breach of the above is not only serious Misconduct but is a criminal offence under the amended Sexual Offences Act 2003 Any breaches of this must now be reported to the police as it is a criminal offence.

For the avoidance of doubt a Child may be in a position of trust with another Child where they have taken on a leadership role.

4.7 GROOMING

The majority of adults working with children in Rugby League are committed to providing an enjoyable and safe environment in which to participate. However, a small proportion of adults actively seek opportunities to abuse children for their own sexual needs. When thinking about danger signs of grooming it is important to recognise that both boys and girls are groomed and/or sexually abused.

Sexual abuse of children is often the result of pre-meditated actions that are carefully planned. Preparing a child or organisation (i.e. a Club) is described as 'grooming' and is illegal under the provisions of The Sexual Offences Act 2003 and Misconduct under this Policy. It is important to understand how an abuser can 'groom' a club or parents or a child by appearing trustworthy and helpful, therefore giving the impression that they can take responsibility for a young person/some young people.

Abusers come from all sections of society, within and outside of the family and within and outside Rugby League. They may be perceived as 'respectable' people – the very last person anyone could suspect of abusing a child; this is usually the image they work hard to portray. Research into abuse demonstrates clearly that children are most likely to be abused by someone they know and who is likely to be in a position of trust with the child. Whilst the vast majority of sexual abusers are male, it is important not to overlook the fact that female sexual abusers do exist.

Sexual abusers use various techniques to 'groom' children, organisations and parents. These include:

- Seeking opportunities to be in contact with children, e.g. volunteering.
- Making friends with children, coaches, volunteers or parents
- Appearing trustworthy and helpful
- Giving presents to children or offering additional individual support/coaching
- Complementing the child to make them feel comfortable and confident
- Threatening (you won't get picked for the team) or bribing (you will get picked for the team) the child.

Abusers target children who they see as particularly vulnerable, this may be due to the child having low self-esteem or it appearing that they have little parental support. Therefore, children's parents should always be encouraged to be part of the club as this can act as an extra safeguard.

There are particular risks for talented children and these children are more at risk of abuse on 'away trips'. These risks are particularly acute at the point at which a player is at 'pre-peak' performance. These risks relate to:

- Separation from close family and friends– due to amount of 'away' travel and possibly living away from home
- Dependence on the coach for team selection, advice, emotional support, money
- Lack of safeguards away from home such as lack of checks on accommodation practices
- Too much emphasis on winning and high performance and not enough on personal development and enjoyment. This environment can sometimes be condoned by parents.

Any concerns relating to an adult's behaviour or intentions towards children should be reported appropriately, see Section 5.

4.8 Contextual Safeguarding

Contextual Safeguarding is an approach to understanding, and responding to, children's experiences of significant harm beyond their families. It recognises that the different relationships children form in their neighbourhoods, schools and online can feature violence and abuse. It requires all who work with children to have a consideration for their needs in the wider non-family context and an understanding that environmental factors around children and their activities including sporting and communication are highly relevant to ensuring children are kept safe.

Children may be vulnerable to abuse or exploitation from within their peer groups, those in a position of trust, or from within the wider community and/ or online. These threats can take a variety of different forms and children can be vulnerable to multiple threats including direct or online abuse and sexual exploitation.

Within our sport we recognise there are certain environments or contexts where children may be vulnerable, and we need to ensure all members take action to prevent risk. An example of a specific risk may include in the changing rooms, where the use of cameras and other devices capable of taking/ recording images may be possible due to unmonitored direct communication with children which may be peers or those in a position of trust.

On that basis, all clubs must ensure they adopt the RFL policies set out in section 3.2 of this policy.

5 RESPONDING TO, RECORDING & REPORTING POOR PRACTICE, ABUSE AND BULLYING OR OTHER CONCERNS WITHIN OR OUTSIDE RUGBY LEAGUE

5.1 BACKGROUND

There is a legal and moral responsibility to report any concerns about a child within Rugby League and any concerns which may be raised about a child outside the sport. Child abuse of all types, particularly sexual abuse, can generate strong and confusing emotions in those facing such a situation for instance disbelief, disgust, anger etc. It is important to understand these feelings and not allow them to interfere with your judgement about any action to take. Abuse and poor practice can occur within many situations including the home, school and the sporting environment.

It is understood that people may often have concerns about reporting the behaviour of adults who are aggressive and potentially violent. Where possible the RFL will protect the identity of the person who has reported an incident when they feel threatened by the individual concerned. It should be remembered that if these individuals are intimidating to other adults they are likely to be even more intimidating to any children within their care and that there is a duty of care and an obligation under this Policy to report such behaviour.

Rugby League clubs are often close communities which generate strong loyalties between the volunteers working together. The RFL appreciates that it can be difficult to report close colleagues but would remind all those involved in the game of their over-riding moral duty to ensure the welfare of the children at the club above any sense of loyalty to colleagues or the club. All suspicions of abuse or cases of poor practice should be reported following the guidelines in this document.

A coach, official or volunteer may have regular contact with children and be an important link in the identifying cases where a child needs protection. In addition coaches can often become the only adult that a child feels they can trust. This can often lead to a coach receiving a disclosure about abuse outside the club environment. In these circumstances there is a duty to pass on the information and coaches and other volunteers need to be aware of the action to take in these circumstances.

5.2 WHISTLE BLOWING

The RFL is determined to ensure that the culture of the sport is one in which it is safe, acceptable and gives confidence *to* those involved in rugby league to raise concerns about unacceptable practice and misconduct. In order to achieve this, the RFL has a Whistle Blowing Policy which can be found at https://www.rugby-league.com/governance/safeguarding The RFL rules make it an offence to harass or victimise a whistle blower.

5.3 WHAT TO REPORT

In order for the Safeguarding Case Management Group (SCMG) to carry out its responsibilities under the Safeguarding Policy the Group needs to be informed of the following issues or related allegations. In appropriate instances the Group will log the issue/allegation and refer it to the relevant League or Club to deal with and report back to the SCMG, alternatively the SCMG will deal with the issue/allegation itself or refer it to the appropriate statutory agencies.

When reporting an allegation/incident the LWO and/or CWO should complete a cause for concern/ safeguarding intervention form https://www.rugby-league.com/governance/safeguarding/reporting-a-concern and submit it to the RFL Safeguarding Department who will deal with the allegation or incident.

In the event that any individual working with children be required to make a statutory referral they can find the relevant Local Authority by entering the postcode of the child's main home address here: https://www.gov.uk/find-local-council

The following is a list of issues and/or allegations which should be referred to the SCMG, please note this is not exhaustive and if anyone in the game believes a Child is at risk of harm this should be reported.

5.3.1 Physical abuse

- Assault or inappropriate contact on a Child by an adult
- Allegations or suspicions that a Child is being physically abused in or outside Rugby League

5.3.2 Verbal Abuse

- Threatening and/or abusive language that causes (or that a reasonable adult would expect to cause) emotional distress to a Child

NB just because a Child does not appear to be emotionally distressed does not mean that they are not, when verbal abuse is regular Children learn to hide their feelings.

5.3.3 Racist, homophobic or other discriminatory abuse

- Racist, homophobic or other discriminatory abuse or allegations of abuse which have not resulted in a dismissal.

NB if the Match Official has heard the abuse and dismissed the player then the report should be dealt with in the same manner as any other dismissal.

5.3.4 Neglect

- Allegations or suspicions that a Child is being neglected.

5.3.5 Sexual abuse/breach of Relationships of Trust

- Allegations or suspicions that a Child is being sexually abused either in the game or in any other place e.g. school, home, church, by other Children
- Allegations of an adult sharing a room with a Child, showering with Children, making sexually suggestive comments to a Child, inappropriate touching, taking or inviting a Child to their home on their own
- Allegations or suspicions that a volunteer or employee is entering into a sexual relationship with a Child under 18 involved in the game.

5.3.6 Information about Participants

- Information and/or rumours about participants in the game which if true would lead a reasonable person to believe that the participant (regardless of age) may be a threat to the safety of Children.

5.3.7 Bullying

- Bullying of Children by adults

Child on Child bullying should usually be dealt with by the CWO at the club who may contact the Safeguarding Manager for advice.

5.3.8 Female Genital Mutilation, Honour Based Violence, Radicalisation

Allegations or suspicions of any of the above should usually be reported to the police, however CWOs may contact the Safeguarding Manager for advice.

5.3.9 Poor Practice

Poor practice should initially be reported to the Safeguarding team who may decide to deal with it (particularly if either the adult concerned is already known to the Safeguarding team or if there have been a number of incidents of poor practice raised at a particular club which the club does not appear to be capable of dealing with) or may refer the issue back to the club/league to deal with internally. In these situations the club/league must report back on their findings.

5.4 WHAT ACTION TO TAKE TO REPORT CONCERNS, REPORT A DISCLOSURE OR AN ALLEGATION

On becoming aware of or witnessing a concern, receiving a disclosure or an allegation or a breach of this Policy you should:

In the case of Abuse:

- Contact the CWO who will report to the RFL Safeguarding Manager
- If the CWO is not available report your concerns direct to the RFL Safeguarding Manager
- The RFL Safeguarding Manager will report to the RFL Safeguarding Case Management Group or the statutory agencies as appropriate
- If neither the CWO or the Safeguarding Manger is available and/or immediate action is required to protect the child contact Children's Social Care or the police as appropriate.

In the case of Poor Practice:

- Contact the CWO who will report to the RFL Safeguarding Manager
- If the CWO is not available report your concerns direct to the RFL Safeguarding Manager.

5.5 ADVICE ON ACTION TO BE TAKEN IF A CHILD DISCLOSES TO YOU

The points below set out general principles to be followed with all concerns, allegations and disclosures.

If a child informs you directly that he/she, or another child, is concerned about someone's behaviour towards them (this is termed a 'disclosure') then:

The person receiving the information should:

- React calmly so as not to frighten or deter the child
- Believe what the child is telling you
- Tell the child he/she is not to blame and that he/she was right to tell
- Ensure the immediate safety of the child
- If the child needs immediate medical treatment, take them to hospital or telephone for an ambulance, inform doctors of the concerns and make sure that they know that this is a Safeguarding issue
- Take what the child says seriously, recognising the difficulties inherent in interpreting what is said by a child who has speech disability and/or differences in language
- Keep any questions to the minimum required to ensure a clear and accurate understanding of what has been said
- Do not ask leading questions or make suggestions about what may have happened

- Reassure the child but do not make promises of confidentiality which might not be feasible in the light of subsequent developments
- In the event of suspicion of sexual abuse do not let the child shower or wash until given permission to do so by the police as washing can destroy valuable evidence
- Before contacting parents ensure that they are not the perpetrators
- Where appropriate seek advice immediately from Children's Social Care or Police who will advise on the action to be taken, including advice on contacting parents, Expert advice can also be provided by the NSPCC Helpline on 0808 800 5000 or ChildLine on 0800 1111 (both 24 hours)
- Alternatively contact the RFL Safeguarding Team who can make referrals on your behalf
- Involve somebody else – if not Children's Social Care or Police then the CWO, or the RFL Safeguarding Manager so that you can begin to protect the child and gain support for yourself.
- Write down the details of the concern, incident and/or what the child has disclosed as soon as possible, including details of who this information has been shared with and when.

The person receiving the information should NOT:

- Panic
- Allow their shock or distaste to show
- Show any disbelief or fail to take the allegations seriously
- Ask questions other than to clarify that they have enough information to act
- Speculate or make assumptions
- Make negative comments about alleged abuser
- Approach the alleged abuser
- Make promises or agree to keep secrets
- Take sole responsibility
- Shirk the responsibility to report the concern.

5.6 CONFIDENTIALITY

Every effort should be made to ensure that confidentiality is maintained for all concerned. The legal principle that the "welfare of the child is paramount" means that considerations of confidentiality which might apply to other situations within the organisation should not be allowed to override the right of children to be protected from harm.

However every effort must be made to ensure that appropriate confidentiality is maintained when an allegation has been made and is being investigated.

Information should be handled and disseminated on a 'need to know' basis only. This may include the following people:

- The CWO
- The League Welfare Officer
- The RFL Safeguarding Manager and Safeguarding Case Management Group

- The parents of the person who is alleged to have been abused (only following advice from the Children's Social Care/Police or where the abuse does not involve the family)
- The person making the allegation
- Children's Social Care/the Designated Officer/Police
- The alleged abuser (and parents if the alleged abuser is a young person) only following advice from the Children's Social Care/Police.

Information should be stored in a secure place with limited access to designated people, in line with the data protection laws (e.g. that information is accurate, regularly updated, relevant and secure).

5.7 RECORDING THE INCIDENT OR ALLEGATION

Information passed to Children's Social Care or the Police must provide as much detail as is available and relevant in order to be as helpful as possible, hence the necessity for making a detailed record at the time of the disclosure/concern. The initial report should be made to the RFL Safeguarding Manager using a cause for concern/ safeguarding intervention form. https://www.rugby-league.com/governance/safeguarding/reporting-a-concern The RFL Safeguarding Manager will act as the single point of contact with all statutory agencies.

Information required at the referral stage:

Child - Age/ gender / name / disabilities / address /date of birth/ contact details/ parental responsibility / agencies already working with the family / relationship between child and accused.

Accused - Name / address / contact details/ position – employee / volunteer / paid / level of coach; Any other allegations; Marital status; Age; Previous incidents.

Primary evidence

Core information about the alleged incident.

a) Facts from the person making the allegation including dates/times/venue/witness details
b) Records with dates
c) Has anyone else been informed or is anyone else already involved in the investigation.

Other than in the case of an emergency situation the initial report should be made to the RFL Safeguarding Manager who will act as the point of contact with the statutory authorities.

In an emergency reporting the matter to the Police or Children's Social Care should not be delayed by attempts to obtain more information. A record should also be made of the name and job title of the Children's Social Care or Police Officer whom the concerns were passed, together with the time and date of the call. Any information forwarded to the Children's Social Care or Police must also be provided to the RFL Safeguarding Manager and/or the RFL Safeguarding Case Management Group (as soon as reasonably possible) who will take over management of the case and consider any wider issues within the game and put in place relevant protections.

Where reports are made to the RFL, the Safeguarding Manager will inform the Designated Officer where relevant as soon as possible.

In cases which are not an emergency but where there are concerns about a child's welfare the RFL Safeguarding Manager can make a referral to Children's Social Care on behalf of a club.

5.8 THE ROLE OF THE STATUTORY AGENCIES

Where clubs are made aware by any of the statutory agencies including but not limited to the Designated Officer, Children's Social Care and the Police, that their club or a volunteer or child at their club is subject to an investigation relevant to any issue related to the Safeguarding Policy the **club must always inform the RFL Safeguarding Manager immediately**. The RFL may have to take immediate action to protect the welfare of children but will always work in tandem with the statutory agencies.

5.9 THE RFL CASE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (Please refer to RFL Operational Rules D1 and D4 for full details)

https://www.rugby-league.com/governance/rules-and-regulations/operational-rules

All reports of alleged abuse or poor practice made to the RFL Safeguarding Manager are referred to the RFL Safeguarding Case Management Group (SCMG) who meet regularly throughout the year to consider those cases. The powers of the SCMG are set out in RFL Operational Rules Tiers 1-3 and Tiers 4-6.

- The SCMG may refer allegations to the RFL's team of Independent Compliance Investigators, some of whom have specific Safeguarding experience. The Investigators will carry out an investigation and provide a report to the SCMG. Following the investigation the SCMG will consider the Compliance Investigator's report and decide on the course of action to take under the Operational Rules.

Where the Police and/or Children's Social Care and/or a Designated Officer is involved in a case the RFL SCMG will liaise with the statutory bodies and may defer any action until the statutory bodies have completed their work. Irrespective of the findings of statutory bodies enquiries, the RFL Safeguarding Case Management Group will assess all individual cases to decide whether action should be taken by the RFL in line with the Operational Rules.

The welfare of the child will always remain paramount.

5.10 SUPPORT TO DEAL WITH THE AFTERMATH

Consideration should be given about what support may be appropriate to children, parents and members of staff and volunteers. Use of Help Lines, support groups and open meetings will maintain an open culture and help the healing process. The British Association of Counselling Directory may be a useful resource. The RFL may be able to advise on counselling options.

5.11 SUPPORT FOR THE ALLEGED PERPETRATOR

Consideration should be given about what support may be appropriate to the alleged perpetrator of the abuse.

Additional information is available on request from the RFL.

5.12 REFERRAL FLOWCHART

If a child has disclosed information to you, OR you have witnessed, OR had reported to you an incident or complaint involving the behaviour of an individual's in relation to a child, which may be considered abuse or poor practice, below is the reporting process.

Is the child in need of urgent medical treatment or in immediate danger?

NO

Report to your Club Welfare Officer (CWO) or League Welfare Officer (LWO)
or
RFL Safeguarding Team
at the earliest opportunity

YES

Contact the emergency services (999) and inform them of potential Safeguarding issues.
Then inform your CWO, LWO or RFL Safeguarding Team

Does the allegation or incident involve the child's parent(s) guardian(s) or carer(s) or someone in a position of trust?

NO

CWO, LWO or RFL Safeguarding Team to inform the child's parent(s) guardian(s) or carer(s)

FOLLOW

The RFL Safeguarding Team will decide either of the following:

1. low level concerns to be managed by the League
2. poor practice to be managed by the RFL

YES

Where possible RFL Safeguarding Team to report to local social services when the concern involve the child's parent(s) guardian(s) or carer(s).

In some circumstances you may be asked to do this.

If the concerns relate to someone in a position of trust the RFL Safeguarding Team will make a referral into the Local Authority Designated Officer

The person receiving, and then reporting the complaint or concerns must send a written statement to the RFL Safeguarding Team at the earliest opportunity.

All relevant parties will be kept up to date with information and the case outcome where appropriate.

USEFUL CONTACTS
Find your local social services - **www.gov.uk/find-local-council**
NSPCC helpline 10am—4pm Monday to Friday **0808 800 5000**
Childline—**0800 1111**
RFL Safeguarding Team—**safeguarding@rfl.co.uk**