

Wicklow Tennis Club – Child Protection Policy

Appendix 17

Bullying Policy

Wicklow Tennis Club is aware of the potential for bullying behavior to take place within the club. This Appendix sets out the club's policy on bullying, the supports to be put in place to support the victims of bullying and the procedures to be followed if incidents occur.

What is Bullying?

Bullying can be defined as repeated aggression be it verbal, psychological or physical conducted by an individual or group against others.

It is behaviour that is intentionally aggravating and intimidating and occurs mainly in social environments such as schools, clubs and other organisations working with children.

It includes behaviors such as teasing, taunting, threatening, hitting and extortion behaviour by one or more children against a victim.

How would you know if a child is being bullied?

All bullies operate using furtiveness, threats and fear. Bullying can therefore only survive in an environment where the victim does not feel empowered to tell someone who can help or in which it is not safe to do so. The club will actively encourage all young members to reject bullying and encourage the reporting of incidents to the Children's Officers.

The following indicators are warning signs that a young person might be getting bullied.

- Reluctance to come to a venue or take part in activities.
- Physical signs (unexplained bruises, scratches, or damage to belongings).
- Stress-caused illness – headaches, and stomach aches which seem unexplained.
- Fearful behaviour (fear of walking to a meeting, going different routes, asking to be driven).
- Frequent loss of, or shortage of, money with vague explanations.
- Having few friends.
- Changes in behaviour (withdrawn, stammering, moody, irritable, upset, distressed).
- Not eating.
- Attempting suicide or hinting at suicide.
- Anxiety (shown by nail-biting, fearfulness, tics).

There are of course other possible reasons for many of the above.

Who should deal with bullying?

While the more extreme forms of bullying would be regarded as physical or emotional abuse and are reported to the Tusla (Child and Family Agency) or An Garda Síochána, dealing with bullying behaviour amongst young people in the club will, in the first instance, be the responsibility of the club's Children's Officers.

How can it be prevented?

- ❖ Ensure that all members follow the code of conduct, which promotes the rights and dignity of each member.
- ❖ Deal with any incidents as they arise.
- ❖ Use a whole group policy or 'no-blame approach', i.e., not 'bullying the bully' but working with bullies and the group of children, helping them to understand the hurt they are causing, and so make the problem a 'shared concern' of the group (see below).
- ❖ Reinforce that there is 'a permission to tell' culture rather than a 'might is right' one.
- ❖ Encourage children to negotiate, co-operate and help others, particularly new or different children.
- ❖ Offer the victim immediate support and put the 'no blame approach' into operation.
- ❖ Never tell a child to ignore bullying.
- ❖ Never encourage a child to take the law into their own hands and beat the bully at their own game.
- ❖ Tell the victim there is nothing wrong with them and it is not their fault.

What is the 'No Blame' Approach?

Step 1 – Interview with the victim

If there has been an incident of bullying, one of the club's Children's Officers will talk to the victim. At this stage he/she will try to find out who was involved and what the victim is now feeling by asking questions such as.

- Was it verbal or physical intimidation?
- How hurt is the victim
- Was it within his/her own peer group?

Assure the victim that his/her name will not come out in the investigation and actively listen.

Step 2 – Meet with all involved

The Children's Officers will arrange to meet with all those involved. This should include bystanders, those who may have colluded, those who joined in and those who initiated the bullying. However, try to limit it to a maximum of six to eight in the group – keep the number controllable.

The Children's Officers should

- ❖ Make a point of calling a 'special' meeting.
- ❖ Ensure the severity of the topic is understood by all.
- ❖ Speak only of the hurt caused in general terms with no reference to the victim.
- ❖ Play on the conscience of all – ask questions like: How would you feel? Would you like it done to you?

Step 3 – Explain the problem

The distress being suffered as a result of the bullying incident will be explained. At this stage the details of the incident or the allocation of the blame will not be discussed. Explain the feelings of loneliness, feeling left out, rejected, laughed at.

Try asking questions:

- Would they like it if it happened to them?
- Someone here in this group was bullied by someone within the group, what can be done to see it does not happen again?

The Children's Officers will use the meeting to identify the basis for the bullying incident and without isolating anyone try to identify a solution.

Step 4 – Share the responsibility

The Children's Officers will explain what steps/controls may have to be introduced to prevent further incidents and how everyone will lose out as a result.

Step 5 – Ask the group for their ideas

At this stage the group will be encouraged to suggest ways that would make the victim feel happier. All positive responses will be listened to and noted.

Step 6 – Leave it to them

Now that the problem has been identified, solutions suggested, the problem will now be handed over to the group to solve. A further meeting will be in a week's time. The responsibility will now be handed over to the group and give a time frame within which something must be done.

Step 7 – Meet them again

At the second meeting each member of the group will discuss how things are going, who is doing what and have there been other incidents. This will allow for continual monitoring and also keeps everyone involved in the process.

Again the idea of the 'team' looking after each other will be reinforced at regular intervals to ensure it is known that bullying or intimidating behaviour will not be tolerated.