

Aquinas FC – Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy!

Introduction

Aquinas Football Club is fully committed to providing a safe and positive environment for all young people involved in our activities. We recognize our responsibility to safeguard the welfare of every child under the age of 18 who participates in club activities. Our policy adheres to the standards and guidelines set by the Irish Football Association (IFA) and the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995.

Principles

- Best Interests of the Child: The welfare and well-being of children are our primary considerations in all decisions and actions.
- Zero Tolerance for Abuse: We will not tolerate any form of child abuse or exploitation.
- Equality and Inclusion: Every child, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, or religion, has an equal right to protection.
- Empowerment and Participation: Children should be empowered to understand their rights and have a voice in the decisions that affect them.

Definitions

- Child: Anyone under the age of 18.
- Safeguarding: The proactive policies and procedures in place to protect children from harm, abuse, or exploitation.
- Child Protection: Actions taken to protect a child where there are concerns about abuse or neglect.

Code of Conduct for Coaches, Volunteers, and Staff

All coaches, volunteers, and staff at Aquinas Football Club must adhere to the following guidelines:

- Respect the Rights of Children: Treat all children with dignity, respect, and fairness, ensuring they feel valued and safe.
- Professional Boundaries: Avoid inappropriate physical contact and never engage in any behavior that could be misinterpreted as grooming or abusive.
- Clear Communication: Communicate openly and appropriately with children, ensuring all instructions and feedback are positive and encouraging.
- Avoid One-to-One Situations: Whenever possible, ensure that two adults are present when interacting with a child.
- Report Concerns: Coaches and volunteers are required to report any concerns about a child's welfare to the Designated Safeguarding Officer (DSO) immediately.

Reporting and Responding to Concerns

Aquinas Football Club has a clear process for reporting and responding to concerns:

- Recognize: Understand the signs and symptoms of abuse or neglect.
- Respond: Take immediate action if a child discloses abuse or if abuse is suspected. Listen calmly and without judgment.
- Report: All concerns must be reported to the DSO, who will take appropriate action in line with the IFA's safeguarding procedures.

- Record: Any concerns or disclosures should be documented promptly and securely, including the child's details, the nature of the concern, and the actions taken.
- Refer: If necessary, the DSO will refer the case to statutory authorities such as Social Services or the PSNI (Police Service of Northern Ireland).

Designated Safeguarding Officer (DSO)

The DSO is responsible for:

- Overseeing Safeguarding Policies: Ensuring the club's policies are regularly updated and in line with IFA guidance.
- Receiving and Acting on Concerns: Handling all safeguarding and child protection concerns in a timely and confidential manner.
- Training and Support: Providing safeguarding training to all coaches, volunteers, and staff, and offering ongoing support in implementing safeguarding best practices.

Current DSO: Shauna Hegarty

Contact Information: 07902241525

Recruitment and Vetting

Aquinas Football Club will ensure that all coaches, staff, and volunteers undergo proper vetting procedures:

- Access NI Checks: All individuals working directly with children must complete an enhanced Access NI check.
- References: We will seek references to assess the suitability of potential coaches and volunteers.
- Safeguarding Training: All new staff and volunteers will be required to attend safeguarding training before starting their roles.

Training

All coaches and volunteers will undergo regular safeguarding and child protection training, provided through the IFA or other approved bodies. This will ensure that all personnel are familiar with current safeguarding practices, including how to recognize and respond to concerns.

Safe Practices on and off the Field

- Consent for Activities: Parental consent will be obtained for all club activities, including training sessions, matches, and events.
- Photography and Media: No photographs or media of children will be published or shared without the express consent of their parents or guardians.
- Transport: Children will only be transported to or from club activities with the consent of their parents or guardians and in line with club guidelines to ensure safety.

Confidentiality and Information Sharing

Aquinas Football Club is committed to maintaining the confidentiality of all safeguarding matters. Information will only be shared on a need-to-know basis and in accordance with legal requirements, especially when it is in the best interest of the child.

Review of the Policy

This policy will be reviewed annually to ensure it remains relevant and effective, or earlier if there are any changes to legislation or IFA safeguarding guidelines.

This policy outlines our commitment to safeguarding children at Aquinas Football Club. Coaches, volunteers, parents, and players are encouraged to familiarize themselves with its contents and work together to uphold the safety and welfare of our young players.