



## **Mountaineering Ireland Children's Policy**

### **Good Practice & Child Protection**

*Approved at the 2003 Autumn Council meet in Clifden*

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#### **Introduction**

Children have a lot to gain from involvement in sport. Like other sports, mountaineering provides an opportunity to learn new skills, explore new environments, gain confidence and of course have fun. The full potential of these benefits can only be gained with a positive and progressive approach to the child's involvement. The focus should be on the needs of the child rather than on competition or success. A child-centred approach to mountaineering involving young people will result in continued participation, a positive public image of our sport and long-term benefits in terms of the health and well-being of our future adult population.

Mountaineering Ireland has a duty of care to safeguard all children involved in youth mountaineering activities from harm. All children have a right to protection, and the needs of disabled children and others who may be particularly vulnerable must be taken into account. Mountaineering Ireland will ensure the welfare and safety of all children involved in youth activities through promotion of, and adherence to, the Good Practice and Child Protection guidelines adopted by Mountaineering Ireland.

***A child is defined as under 18 by the  
UN Convention on the Rights of the Child***

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All sporting organisations which make provision for children and young people must ensure that:

- The welfare of the child is paramount;
- All children, whatever their age, culture, disability, gender, language, racial origin, religious beliefs and/or sexual identity have the right to be involved in sport;

### **Policy Statement**

Mountaineering Ireland is fully committed to safeguarding the well being of its members. Every individual and club member of Mountaineering Ireland should, at all times, show respect and understanding for their rights, safety and welfare. They should conduct themselves in a way that reflects the principles of Mountaineering Ireland and the guidelines contained in Mountaineering Ireland's Good Practice and Child Protection Policy.

### **Code of Good Practice for Mountaineering Ireland Volunteers and Staff**

By adhering to this Code of Good Practice, Mountaineering Ireland volunteers and staff can ensure that our sport will be safe and fun for young participants, while those undertaking roles within our sport will be protected.

### **Good Practice means:**

- putting the child's welfare, safety and enjoyment first, before winning or achieving goals.
- treating all young people/disabled adults equally, and with respect and dignity.
- making sport and activities fun, enjoyable and promoting fair play.
- building balanced relationships based on mutual trust, which empowers children to share in the decision-making process.
- being an excellent role model – this includes not smoking or drinking alcohol in the company of young people.
- giving enthusiastic and constructive feedback rather than negative criticism.
- planning and preparing appropriately so that each session suits the needs of the group (eg activities are age appropriate and allow each child to participate in an enjoyable way).
- always working in an open environment (e.g. avoiding private or unobserved situations and encouraging an open environment i.e. no secrets).
- recognising the developmental needs and capacity of young people and disabled adults – avoiding excessive training or competition and not pushing them against their will.
- ensuring that manual or physical support is only provided when necessary, and that this is in the interest of the child and takes place openly. Young people should always be consulted and their agreement gained. Care is needed, as it is difficult to maintain hand positions when a child is constantly moving. Some parents are becoming increasingly sensitive about manual support and their views should always be carefully considered.

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- keeping up to date with the technical skills, qualifications and insurance for sport.
- involving parents/carers wherever possible (e.g. for the responsibility of their children in changing rooms). If groups have to be supervised in a changing area, always ensure parents / teachers / coaches / officials work in pairs.
- securing parental consent in writing to *act in loco parentis*, if the need arises to give permission for the administration of emergency first aid and/or other medical treatment.
- keeping a written record of any injury that occurs, along with the details of any treatment given.
- ensuring that if mixed groups are taken away, they should always be accompanied by an adult male and an adult female.
- ensuring that on residential activities, adults should not enter children's rooms or invite children into their rooms.
- requesting written parental consent if club officials are required to transport young people in their cars.

It is important that all Mountaineering Ireland volunteers and staff follow this Code of Good Practice. By keeping young people at the forefront of our planning and practice we can be confident that participants will enjoy their mountaineering experiences and that our actions will be regarded as safe. In addition volunteers and staff **should never:**

- Exert undue influence over a young participant in order to gain personal benefit or reward.
- Share a room or tent alone with a young person on away trips
- Engage in rough contact, sexually provocative games, inappropriate touching of any kind, and/or make sexually suggestive comments about or to a child.
- Engage in a sexual relationship with a young person. This is considered a breach of trust and a disciplinary matter. If the young person is below the age of consent it may be illegal and hence a criminal matter.
- Use any form of corporal punishment or physical force on a young person.
- Take body measurements or engage in certain types of fitness testing without the presence of another adult.
- Undertake any form of therapy (hypnosis etc.) in the training of young people.

Mountaineering Ireland volunteers and staff, particularly those involved in climbing activities, will be working in an environment where a 'hands on' approach may sometimes be necessary (e.g. demonstrating a technique during coaching, or assisting with personal protective equipment such as a climbing harness). Ensure that such contact is kept to the safe minimum, done openly, is in response to the child's need, and is with the knowledge and consent of the child and their parent/guardian.

Minimum reasonable force or restraint may be used in exceptional circumstances; self defence, preventing risk of injury, or damage to property. Record and report any such incidents to the Club Children's Officer or the Mountaineering Ireland's National Children's Officer.

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Challenge sensitively any inappropriate behaviour from a child, such as a crush on an instructor or attention seeking behaviour. If this is focused on you, seek support and inform the Club Children's Officer or Mountaineering Ireland's National Children's Officer.

Following any incident where an volunteer or member of staff feels their actions could be misinterpreted, a written report should be submitted to Mountaineering Ireland's National Children's Officer.

Finally, prepare yourself, and those who work with you, by taking preventative measures. Think through:

- the reasons for doing what you are doing;
- how you do it;
- any possible misinterpretations of your actions.

### **Guidelines for Use of Photographic & Filming Equipment at Sporting Events involving children.**

There is evidence that some people have used sporting events as an opportunity to take inappropriate photographs or film footage of young and disabled sports-people in vulnerable positions. Photographers should have the participants' permission or accreditation where appropriate. It is advisable that all clubs be vigilant and that any concerns are reported to the Club Children's Officer.

Videoring as a Coaching Aid: there is no intention to prevent club coaches and teachers using video equipment as a legitimate coaching aid. However, permission should be sought and performers (and their parents / carers) should be aware that this is part of the coaching programme. Care should be taken in the storing of such films.

#### **Rules to guide use of photography:**

- If the athlete is named, avoid using their photograph.
- If a photograph is used, avoid naming the athlete.
- Ask for the athlete's permission to use their image. This ensures that they are aware of the way the image is to be used to represent the sport.
- Ask for parental permission to use the young person's image. This ensures that parents are aware of the way the image is to be used to represent the sport.
- To reduce the risk of inappropriate use, only use images of athletes in suitable dress. The content of the photograph should focus on the activity not on a particular child
- The use of inappropriate images should be reported to Mountaineering Ireland's National Children's Officer or the health board /social services or the Gardaí / PSNI.

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Amateur photographers / film / video operators wishing to record an event or practice session should seek accreditation with the Club Children's Officer / Mountaineering Ireland's National Children's Officer or the leader of the session. The club / organisation should display the following information prior to the start of an event to inform spectators of the policy:

*"In line with the recommendation in the Mountaineering Ireland's Children's Policy, the promoters of this event request that any person wishing to engage in any video, zoom or close range photography should register their details with the organisers. On no account should children be photographed or filmed without their permission and the permission of their parents".*

Those commissioning professional photographers or inviting the press to an activity or event should ensure the media representatives are clear about expectations of them in relation to child protection. Professional photographers / film / video operators wishing to record an event or practice session should seek accreditation with the Club Children's Officer / Mountaineering Ireland's National Children's Officer or event organiser by producing their professional identification for the details to be recorded.

The Children's Officer / event organiser must then:

- Provide a clear brief about what is considered appropriate in terms of content and behaviour
- Issue the photographer with identification which must be worn at all times
- Keep a record of accreditations
- Inform athletes and parents that a photographer will be in attendance at an event and ensure they consent to both the taking and publication of films or photographs.
- Not allow unsupervised access to athletes or one to one photo sessions at events
- Not approve/allow photo sessions outside the event or at an athlete's home

### **Recruitment and Selection of Staff and Volunteers**

The vast majority of Mountaineering Ireland actions are propagated by volunteers with the aid and guidance of a small number of paid staff. Mountaineering Ireland seeks to position itself to support its members by allowing the recruitment of workers to provide technical, physical and clerical assistance.

Mountaineering Ireland will endeavour to recruit and select volunteers and staff in a transparent and equitable fashion in line with current guidelines set out by the sports councils and labour agencies (RoI & NI).

Mountaineering Ireland recognises that anyone may have the potential to abuse children in some way and that all reasonable steps are taken to ensure unsuitable people are prevented from working with children. When undertaking pre-selection checks the following should be included:

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- All volunteers /staff working with young people should complete an application form. The application form should elicit information about the applicant's past and include a self-disclosure about any criminal record.
- For those working or volunteering in NI: consent should be obtained from the applicant to seek information from the Pre-Employment Consultancy Service.
- Two confidential references, including one regarding previous work with children. These references must be taken up and confirmed through telephone contact.
- Evidence of identity (passport or driving licence with photo).

## Dealing with Bullying

### Action to prevent bullying in sport and to help the victims of bullying:

- Take all signs of bullying very seriously.
- Encourage all children to speak and share their concerns (It is believed, that on this island, up to 12 children per year commit suicide as a result of bullying, so if anyone talks about or threatens suicide, seek professional help immediately). Help the victim to speak out and tell the person in charge or someone in authority.
- Create an open environment.
- Investigate all allegations and take action to ensure the victim is safe. Speak with the victim and the bully(ies) separately.
- Reassure the victim that you can be trusted and will help them, although you cannot promise to tell no one else.
- Keep records of what is said (what happened, by whom, when).
- Report any concerns to the Club Children's Officer or the school (wherever the bullying is occurring).

### Action towards the bully(ies):

- Talk with the bully(ies), explain the situation, and try to get the bully (ies) to understand the consequences of their behaviour. Seek an apology to the victim(s).
- Inform the bully's parents.
- Insist on the return of *borrowed* items and that the bully(ies) compensate the victim.
- Provide support for the coach of the victim.
- Impose sanctions as necessary.
- Encourage and support the bully(ies) to change behaviour.
- Hold meetings with the families to report on progress.
- Inform Club Committee / relevant authority of action taken.
- Keep a written record of action taken in incident book

Further information and advice on Dealing with Bullying is available from the Anti-Bullying Fact-sheet published by the Department of Health and Children (RoI) with 'Our Duty to Care'.

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### What happens if ... (making a Disclosure, also called a Referral)

Child abuse, in any form, can arouse strong emotions in those facing such a situation. It is important to understand these feelings and not allow them to interfere with your judgement about any action to take. Abuse can occur within many situations including the home, school and the sporting environment. Some individuals will actively seek employment or voluntary work with young people in order to harm them. A coach, instructor, teacher, official or volunteer may have regular contact with young people and be an important link in identifying cases where a young person needs protection. All suspicious cases of poor practice should be reported following the guidelines in this document. When a child enters the club having been subjected to child abuse outside the sporting environment, sport can play a crucial role in improving the child's self esteem. In such instances the club must work with the appropriate agencies to ensure the child receives the required support.

All those working with children within a sporting organisation, whether in a paid or voluntary capacity, have a responsibility to ensure that children are protected from harm, **but do not** hold responsibility for deciding whether or not abuse has taken place. It is the role of statutory agencies to make enquiries to assess whether a child is at risk of abuse and to take any necessary action to protect that child or young person. *(Local Authorities within the NI have a statutory duty under the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995. The Children First guidelines 1999 (ROI) give statutory authorities a moral obligation to ensure the welfare of children).*

### **If there is a concern about a child's welfare, or the behaviour of an adult - the one thing not to do, is to do nothing!**

#### **When a child tells you about abuse...**

- A good solution to the discretion and caution required is 'observed confidentiality' where you are witnessed speaking with the child, but not overheard.
- If a child or young person talks to you about a concern, or if the child tells you about their abuse listen carefully and compassionately to what they tell you.
- It is important to stay calm and not show any extreme reaction to what the child is saying.
- The child is taking a risk by telling you this, you should ensure that the child's experience of telling is a positive one.
- Encourage the child to talk, using open-ended questions such as "Do you want to tell me about this?"
- Remember the setting - the child is likely to be frightened or anxious.
- Tell the child he/she that he/she was right to tell and is not to blame.
- Take what the child says seriously.
- Recognise the inherent difficulties interpreting what is said by young children or children with communication difficulties.

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- However don't prevent a child from recalling events.
- No judgmental statement should be made about the person against whom the allegation is made.
- Be honest with the child about what you can and cannot do. Tell them you are not able to keep what they have told you secret and that you will try to find them the help they need. Tell them what is likely to happen next (e.g. informing parents / guardians, health board etc.)
- When they have finished make a detailed note of what they have said and pass that information onto someone in a position of authority as soon as possible.
- If you have serious concerns about the immediate safety of that child contact the statutory authorities. Record who you spoke to and inform Mountaineering Ireland 's National Children's Officer of what you have done.
- Find someone you trust to talk to and support you, but remember not to name or identify those involved in the allegations.
- In the Republic of Ireland the Protections for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act, 1998 provides immunity from civil liability to persons who report child abuse 'reasonably and in good faith'. This law does not exist in NI, but an individual who reports a concern in good faith is not deliberately attempting to slander another person's name. In NI the Criminal Law Act (NI) 1967 places the responsibility on everybody to report offences or to forward information to the police (*pg 38 Code of Ethics & Good Practice for Children's Sport*).

### **Actions to Avoid**

The person receiving a disclosure of child abuse should not:

- \* Panic. \* Allow their shock or distaste to show. \* Ask direct questions – "Who, What Where or When".
- \* Speculate or make assumptions. \* Make negative comments about the alleged abuser. \* Approach the alleged abuser. \* Make promises or agree to keep secrets. \* Contact or confront the individual who is alleged to be responsible.

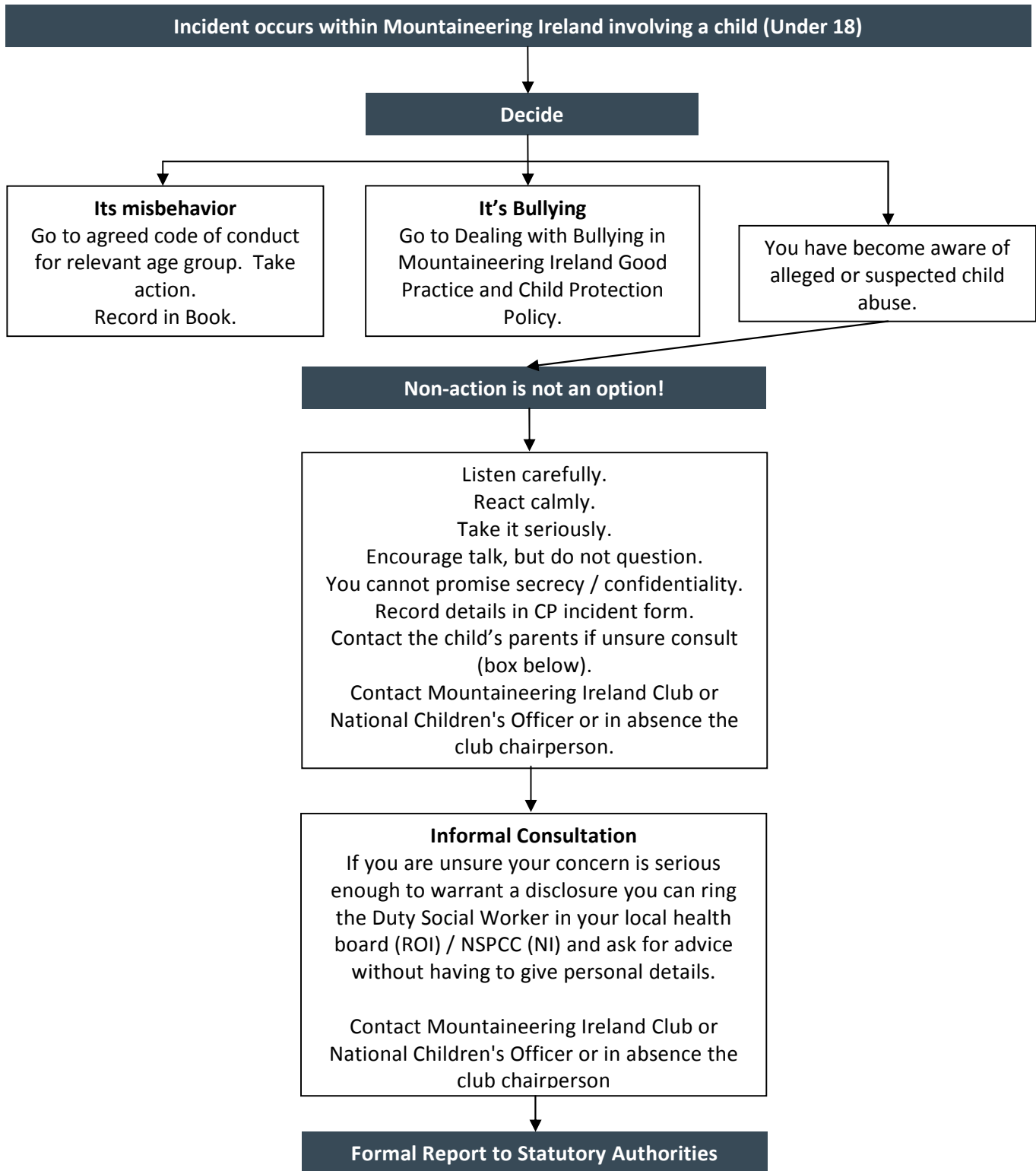
### **Responding to non-verbal concerns**

Changes in a child's behaviour can be the result of a wide range of factors and this makes it difficult to identify if the changes are linked to abuse. Even signs such as bruising or other injuries cannot be taken as "proof" of abuse. However if you have concerns, you have a responsibility to act on those concerns.

### **Allegations of previous abuse**

Allegations of abuse may be made some time after the event (e.g. by an adult who was abused as a child or by a member of staff who is still currently working with children). Where such an allegation is made, the club should follow the procedures as detailed above and report the matter to the social services or the police. This is because other children, either within or outside sport, may be at risk from this person.

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## **If a Mountaineering Ireland volunteer or staff member is the subject of a disclosure or referral**

Mountaineering Ireland will assure all staff/volunteers that it will fully support and protect anyone, who in good faith reports his or her concern that a colleague is, or may be, abusing a child.

Where there is a complaint against a staff member or volunteer there may be three types of investigation:

- A criminal (Garda / PSNI) investigation,
- A child protection investigation,
- A disciplinary or misconduct investigation.

The results of the criminal and child protection investigation may well influence the disciplinary investigation, but not necessarily.

### **Poor Practice**

- If, following consideration, the allegation is clearly about poor practice; the Club Children's Officer / Mountaineering Ireland's National Children's Officer or Disciplinary Committee will deal with it as a misconduct issue.

### **Suspected Abuse**

- Any suspicion that a child has been abused, by either a member of staff or a volunteer, should be reported to the Club Children's Officer / Mountaineering Ireland's National Children's Officer. The Children's Officer will take such steps as considered necessary to ensure the safety of the child in question and any other child who may be at risk.
- The Club Children's Officer / Mountaineering Ireland's National Children's Officer will report the allegation to the local health board or social services department who may involve the Gardaí / PSNI. Out of hours, the Children's Officer may go direct to the Gardaí / PSNI.
- The parents or carers of the child should be contacted as soon as possible, unless by doing so the child may be exposed to further risk. If in doubt follow advice from health board officer / social services department.
- If the Club Children's Officer is the subject of the suspicion/allegation, the report should be made to the Mountaineering Ireland's National Children's Officer. If Mountaineering Ireland's National Children's Officer is the subject of the suspicion/allegation, the report should be made to Mountaineering Ireland's Chairperson who will refer the allegation to the statutory authorities.

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- All members have the option of making a report direct to the statutory authorities if they so wish, or if they are unhappy with how the allegation is being dealt with by the club / Mountaineering Ireland.

### Confidentiality

Every effort should be made to ensure that confidentiality is maintained for all concerned. Information should be handled and disseminated on a **need to know basis** only. This includes the following people:

- The Club Children's Officer;
- The Mountaineering Ireland's National Children's Officer;
- The parents of the person who is alleged to have been abused, unless doing so would endanger the child further;
- The person making the allegation;
- Health board / Social Services, Gardaí / PSNI
- The alleged abuser (and parents if the alleged abuser is a child)\*

*\* Seek advice of the statutory authorities on who should approach alleged abuser.*

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

### Internal Enquiries and Suspension

- The Mountaineering Ireland member accused of abuse will be asked to stand down pending the outcome of any investigation by the statutory authorities. It should be made clear to a person asked to stand aside, that this is only a precautionary measure and will not prejudice any later disciplinary procedure.
- Mountaineering Ireland's National Children's Officer's name should be known and disseminated, it is recommended that Mountaineering Ireland clubs should publicise this name and that of their Club Children's Officer to their members.
- Irrespective of the findings of the criminal and child protection inquiries, the Mountaineering Ireland Board of Directors will appoint a Disciplinary Committee who will assess all individual cases to decide whether a member of staff or volunteer can be reinstated and how this can be sensitively handled. This may be a difficult decision; particularly where there is insufficient evidence to uphold any action by the Gardaí / PSNI. In such cases, the Mountaineering Ireland Disciplinary Committee must reach a decision based upon the available information. **The welfare of children should always remain paramount.**

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### **Support to Deal with the Aftermath**

- Consideration should be given about what support may be appropriate to children, parents and members of staff. Use of help lines, support groups (e.g. ISPC, ROMAL & Association of Boys & Girls Youth Clubs) and open meetings will maintain an open culture and help the healing process.
- Consideration should be given about what support may be appropriate to the alleged perpetrator of the abuse.

### **If you (an adult) are accused of an abusive action**

- Make notes of all your actions/contacts with the child in question as soon as possible.
- Seek access to professional and legal advice.
- Ensure you are no longer working with the child/children making the allegation.
- Consult Mountaineering Ireland's procedures and make sure these are followed correctly
- Accept that colleagues may be expected not to contact you whilst an investigation is underway.
- Don't believe it couldn't happen to you.
- Think about your relationship with a colleague who is under investigation. Ask management to confirm the contact arrangements and what support is available to your colleague and all other staff they work with.



## Appendix: Mountaineering Ireland - Sample Incident Record Form

Your name:

Your position:

Child's name (Initials):

Child's date of birth:

Parents / guardians names:

Child's home address (and phone number, if available):

What prompted your concerns (include date and time of any incident, also any physical and behavioral signs you have observed):

Have you spoken to the child about this? As best you can, record exactly what the child said and what you said: (remember, do not lead the child – record actual details. Continue on separate sheet if necessary)

### Action taken so far:

Have parents been contacted?

*(if unsure contact an agency – see below)*

What has been said?

### External agencies contacted (date & time)

Gardaí / PSNI If 'yes'

Social services yes/ no Social worker

Other (e.g. ISPCC, NSPCC) 24 hr helpline: 1800 66 66 66 (ROI) or 0808 800 5000 (NI)

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