

1. Purpose and scope

The Oxfordshire Youth Football League is committed to providing football in an environment where children and young people are safe, respected and able to enjoy the game.

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Everyone involved in OYFL football has a responsibility to recognise concerns, behave appropriately and take action when the welfare or safety of a child may be at risk.

This policy sets out OYFL's safeguarding responsibilities and the standards expected of its member clubs, officials and volunteers. It should be read alongside The Football Association's current safeguarding policies, procedures and regulations.

For safeguarding purposes, a child is anyone under the age of 18.

OYFL operates competitions from U7 to U21. Where players aged 18 or over participate, the FA's adult welfare and safeguarding arrangements apply to those adults; the child-safeguarding requirements in this policy continue to apply to every participant under 18.

2. Our safeguarding principles

OYFL's approach is based on three principles:

RIGHT PEOPLE	RIGHT BEHAVIOUR	RIGHT ACTIONS
People working with children must be suitable for their roles and appropriately recruited, checked and trained where required.	Adults must maintain appropriate boundaries and create a positive environment where children are treated with dignity and respect.	Concerns must be taken seriously and reported promptly through the appropriate safeguarding route.

No one should assume that somebody else will deal with a safeguarding concern.

3. Roles and responsibilities

OYFL

OYFL will:

- appoint a Youth League Welfare Officer (YLWO) in accordance with FA requirements;
- provide clear safeguarding reporting and escalation routes;
- maintain an appropriate safeguarding support network with member clubs and the relevant County FAs;
- signpost clubs to current FA safeguarding policies, training and guidance;
- ensure appropriate safeguarding requirements apply to relevant League roles;

- refer safeguarding matters to the appropriate County FA, The FA or statutory authority where required; and
- keep its safeguarding arrangements under review.

Youth League Welfare Officer

The Youth League Welfare Officer (YLWO) is OYFL's designated welfare lead for youth football.

The YLWO will:

- support the League in meeting its safeguarding responsibilities;
- work with Club Welfare Officers;
- provide advice and signposting where safeguarding or welfare concerns arise;
- liaise with the relevant County FA safeguarding teams;
- promote current safeguarding practice and training; and
- ensure concerns requiring escalation are passed to the appropriate safeguarding authority.

The YLWO is not responsible for personally investigating allegations of abuse.

Current YLWO contact details will be maintained on the OYFL website rather than embedded in this policy.

Member clubs

Member clubs are responsible for their own safeguarding arrangements and must comply with current FA and County FA requirements.

Clubs must ensure that:

- an appropriately qualified Club Welfare Officer is in place where required;
- people carrying out relevant roles meet current DBS and safeguarding-training requirements;
- safeguarding concerns can be reported easily;
- officials understand how concerns should be escalated;
- children and parents/carers know where to seek help; and
- appropriate safeguarding records are handled securely.

Everyone involved in OYFL football

League officials, club officials, managers, coaches, referees, volunteers and other adults must:

- put children's welfare first;
- maintain appropriate boundaries;
- listen to children;
- challenge inappropriate behaviour;
- take concerns seriously; and
- report safeguarding concerns promptly.

4. Creating safe football environments

OYFL expects member clubs and everyone involved in League football to follow current FA safeguarding and safer-working guidance.

Safer recruitment, DBS and training. Relevant roles must meet current FA safer-recruitment, DBS and safeguarding-training requirements. A DBS check is one part of safer recruitment and does not replace appropriate recruitment, supervision and training.

Appropriate behaviour. Adults must behave in a way appropriate to their role and maintain appropriate relationships and boundaries with children.

Digital communication and social media. The same safeguarding standards apply online as offline. Communication with under-18s must follow current FA guidance and be appropriate, transparent and properly supervised.

Photography and filming. Photography and video can be a positive part of grassroots football but must be undertaken in accordance with current FA safeguarding guidance, with appropriate regard to consent, privacy and children's safety.

Bullying, discrimination and poor practice. Bullying, harassment, intimidation and discriminatory behaviour are not acceptable. Poor practice should be challenged and addressed even where it does not meet the threshold of a safeguarding allegation.

Detailed current guidance is maintained through The FA's safeguarding framework rather than reproduced within this policy.

5. Responding to a safeguarding concern

If someone becomes concerned about the welfare or safety of a child they should:

LISTEN. Stay calm and listen carefully. Do not interrogate the child or ask leading questions.

REASSURE. Explain that they have done the right thing by speaking up. Do not promise confidentiality.

RECORD. Make an accurate record of what was seen, heard or disclosed, including relevant dates and circumstances.

REPORT. Pass the concern promptly through the appropriate safeguarding route.

DO NOT INVESTIGATE. It is not the role of a coach, referee, club official, League official or volunteer to decide whether abuse has occurred.

IMMEDIATE DANGER

If a child is in immediate danger, contact the emergency services.

For concerns arising in football, the normal route is through the appropriate:

Club Welfare Officer	OYFL Youth League Welfare Officer (YLWO)	Relevant County FA safeguarding team
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depending on the circumstances.

Where the concern involves someone within the normal reporting route, it must instead be escalated directly to the appropriate County FA, The FA or statutory authority.

Current contacts and reporting routes will be maintained at oyfl.uk, so that this policy does not become inaccurate when role-holders or contact details change.

6. Whistleblowing

OYFL supports and adopts the principles of The FA's safeguarding whistleblowing arrangements.

Whistleblowing is appropriate where someone has concerns about misconduct or malpractice, particularly where:

- the normal safeguarding process has not been followed;
- appropriate action does not appear to have been taken;
- the concern involves someone within the usual reporting route; or
- a person does not feel able to raise the issue through normal channels.

Safeguarding whistleblowing concerns may be raised directly through The FA Safeguarding Team or the appropriate statutory safeguarding authority.

Current whistleblowing contacts and reporting methods are maintained on The FA's safeguarding website.

GOOD-FAITH REPORTING

No person should be disadvantaged for raising a genuine safeguarding concern in good faith.

7. Confidentiality and information sharing

Safeguarding information must be treated sensitively and shared only with those who need it in order to safeguard a child or manage the concern appropriately.

Records should be:

- factual;
- accurate;
- handled securely; and
- retained or shared in accordance with applicable safeguarding and data-protection requirements.

A request for confidentiality must never prevent appropriate action being taken where a child's safety may be at risk.

The welfare of the child is the priority.

8. Adult welfare

Because OYFL includes U19-U21 football, some participants are adults.

Where a welfare or safeguarding concern relates to an adult, OYFL will follow and signpost to The FA's current Adult Welfare and Safeguarding in Affiliated Football policy and procedures.

Where a concern relates to an under-18 participant - including an under-18 player within an older age group - the child-safeguarding arrangements in this policy apply.

9. Guidance, reporting and review

Current safeguarding resources are maintained through:

- OYFL Safeguarding: oyfl.uk/about/safeguarding
- OYFL Safeguarding & Welfare Resources: oyfl.uk/resources/safeguarding-welfare
- The FA safeguarding website
- the relevant County FA safeguarding teams.

The resources hub provides current links for:

- safer recruitment and DBS;
- safeguarding training;
- Welfare Officer support;
- digital safeguarding;
- U18 guidance;
- parents and carers;
- photography and filming;
- anti-bullying; and
- current FA policies and templates.

This policy will be reviewed:

- annually;
- following material changes to FA safeguarding requirements;
- following a significant safeguarding incident where lessons need to be incorporated; or
- where changes to OYFL's organisation or activities make review necessary.

Material changes will be approved through the League's normal governance arrangements.

DOCUMENT CONTROL

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