

Managing allegations against people who work with children in tennis

Tennis clubs play an important role in delivering services to children and young people through the use of paid staff, volunteers and contractors. The vast majority of these people act professionally and aim to provide a safe and supportive environment for the children in their care.

Sometimes a situation may arise where an individual is alleged to have abused their 'position of trust' and harmed a child. An allegation can be made against a staff member, volunteer or contractor at any time and we know it can be very challenging to believe that someone at your club could cause harm to a child.

When an allegation is raised, it is important that your club is able to safeguard and protect children and young people from possible further harm whilst the allegation is investigated by relevant agencies.

This document and flowchart outlines the process that should be followed when an allegation is raised about someone who works with children and young people at your club.

What happens when an allegation is made?

If an allegation indicates the individual has:

- Behaved in a way that has, or may have, harmed a child;
- Possibly committed a criminal offence against or in relation to a child; or
- Behaved in a way that indicates s/he is unsuitable to work with children

Your Welfare Officer must contact the LTA Safe and Inclusive Tennis Team and Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) within 24 hours.

If you do not have a Welfare Officer, a senior committee member must take responsibility for this process.

It has been reported to us that an individual has been found in possession of indecent images of children. What do we do?

If the Police are not already aware, you should report this matter to them immediately and then inform the Safe and Inclusive Tennis Team and LADO.

If you are in doubt about whether the images are criminal, you should discuss with the Police the best way for them to receive copies to determine whether they are criminal or not.

If the individual has had access to any electronic devices which are the property of the club, quarantine the devices in question and inform the Police about them.

What is a LADO?

Every Local Authority has a statutory responsibility to have a Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). They are responsible for coordinating the response to concerns about an individual who works with children.

The LADO will also consider who else is required to know of the concerns, e.g. other employers or agencies.

Should we suspend the individual?

In the first instance you should seek advice from the LADO and Safe and Inclusive Tennis Team. If a suspension is implemented, it will need to be done in accordance with your club's constitution and any other contracts, policies and procedures.

A suspension helps protect the complainant whilst the allegation is investigated by the relevant authorities. This could be you as a club, the LTA, Police or Social Care.

It is important to inform the individual verbally and in writing and reassure them the suspension has been made without prejudice.

If you are unsure of what to do, please seek advice from the Safe and Inclusive Tennis Team.

Should we inform the individual why they are suspended?

It will be necessary to provide some information, however each situation is different. Please seek advice from the Safe and Inclusive Tennis Team.

What will the LADO do?

If there is cause to suspect a child is suffering or may suffer significant harm, or a criminal offence might have been committed, the LADO will arrange a Strategy Meeting.

Who attends a Strategy Meeting?

The Police, Children's Services, the Safe and Inclusive Tennis Team, your club's Welfare Officer, and any other relevant employers or agencies.

What happens at a Strategy Meeting?

The aim is to share relevant information and determine whether an investigation needs to be conducted by Social Care, the Police, the LTA and/or the club under disciplinary procedures.

Will there be a Police investigation?

In some instances the Police may decide to proceed with a criminal investigation. The individual may be arrested and interviewed under caution, or invited to assist the Police with their investigation.

You will be kept updated by the LADO.

We are concerned about rumours and people finding out.

You may get questions from club members and staff, especially if the individual has not been at work due to the suspension. It is important to remain calm and maintain confidentiality by providing a consistent response.

The Safe and Inclusive Tennis Team can provide you with comms support and help you efficiently manage any enquiries.

Is there a basic comms line we can use in an emergency?

Keep your response simple by using: "NAME is not at the club today. It is a private matter so we are unable to tell you anything more." This does not need to be used in verbatim, however, try not to deviate too much.

The Safe and Inclusive Tennis Team will be able to support you with long term comms support as the situation develops.

Can we dismiss the individual whilst investigations are ongoing?

You should only make a formal employment decision once the Police and Children's Services have concluded their investigations.

The Police have taken no further action. What does this mean and what happens next?

In order to achieve a successful prosecution, the Police need to meet the legal threshold of beyond reasonable doubt. This means a conviction is not always guaranteed.

If no further action is taken by the Police, there will be a closing Strategy Meeting where more information is shared and help given to you as the employer.

What happens if we dismiss the individual or they resign?

If the individual is deemed to pose a risk of harm to children and young people, you have a legal duty to refer to the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS).

You can contact the Safe and Inclusive Tennis Team for support with completing the referral.

What happens if the individual resigns whilst an investigation is still ongoing?

Please inform the Safe and Inclusive Tennis Team and the LADO. Whilst the individual is no longer employed at your club, you will still be responsible for completing a referral to the DBS.

Do we need to offer any support to the individual?

Everyone who is the subject of an allegation will find it stressful and must be offered support. What type of support and who is most suitable to do this will be agreed at the Strategy Meeting.

If the individual is severely distressed and their health and general functioning are affected, they should be advised to seek support from their GP.

Can anyone give us legal advice?

If you are an LTA Registered venue, you can access free legal advice by contacting BASeLINE on 08445618133.

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Managing allegation procedure flowchart

