

Safeguarding Children Policy

Star Soccer Academy – Season 2026/27. Affiliated to the Leicestershire & Rutland County FA and operating under The FA's Safeguarding Children Policy and Regulations.

If a child is in immediate danger, call the police on 999. Otherwise, report any concern to the Club Welfare Officer: Matt Finnigan – matt@starsocceracademy.co.uk. You can also contact the Leicestershire & Rutland County FA safeguarding team on 0116 286 7828 (option 1) or safeguarding@leicestershirefa.com, or the NSPCC helpline on 0808 800 5000.

1. Our commitment

Star Soccer Academy ("the club") is committed to making football safe, enjoyable and inclusive for every child and young person who takes part in our sessions, matches, camps and events, at every venue we use. The welfare of the child is paramount and comes before results, selection, reputation or the convenience of adults.

This policy applies to everyone involved with the club: the owner, coaches, assistant coaches, volunteers, referees we appoint, parents and carers, spectators and players. It covers all children and young people under 18.

Principles

- Every child has the right to take part in football free from abuse, bullying, discrimination and poor practice.
- All concerns are taken seriously and responded to promptly, fairly and in line with FA procedures, whoever raises them and whoever they are about.
- Children are listened to. A child who tells us something is worried or upset will be heard and supported, and will never be in trouble for speaking up.
- Nobody who raises a concern in good faith will be treated less favourably as a result.
- Everyone working with children at the club is suitably checked, trained and supported to do so.
- We work openly with parents and carers, and with the County FA and statutory agencies where needed.

2. Roles and responsibilities

Club Welfare Officer (CWO)

The CWO is the first point of contact for any safeguarding concern. The CWO holds an FA-accepted DBS check and up-to-date FA safeguarding training, is registered on the FA's Whole Game System, and is responsible for:

- receiving, recording and responding to concerns, and referring them to the County FA or statutory agencies where appropriate
- making sure every coach and volunteer has the required checks and training, and that these are kept in date
- making sure this policy and the club's codes of conduct are issued, understood and followed
- keeping safeguarding records securely and confidentially
- seeking advice from the County FA Designated Safeguarding Officer whenever there is doubt about how to handle a matter, or where the CWO's independence could be questioned

Club Welfare Officer: Matt Finnigan – matt@starsocceracademy.co.uk

Where the Club Welfare Officer is unavailable, or is personally involved in a matter, concerns should be raised directly with the Leicestershire & Rutland County FA safeguarding team (contact details in section 6). The club intends to appoint a Deputy Welfare Officer during the 2026/27 season.

Owner and management

The owner is responsible for making sure the club meets the safeguarding requirements of affiliation, that the CWO is supported and resourced, and that any safeguarding recommendation from the County FA or The FA is acted upon.

Coaches and volunteers

Every coach and volunteer working with children must: hold an FA-accepted DBS check and complete the FA Safeguarding Children course and Introduction to First Aid before working unsupervised; renew these as required (DBS every three years); follow the Coaches' Code of Conduct and the good practice in section 4; and report any concern to the CWO on the day it arises.

Parents and carers

Parents and carers are asked to accept, in the Star app, and follow the Parents' and Spectators' Code of Conduct, to help their child understand the Players' Code, and to raise any concern with the coach or CWO promptly and in private.

3. Safe recruitment

Before anyone takes up a role working with children, the club will: take up references where the person is not already known to the club; obtain an FA-accepted DBS check through the County FA; confirm completion of the FA Safeguarding Children course and Introduction to First Aid; and ensure the person is registered against the club on the Whole Game System. Nobody may work unsupervised with children until these are in place. The CWO keeps a register of everyone's checks, training and renewal dates and reviews it at least termly.

4. Good practice

The following applies to all coaches and volunteers:

- Coach in open view. Avoid being alone with a child where you cannot be seen; if a one-to-one conversation is needed, hold it within sight of others.
- Never use foul, abusive, sarcastic or humiliating language towards a child, and never single out a child in front of others for a mistake.
- Treat every child fairly regardless of ability, background or any protected characteristic, and challenge poor behaviour by players, parents or other adults promptly.
- Keep physical contact to what is necessary for coaching or first aid, explain what you are doing, and respect a child's wishes.
- Do not enter changing rooms unless necessary and, where possible, with another adult present. Never photograph or film in changing areas.
- Do not transport a child alone in a vehicle unless it is unavoidable, agreed with the parent and known to the CWO.
- Communicate with players under 18 through their parents or carers, or in group messages that include a parent, another coach or the CWO. Do not exchange private direct messages with a child.
- Follow the club's photography and filming guidance: only with parental consent, only for club purposes, stored securely and never shared publicly without consent.
- Do not consume alcohol or use drugs while responsible for children, and do not smoke or vape in front of them.
- Ensure at least two adults are present at every session and that the ratio of adults to children is appropriate for the age group and activity.

5. Recognising concerns

Concerns may involve abuse by an adult, harm caused by another child, poor practice by a coach, or something happening outside football that a child discloses to us. Types of harm include:

Type	What it may look like
Physical	Hitting, shaking, pushing or any deliberate injury; unexplained or repeated injuries.
Emotional	Persistent criticism, humiliation, threats, being made to feel worthless; a child becoming withdrawn, anxious or fearful.
Sexual	Any sexual activity or contact with a child, grooming, inappropriate messages or images.
Neglect	Failing to provide for a child's basic needs, supervision or safety.
Bullying and child-on-child harm	Repeated or serious abuse, exclusion, intimidation or targeting of a child by other children, in person or online, including language aimed at a child's ability, appearance or identity.
Discrimination	Abuse or unfair treatment related to race, religion, disability, sex, sexual orientation or any other protected characteristic.
Poor practice	Behaviour by an adult that falls below the standards in this policy or the codes of conduct, even where it is not abuse.

You do not need to be certain that something is wrong to report it. If you are worried, tell the CWO.

6. Responding to a concern or disclosure

If a child tells you something

1. Stay calm, listen, and let the child speak in their own words. Do not interrupt or ask leading questions.
2. Reassure the child that they were right to tell you and that it is not their fault.
3. Do not promise to keep it secret. Explain that you will need to tell the Club Welfare Officer so the child can be helped.
4. Do not confront the person the concern is about.
5. As soon as possible, write down what the child said, in their words, with the date, time, place and who was present. Sign and date your note.
6. Pass your note to the CWO the same day.

What the CWO will do

- Record the concern on the club's safeguarding record and acknowledge it to the person who raised it, normally within two working days.
- Where a child may be at risk of significant harm, contact the County FA safeguarding team and, if necessary, children's social care or the police, without delay. Parents will be informed unless doing so could put the child at greater risk.
- Where the concern is about the behaviour of a coach, volunteer or other adult in a position of trust, refer it to the County FA safeguarding team. The club will not investigate such matters itself.
- Where the concern involves another child (see section 7) or poor practice, take advice from the County FA where appropriate, gather accounts from those involved and any witnesses, and manage the matter under this policy and the codes of conduct.
- Put interim measures in place to protect the child while the matter is looked into, record them in a written risk assessment, and share them with the child's parents.
- Keep the family informed, tell them the outcome and any actions taken, and explain that they may contact the County FA safeguarding team at any time if they are not satisfied.

Key contacts

Who	Contact	When
Police	999 (emergency) / 101	A child is in immediate danger or a crime has been committed
Leicestershire First Response Children's Duty	0116 305 0005 (24 hours)	A child may be at risk of significant harm
Leicestershire & Rutland County FA safeguarding team	0116 286 7828 option 1 / safeguarding@leicestershirefa.com	Any concern about an adult in football, advice on any concern, or where the club's handling is questioned
NSPCC helpline	0808 800 5000	Advice for any adult worried about a child
Childline	0800 1111	For children and young people to contact directly

7. Bullying and harm between children

Unkind behaviour between teammates in the heat of a game is not automatically bullying, but the club takes all such incidents seriously because they can quickly become a pattern and because the child on the receiving end may be badly affected. Language aimed at a teammate's ability after a mistake is a breach of the Players' Code of Conduct and will always be addressed.

When an incident between children is reported, the CWO will:

- speak separately to the children involved, with a parent present where appropriate, and gather accounts from adults who were present
- consider whether the incident is a one-off, a repeat, or part of a pattern, and whether any earlier warning applies
- put proportionate measures in place, which may include a reminder or warning, an apology, managing groupings at training and matches, a period out of selection or, for serious or repeated behaviour, a review of a player's place at the club
- make sure the child affected has a named adult at the club they can go to, and check in with them and their parents
- record the incident, the accounts gathered, the decision and the reasons for it

The child affected and the child responsible will both be supported. Sanctions are applied consistently and are never influenced by a player's ability, a family's standing at the club or whether a concern has previously been raised.

8. Concerns and complaints from parents and carers

Parents who raise a welfare concern will receive a written acknowledgement, a named point of contact, a clear explanation of what the club will do and by when, and the outcome in writing. Where the CWO is personally involved in the matter, or where the club's independence could reasonably be questioned, the CWO will seek advice from the County FA safeguarding team on how the matter should be handled. A parent who is not satisfied with the club's response may raise the matter with the County FA safeguarding team directly.

Raising a concern will never be held against a child or family. Decisions on selection, playing time and registration are made through the club's ordinary review process, applied to every player on the same criteria, and are recorded.

9. Whistleblowing

Anyone who believes that safeguarding is not being taken seriously at the club, or who is concerned about the behaviour of a person in a position of authority, including the owner or the CWO, can raise this directly with the Leicestershire & Rutland County FA safeguarding team, The FA Safeguarding Team (safeguarding@thefa.com) or the NSPCC. They will not be penalised for doing so.

10. Records and confidentiality

Safeguarding records, including concern forms, statements, risk assessments, correspondence, video footage and notes of advice from the County FA, are kept securely by the CWO, separately from general club records, and shared only with those who need them to protect a child. Records are factual, dated and signed. Information is handled in line with data protection law. Records relating to a concern are retained in line with FA guidance so that they are available if the matter is revisited.

11. Related documents

- Players' Code of Conduct
- Parents' and Spectators' Code of Conduct
- Coaches' Code of Conduct
- Equality and Anti-Discrimination Policy
- Photography, Filming and Social Media Guidance
- The FA Safeguarding Children Policy and Regulations, and the FA Respect codes, which take precedence over this policy where they differ

12. Review

This policy is reviewed at least annually, and sooner following any serious incident, change in FA requirements or advice from the County FA. It is issued to every coach and volunteer, is available to all parents on request and on the club website, and is included in new-player welcome packs.

Approved by Matt Finnigan, Owner and Club Welfare Officer, September 2026. Next review due September 2027.