

Safeguarding Bulletin

October 2026

This month, our Safeguarding Bulletin focuses on Mandatory Sexual Abuse Reporting, introduced by the Crime and Policing Act 2026, for individuals undertaking key roles with responsibility for children and young people in England.

This article covers sensitive topics – please take care when reading.

What is Mandatory Reporting?

This duty requires individuals to report sexual abuse when made aware of it, with specific conditions for exemptions. The Act also creates a new criminal offence of attempting to prevent someone from reporting child sexual abuse.

The legislation aims to better safeguard children and young people at risk of sexual abuse and is part of the broader response to child sexual exploitation and abuse.

Mandatory Reporting – What Coaches and Volunteers Must Now Do

The Act introduces a statutory duty to report child sexual abuse for anyone in a regulated activity with children in England, including coaches, club officials, and regular volunteers who work closely and regularly with young players.

Notably, the government specifically cited sports volunteers when explaining why they did not criminalise failure to report, recognising the vital role volunteers play in grassroots sport. The duty still exists, but the consequence for failing to report is a DBS referral rather than prosecution.

A Critical Distinction – Two Very Different Consequences

Consequence A – Failing to Make a Required Report

This is NOT a criminal offence. The government deliberately chose not to criminalise failure to report, to avoid creating a chilling effect that might deter volunteers and professionals from working with children.

Consequence: Referral to the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS), which could result in being permanently barred from all child-facing work.

Sporting Example:

An under-14s football coach gives a player a lift home after training. The player discloses during the journey that their stepfather is sexually abusing them. The coach mentions it to the club welfare officer the next day and assumes it has been dealt with. Two weeks later, nothing has been reported to the police or children's services.

The coach's duty was personal – they needed to confirm the referral actually happened. They could now be referred to the DBS and permanently barred from coaching.

Consequence B (Criminal Offence) – Obstructing Someone Else's Report

This IS a criminal offence. Deliberately stopping, discouraging, or interfering with a required report, regardless of seniority, is now a crime under the Act.

Consequence: Criminal prosecution. This applies to senior leaders, managers, and trustees who instruct others not to report.

Sporting Example:

A swimming club welfare officer discloses a safeguarding concern about a senior coach to the club chairman. The chairman, aware the coach brings significant sponsorship, says: "Don't escalate this until after the county championships."

This is criminal obstruction of a required report. The chairman could face prosecution. No competitive or commercial interest can justify blocking a safeguarding report.

The Individual Duty in Sport

Sport has a deeply embedded culture of reporting upward to the head coach or club secretary. The Act does not change reporting channels, but it makes clear that if you receive a disclosure, you are personally responsible for confirming it reached the police or children's services.

You cannot assume someone else did it.

All bowls clubs their members staff volunteers and coaches are required to understand their responsibilities in relation to the Crime and Policing Act 2026 – mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse (CSA) and the potential consequences.