



Clane GAA

'One Club'

Juvenile Policy Guidelines

2018

For Players, Parents, and
Mentors

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ONE CLUB

Why we are doing this ... a Personal Reflection

A number of months ago, I was struck by a headline on the Scoil Bhride's primary girl website that stated "education is a journey and not a race". I contemplated about this and thought; isn't that same statement equally true and applicable with respect to our sport and Gaelic games, "sport, health & fitness is a journey and not a race...". The seed was sown & we created a policy working group (inclusive of all 4 codes) to produce a Juvenile document that guides (children, parent, and coaches) from nursery through to and including U16 age group. The result of that work is with us in this document.

Children see our Gaelic games and how it is managed, coached and reflected in the club. Just like their family backgrounds, they accept what they perceive as the norm – so we need to ensure that whatever agenda we set is borne out of a real aspiration to bring all children in our Club on a successful journey from their introduction to the club, through to adulthood and representing our Club at senior level (no racing!).

Clane GAA is a club for children, young players and their parents. Without parent support and involvement there is simply no club. We understand the importance of parents engaging themselves in the club. Therefore, it is vital that the club provides the parents with a clear and transparent picture as to how the club operates, hence the rationale for producing this document before us today...

If we only see children as players, then we will view the family separate from the club. By this we mean that the family is expected to do its job and leave the Gaelic games education solely to the club. If the club sees the young players as children, then it is possible to see both family and club as partners in the child's learning and development. Importantly we know from experience that the coach and the parent are often the same person in many grassroots clubs.

So I feel that the objectives of the document are to:

- **Create a CULTURE of TRUST**

If all people (coach, parent) around the child send the same message, then it is easier for the child to interpret and accept.

- **Create a forum among our members to facilitate discussion – We are educating each other!**

- Offer coach education to parents
- Organise workshops to develop our coaches learning and advancement.
- Reflect, Amend and update the document to reflect change.

Our vision is:

- As many players as possible, as long as possible, in the best environment possible.
- Participation, performance & personal development.

Our Principles are:

- Transparency
- Motivation climate where development is central and the focus is on learning
- Flexibility and patience – development in a sporting context
- Development does not happen in a vacuum. We the GAA club are one part of a system (School, parents, peers, & other sports organisations)

Therefore, we need..... A commitment to learning and development

The culture of our youth sports should be seen and understood as a good environment for learning. Not just the opportunity to learn skills that will benefit development in the sport, but even those that can be applied to life in general. Children do not develop in a linear fashion and we must support that

- Chronological age v Biological age
- Chronological age: The amount of years that have passed since birth
- Biological age: "Physical maturity" age. For example, a 9 year- old can have a biological age of 7 or 11.

Psychological

Development is very sensitive and will affect the overall mental state.

This affects

- Performance
- Participation
- Confidence
- Motivation

This document guides our coaches (both new & established) creating an environment where children want to and can learn – we are fostering a desire to learn.

Introduction

The growth in our Juvenile section over recent years is very impressive. We fully appreciate all our volunteer mentors, coaches, and helpers who week in week out continue to help, nurture and develop all our players. It is their invaluable work that is driving our success on the field of play and growth in club membership.

Clane GAA is a club very much at the heart of the community. The juvenile section of the club plays an extremely important role in developing numerous aspects of young lives, and especially in promoting a healthy and active lifestyle through sport. Clane GAA provides opportunities for both boys and girls to play Gaelic Football, Hurling, Camogie, and Ladies Football.

This handbook is a compilation of good practice guidelines we believe all mentors should have to help them carry out their role. *These guidelines are a work in progress and have been informed both by the feedback received in the managers surveys and good practices garnered from other GAA clubs.* The document will evolve and if you don't find the answers you are looking for, please let us know and we will add that information to our next edition in early 2018. The scope of this guideline is for all players from the age of seven up to and including sixteen years.

This handbook should be viewed in conjunction with Our Games - Our Code the Joint Code of Best Practice in Youth Sport which has been agreed between the GAA, the Ladies Gaelic Football Association and the Camogie Association. (Available at <http://www.gaa.ie/the-gaa/child-welfare-and-protection/code-of-behaviour>)

You may ask, why do we need such guidelines in 2018? The simple answer is that the Club is expanding and many new people are joining. Also, there is an increasing set of requirements being placed on the Club in terms of how we engage with our players, our mentors and their families. These guidelines are intended to help all in the Club ensure that all those involved in our Juvenile Section are operating to the highest standards.

ONE CLUB Vision

“Clane GAA is an inclusive family Club, where everybody has the opportunity to be welcomed to take part in our games and culture, to participate fully, to grow and develop and to be inspired to keep a lifelong engagement with our Club and Association.”

Appointment of Club Mentors

Volunteering in Clane GAA

Clane GAA is a voluntary organisation and without the dedication of all members, the club simply would not exist. All activities are organised by our own members, especially the managing and training of our juvenile players which is carried out by Juvenile Mentors. In conjunction with the juvenile committee, Mentors and Co-ordinators are ratified by the Club Executive each year. This includes a review of their Garda vetting status, and that they are a fully paid up member, as well as confirming they have completed both the Code of Best Practice training and the relevant coaching course(s) for their age group. Lead mentor coordinators are appointed within each year code and they are responsible for ensuring there is effective communication amongst their mentoring team for the implementation of these new Club guidelines.

Engaging with Team Mentors/Coaches

If parents wish to raise an issue with a team mentor/coach, then they should formally request a meeting and arrange a meeting time which is mutually beneficial to both parties. In many instances, new parents first point of contact with the club is when they bring their child down to the nursery for the first time. Most parents will be only too willing to assist in nursery coaching so the key is to ask them directly for their help and then promote training and encouragement.

Becoming a Coach

We welcome all potential mentors/coaches to fulfil roles within the Club. While it can be suggested that an individual will be suited to a mentor's role it must be remembered that the responsibility of appointing mentors lies with the club and not with any one individual Club member. When asked by a Lead Mentor to become a mentor/coach, an application should be handed in to the Club Juvenile Committee for

their next monthly meeting. From there the Children's Officer will present any necessary material for discussion with the Executive and Juvenile committees. Upon ratification, each new mentor/coach will be required to sign up and abide by the Code of Ethics and Good Practice as well as this and other club policies and procedures. Generally, mentors/coaches will remain with their designated age group through initially from U8 to U12. Before entering (U13 onwards), the mentoring situation will be reviewed by the relevant Juvenile Committee in association with the Coaching Committee and recommendations will be made to the Executive regarding the status of the management team.

What should Success look Like on the Field of Play?

Clane GAA is not a win at all cost Club. We want to ensure we have as many young people playing Gaelic Games in Clane, as is possible and that means providing all players with as much playing time as possible. Ultimately, we want to bring as many of our juvenile players to play senior for Clane in football, hurling or camogie. In the Juvenile grades we define success as follows:

- Ensure each team has the same or more players on the panel by the end of the year
- That all players have developed over the course of the year (both in terms of personal development, skill development and athletic development)
- That all players are enjoying playing with Clane GAA

Therefore, the Club will endeavour to place each team in an appropriate league/championship where they are competitive and where all players will be afforded appropriate game time.

Club Policy on Team Selection

As a club, we encourage and support the development of our players to be the best they can be. Sometimes, but not always, this leads to success on the field.

To ensure that all our players can develop and to promote player retention, we encourage mentors/coaches, as much as possible, to give all players the chance to participate in games on a regular basis. It is appreciated that this is something that may not always be possible to achieve, particularly when players may be playing out

of their age category. The issue of “playing up” whether from a lower division team, or from a younger age group, and the matter of players “not getting their game” causes more debate at juvenile level than any other matter.

It is impossible to adjudicate in advance of specific games and circumstances and we rely on common sense and good judgement amongst our mentors to resolve such issues. To assist, we are **providing** the following guidelines which mentors/coaches hopefully will find useful, particularly when explaining specific situations to players and parents.

- If appropriately documented, County board rules will take precedence, and mentors must be familiar with the rules and regulations of their code surrounding playing up. At present, while neither the LGFA nor juvenile GAA restrict playing up or playing down fair play is expected and mandated both by Clane GAA club and by the GAA Code of Behaviour.
- When making their team selection, mentors must base their team selection on a player’s commitment to and discipline during training.
 - o It is not enough to simply turn up to training.
 - o Players must engage and participate fully in all activities set out by mentors throughout the training session.
 - o Dedicated, hardworking players must be given every opportunity to advance their playing ability and skills.
 - o This must be the main guide for selecting teams, but other factors such as fitness (recovering from injury/illness, discipline) may also influence team selection.

NB: Mentors are expected to make their selections with due consideration for every player on their panel, and players and parents are expected to respect these decisions.

- In the case of challenge matches, all players should enjoy significant playing time.
- In the case of championship matches, situations will arise where it may not be possible to play all players.
- In some situations, some age groups may struggle to field a second team because of the numbers within their age group.
 - o If the Club decides to field only one team it must be accepted that this will limit the amount of playing time everyone gets due to the number of players.

- If this happens the club will assess the possibility of setting up a 2nd team that consists of players from that particular age group as well as players from the age group below.
- This team will normally be entered into a lower division. Mentors of the lower age group should use this opportunity to rotate players who can play up on such a 2nd team.
- In special circumstances the juvenile committee of a code may agree to merge age groups where numbers dictate that greater playing time will be enjoyed if two or more age groups play together. No precedent will be set, and the grouping will be reviewed on an ongoing basis and at the end of that playing year.
- On completion of the nursery programme, the Club will organise players by gender and age. Therefore, club policy dictates that Clane GAA will not field girls on any boy's teams, and vice a versa, for all age groups.
- Selection of Clane GAA players for all Kildare underage development squads will be overseen and ratified by the juvenile committee. This is to ensure equity in chance for selection and no individual bias comes into play.

Grading or Streaming of Teams in Clane GAA

Clane GAA has a significant number of children playing our games and our policy is to encourage them all to play to the best of their abilities. At the start of each playing season mentors should review their teams and consider on which team each child will achieve their potential. Children develop at different stages and a child who is seen to be potentially weak at age 10 may be a very strong player at age 14 and vice versa. Grading must be constantly reviewed. When streaming teams, parents of players are encouraged not to offer a view on their own child. Also, a mentor of a team should not be involved in the process of streaming his/her own child.

What is Streaming in Clane GAA?

Streaming is putting players of similar ability on the same team as opposed to having a team of mixed ability playing together.

Why do we Stream in Clane GAA?

The central theme behind Streaming is about developing those players who are not considered as the “strong” players and by putting these players together they will all get a better chance to get more of the ball and consequently have more fun and develop.

How do we Stream in Clane GAA?

Streaming should be a player centred process and mentors/coaches must endeavour to find the right team for the player to play on to develop the player’s confidence, skills and participation. The logic used by the mentors/coaches in this streaming process must be transparent and fair – especially in the eyes of parents who may challenge the mentor/coach’s decision. Also, it is strongly recommended that no individual mentor/coach should make such a decision on their own and it should be ratified by the management team.

Are there different approaches to Streaming?

Yes. One approach is for the management team to all the players in terms of skill development, strength, age, etc. and then to assign them to teams accordingly.

Another method is the management team to rank players into three groups:

- Group 1 would contain ‘strongest’ A team players
- Group 2 would contain ‘need further development’ B team players
- Group 3 would contain a group of players that are marginal A or B players.

In this second approach, these players are not assigned to either A or B team but would alternately from week to week at the management teams discretion play on either A or B.

Note: This approach is already being implemented by some teams within the Club.

For either approach, the norm is that all the mentors for the wider group would meet at the beginning of the year and review each player and agree what approach they will adopt as a mentoring group and which team best suits the player. A mentor who is a parent of a player is encouraged not to offer a view on their own child.

The team assignment is generally not a scientific process but is rather just the views/opinions of the management team that are closest to that individual child. So,

while it is subjective, the mentors should strive to do this in a fair and transparent way and always with the child's and club's interest in mind but noting that we must balance playing numbers across team panels.

Is Streaming a Fixed Outcome?

No, it is well recognised that players develop at different times and at different rates. Based on this we encourage the mentoring team to review their players ratings at least on two further occasions during the year - once after Easter and again after the summer.

At those review points it is normal that some players move to a different team. Again, this is done with the best interests of the player in mind. Sometimes moving to a lower team is the right decision for a player as they will enjoy more of the ball and more time on the ball and consequently their confidence and skills will develop and thus position them for future growth. This process must be explained to the parents as a group in advance and every time this streaming process is undertaken. The management team should be open to reviewing their decisions on streaming however, the final decision ultimately rests with the management team.

Approaches to Streaming and the Wider Playing Group?

While streaming may be an important practice when establishing two teams, it is also important to ensure that none of the players do not lose their sense of the wider group as many of the players will move up and down through the streamed teams over the year(s). To keep the Group philosophy intact it is important that the entire group continues to train together.

Important

***EACH** of the four codes (Football, Hurling, Camogie & LGFA) is responsible for their own policy regarding streaming and where it is applicable.*

Club Policy on Playing Within Age

We would rather have a large number of happy juvenile players, playing to the best of their ability, than having a few elite teams who win all around them. We have

attempted to provide guidelines here, which mentors/coaches should adhere to, and which can be openly explained to players and parents.

The following guidelines are relevant for juvenile players playing within their own age groups:

- Juveniles must play and train with their year group
- Juveniles may also play, on occasion, on a team one year above the appropriate aged team provided that:
 - o the managers of both age groups have given consent
 - o the parents of the child playing up has given consent
 - o juveniles of the higher age are not being deprived of sport and receive equal playing time as their peers

This means that we are not playing younger players ahead of appropriately aged players just to be competitive.

Occasionally groups may struggle to field a full second or third team because of the numbers within their group; and by deciding to go with lesser teams a panel might be so generously sized that it will severely limit playing time. In such cases consideration should be given to setting up an additional panel consisting of some players from the younger age group.

In this scenario where age group, or a team within an age group, typically a B or C team, needs consistent support from the younger age group then this should be discussed at the start of the year between the mentors from both age groups and with the group coordinator. The younger team mentors are encouraged to support the older team to ensure that the Club helps to retain those older players by having a viable team in place. In this scenario, permission/agreement from the relevant code lead mentor coordinator must be requested at the start of the year. Mentors of the lower age groups should use this opportunity to rotate players willing and able to play up.

Playing 2 years out of age

In exceptional circumstances, it may happen that a team cannot secure enough players from the group one year younger and then to ensure they can fill a team the management group can consider approaching the group 2 years younger. This is not

encouraged and should be considered as a last resort only. Player welfare should always come before competition considerations and this is especially true in the event where children are being asked to play 2 years out of their own age group.

In this scenario, permission/agreement should be sought from the relevant Juvenile Chairperson in advance of each fixture. However before requesting this permission there are a number of questions that should be considered:

- What is the total number of age appropriate players available across the wider group that could support the group fixtures?
- Has the group looked within itself to balance its own playing numbers across A, B teams etc. for the fixture in question?
- What support has been requested and received (or not) from the group one year below across A, B teams etc. for the fixture(s) in question?
- What is the minimum team size that you are allowed field for the fixture(s) in question?
- Can the fixture be rescheduled when more age appropriate players or players from the year one year below are available?
- Has the mentor from the 2-year younger group agreed to request of their players parents to support?

Other Considerations

Mentors of both teams should also give due consideration to only allowing these younger players to play up only if they possess both the necessary skill and physicality levels, so that they will not be out of their depth.

- 2 year younger players should not be asked to play on an A team as this higher level is more likely to have increased speed and physicality.
- Parents of the 2 year younger players should fully understand what team their child is being asked to play on and parental consent is required in advance of the game being played.
- The number of 2 year younger players on teams to be restricted to 3.

Underage Dual Players

Clane GAA wishes to promote, encourage and facilitate dual players at all underage levels. This will start at the nursery stage of player's development. The cooperation

between Managers and mentors in football and hurling (Ladies football and Camogie) is a crucial part of why the club can be successful in all codes in the future.

Recent analysis suggests that where cross-code Management teams work in harmony the club is more successful in fielding competitive teams in both codes.

- 1) No player should ever be told by a mentor not to play football or hurling (If there is a final coming up or key game for one of the codes then this should be discussed between the respective managers and escalated to the appropriate committee if the matter cannot be resolved through conversation).
- 2) Managers of opposite teams should sit down at the start of the year to work out a plan so that they can work in harmony to the betterment of both teams.
- 3) Managers at all levels should work together to avoid clashing training / fixtures throughout the season.
- 4) Regular contact between managers should be maintained during the year to highlight busy times and key games.
- 5) No player should be put under pressure to play hurling or football, if they do not wish to play.
- 6) Dual players are under more pressure to attend training sessions & games so parents need to be in the loop to ensure players are looked after and their studies are not impacted.
- 7) The underage football and hurling chairpersons should sit down regularly to review how management teams are engaging throughout the year.

Kildare Development Squads

While it is an honour for Juvenile players to be selected on Kildare Development squads, due consideration must be given to player welfare and burnout. The respective Juvenile chairperson should liaise with Kildare Development squad managers to ensure that training plans are developed in the best interests of the players' long-term development.

Parents of players involved in Kildare development squads must remember that the players' **first** allegiance is to their club. Under no circumstances should players engage in training with Kildare Development squads without prior approval of the Club juvenile section and team mentors concerned.

Conclusion

These guidelines have been compiled based on reviewing good practice guidelines in other clubs. The Club is keen to build on these guidelines to assist all players, mentors, and parents, to achieve maximum enjoyment playing for Clane GAA. We want to maximise the number of young people who play for Clane in all four codes by ensuring they have opportunities to grow as players and contribute to the future success of the Club.

Appendix A

Clane GAA Code of Behaviour Coaches

Coaches to underage teams within our club provide a positive, healthy and encouraging ethos to our young players while at the same time developing the skills levels of every player.

Clane GAA promotes and implements a code of behaviour that encourages fair play, respect, equality and safety.

Clane GAA Code of Behaviour (underage) complements the Irish Sports Council Code of Ethics and Good Practice for Children's Sport and addresses the appropriate levels of behaviour, practice and conduct required from our young players, coaches, mentors, supporters, parents/ guardians and clubs. Clane GAA has adopted the GAA code of behaviour and asks that all our players sign up to this code of conduct.

- ✓ **Coaches, maintain a child centred approach**
- ✓ Encourage **enjoyment, fun and participation** in our GAA games and activities.
- ✓ **Respect** all players, give all players an opportunity to play and develop.
- ✓ Be **positive** during coaching sessions, games and other activities so that underage players always leave with a sense of achievement and an increased level of self-esteem
- ✓ **Don't shout at or lecture players** or reprimand them when they make a mistake. Children learn best through trial and error. Children and Young people should not be afraid to risk error so as to learn.
- ✓ *Do not equate losing with failure* and do not develop a preoccupation with medals and trophies. The level of improvement made by underage players is the best indicator of effective coaching

Remember, you are a role model for your players!

Appendix B

Remember that all coaches and helper's must:

- 1) Be **Garda Vetted**. if you have not done so, please complete online via our club website @ Clane GAA E-Vetting Application
- 2) Attend the **child protection workshop** – Contact children's officer for details
- 3) Must have completed the relevant coaching course(s) for their respective team

Clane GAA has a **Children's Officers officer** who promotes child welfare, club ethos and ensures the implementation and promotion of the relevant Child Welfare Protection Codes and Guidelines for good practice so as to ensure that young people can participate, enjoy and benefit from our Gaelic Games in safe and enjoyable surroundings.