

ARDAGH UNITED FC

PARENT AND SUPPORTER CODE OF CONDUCT

Effective for the 2026/27 season

1. Purpose

Ardagh United Football Club wants football to be a positive, safe and enjoyable experience for every child who plays the game. Parents, guardians and supporters have a major influence on the atmosphere around our teams and on how children experience football.

This Code sets out the behaviour expected from all parents, guardians, family members and supporters attending Ardagh United training sessions, matches, tournaments and club activities, or communicating about the club online.

By registering a child with Ardagh United or attending club activities, parents and supporters are expected to respect this Code and help us create an environment where children can learn, compete, make friends and enjoy playing football.

2. Our Sideline Standard

The role of a parent or supporter is to encourage. The role of the coach is to coach. The role of the referee is to referee. Keeping those roles clear gives children the best possible football experience.

- Support every child positively, regardless of the score or result.
- Praise effort, teamwork, improvement and good sporting behaviour.
- Allow coaches to coach without instructions being shouted from the sideline.
- Accept the decisions of referees and match officials, even when you disagree with them.
- Show respect to opposition players, coaches, parents and supporters.
- Remember that underage players are children learning the game, not professional footballers.

3. Behaviour at Matches and Training

Parents and supporters representing Ardagh United are expected to behave in a way that reflects well on the club and provides a good example to young players.

Parents and supporters must not:

- shout abusive, insulting, threatening or discriminatory language at any player, coach, referee, official or supporter;
- ridicule or criticise a child for making a mistake;
- put excessive pressure on a child to perform or win;
- enter the field of play unless invited by a coach, match official or in a genuine emergency;
- approach, confront or intimidate a referee or match official before, during or after a game;
- become involved in arguments or confrontations with opposition supporters or coaches;
- encourage dangerous, aggressive or unsporting behaviour; or
- attend youth football activities in a condition where alcohol or other substances affect their behaviour or judgement.

4. Supporting Your Child

Children develop at different rates and will have good days and difficult days. Parents can make a major difference by keeping football in perspective and allowing children to enjoy their own journey in the game.

We ask parents and guardians to:

- ask children whether they enjoyed the game before focusing on the result;
- encourage attendance, effort and commitment without creating unnecessary pressure;
- help children accept winning and losing with the same level of respect;
- avoid comparing one child with another;
- support coaches in promoting development rather than a win-at-all-costs approach; and
- speak positively about teammates, coaches, referees and opponents in front of children.

5. Coaching Decisions and Playing Time

Team selection, player positions, substitutions, training content and other football decisions are the responsibility of the appointed coaching team, acting within club and league requirements.

Parents are welcome to ask reasonable questions, but concerns should be raised privately and respectfully. The touchline, immediately after a match, is rarely the right place for a detailed discussion.

Where possible, parents should allow a short cooling-off period after matches before raising concerns about football decisions. This helps everyone discuss the issue calmly and constructively.

6. Referees and Match Officials

Without referees there is no game. Many referees involved in underage football are themselves young people or are still developing their experience.

- Decisions must be accepted without abuse, intimidation or persistent criticism.
- Parents and supporters must not confront match officials after a game.
- Any genuine concern regarding officiating should be raised through the team coach or appropriate club channel rather than directly with the referee.

Disagreement with a decision is never an excuse for abusive behaviour.

7. Communication, WhatsApp and Social Media

The same standards of respect expected at Sullivan Park and at away fixtures also apply online.

Parents and supporters must not:

- post abusive, insulting or defamatory comments about players, coaches, referees, opposition clubs or other parents;
- use club messaging groups to argue about team selection, playing time or individual children;
- share private club messages, personal information or safeguarding matters publicly;
- identify or criticise an individual child on social media; or
- use social media in a way that could reasonably bring Ardagh United or youth football into disrepute.

Club messaging groups should be used for relevant team and club communication. Personal disagreements should be dealt with privately and through the appropriate club process.

8. Safeguarding and Children's Privacy

The welfare of children comes first. Parents and supporters must respect the club's safeguarding procedures and the privacy of all young players.

- Never photograph or record children in changing rooms or other private areas.
- Respect instructions from the club where a child must not be photographed or recorded.
- Do not share another child's personal information, medical information, photographs or videos without an appropriate reason and permission.
- Any child-welfare or safeguarding concern should be reported through the club's safeguarding procedures rather than discussed in team groups or on social media.

A safeguarding concern should always be treated seriously and confidentially.

9. Parent and Guardian Responsibilities

Parents and guardians also have practical responsibilities which help coaches provide a safe and organised environment.

- Ensure the club has accurate contact and emergency information for your child.
- Tell the coaching team about relevant medical, injury or welfare information that may affect your child's safe participation.
- Ensure children arrive and are collected at the agreed times.
- Let the team know as early as reasonably possible if a player cannot attend a fixture or activity.
- Do not leave responsibility for a young child with the club outside the agreed training or match arrangements.
- Respect club facilities, opposition facilities and local residents when parking or attending matches.

10. Raising a Concern

Ardagh United welcomes genuine concerns and constructive feedback. If something is wrong, we would rather it is raised properly so that it can be addressed.

Depending on the issue, a concern can normally be raised with the team coach, relevant club officer, Children's Officer or club committee. Safeguarding concerns should always follow the club's safeguarding procedures.

Concerns should be raised respectfully and should focus on the issue rather than personal attacks. Matters involving children should not be debated in public messaging groups or on social media.

11. Breaches of This Code

Ardagh United has a responsibility to protect children, volunteers, match officials and the reputation of the club. Behaviour that breaches this Code may therefore result in action by the club.

Depending on the seriousness and frequency of the behaviour, action may include:

- a reminder of the expected standard;
- a request to move away from the technical or spectator area;
- a request to leave a training session, fixture or club event;
- a formal warning;
- restrictions on attendance at club activities;
- referral to the club committee, league, FAI or another appropriate body; or
- other disciplinary action considered appropriate under club or governing-body rules.

Serious abusive, threatening, discriminatory, violent or safeguarding-related behaviour may result in immediate action without a prior warning.

12. Working Together

Ardagh United is a community club run largely by volunteers. Coaches, committee members, match officials and parents will not always agree on every decision, but everyone involved has a shared responsibility to make football enjoyable and safe for our young players.

A positive sideline creates confident players. A respectful club creates an environment children want to remain part of.

Thank you for supporting the players, the volunteers and the values of Ardagh United Football Club.

13. Related Policies

This Code should be read alongside the club's Safeguarding and Child Welfare policies, Data Protection and Privacy Notice, Photography and Social Media guidance, Complaints procedures and other applicable FAI and league rules.

ARDAGH UNITED FOOTBALL CLUB

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