



# IRISH FOSTER CARE ASSOCIATION (IFCA)

## Members & Volunteers Code of Conduct

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| <b>Document Name</b>     | Members & Volunteers Code of Conduct |
| <b>Version Reference</b> | 2.0                                  |
| <b>Document Owner</b>    | Membership and Volunteer Manager     |
| <b>Approved by</b>       | Board of Directors                   |
| <b>Date</b>              | September 2025                       |
| <b>Review Date</b>       | September 2028                       |



## IRISH FOSTER CARE ASSOCIATION (IFCA) MEMBERS AND VOLUNTEERS CODE OF CONDUCT

### **1. Introduction**

The Irish Foster Care Association (IFCA) is a national organisation that supports foster families and the wider fostering community. Established in 1981 by a group of foster carers and social workers our primary objective as an organisation is to promote excellence in foster care.

The intention of this code is not to unreasonably restrict the rights of any member or volunteer, but rather to ensure that all members and volunteers are treated with dignity and respect in the course of their involvement with IFCA, and that all members conduct themselves in line with the principles of this code.

The Code's purpose is threefold:

1. To function as a guiding compass, promoting ethical, respectful, and professional behaviour in all interactions within and on behalf of the organisation.
2. To provide the fostering community and the wider public with a clear understanding of the standards they can expect from IFCA and its members.
3. To serve as a reference point for how concerns will be addressed through IFCA's investigative and disciplinary processes.

This Code of Conduct forms part of IFCA's overall governance framework and should be read together with IFCA's Constitution and any other applicable organisational policies and guidance

### **2. Principles and Purpose**

This code is informed by IFCA's vision and values as set out on our [website](#).

This code seeks to underpin an environment where everyone is treated with dignity, fairness, and respect and where members and volunteers display integrity and honesty in their engagement with other members, volunteers, and employees.



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The purpose of this Code of Conduct is to set out standards of behaviour expected from members and volunteers of IFCA and outline how unacceptable behaviour will be addressed.

All members (including, for the sake of clarity, all board trustees, officers of IFCA, contractors and consultants) and volunteers should ensure that they have read and comply with this Code of Conduct.

### **3. Conduct and Behaviour**

Members and volunteers are expected to maintain high standards of conduct and behaviour in their interactions with other members, volunteers, and employees. In particular, they should:

- Treat others with fairness, equality, dignity and respect.
- Act in a manner consistent with the purpose, vision and values of IFCA.
- Act honestly, responsibly and with integrity.
- Communicate respectfully and truthfully at all times.
- Never use abusive or vulgar language, or make derogatory racial, ethnic, gender-related, or other derogatory comments at IFCA events or in IFCA-related contexts.
- Never make unwanted sexual or physical contact with any person.
- Follow the organisation's policies and procedures.
- Seek authorisation from IFCA senior management before communicating externally on behalf of IFCA.

Members are expected **NOT** to:

- Bring IFCA into disrepute (including through the use of email, social media and other internet sites, engaging with media etc.).
- Make or issue a materially false or misleading statement, declaration, document, record or claim in respect of IFCA, its members, employees, or volunteers.

Where an individual is found, under the procedures set out in the IFCA Constitution, to be in material breach of this Code of Conduct, appropriate sanctions may be applied, up to and including withdrawal of membership.

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Withdrawal of membership is the most severe sanction available and will only be applied where proportionate in the most serious cases. Severe cases may include (but are not limited to) serious safeguarding breaches, harassment or discrimination, deliberate dishonesty or fraud, actions causing significant reputational damage to IFCA, repeated non-compliance with this Code despite warnings, or unauthorised disclosure of confidential information.

### **4. Unacceptable behaviour**

Unacceptable behaviour, for the purposes of this Code of Conduct, is the improper interference, in a material way, with the proper functioning or activities of IFCA, or those who work or volunteer for the organisation or any action which otherwise is disruptive or damaging in a material way to IFCA.

**Subject to the definition above, the following shall constitute unacceptable behaviour:**

- Disruption of, or improper interference with, the administrative, social or other activities of IFCA.
- Engaging in any form of disrespectful, offensive, abusive, harassing, or discriminatory behaviour towards any person in the organisation, whether directly or indirectly, including through email, social media, online platforms, or engagement with the media.
- Obstruction of or improper interference with the functions, duties or activities of any fellow member, volunteer, or employee.
- Disorderly, disruptive, threatening or offensive behaviour or language whilst attending meetings as a member or representative of IFCA.
- Fraud, deceit, deception or dishonesty in relation to IFCA or its employees or in connection with holding any office in the organisation or in relation to being a member of IFCA.
- Sexual, racial or any other form of personal harassment or discrimination of any fellow member, volunteer, employee or trustee.
- Submission of vexatious and/or malicious complaints.

This list is indicative and not exhaustive.

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**5. Addressing Unacceptable behaviour**

In the first instance, witnesses to or subjects of, unacceptable behaviour are encouraged, where suitable, to address it at the time the incident or behaviour occurs by drawing the persons attention to it and respectfully reminding them of this Code of Conduct, and expectations of behaviour. In most instances, it is expected that such an approach will amicably address the matter and serve as a reminder of the standards of behaviour expected.

**6. Complaints Procedure**

Complaints regarding persistent or serious unacceptable behaviour by any member or volunteer should be set out in writing and submitted to IFCA. Such complaints will be examined, and an appropriate course of action determined in line with the IFCA Constitution and IFCA's Complaints Policy, as published on the IFCA website.

IFCA will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within 5 working days of receiving it, and all complaints will be treated confidentially, with details shared only as necessary to resolve the matter.



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### 7. Implementation and Review

#### Actions on Breach of Code

**Note:** At any stage of this process, the matter may be resolved by agreement between the parties, provided that the resolution is consistent with this Code of Conduct and the IFCA Constitution.

All concerns and complaints will be treated confidentially, with details shared only as necessary to resolve the matter.

All parties have the right to be accompanied by a support person at any stage throughout the below processes.

#### Informal Discussion

Where a potential breach of this Code is identified, the complaints officer will notify the member, trustee, or volunteer concerned. The matter will first be discussed informally at a meeting, with the aim of resolving the issue at the earliest stage. A written note of the meeting will be kept.

Where a member of IFCA believes that the Code has been breached, they may set out their concern in writing via email addressed to [Feedback@ifca.ie](mailto:Feedback@ifca.ie), to the complaints officer. IFCA will acknowledge receipt of the concern within 5 working days of receiving it. The concern will then be addressed with the individual concerned at an informal meeting, with the complaints officer.

At the meeting, the issue will be outlined and the individual will be requested to adhere to IFCA's Code of Conduct. A written record of the meeting will be provided to those in attendance.



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### **Formal Procedure (Stage 1)**

If the informal procedure does not resolve the issue to the satisfaction of the parties, and/or the member's non-adherence to the Code continues, the CEO will write to the member outlining IFCA's concerns. The letter will:

Set out the specific breach(es) of the Code of Conduct; and

Confirm that a formal written warning is being issued.

A copy of the warning will be kept on record. The member will also be reminded of their right to respond (in person or in writing) and to be accompanied by a support person at any subsequent meetings, should they wish.

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**Formal Procedure (Stage 2)**

1. If, following the issuing of a formal written warning, the member's non-adherence to the Code continues, the matter will be referred to the IFCA Board of Directors (the "Board"). The Board will decide on the member's status, which may include, without limitation, suspension, or withdrawal of membership. In cases where a single incident is considered sufficiently serious, the matter may be referred directly to the Board under Stage 2, without the need for a prior written warning.
2. Any decision made by the Board will be fair, transparent, and proportionate to the breach of the Code.
3. The Chairperson of the Board will recuse themselves from the Board's determination on this issue to preserve impartiality.
4. The member will be informed in writing that the matter is being put before the Board and will be invited to make a written submission.
5. Following the Board's meeting, the member will be notified of the decision in a timely manner.
6. The member will have the right to appeal the Board's decision to the Chairperson of the Board within one month of being notified. The Chairperson will appoint a panel of Board members. The member may provide a further written submission as part of the appeal.
7. The panel will consider the appeal and any submissions made by the member and will make a final determination on the issue. They will notify the Chairperson of their decision.
8. The member will be notified of the decision in a timely manner.
9. Any decision made by the Board will be taken in accordance with IFCA's Constitution and will be proportionate to the breach of the Code.





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10. The decision reached under this process will be final and binding on all parties, subject to ratification by the Board.



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**Implementation and Review**

This Members and Volunteers Code of Conduct was approved by the Board of Trustees on September 2025.

The Board of Trustees, through the Governance Sub Committee, will review the Code at 3 year intervals or as appropriate from time to time.