

For Parents and Carers

One page about how football works at Castlewellan Town FC — worth five minutes in August, and a season of fewer misunderstandings after that.

Your coach is a volunteer working from a club-wide plan: forty-four structured sessions built around touches, decisions, confidence and enjoyment, adapted to each age group under the Irish FA's youth framework. This page covers the questions that otherwise get asked across a touchline in the rain.

What we're trying to do

Develop players and keep them in the game — in that order, and ahead of results. At the youngest ages there are no league tables on purpose. The measure of a good season is a child who is a better, braver player in May and wants to come back in August.

Game time and selection

Every child plays. The club's match-day planner rotates the squad within the Irish FA's rules for each format, and coaches plan substitutions before the match rather than deciding them on emotion during it. Positions rotate too at the younger ages — the nine-year-old defender is not a defender; they're a footballer having a defending month. If you ever feel your child is consistently getting less than their share, ask the coach directly and away from the pitch — it's a fair question and coaches expect it.

The touchline

The Irish FA Youth Football Charter gives every child the right to play free from adult pressure, and most of that right is delivered — or taken away — by what the sideline sounds like. What helps: encouragement, applause for both teams, and silence while a child is making a decision. What doesn't: instructions ("pass it!", "shoot!"), even kind ones — a child listening to the crowd isn't reading the game. Leave the coaching to the coach; leave the refereeing to the referee, who at this level may be sixteen and learning too. The car home matters most of all: the best sentence in youth football is *"I loved watching you play."*

Heading, concussion, and safety

Deliberate heading practice is restricted in youth training under Irish FA guidance — the youngest groups don't practise it at all, and where it's introduced later it's a handful of careful repetitions, never volume. No child at this club is ever made to head a ball. Any blow to the head means coming off and staying off — *if in doubt, sit them out* — and the coach will tell you it happened. If your child seems "not right" in the days after any knock, tell the coach and see a doctor before they play again.

Growing bodies

Children grow at wildly different speeds, and the club plans for it: heel and knee pain in growing players (Sever's, Osgood-Schlatter) is common, real, and managed by adjusting load rather than pushing through. Tell the coach about pain that keeps returning, about a recent growth spurt, and about how much other sport your child is doing in the same week — it all counts toward the same pair of legs.

Safeguarding

The club follows the Irish FA's safeguarding policies and procedures. If your child tells you something that worries you, or you see something that doesn't feel right, contact the club's Designated Safeguarding Officer:

Designated Safeguarding Officer: _____ **Contact:** _____

You can also go to the Irish FA's safeguarding team directly at any time — details at irishfa.com under Safeguarding.

The practical list

Every session and match: **shin pads, water bottle, clothes for the weather** (sessions run in rain), and named kit. Please aim to arrive five minutes early — the first ten minutes are built to start the moment players do — and tell the coach in advance when your child can't make it, because session plans adapt to numbers.

Want to help?

Volunteer clubs run on parents. Linesman duty, kit washing, a lift rota, or doing your coaching badges alongside your child's football — mention it to the coach. Nobody has ever regretted the Level 1.

Coach: _____ **Contact:** _____ **Team/age group:** _____

Castlewellan Town FC · Youth Coaching Plans · please keep this for the season · written by Alan Cunningham with Claude AI