



THE GRASSROOTS CODE

The Grassroots Code is here to help make behaviour better in football. Replacing the previous Code of Conduct, it's designed to unite everyone across grassroots football by encouraging positive behaviour we can all get behind.

The Grassroots Code sets out the standards everyone expects to see across the grassroots game, including at your own club. It includes the following Standards of Behaviour which, if adopted, will ensure a positive environment for all:

ENJOY THE GAME
GIVE RESPECT
BE INCLUSIVE
WORK TOGETHER
PLAY SAFE

Together these Standards of Behaviour promote a positive, inclusive and respectful football experience for everyone. One in which your club can take pride in. One which makes even the strongest football clubs stronger. One which better represents our communities.



There are three versions of the Grassroots Code, each created for different people involved in the game:

**THE GRASSROOTS
CODE FOR YOUTH
FOOTBALL**

**THE GRASSROOTS
CODE FOR ADULT
FOOTBALL**

**THE GRASSROOTS
CODE FOR ADULTS IN
YOUTH FOOTBALL**

Workshops and assets are also available to support clubs and teams with understanding and embracing the grassroots code.

You can find these handy resources here:

[The Grassroots Code](#)

Respect the Standard promotes the Grassroots Code and Standards of Behaviour to everyone including players, coaches, officials, parents and supporters.

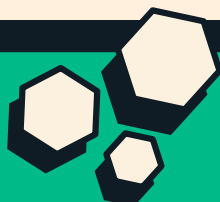




DEALING WITH POOR STANDARDS OF BEHAVIOUR



We all want to create a positive experience for everyone involved in grassroots clubs, but from time to time, things will go wrong. As club Leaders, you should think ahead about what your response might be if someone isn't respecting the standard, making sure you have a plan, or at least some ideas to fall back on if you need them.



WHAT MIGHT GO WRONG?



There are a few things that could be considered as bad behaviour within a club. Below are examples of how members of your club might not respect the Standards of Behaviour in the Grassroots Code.



Enjoy the Game – we're here to enjoy ourselves... win, lose or draw:

- A player may come to training or matches with a poor attitude which could upset other players.
- A coach may feel that winning is the only thing that matters, but grassroots football should be about enjoying the game, and not just about the results.



Give Respect – we always treat others as we'd like to be treated:

- A coach may show their disappointment after a loss by shouting at the team or individual players. Everyone involved in the grassroots game should always use respectful, positive language and actions, regardless of the team's result or individual performances. If a coach behaves inappropriately, their actions must be addressed.
- A parent may disagree with a decision made by the referee and act disrespectfully or aggressively. Referees are there to make sure the game runs smoothly, fairly and within the Laws of the Game, and any disrespectful behaviour must be called out. Some referees are under 18 years old and so acts of abuse or aggression towards them are also acts of abuse or aggression towards a child, which is taken very seriously.





**Be Inclusive – we embrace our differences...
football is a game for everyone:**

- A youth coach may give more pitch time to high performing players than those who are newer to the game. To be truly inclusive, coaches should try to give fair playing time to all children whatever their ability, unless agreed by parents and coaches when the new players were registered.
- A player may use hateful language when talking about another person. Clubs must have zero tolerance to discrimination of any kind, on or off the pitch, and the player's behaviour must be challenged.



Work Together – we're a team, on and off the pitch:

- Club Committees sometimes have difficult decisions to make which won't always be supported by everyone. Members should accept decisions made by the club, and try to implement them as best as they can, regardless of their personal opinion or feelings.
- Some clubs have multiple teams in the same age group. Managers should work together to ensure every player reaches their full potential.



**Play Safe – we all have a role in safeguarding
young people and vulnerable adults:**

- Occasionally, adults in football may see or hear something which causes them to become worried about a child's safety or wellbeing. Any concerns regarding young people must be reported to the Club Welfare Officer. If a report is knowingly not reported, this must be addressed.
- Adults involved in youth football shouldn't take part in training, warm up or cool down sessions with children to protect them from accidental physical harm. Those who get involved in sessions meant for children should be challenged to avoid any other future issues.

HOW CAN YOU STOP THINGS FROM GOING WRONG?

1. Download the Grassroots Codes of Conduct and discuss them with players, coaches and parents in the youth game. Even better, have them signed so everyone is committing to following the standards. This can serve as a behavioural pledge and will give you something to follow up on if needed.

[You can download the Grassroots Codes here.](#)

2. Introduce a Volunteer Agreement to your club can help reduce problems with poor behaviour. This will help your club be clear about what's on offer to volunteers, and what's expected of them. Introducing this as part of a welcome meeting for all volunteers is a great way to establish a positive and respectful environment from the start. You can download the Volunteer Agreement here:

[The Volunteer Agreement.](#)

3. Coaches to attend Managing Matchday Behaviours Workshop and utilise England Football coach resources on how coaches can manage matchday.

[Full details here.](#)

Things going wrong can be avoided if good communication and trust have been created from the get go and if everyone understands the environment we want the game to be played within. Look out for signs that volunteers may be struggling to stick to the Standards of Behaviour. Make time to check in with volunteers, perhaps through the Volunteer Co-ordinator, so that the club can step in to help before things get worse.



WHY DO CLUBS NEED TO ADDRESS DIFFICULT VOLUNTEERS?

Dealing with conflict can be daunting, especially when volunteers are generously offering their time and skills for free.

However, it's crucial to address challenging behaviour as soon as it happens. Disruptive behaviour can escalate over time, negatively affecting club culture and making it hard for members to have fun and enjoy the game.

Ignoring poor behaviour can lead to:

- Unnecessary conflict
- Poor morale
- Losing volunteers
- Lower performance on and off the pitch
- Poor reputation
- Increased legal risks
- Safeguarding & Welfare concerns going unchallenged
- Incidents being reported to your local County FA and misconduct charges raised

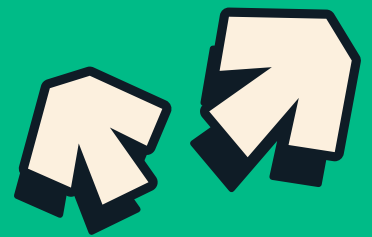


WHAT SHOULD CLUB LEADERS DO IF THERE IS A PROBLEM?



As soon as a volunteer starts to create friction, try and take action before minor frustrations turn into major problems. However, only do so if comfortable, and never place yourself in a position of risk.

It can be helpful to have a problem-solving process to help with such behavioural problems. This might mirror or run alongside your club's complaints policy, or follow a similar path to your grievance or disciplinary procedures if your club has paid staff.





A PROBLEM SOLVING PROCESS SHOULD INCLUDE THESE QUESTIONS:



How does our club define what is meant by 'behavioural problem'?

This means describing when and where the club might need to use this process. One way to do this would be to focus on the five Standards of Behaviour in the Grassroots Code.

What is the process for reporting an issue?

For example, who should people contact if they think there's an issue, or if they spot something concerning. What systems does the club have in place for reporting problems?

Who will be involved if there's a problem?

This might be a defined person with responsibility for intervening e.g. the volunteer coordinator/Respect Marshall or it could depend on the volunteer or area of work, e.g. Club Chairperson, Welfare Officer etc.



What steps should be taken when a problem has been reported?

This could include:

- Resolving problems informally where possible
- Having a description of the actions you'll take if a problem is found or reported. For example, an informal chat with the volunteer could be the first step, and if the issue can't be resolved, find what a more formal process would look like.
- Instructions for a volunteer who wants to raise a problem – who they should contact, what information you'll need, and what you will do with their report. Reports can be made to England Football here: englandfootball.com/participate/behaviour/reporting-discrimination
- Pointing out other relevant policies, like your complaints procedure, safeguarding policies and GDPR and the Grassroots Code, or your grievance and disciplinary procedures if you have them.
- Knowing where you might need to report concerns externally, for example to the County FA, League, NSPCC or police.
- What possible outcomes might look like, like the creation of an improvement plan, increased supervision and support, new ways of working, suspension or removal of club membership.

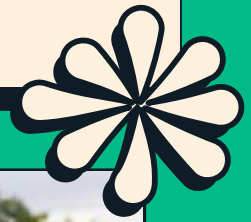
How can you make sure the problem-solving process is fair?

This includes ensuring the process doesn't involve decision-making by a person who has complained about the volunteer, or has sway over the other colleagues involved.

Refer to your EDI, Safeguarding, Anti-Bullying, Complaints policies and the Grassroots Code and Make sure your problem-solving processes are timely, fair, transparent, and clearly communicated.



HOW MIGHT YOU INVESTIGATE A PROBLEM?



Talk to the volunteer and find out the facts:

If the problem involves several volunteers, try to speak to all involved. If you are investigating a problem:

- avoid taking sides
- listen to what people have to say
- don't become defensive
- try to stick to facts
- avoid blame

Once you understand the issue, you can work out the best course of action.



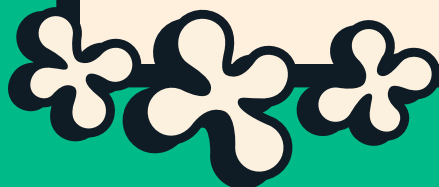


Sketch out potential solutions:

You could think of this as a risk-assessment exercise. Think about the issues that might happen, and what you could do to resolve them. It's likely you'll need to tweak your plans to suit the individual circumstances, but having some ideas to work from can be very helpful in stressful or emotional situations.

For example:

- If a coach is struggling to show respect, you could ask them to complete the Respect for Coaches online module.
- If a player has criticised a teammate, you could ask them to write a letter of apology or say sorry to the child they have upset.
- If a parent has shouted at the opposition or the referee, you could remind them of the Grassroots Code and give them a final warning before they are asked not to attend future matches. It would be useful to encourage the use of Respect Marshalls.
- If there are complaints around the way a coach is delivering sessions, pair them up with another coach to act as a buddy – perhaps someone who is more experienced in coaching and could offer some helpful advice. You could also reach out to your County FA for support from a coach developer.
- If a committee member is unhappy with something at the club, you could ask them to write their concerns down, then talk them through with you. You can offer a different perspective and some background on why certain decisions have been made. They might also have some useful points that you could feed into future decision making.





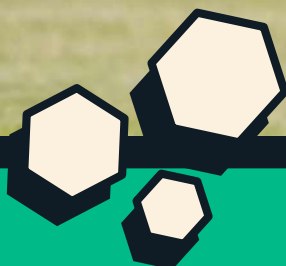
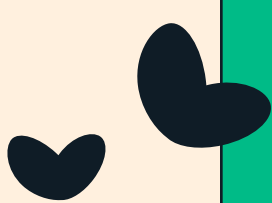
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Reflect:

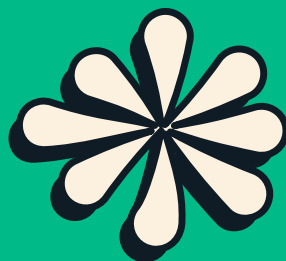
Where a behaviour issue is raised or found, there's always an opportunity for learning, whatever the outcome.

Make sure you take time to review what happened, and what steps you could take to avoid it happening again. Reflect on your role descriptions, your promotion of the Grassroots Code and your advertising and recruitment processes – did they make expectations clear?

Did you offer robust and clear training on your policies and procedures? Is there a better way of integrating new volunteers into your club?



TOP TIPS



Here's some tips for taking the heat out of a situation so everyone can get back to enjoying the game, safely and respectfully. Use the SMART steps below:

SAFE

Your own safety and that of others must come first. If you judge the situation to be unsafe, don't feel pressured to take action on your own and in the moment. However, if you feel it's safe to take some action then getting your language right from the outset is essential.

MODERATE

Consider the best approach. Always be open to talk: try to appeal to reason, such as pointing out the harm that is being done. Be calm and composed in your language. Speak in ways or language that will de-escalate the situation rather than aggravate it.

ACTIONS

Challenge the behaviour, not the person. Take a solutions-oriented approach. At all times, try to be constructive. Refer to the Grassroots Code and the Standards of Behaviour, reminding the person that they shouldn't speak or act in this way. Reporting is important: make sure a club official is across what has happened.

ROLE MODELLING

Represent your club as your best self. It's always important that you model calm and respectful behaviour. Don't drop your own standards.

TEAM / TRAINING

We're all in this together. At all times, it's best to appeal to the idea of "team". Your team, our team, and emphasise that team health and well-being is the main thing, always. Training at a club is never only about the sport, but also how a club continually strives to educate its people.

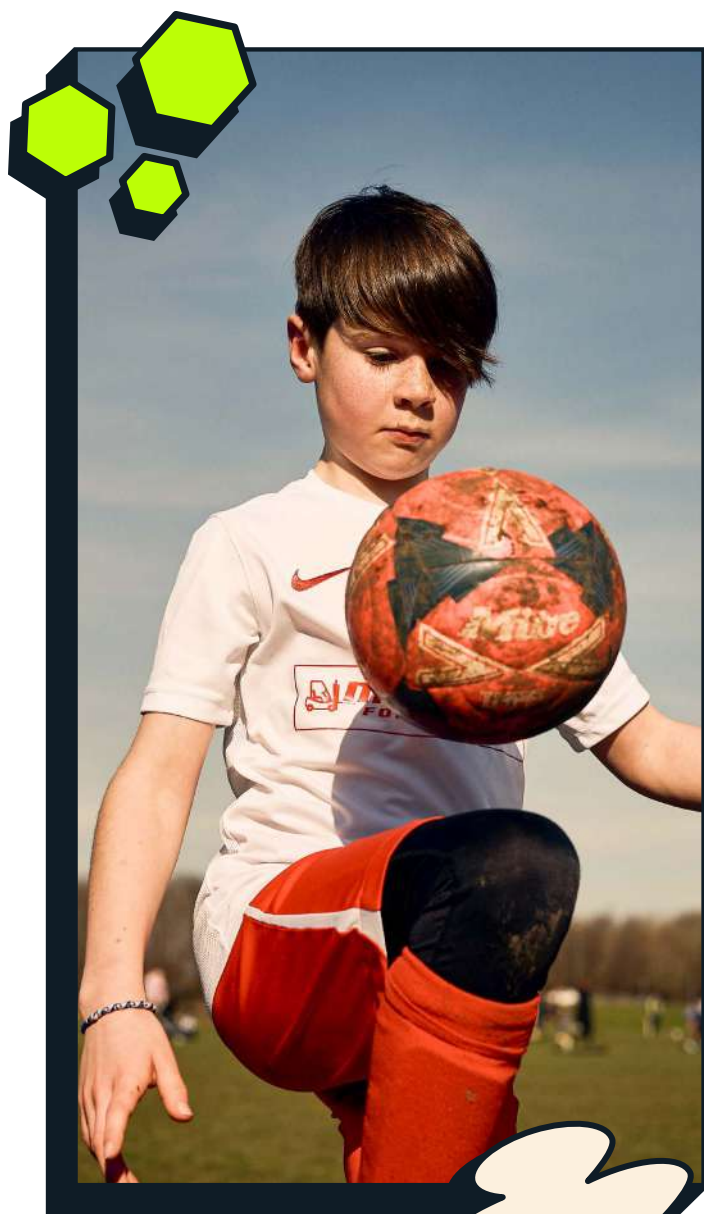
HERE'S AN EXAMPLE FRAMEWORK YOU CAN USE TO ADDRESS POOR BEHAVIOUR IN YOUR CLUB:

AUDIENCE AND PURPOSE:

This document sets out how to deal with instances of poor behaviour by club members, volunteers (including coaches, managers and club leaders/officials/volunteers) or members of the public including parents of the [club name]. The procedure should be used to make sure everyone involved in the club sticks to the Grassroots Code and respects the Standards of Behaviour detailed within it.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

Instances of poor behaviour will be dealt with confidentially by all parties involved, except where it's necessary to disclose information to carry out a fair investigation.





Informal resolution

In the first instance, the club should consider taking steps to resolve the matter informally before starting a formal process. This might include discussing the matter with the individual, and/or seeking advice from Committee members.

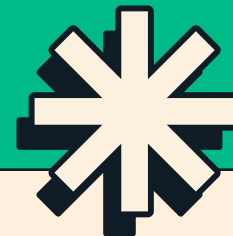
If this is not possible, the Club may wish to appoint an independent mediator (such as the Club's Volunteer Co-ordinator) to try and resolve matters. If the informal resolution proves unsuccessful, the Club should undertake a formal process to address the poor behaviour.



Making a formal complaint regarding the Poor Behaviour

A formal Complaint should be made to **[name or role of person/people responsible for dealing with complaints]** (the 'complaints handler') within 14 days of the conduct complained of (the "Complaint").





Reporting the Complaint

The Complainant should report the matter in writing to the **[name or role of person/people responsible for dealing with complaints]** within **[14 days]** of the poor behaviour taking place. Email address: **[add email address here]**.

The report should include:

- a. A detailed description** of what poor behaviour was demonstrated and by whom;
- b. Details** of **when and where** the poor behaviour took place;
- c. Statements** by any people who witnessed the behaviour or were affected by the poor behaviour;
- d. Names** of any others who have been treated in a similar way (provided that those people consent to their names being disclosed);
- e. Details of any former complaints** made regarding the individual's behaviour, including the date and to whom such behaviour was directed; and
- f. A recommendation** as to the **desired outcome of the Complaint process**.



Responding to the Complaint

The complaint handler/s will write to the Respondent attaching the Complaint, the accompanying evidence and a copy of this procedure. It will ask the Respondent to provide written representations and any evidence in response to the Complaint (the "Response") within **[insert a specified time period]**.

5

Considering and investigating the Complaint

Following consideration of the Complaint, and during the investigation process, the complaint handler/s may consider whether it is appropriate and proportionate to immediately suspend a member from the Club until the complaints process is concluded. The complaint handler/s should consider the seriousness of the complaint, and the impact it has had on the Complainant. This must be balanced against the need to conduct a fair and impartial investigation and the impact suspension may have on the Respondent. Matters which may warrant suspension include breaches of the law e.g. the Equalities Act or criminal matters.

Upon receipt of the Response, the complaint handler/s may make any further enquiries of any party that they consider necessary.

6

Decisions following the investigation

The complaint handler/s may:

- Decide to uphold or dismiss the complaint without holding a hearing;
- Arrange a hearing (whether or not such a hearing is requested by either party) at which both parties will be entitled to attend and present their case to the Club committee or a sub-committee.
- If the Committee /subcommittee considers that any other sanction is appropriate, it will record its decision and the reasons for it in writing. It will send a copy of the decision and its reasons to the parties within 10 days of the deadline for the Response.

The Committee /complaint handler/s shall record their decision and the reasons for it in writing. It will send a copy of the decision and its reasons to the parties within [10 days] of the deadline for the Response.

7

Sanctions

The sanctions that may be imposed under this procedure include:

- **A warning (verbal or written)** as to future conduct;
- **Suspension** of Club membership;
- **Removal** of Club membership;
- **Removal** from office of a Club committee;
- **Exclusion of** a non-member from the Club, training sessions and / or matches, either temporarily or permanently
- **A request** to participate in FA training
- **Not approving** a non-member's current and/or future membership applications

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Appeals

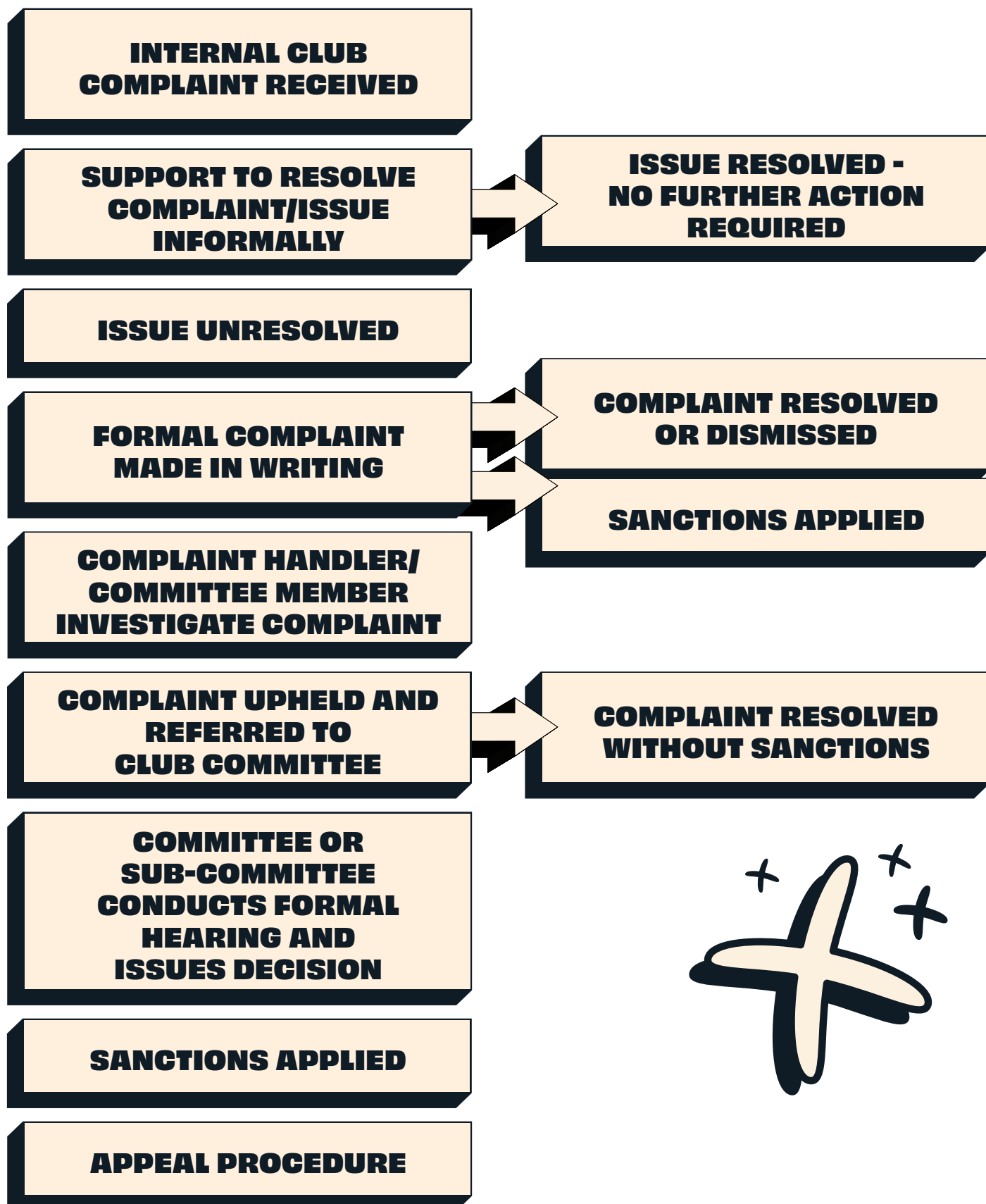
Either party may appeal a decision of the committee in writing within 28 days of the Club's decision being notified to that party.

If the Club is unable to resolve a complaint, the Club may ask the County FA to act as an external mediator to try and reach a resolution.





AN OVERVIEW OF THE FRAMEWORK





RESPECT
THE STANDARD

