

VERWOOD TOWN FOOTBALL CLUB

Young Referee Support & Respect Policy

How VTFC protects, supports and respects the referees who take to our pitches

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Review due	Annually, or following any significant change in club operations or legislation
Policy owner	Club Welfare Officer / Referee Co-ordinator

1. PURPOSE

Verwood Town Football Club depends on referees to run our matches. Without referees there is no game. Many of the referees who officiate at VTFC matches are young people aged 14–17, who are learning to referee while still in their formative years. They are children. They deserve the same care, respect and safeguarding as any other young person at our club.

This policy sets out the standards of conduct expected from everyone at VTFC when a referee, young or adult, is taking charge of a match, and the responsibilities that sit firmly with coaches and club officials, not with the referee.

2. SCOPE

This policy applies to all VTFC-affiliated activity where a referee is present, including:

- All league and cup fixtures
- Friendly matches and tournaments
- Training sessions involving a referee or match official
- Any match where a young person is officiating

It applies to all managers, coaches, assistant coaches, players (adult and youth), parents, carers, spectators, volunteer helpers and anyone organising matches or referee appointments at VTFC.

3. THE PRIVILEGED POSITION OF HAVING A REFEREE

VTFC recognises that having a referee, especially a young referee who is giving their time to develop a skill and support the game, is a privilege, not a right. Across grassroots football, referee numbers are declining. Every young person who qualifies and chooses to referee represents an investment in the future of the game that should be celebrated, not criticised.

A young referee on your pitch is doing you a favour. Treat them accordingly.

Managers, coaches, parents and players who undermine, disrespect or intimidate a referee risk driving that young person out of the game permanently. VTFC will not tolerate conduct that damages our referees' confidence, enjoyment or wellbeing.

4. PITCHSIDE BEHAVIOUR IS THE ADULT COACHES' RESPONSIBILITY

Important: *This is the single most important principle in this policy. The responsibility for the atmosphere and behaviour around the pitch belongs to the adult coaches, not to the referee*

Under FA guidance and VTFC policy:

- (a) **Coaches are responsible for the conduct of everyone in their team's area** — including parents, carers, substitutes and spectators standing near their team.
- (b) The referee — regardless of their age — is not responsible for managing the behaviour of adults on the touchline. This is especially true when the referee is a child themselves.
- (c) If a parent or spectator's conduct is affecting the referee or the match, the coach must act. It is not acceptable to stand by, shrug, or say "I can't control them." The coach has the authority and the obligation to intervene.
- (d) If a coach fails to manage touchline conduct after being asked to do so by the referee, the club may be held responsible for the resulting consequences — including the match being stopped or abandoned.

The above applies equally when the referee is an adult. Coaches are responsible for the behaviour of their team's supporters regardless of who is officiating.

5. RESPECT STANDARDS — WHAT WE EXPECT

5.1 Managers and coaches

- Welcome the referee before the match and introduce yourself by name
- Remind your parents and spectators of this policy and the Parent/Spectator Code of Conduct before kick-off
- Remain in the designated technical area and coach in a positive, constructive manner
- Never publicly question, mock, or berate a referee's decision — during or after the match
- Never approach the referee to complain during the match; if you have a legitimate concern, raise it calmly at a stoppage
- **If the referee is a young person:** treat them as you would want your own child to be treated in a similar situation
- If a parent or spectator in your team's area is behaving unacceptably, intervene immediately — this is your responsibility, not the referee's
- Thank the referee after the match, regardless of the result
- Any complaint about a decision must be made in writing to the committee after the match — never to the referee directly

5.2 Players

- Never speak disrespectfully to a referee during or after a match
- Never surround or pressurise a referee over a decision — one captain may calmly seek clarification if appropriate
- Accept decisions without argument, even if you disagree
- Shake hands with or acknowledge the referee at the end of every match
- **Young players:** remember that if the referee is a fellow young person, they are in the same position as you — learning and doing their best

5.3 Parents, carers and spectators

- Remain in the spectator area and do not enter the field of play or the technical area
- Applaud good play from both teams — do not direct comments at the referee
- Do not call out, challenge or approach the referee at any point during or after the match
- Do not comment negatively on the referee's age, appearance, gender or ability
- **If the referee appears to be a young person:** you are an adult. Set an example.
- If you have a concern about refereeing conduct, report it to the team manager after the match, never raise it directly with the referee

5.4 Match organisers and referee coordinators

- Ensure young referees are always allocated a VTFC point of contact for every match they officiate
- Brief young referees before their match, ensure they know who to speak to if they have a concern
- Never allocate a young referee to a match without a responsible adult available on the pitch if needed
- Follow up with young referees after any match where an incident has been reported
- Ensure referee feedback and concerns are reported to the Club Welfare Officer and committee
- Actively encourage young referees and acknowledge their contribution to the club

6. HOW VTFC SUPPORTS YOUNG REFEREES

VTFC is committed to creating an environment where young referees feel safe, valued and supported. The club will:

- Provide every young referee with a named VTFC contact for any match they officiate at a VTFC event
- Ensure the Guidance for Young Referees (VTFC.INFO.001) is made available to all young referees before their first match
- Brief all managers on their responsibilities to support and protect referees before the start of each season
- Take all reports of unacceptable conduct toward a referee seriously, regardless of whether the match was completed
- Support young referees in reporting incidents and ensure they are never required to confront adults as a result
- Recognise and celebrate young referees within the club community

7. WHAT A YOUNG REFEREE CAN DO

The steps a young referee should take when facing unacceptable behaviour are set out in full in **VTFC.INFO.001 — Guidance for Young Referees**. In summary:

- Pause the game if needed — they do not have to play on through unacceptable conduct
- Speak to the coach — ask them to manage the behaviour; they do not need to engage with parents or spectators directly
- Stop or abandon the match — if behaviour continues or they feel unsafe, they have every right to do so and will be fully supported
- Report what happened after the match — to their VTFC contact, referee mentor or the Club Welfare Officer

A referee who stops or abandons a match because of unacceptable conduct has done the right thing. VTFC will always back that decision.

8. CONSEQUENCES OF BREACHING THIS POLICY

Any person who breaches this policy may be subject to action by VTFC and/or Dorset County FA. VTFC treats any misconduct toward a referee — particularly a young referee — with the utmost seriousness.

Club-level consequences (may include)

- Formal warning issued to the individual and the team's manager
- Requirement to attend an FA Respect course
- Ban from attending matches for a specified period
- Removal of club membership
- Referral of the incident to Dorset County FA for further action

FA/league-level consequences (may include)

- Fine or suspension imposed on the club by the league or County FA
- Match awarded to the opposition where a game was abandoned due to conduct
- Individual suspension or ban from football

Important: Where conduct toward a young referee constitutes a safeguarding concern, it will be referred to the Club Welfare Officer and handled in accordance with the club's Safeguarding Children Policy (VTFC.POL.008) and reported to Dorset FA.

9. REPORTING

Anyone who witnesses unacceptable conduct toward a referee should report it promptly:

- **During a match:** inform the nearest manager or club official immediately
- **After a match:** report to the Club Welfare Officer or Club Secretary in writing
- **If a young referee is involved:** ensure the CWO is notified regardless of the severity

All reports will be handled confidentially and in accordance with the club's Disciplinary & Complaints Policy (VTFC.POL.013).

10. REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Club Committee and updated in line with any changes to FA Respect guidance or safeguarding requirements.

Key contacts	
Club Welfare Officer	Clare Nixson – welfare@vtyfc.co.uk / 07758 246452
Club Secretary	youth_secretary@vtyfc.co.uk
Referee Co-Ordinator	Jason Bartlett - 07803 765588
Club Chairperson	youth_chairman@vtyfc.co.uk
Dorset FA Safeguarding	safeguarding@dorsetfa.com / 01202 688270
FA Referee Development	refereeing@thefa.com