

Digital Communications and Social Media

Communication technology and social media developments advance extremely quickly, meaning ways in which we communicate and receive and absorb information are changing all the time. This provides a great opportunity for clubs to promote their activities and communicate easily with members. But it can also put children and young people at risk, which is why safeguards must be put in place.

Adults who seek to harm children have been known to use technology and social media to “groom” children. This area is specifically addressed by the Protection of Children and Prevention of Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2005. Software enabling the manipulation of online images can also pose a risk of harm to children and young people. It is also widely acknowledged that children can be harmed by the behaviours and actions of their peers, for example online bullying and sexting.

The following guidelines should be followed in order to safeguard all parties when communicating via digital technology and social media:

- All communications from the club with children and young people should be open, transparent and appropriate.
- Children and young people and their parents/carers should be informed about the communication approach by the club and should also be given information on how to keep themselves safe and who to report any concerns to.
- Messages should only be sent to communicate details of meeting points, training, match details, competition results etc. The same message should be sent to every member of the group/team
- The use of apps must take account of the terms and conditions of using the app including age limitations.
- It should always be clear that it is the club who is communicating information – one-to-one messaging arrangements between sports volunteers/staff should be strongly discouraged and safeguards should be in place and settings adjusted to prevent this happening.

- Messages should never contain any offensive, abusive or inappropriate language. They should not be open to misinterpretation.
- Written permission must be sought from parents/carers to communicate with children under 16 years.
- Parents should be offered the option to be copied into any messages their child will be sent.
- Consent to communicate via digital technology/social media should be sought directly from young people aged 16 to 18. Though consent from parents/carers is not required for this age group it is recommended that parents/carers are informed of the intention to communicate with their children.
- All concerns about the inappropriate use of digital technology and social media will be dealt with in line with the Procedure for *Responding to Concerns about a Child*. This may include the concerns being reported to police.
- Where phone numbers/email addresses of children and young people are gathered these should be kept securely in a locked cabinet or password-protected electronic file or database.
- The number of people with access to children and young people's details should be kept to a practical minimum. A record should be kept of their numbers/addresses by the Child Wellbeing & Protection Officer

Websites/Social Media Sites

Websites/Social Media sites provide an opportunity for a club to extend their community profile, advertise and communicate easily with their members. Thought should be given to consent, tone and how sites and pages will be monitored. In terms of publishing information and pictures the following good practice should be noted:

Permission

- For permission to publish information or pictures about a child aged under 16 written parent/carer consent must be obtained.
- Special care must be taken in relation to vulnerable children, e.g. child fleeing domestic violence or a child with a disability, and consideration given to whether publication would place the child at risk.

- Young athletes who have a public profile as a result of their achievements are entitled to the same protection as all other children. In these cases, common sense is required when implementing these guidelines. All decisions should reflect the best interests of the child.

Use of Images and Information

- Information published on the websites or through social media must never include personal information that could identify a child e.g. home address, email address, telephone number of a child. All contact must be directed to the club. Credit for achievements by a child should be restricted to first names, e.g. Tracey was Player of the Year 2002.
- Children must never be portrayed in a demeaning, tasteless or a provocative manner. Children should never be portrayed in a state of partial undress, other than when depicting an action shot within the context of the sport. Attire such as tracksuits or t-shirts may be more appropriate.

Group Chats/Forums

Where a site or app allows for two-way communication between the club and members, or amongst a group of members, close monitoring is required. From time to time group chats/forums can be used to target individuals or to engage contributors in debates that can cause upset and embarrassment to children and young people.

Coaches, members of staff/volunteers should refrain from being drawn into debates concerning selection, performance or personalities – even where the subject of discussion is anonymous.

Any offending comments should be removed by the club and appropriate procedures should be used to address poor practice or Code of Conduct breaches.

Concerns

Any concerns or enquiries should be reported to the Child Wellbeing and Protection Officer.

