

There are significant benefits for clubs using texts/emails and setting up social networking sites. Not only is it cheap, it's one of the most direct forms of communication with young people. However, there are risks. Adults who seek to harm children have been known to use messaging to "groom" children. This area is now specifically addressed by the Protection of Children and Prevention of Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2005.

**For children and young people, the safeguarding risks of these technologies include:**

- Inappropriate access to, use or sharing of personal details (e.g. names, email addresses)
- Unwanted contact with children by adults with wrongful/questionable intent
- Being sent offensive or otherwise inappropriate material
- Sending offensive or otherwise inappropriate material
- Online bullying by peers
- Grooming for sexual abuse
- Direct contact and abuse

**For adults, risks involved include:**

- Their communication with children being misinterpreted.
- Potential investigation (internal or by statutory agencies).
- Potential disciplinary action.
- Suspension from the sport.
- Added to the PVG Children's List and barred.

**Text & Emails**

Staff/volunteers must consider whether it is necessary to communicate with children via text, messaging and email. The general principle is that all communications with children should be open, transparent and appropriate.

Good practice would include agreeing with children and parents/carers what kind of information will be communicated directly to children and young people by text message/instant message and should be sent in a group communication. This information should only be "need to know" information such as the last-minute cancellation of a training session.

In the first instance parent/carer consent must be obtained for all children under 18 years. Contact should always be made at the phone number/email address the parent has provided on the child's behalf. Parents/carers should be offered the option to be copied into any messages their child will be sent. Although consent is not legally required for young people aged between 16 and 18 it is still recommended that parents are informed of the intention to send their child(ren) emails, messages or texts. It is also good practice to obtain the consent of the 16 to 18 year-old young person.

The following good practice is also required:

- All phone numbers/email addresses of children and young people should be recorded and kept securely in a locked cabinet or password-protected electronic file, club management system 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 and addresses, namely by the Club Membership Secretary.
- Messages should never contain any offensive, abusive or inappropriate language. They should not be open to misinterpretation.
- The club should be clear that messages should be sent only to communicate aquatics related matters: details of meeting points, training, match details, competition results etc. The same message should be sent to every member of the group/team.



## **Safeguarding Guidance Document**

- Communication by text/message/email between coaches/volunteers and children/young people should include a copy to a third party e.g. copy to relevant Wellbeing & Protection Officer (WPO) and/or parent.

### **Internet**

The internet brings with it an opportunity for organisations to extend their community profile, advertise and communicate easily with their members. Sometimes this is done via social networking platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Thought should be given to content, tone and how sites or social networking platforms and pages will be monitored.

In terms of publishing information and pictures, the following good practice should be noted:

### **Permission**

- Written parent/carer consent must be obtained for all children aged under 18 before publishing any information or pictures of a child. If the material is changed from the time of consent, the parents/carers must be informed and consent provided for the changes.
- 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/social networking sites 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 2024.
- Children must never be portrayed in a demeaning, tasteless or a provocative manner.
- Information about specific events or meetings e.g. coaching sessions must not be distributed to any individuals other than to those directly concerned.

### **Concerns**

Any concerns or enquiries about publications or the internet should be reported to the club WPO. Additional guidance regarding images, photography and videos can be found in appendix SG22 – Photography of Members.

### **Social Networking Sites**

The following is recommended if the club decides to allow mutual access between it and its members (including children):

#### *Permission*

- Obtain written permission from parents/carers of under 18s to allow mutual interaction with the organisation profile. Make parents/carers aware of the profile's existence, the site the child will be accessing and the restrictions of use for this preferred site.
- An official agreement should be in place which states that access to members' profiles are used only to pass on relevant information or to answer questions regarding organisation or sport issues. This agreement should also be incorporated into the club rules or code of conduct.
- Set up a club profile rather than staff/volunteer profiles. This avoids access from members to individual's profiles.
- Keep the club profile on "private" – allowing only members access to it (the organisation can monitor this and accept or decline requests to join).

*Concerns*

- Informal online “chat” with members around subjects outside the sport/activity should be immediately discouraged.

Private matters or questions should also be discouraged. However, any disclosures should be removed from the site and dealt with in line with accordingly.

More information about the use of social media and how to use it safely, refer to appendix SG25 – Setting up social media accounts.

**Internet Forums**

There has been an increase in the use and abuse of internet forums to target individuals or to engage contributors in debates which can cause upset and embarrassment to children and young people. Sites should be well monitored, and any offending comments removed.

A coach, member of staff or volunteer should refrain from being drawn into any debates concerning selection, performance or personalities – even where the subject of the discussion is anonymous. This could be considered a breach of the code of conduct or poor practice.

**Mobile Phone, Cameras & Video**

There have already been a number of cases where children have been placed at risk as a result of the ability to discreetly record and transit images through mobile phones. There is also scope for humiliation and embarrassment if films or images are shared on popular websites such as YouTube. The use of mobile phones in this way can be very difficult to monitor.

Clubs should follow the guidelines within this section as well as adopt and follow the Acceptable Use of Mobile Phone Policy. Particular care is required in areas where personal privacy is important e.g. changing rooms, showers, bathrooms and sleeping quarters. No photographs or video footage should ever be permitted in such areas of personal privacy.

**The use of mobile phones and electronic devices shall not be permitted at any time in sensitive areas such as:**

- **changing areas**
- **toilets**
- **showers areas**
- **first aid areas**

All concerns about the inappropriate use of mobile phones to record photographs or video footage will be dealt with in line with Scottish Swimming Complaints Policy and/or Disciplinary Procedure. This may include the concerns being reported to the police.