

## Social media and digital communication with young people

### Guidance and recommendations for coaches, volunteers, officials and designated officers

*For the purpose of this Best Practice note, the term 'coach' is used to apply to all adults working with young people (U18) in athletics.*

*For the purpose of this Best Practice note, electronic communication includes contact with young people via email, text messaging, social networking sites (eg Facebook, Twitter) and instant messaging systems (eg MSN).*

#### Introduction

As technology develops, the internet and its range of services can be accessed through various devices including mobile phones, computers and game consoles. Although the internet has many positive uses, it provides the key method for the distribution of indecent images of children. Furthermore, social networking sites, chat rooms and instant messaging systems are increasingly being used by online predators to 'sexually groom' children and young people. In addition, electronic communication is being used more and more by young people as a means of bullying their peers.

All adults working with young people in athletics are asked to adhere to the following best practice guidelines which form part of the **scottishathletics/ British Athletics Welfare Policy**.

**scottishathletics** will investigate any 'coach' who is not adhering to best practice in communication with young people.

#### General Good Practice

It is inappropriate for adult coaches to communicate on a *one to one* basis with athletes under the age of 18 years by:

- text message
- e-mail
- instant messaging or through social networking sites

All electronic communication by the above methods should include (where possible) a copy to a third party, e.g. copy to the relevant safeguarding officer and/or the parent.

Coaches should also limit all electronic communication to athletics-related matters. It is advisable to always send a group message rather than single messages to one athlete.

For U16 athletes, parental consent is required for communication between the adult and the young person. This guideline can form part of the club membership details given when joining the club.

For U18 athletes, parents should be informed and aware of the communication between the coach and young person.

All coaches, staff, volunteers, parents and members should always behave responsibly and respectfully when online or texting.

They should not post or discuss unfavourable comments about coaches, athletes, any helper or volunteer, parents or club/s.

Mobile phones should be turned off during an athletics session except in the case where a phone is used as a club contact number or for emergencies.

#### Text Messages

Text messages are **NOT** the preferred method of communication between adults and young people. However where they are used, they should be group (bundled) messages and should always be copied into the relevant safeguarding/welfare officer.

In the event of an emergency, individual texts may be used but again must be copied into the safeguarding officer and/or parent.

### **Instant Messaging Services**

MSN, Yahoo and other instant messaging systems should not be used by adults to communicate with young athletes under any circumstances.

### **Emails**

Emails are a positive and simple method of communication between coaches and young athletes and groups are easy to set up.

Group emails are preferred, although in the case of an email to one person, a copy must be sent to the relevant safeguarding officer.

### **Social Networking**

Coaches should NOT have athletes under the age of 18 as their 'friends' on social networking sites when the primary reason for the relationship is athletics and they have a position of trust in relation to that young person. Should a young person in your club request to become a named friend on your social networking page or request that you become a named friend on their page you should decline if any of the below apply:

- You are in an athletics position of responsibility in respect of that child.
- You hold a position of trust and responsibility in the athletics club.
- Your contact with the child is through an athletics club **and** the parent/guardian of the child does not give their consent to such contact.

The social network site should never be used as a medium by which to abuse or criticise club members or other clubs and to do so would be in breach of the **scottishathletics/** British Athletics Codes of Conduct and therefore subject to disciplinary action.

Coaches are advised to consider carefully what they post as some comments can be seen by friends of friends. This also applies to comments left on other people's pages and the sharing of photographs. Consider your position as a role model in this area.

The publishing of a photograph or video footage on a social networking site is governed by the same requirements as any other media see the **scottishathletics/** British Athletics Photography Policy.

<http://www.britishathletics.org.uk/governance/policies/use-of-photographic-video-images-of-children-young-people-under-the-age-of-18/>

### **Club Facebook Group**

Clubs using Facebook as a forum for members are advised to use a closed group (see separate guidance sheet on setting up social media accounts for your club). They should only accept members of the club as members of the group. This must be stated on the group and the group must be set up for that reason.

Coaches are reminded that ALL social networking websites are restricted to people aged 13 years and over, this restriction must be adhered to.

### **Club Facebook Page**

A Facebook Page can be set up for the club to promote its activities to the wider community, all members must be aware that this Page is visible to all users and should not contain information about young people.

Please see the **Good practice guidelines for setting up your club's social media accounts** document on [www.scottishathletics.org.uk/welfare](http://www.scottishathletics.org.uk/welfare)

### **Guidance to coaches who have children that participate in the club where they coach**

Many parents are becoming members of social networking sites that their children sign up to for security reasons. This enables them to view their child's activity and help ensure the safety of their own child. It would not be appropriate for **scottishathletics** to prevent a parent who is also a coach in his/her child's club from using this form of protection for their child's online activities. On sites such as facebook, this will give the parent access, via their child's account, to all children listed as friends or followers of their child. Therefore in such cases -

On facebook:

- The coach concerned should not have direct contact or communication with those athletes under the age of 18 who are friends with their child.
- The coach should not accept such athletes as friends.
- The coach should inform the Club Welfare Officer that they are friends with their child on facebook.

On Twitter/Instagram/etc:

- Coaches are advised not to follow athletes under the age of 18 on Twitter/Instagram/similar sites.
- While it is not required for coaches to block athletes under the age of 18 from following them on Twitter/Instagram, they must be mindful that what they are posting is visible to those athletes, and to the wider world.
- Coaches should not interact with athletes under the age of 18 on these sites on any topic other than athletics, and must ensure that the welfare officer and the child's parent are aware that communication is taking place via this medium.
- Coaches should never use the private messaging options on these sites to contact athletes under the age of 18.

### **Coaches/teachers/officials who are aged Under 18**

scottishathletics recognises that social networking sites can be a useful tool for coaches and officials within athletics clubs to share information with other coaches or officials. If, however, the coach or official is under the age of 18, while they may be a colleague; these requirements must be adhered to.

For young people aged 16 or 17 it is the view of scottishathletics that to restrict the ability to share professional information with them from other coaches or officials may be detrimental in their professional development. Therefore in such cases if the parent of a young person in a position of responsibility aged 16/17 and the young person themselves requests to have contact with an adult club officer or coach for the purposes of sharing professional information relevant to their role:

- The club should gain written consent of the parent/guardian and young person to have such contact naming the individual adult and social networking site concerned
- The named adult must sign an agreement to keep the contact with the young person to the discussion of matters relevant to the young person's professional role in the club
- All such communications should be shared with an identified 3rd person (e.g. the young person's parent/guardian or Club Welfare Officer)

If the young person or the adult is found to breach the above agreement action must be taken by the club to address the concern and/or the breach referred to scottishathletics or the statutory agencies if appropriate.

### **A note to young athletes**

Young members must be reminded to set their privacy settings and not accept requests either from people unknown to them or to other adults involved in athletics.

### **Reporting concerns**

In the event of an athlete showing a coach a text or instant message, image or email that is considered to be inappropriate for a child to have, the coach must inform the appropriate welfare officer, either at club or scottishathletics national level. If a young person is concerned with anything they have seen on the internet they are advised to speak to their welfare officer.

The information in this scottishathletics guidance note is consistent with the following CPSU guidance.

### **Whether you're a child, young person, parent or carer, familiarise yourself with our ten top tips for young people to stay safe online**

1. Stop & think before you post messages online. Cyber-bullying includes sending hurtful messages, name calling, making threats, using abusive language or targeting someone because they are different.
2. Never give out your personal details online (eg. phone number; address; bank details; your real name on sites where you are only known by a different username).
3. Remember - if you haven't met someone in person, they are a stranger. Never arrange to meet people you don't know.
4. Don't go into adult chat rooms. How can you be sure who you are talking to?
5. If you see something on a website that upsets you, turn off the screen and tell an adult you trust. You can also call **ChildLine** on 0800 1111.
6. Only use a webcam if you have told an adult you trust first.
7. Don't engage in sexual talk online. You have no way of knowing who you are really talking to.
8. Never post intimate photos or videos of yourself online. Have you considered where it could end up?
9. If you think you are being cyber-bullied or blackmailed, tell an adult you trust or contact **ChildLine** on 0800 1111. ChildLine is totally free and totally confidential.

10. If you are an adult seeking advice about cyber-bullying and online safety, download our **factsheet** or call **ParentLine Scotland** on 08000 28 22 33.

### Useful links

(Hold down CTRL to open links)

[Internet safety factsheet](#)

[ParentLine Scotland](#)

[Think U Know](#)

[Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre \(CEOP\)](#)

[ChildLine](#)

[Respect Me](#)

[10 Steps to Safeguarding in Sport](#)

[Safeguarding in Sport Training](#)

[Children's 1<sup>st</sup>](#)