

Club Communication Guidelines



Appropriate Communication Guidelines for Clubs

Clubs may now find that they have a website, a profile on a couple of social networking sites and collect email addresses and mobile numbers from their members. When this involves contacting young people, there are good practice guidelines that clubs should follow.

Emails

Emails can provide an excellent opportunity to quickly disseminate information to a group of people. However, there are some risks and clubs should be aware of good practice which includes:

- Language should be appropriate and professional;
- Emails should come from the same person, i.e. club secretary or head coach;
- Emails should be about legitimate club information and avoid over-familiarity;
- Ideally emails should be sent to groups rather than individual children. If communication needs to be sent to an individual child, another adult such as their parent or club secretary/club welfare officer should be copied into the message;
- For group emails, consideration should be made as to if it is appropriate to allow others access to all the recipient's email addresses by using the 'to' field or if the 'blind carbon copy' (bcc) function should be used;
- People should be given the option to opt out of receiving further emails;
- For under 16's, parental consent must be gained before collecting email addresses and parents should also be copied into the email. Parents should be able to include their own email address instead of their child's;
- For young people aged 16-18, their permission should be gained to email them, and parents should be made aware that the club will be emailing their child and the reasons for this;
- If the club receives any emails of concern from a young person, the child protection policy should be followed;
- If a club official leaves their position, they should ensure they delete club member's email addresses from their computer;
- Email addresses should not be passed on or used for other purposes without permission.

Text messaging

The use of text messaging increases the vulnerability of both the young person and (typically) the coach. However, it is one of the most direct forms of communication with young people so clubs may decide they would like to use text messaging. Good practice on how to reduce the risks include:

It should be a club decision to use text messaging, rather a decision taken in isolation by one person;

- The content should relate solely to basketball and should reflect the professional relationship between coach and athlete;

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- Text messages should be sent at appropriate times of the day (i.e. not overnight) and avoid language that is overly familiar or could be misinterpreted;
- Club officials with access to the young people's personal contact details should be kept to a practical minimum;
- Club officials should not allow anyone to use their phone to text a young person and they should not pass on young people's mobile phones numbers to other people
- Consent must be obtained from young people prior to sending them text messages. For under 16's, parental consent must also be obtained, and parents should be given the option of also being sent the text message;
- For young people aged 16-18, their permission should be obtained before texting them and their parents made aware;
- Clubs should ensure that people know how to sensitively deal with concerns if they receive messages from a young person that could be considered inappropriate or concerning;
- Young people should be given the opportunity to request not to receive further messages.

Websites/social networking

The internet provides an excellent opportunity to reach a wide audience at little cost. Clubs can use the internet to attract new members, publicise themselves and keep in contact with existing members. However, clubs need to be mindful in how they present themselves online and the risks the internet can pose to young people if not used appropriately.

Good practice guidelines include:

The website/profile should present a professional image, ensuring all language and content is appropriate;

- Clubs should plan how they will manage their club website/social networking profile. There should be more than one person with 'moderator' responsibilities, so content can be edited/removed quickly if necessary;
- The website/profile should be regularly monitored, and links reviewed regularly to ensure they are appropriate and working;
- Procedures and contact details for reporting any problems/concerns should be easy to locate;
- Contact details for the club welfare officer should be available and links established to help organisations such as Childline;
- If the club decides to publish team/player profiles of under 18's, their and their parent's permission should be sought first;
- Permission to publish photos/videos of young people should be gained from them and their parents and follow photography guidelines in the Child Protection Policy;
- Clubs should avoid publishing excessive personal information of under 18's i.e. never includes email address, home address, school attended etc;
- If there is a minimum age on the social networking site, the club should not target young people under this age to use it;
- Parents should be encouraged to view the club website/profile as well as young people;
- If the club becomes aware of problems such as cyber bullying or a young person placing themselves at risk with the information they share on the internet, they should follow their club procedures for concerns or contact a help organisation for advice;
- Club officials, particularly coaches, should think carefully about their personal online profiles and if it is appropriate for young people in the club to be able to view them.
- It is inappropriate for adult coaches to communicate on a one to one basis with players under the age of 18 years through social media or instant messaging.

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- Coaches and staff should not be “friends” with the children they coach, and they should not comment on their status as this can open the adult to allegations.

Further information and good practice templates are available from the ‘resource library’ section of the Child Protection in Sport Unit website: www.thecpsu.org.uk