Social Media and Digital Communication with Young People

Guidance and Recommendations for Clubs and 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 but is not restricted to; contact with young people via email, text messaging, social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc.) and messaging systems (e.g. WhatsApp, Snapchat, etc.).

1. INTRODUCTION:

As technology has developed, the internet and its range of services can be accessed through various devices including mobile phones, tablets, computers and game consoles. Although digital communication methods have many positive uses, they can also be used in child sexual exploitation to groom and abuse a child, or in the distribution of indecent images of children. In addition, electronic communication is being used more and more by young people as a means of bullying their peers.

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

scottishathletics will consider disciplinary action against any 'coach' who does not adhere to these guidelines.

2. GUIDELINES FOR COMMUNICATING WITH CHILDREN UNDER 18 YEARS:

- It is not acceptable for adult coaches to communicate on a *one to one* basis with athletes under the age of 18 years by:
  - text message
  - e-mail
  - social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter or Instagram)
  - electronic communication apps (e.g. WhatsApp, Snapchat etc.)
  - video conferencing software and Apps
- All electronic communication by the above methods should include a copy to a third party, e.g. copy to the relevant club welfare officer and the parent/carer (where a coach is independent of a club the relevant welfare officer is at the club where the child is a member).
- Coaches should limit all electronic communication to athletics-related matters.
- Parental consent is required for communication between the coach and the young person. This guideline must form part of the relevant club membership details given when joining the club. Where a coach is independent of a club the relevant club is the one at which the child is a member.
- 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 other 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.

We have included more specific guidance for communicating with young people below.

3. TEXT MESSAGING:

Text messages are **NOT** a preferred method of communication between coaches and young people. However, where they are used, they should be group (bundled) messages and should always be copied into the relevant club welfare officer (where the coach is independent of a club, the welfare officer of the club where the athletes are members should be advised).

One to one messaging between a coach and a child is unacceptable unless in an emergency. In the event of an emergency, individual texts may be used but again must be copied into the relevant welfare officer and the parent/carer.

4. 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 recommended. If it is necessary to email one athlete only you must copy in, or 'Cc', the relevant welfare officer and/or the parent/carer (where the coach is independent of a club, the welfare officer of the club where the athletes are members should be advised).

5. SOCIAL NETWORKING:

Coaches should NOT have athletes under the age of 18 as their 'friends' on social networking sites where the primary reason for the relationship is athletics and they have a position of trust in relation to that young person.

Should a child under 18 years request to become a named friend through a social network site, 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 child's 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 **scottish**athletics/ 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 **scottish**athletics/ 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/

6. INSTANT MESSAGING APPS:

Direct messaging systems on sites such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or similar, should never be used by coaches to communicate on a one to one basis with athletes under 18 years.

You should only engage with athletes under 18 on these platforms in the following circumstances:

- by setting up a group, and;
- contact is only with the written permission of the parent/carer, and;
- the parent/carer is included as a member of the group and receives all messages, and;
- the club welfare officer is advised of the group and the names of its members, and;
- the group messages are restricted to coaching related matters.

Note: It is possible that some athletes will be below the age restrictions for some or all social media Apps, (over 16 years for WhatsApp, Over 13 years for all others), so please bear this in mind when considering communication methods.

Scottishathletics cannot recommend specific social media apps to use, but there are organisations which may be able to help you find out more about apps: Safer Internet; Ineqe Safeguarding; Thinkuknow; Internet Matters.

7. LIVE VIDEO CHAT AND LIVE CONFERENCING SYSTEMS AND APPS:

There are few if any athletics coaching scenarios where live video streaming or conferencing with an athlete under 18 years on a one to one or group basis would be necessary or justified and therefore these platforms should not be used for this purpose.

Ideally if coaches wish to share video training material in a coaching setting with athletes under 18, this should be done via a parents/carers using the parents email address, or on a closed Facebook or instant messaging App group following the guidance in this document for using such methods.

Where live video chat or conferencing is used to communicate with groups of athletes under 18 years the following guidance applies:

- One to one contact is not allowed, only group sessions are sanctioned through this media
- The coach must have gained clear permission from the parent/carer of the child for each and every group discussion
- The contact details should be sent via the parent (never send the links/meeting requests directly to the child)
- The parent should open and close the session using their own phone/computer (if a child joins a session without their parents permission the session should stop immediately)
- Ensure another adult (parent/coach) joins the session – never undertake a live video chat/conference with children by yourself
- Ensure everyone can be seen at the same time
- Share details of each session with the relevant club welfare officer (the relevant club is the one at which the child is a member). The welfare officer can join the meeting without your permission.
- Location: Neither the child or the coach should live chat/conference from a bedroom
- Everyone should be appropriately dressed (club kit etc.)
- Be aware of what can be seen on your camera (set the background to blurred where the App allows)
- Group contact should be no more frequent than once per week
- A plan of what will be discussed etc. should be circulated in advance along with rules on behaviour/conduct in the session and what to do and who to speak to if they have a concern about anything occurring within the session
- Follow the additional security guidance issued from time to time relative to platforms such as; Zoom, etc.

8. COMMUNICATION BY COACHES WHOSE OWN CHILDREN PARTICIPATE IN THE CLUB WHERE THEY COACH:

Many parents join social networking sites that their children sign up to for to monitor their activity and help keep their children safe. It would not be appropriate for **scottish**athletics 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 should not have direct contact or communication with those athletes under the age of 18 who are Facebook friends with their child,
- The coach should not accept friend requests from such athletes,
- The coach should inform the Club Welfare Officer that they are friends with their own child on Facebook.

On Twitter/Instagram/etc:

- The coach must not follow athletes under the age of 18 on Twitter, Instagram or similar sites.
- While it is not required for coaches to block athletes under the age of 18 from following them on Twitter or 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 direct messaging options on these sites to contact athletes under the age of 18.

9. COMMUNICATION WITH COACHES WHO ARE UNDER 18 YEARS:

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 **scottish**athletics 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 **scottish**athletics or the statutory agencies if appropriate.

10. CLUB COMMUNICATIONS VIA FACEBOOK:

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.

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.

For more information about setting up and managing club social media accounts, please see the our Social Media & Digital Communication Guidelines for Clubs on www.scottishathletics.org.uk/welfare.

11. GUIDANCE FOR ATHLETES UNDER 18 YEARS:

Whether you're under 18 or a parent/carer you must 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. You may breach the codes of conduct if you send something that is hurtful, threatening or abusive.
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. Child-Line 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.

For more information on using social media appropriately please see our separate guidance for athletes available on our website.

12. REPORTING A CONCERN:

If you have a concern about the conduct of a coach or indeed anyone using digital communication in an athletics setting then you must tell your club welfare officer as soon as possible. Where this is not immediately possible then contact the welfare team at **scottish**athletics via the details below.

Where possible you should take and preserve a screenshot of the concerning communication as the offender may delete or remove it.

If a child is at risk of harm you must contact the police on either 101 or 999.

For further information and advice please visit the welfare section of our website at https://www.scottishathletics.org.uk/about/welfare/child-protection-and-wellbeing/.

You can contact our welfare officer at: angus.macdonald@scottishathletics.org.uk; or by phone on – 07983 081 122.