

Social Media and Communicating with Young Athletes Policy

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 have increasingly been used by online predators to 'sexually groom' children and young people. In addition, electronic communication is being used 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 guidelines which form part of the Thetford Athletic Club (TAC) Welfare Policy – these are seen as industry best practise.

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

GENERAL GOOD PRACTICE

When using social media as a form of communication to athletes the rules that apply in the real world also apply online.

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.

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 MESSAGING

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 and/or parent. 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

Facebook Messenger, Instagram 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 and/or parent.

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 TAC 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 Thetford Athletics Use of Photography policy and the UK Athletics Photography Policy: <https://www.uka.org.uk/governance/policies/use-of-photographic-video-images-of-children-youngpeople-under-the-age-of-18/>

CLUB FACEBOOK GROUP/PAGE

If an athletics group within the club uses Facebook as a forum, the 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.

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.

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 England Athletics 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 guidance note is consistent with the following CPSU guidance.

1. Whether you're a child, young person, parent or carer, familiarise yourself with our ten top tips for young people to stay safe online:
 2. 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
 3. 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). Remember - if you haven't met someone in person, they are a stranger.
 4. Never arrange to meet people you don't know
 5. Don't go into adult chat rooms. How can you be sure who you are talking to?
 6. 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
 7. Only use a webcam if you have told an adult you trust first
 8. Don't engage in sexual talk online. You have no way of knowing who you are really talking to
 9. Never post intimate photos or videos of yourself online. Have you considered where it could end up?
 10. 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
- If you are an adult seeking advice about cyber-bullying and online safety, download our factsheet or call Parent Line/Family Lives on 0808 800 2222