

APPENDIX 22

ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS

This policy follows the guidance of the NSPCC Child Protection Support Unit

Why do we need electronic guidance?

There is growing concern being expressed about what is and what is not permissible in the area of communication between adults and children in sport. Understandably, with the rapid development of mobile phones, text messaging, e-mail and other forms of electronic communication, these methods of communicating have become a feature of the sporting landscape

A number of sports have experience of cases where coaches in particular have misused text messaging and other forms of electronic communication. There is evidence of the use of mobile phones and other electronic communication for grooming or other purposes by coaches and others in positions of trust in relation to children throughout sport. There have also been incidents of child athletes becoming very distressed as a result of bullying by coaches or others who have contacted them without parental knowledge on their mobiles. For this reason we would strongly support the adoption of good practice guidance that acknowledges the potential risks and additional vulnerability of children and advises against the use of mobile phones and other forms of electronic communication for the purposes outlined below.

Guidance to Coaches and club Officers

- Mobile phones should not be used by coaches during training or at competitions, for the purposes of either making or receiving calls. We would consider this to be both unsafe and inappropriate conduct as the primary responsibility of the coach must be the supervision and safety of children that they coach and the provision of a structured, quality coaching experience.
- Many facility providers also have clear guidance on restricting the use of mobile phones based on the concerns that have been identified about their potential misuse (for example, as part of a facility photography policy). Coaches using mobile phones may be breaching guidance and undermining the ability of a facility to enforce their restrictions
- There are situations when access to a mobile phone will make a positive contribution to the safety and welfare of children, particularly when an emergency occurs. Therefore we are not proposing any form of blanket ban on the use of mobile phones by coaches.
- Coach should not contact children with whom they are in a position of trust by phone, text, e-mail or through electronic "chat rooms". Contact by coaches should be primarily on a face to face basis. Additional communication relating to events, training and other information should be directed to the child's parents or legal guardian.
- Coaches may contact children if do so with the knowledge of the club officers as part of a disclosed list (having received prior permission to disclose in group e-mail) where they are disseminating information in relation to training or competitions **and** they copy in the club welfare officer.
- Clubs should have disclosed lists for sending club information via a designated and suitably trained adult (because of their position this person should also have been subject to appropriate selection and vetting processes). Group e-mails should also give individuals the opportunity to have their contact details removed from the list by

including a statement such as: "If you wish to be removed from this e-mail list please contact the administrator"

Guidance for children

Children are often member's chat rooms such as Face book and enjoy sharing information with friends. However sport has identified that such communication can cause concerns to be raised.

Sport has identified children may be in contact friends with friends on "chat rooms" to discuss matters involving their coach, club officers or fellow club members. On a few occasions the comments made have been unpleasant and inappropriate and have in some cases been deemed to be an offence. Children who use electronic communication and cause offence may be in breach of the BAB or club/Association Code of Conduct and are advised to think hard and consider what they place on such websites.

The BAB also accepts that chat rooms and messaging can be great fun but can also hold risks. Therefore, the BAB advise you consider the NSPCC CPSU guidance below when using chat rooms.

Remember, you never really know who you are talking to online. It could be someone trying to trick you, some kind of weirdo, or someone really dangerous. Here are some tips to help you keep safe:

- **Never use your real name** in chat rooms – pick a special online nickname.
- **Never ever tell anyone personal things about yourself or your family** – like your address or telephone number, or the school or clubs you go to. That goes for sending them photos as well (that way if you don't want to hear from them again, you only have to log off.) Remember, even if somebody tells you about themselves; **never** tell them things about you.
- **If you arrange to meet up with someone** you've only spoken to online, remember that they **might not** be **who** they said they were, so **only meet people in public places and take along an adult** – they should do this too, because they don't know who you really are either!
- **If an adult you know makes arrangements to meet you** or contacts you directly on-line or on your mobile without your parents' or carers' knowledge, make sure you let your parents or guardians know about this **before** agreeing to do anything
- **Never respond to nasty or rude messages**, and never send any either! If you feel suspicious or uncomfortable about the way a conversation is going, or if it's getting really personal, save a record of it and stop the conversation. That way you can show someone and ask what they think.
- **Be careful with any e-mail attachments** or links that people send you, they might contain nasty images, or computer "viruses" that could ruin your PC. So if you don't know who it's from, don't open it.
- **Agree some rules** with your parents or carers about what you can and can't do on the Net. It'll save arguments later.
- **Take a look at 'Hands Off!'** the NSPCC magazine for teenagers on keeping safe from abuse. It's got some tips on safe surfing.
- **If you are concerned** about anything you receive, whether it is from a stranger or someone you know, tell someone you trust. Don't delete the message it may be important if some action needs to be taken