

Social Media and Digital Communication with Young People

Policy and Standards for Staff and Volunteers

For the purpose of this document, the terms 'child' or 'children' or 'young person', apply to anyone under the age of 18. The terms 'staff and volunteers' are used to refer to all adult volunteers and paid staff working with children and young people (U18) in Athletics in any capacity and role.

1. INTRODUCTION:

This policy provides guidance on the standard expected when staff and volunteers in athletics use the internet and social media to communicate with children and young athletes.

Aims

The aims of this policy are:

- to protect all participants in athletics but particularly children when communicating online in connection with athletics;
- to provide staff and volunteers with information regarding online safety and inform them how to recognise and respond to incidents;
- to ensure everyone in athletics conducts themselves in line with our rules and the law when it comes to online behaviour.

This document should be read in conjunction with the relevant Home Country Athletic Federations (HCAF) online safety and social media policy for affiliated clubs.

Although digital communication methods have many positive uses, they can also be used in a negative way to harm or to groom and abuse children. In addition, electronic communication is being used more and more as a means of bullying.

All staff and volunteers working with young people in athletics must adhere to these standards which form part of the **UK Athletics** Safeguarding document set. In short, the same principles apply through the use of digital devices as would apply if the contact were face-to-face.

The following standards set clear boundaries for your online communication with children. UK Athletics will consider safeguarding action against anyone who does not adhere to these standards.

2. STANDARDS FOR COMMUNICATING WITH CHILDREN UNDER 18 YEARS:

- It is not acceptable for adult staff and volunteers to communicate on a one-to-one basis with athletes under the age of 18 years by any electronic media and in particular:
 - text message/imessage/facetime, etc.
 - e-mail
 - social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.)
 - electronic communication apps (e.g. WhatsApp, Snapchat, etc.)
 - video conferencing software and Apps
 - activity trackers (such as Strava, Garmin connect, etc.)
- All electronic communication by the above methods should include a copy to the relevant club welfare officer and the parent/carer (where a staff member or volunteer is independent of a club, the parent or carer must be included in the message exchange).

- Parental consent is required for any and all communication between the staff member or volunteer and the young person. Where a staff member or volunteer is independent of a club, consent must be sought in writing with the parent/carer.
- You must limit all electronic communication to athletics-related matters.
- You should always behave responsibly and respectfully when online or communicating online with young people.
- Emojis - Avoid the use of emoji's in any format when communicating with children. Some Emoji's can have multiple meanings and as with language, we should consider who we are speaking to before sending them an emoji. In addition, it is not appropriate to add kisses (x or X) to a message sent to an athlete under 18 years.
- You should not post or discuss unfavourable comments about other staff, volunteers, athletes, parents and club/s.
- if you believe a communication you have had with a child has not complied with these standards, or a child tries to engage you in online or phone conversation, you should -
 - end the conversation / stop replying;
 - refer the contact to your Club Welfare Officer.

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

3. TEXT MESSAGING:

Text messages/imeessages are **NOT** a preferred method of communication between staff, volunteers and young people. However, where they are used, they should be messages to a group (never on a one to one basis) and should always be copied into the relevant club welfare officer or a parent. (where the staff member or volunteer is independent of a club, a parent/carer must be included in the group communication).

One to one messaging between a staff member or volunteer and a child is unacceptable unless in an emergency. In the event of an emergency, individual texts may be used but must be retained and copied to the relevant club welfare officer and the parent/carer.

4. EMAILS:

Emails are a positive and simple method of communication between staff, volunteers and young athlete and group emails are easy to set up.

Group emails are therefore the default and preferred communication position and a club welfare officer or a parent must be included in the group. Where an email or response to a group email is received from a young person on a one-to-one basis, you must respond copying in the group or the relevant parent/carer. If it is necessary to email one athlete only you must copy in, or 'Cc', the relevant welfare officer and/or the parent/carer.

5. SOCIAL NETWORKING:

You should **NOT** have athletes under the age of 18 as 'friends' or contact on social networking Apps, where the primary reason for the relationship is athletics, and you have a position of trust in relation to that young person by virtue of your staff or volunteering role.

Should a child or young person under 18 years request to become a named friend through a social network site, or request that you become a named friend on their account, 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 athletics and the parent/guardian of the child does not give their consent to such contact.

You are advised to consider carefully what you post on social networking sites. This also applies to comments left on other people's accounts and the sharing of photographs. Consider your position as being a role model in this area.

The publishing of athletics related photographs or video footage on a social networking site is governed by the same requirements as any other media - see the UK Athletics Photography Policy.

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 13 years for WhatsApp and all others), so please bear this in mind when considering communication methods.

7. ACTIVITY TRACKERS:

The growing use of wearable products to monitor and record training and exercise, and the associated Apps such as Strava, Garmin Connect, Fitbit, etc., have allowed athletes and runners to record their training session and race data, and share the details with others who can view and comment on them.

The purpose of the comment section on these apps is to allow others to provide praise and constructive feedback to other users on their performance. UKA and the HCAF will not accept abusive, threatening, or inappropriate comments, especially when made towards a child or young person's profile.

Adult members of a private group, created by a club or coaching group and suitably administrated, can comment appropriately, and only where necessary, on a child or young person's profile, where the child or young person is a member of the same group, but shall not interact on a one-to-one basis via the app with children and young people.

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

There are few if any athletics coaching or volunteering 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 you 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 (written) permission from the parent/carer of the child for each and every group meeting.
- The group meeting address 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 one other adult (parent/coach) joins the session to monitor the discussion – never undertake a live video chat/conference with children by yourself.
- Ensure everyone in attendance can be seen at the same time. Cameras must be switched on.
- 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 nor the coach should live chat/conference from a bedroom.
- Everyone should be appropriately dressed.
- Be aware of what can be seen on your camera (set the background to blurred where the App allows).
- Group contact via this method should be no more frequent than once per week.
- A plan of what will be discussed 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.

9. COMMUNICATION BY COACH/VOLUNTEER WHOSE OWN CHILDREN PARTICIPATE IN THE CLUB WHERE THEY COACH:

Many parents join social networking sites that their children sign up for to monitor their activity and help keep their children safe. It would not be appropriate for UK Athletics to prevent a parent who is also staff member or volunteers in his/her child's club or organisation from using this form of protection. However, on certain Apps and sites this may 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:

- You should not have direct contact or communication with those athletes under the age of 18 who are 'friends' with your child on such Apps and sites.
- You should not accept friend requests from such athletes.
- You should inform the Club Welfare Officer that you are friends with your own child on a social media platform.

On Twitter/Instagram/etc:

- You must not follow athletes under the age of 18 who are not your child.
- Never use the direct messaging options on these sites to contact other athletes under the age of 18.

10. COMMUNICATION WITH STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS WHO ARE UNDER 18 YEARS:

UK Athletics recognises that social networking sites can be a useful tool for staff and volunteers to share information with each other. If, however, the staff member or volunteer is under the age of 18; these requirements must be adhered to.

For young people aged 16 or 17 it is the view of UK Athletics that to restrict the ability to share professional information with them from other staff members or volunteers 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 staff member or volunteer for the purposes of sharing professional information relevant to their role:

- The club/organisation should gain written consent of the parent/ guardian and young person to have such contact naming the individual adult(s) who will communicate with the young person and the relevant media to be used.
- The named adult(s) 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/organisation.

11. REPORTING A CONCERN:

If you have a concern about the conduct of a staff member or volunteer or indeed anyone using digital communication in an athletics setting you must [report your concern](#) as soon as possible to the [UKA safeguarding team](#).

Where possible you should take and preserve a screenshot of the concerning communication as they may be deleted by the person posting or deleted automatically depending on the social media platform.

[If a child is at risk of harm you must contact the police on either 101 or 999.](#)