

Social Media and Electronic Communication Policy

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1. Guidance on the Use of Social Networking

There has been a growing awareness of the increasing communication between adults and young people on social networking sites. There are risks associated with these developments, and Swim England has identified a number of issues that have led to both disciplinary and safeguarding concerns stemming from the improper or inappropriate use of such sites by its members.

Swim England recognises that the use of social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, and instant messaging tools such as WhatsApp and Snapchat, continue to grow rapidly and are increasingly being used as the communication tools of choice by young people.

Whilst these technologies provide exciting opportunities for our members, they are accompanied by dangers and negative consequences if abused by users.

The following are links to resources or contacts referenced from this Policy:

Swim England Wavepower	https://www.swimming.org/swimengland/wavepower-child-safeguarding-for-clubs/
Thinkuknow	https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/
Child Protection in Sport Unit – Online Safety	https://thecpsu.org.uk/help-advice/topics/online-safety/
GCSC Welfare Officer	Welfare@Gloucestercityswimmingclub.co.uk

2. Guidance for Coaches and Club Officials

As a coach or volunteer of the Club, you should not be in contact with young people through social networking sites if they are a member of the Club you work for.

Should a young person in your Club request to become ‘friends’ via your personal social networking site, you should decline if:

- You are in a position of responsibility in respect of that child.
- You hold a position of trust and/or responsibility at the club.
- Your contact with the child is through a Swim England club and the parent/guardian of the child does not give their consent to such contact.

Social networks should never be used as a medium by which to abuse or criticise members or Swim England Clubs and to do so may be in breach of the Swim England Rules and Regulations.

The publishing of a photograph or video footage on any social networking site is governed by the same requirements as those contained in the Swim England Photography Guidance available in Wavepower.

If the young coach/volunteer is aged 16 or 17, it is the view of Swim England that to restrict the ability to share professional information with them from other coaches, teachers or staff may be detrimental in their professional development of their role in Swim England.

Therefore, in such cases, if the parent of a young person in a position of responsibility aged 16 or 17 and the young person themselves requests to have contact with an adult member of staff for the purposes of sharing professional information relevant to their role, the Club should:

- Gain written consent from the parent/guardian and young person to have such contact, naming the individual adult and social networking site concerned.
- Ensure the named adult signs an agreement to keep contact with the young person to the discussion of matters relevant to the young person's professional role in the club.
- Ensure all such communications are shared with an identified third person (e.g. the young person's parent/guardian or club Welfare Officer).
- Ensure that 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 ensure that the breach is referred to Swim England or the statutory agencies if appropriate.

2.1. Coaches aged between 18 and 21

Swim England recognises that many young coaches aged between 18 and 21 will have been members themselves before becoming a coach and have been friends with their fellow members, some of whom will be between the ages of 16 and 17. It is therefore plausible they will have contact details for those members and be friends with them on social networking sites, and be able to communicate via other methods of electronic communication.

In this circumstance, Swim England accepts it would be inappropriate to require such friends to be removed from their social networking sites.

Therefore, in such cases:

- If a coach aged between 18 and 21 had friends on their social networking site that were/are members aged 16 or 17 prior to undertaking the role of coach, Swim England does not expect them to remove those members from their listed friends.
- In such circumstances the coach is advised to inform the Welfare Officer and head coach.
- The head coach should make every effort to ensure the coach is not the primary coach for those specified young persons except on an occasional basis.

2.2. Guidance to members of the Club under the age of 18

Do not ask your Coach to be your friend on any social networking site – they will refuse as that would breach good practice.

Use the internet positively and do not place yourself at risk. Have a look at <https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk> for some useful tips.

Consider who you are inviting to be your friend and follow the good advice of the social networking sites to ensure you are talking to the person you believe you are talking to.

Always remember that any communication, comments, photos and video clips posted on a social networking site may be shared with more people than you originally intended.

Never share pictures of yourself or your friends that you would not be happy for your family to see. Also never post or send any photographs, videos or make comments that:

- May be hurtful, untrue, or upsetting or that you may regret sharing later.
- May be used by other people in a way you did not intend or want.
- Other people may find inappropriate.

Do not upload images of other members taking part in your Club's training, activities or events as you may breach the Swim England Photography Guidance (see Wavepower for details). If you do wish to upload such content, you must first seek the advice and consent of your parents, the consent of the other young person(s) and their parents, and an officer of the Club before taking any action. This will not prevent you having images of your friends from the Club on your personal social networking site, as long as they were taken outside of the sporting arena. Even so, it is still a good idea to check that any person in the image, and their parents, are happy for you to upload the image.

Always be aware that social networking sites are a method of communication like letter writing and the spoken word. They are bound by the same laws and rules. The delivery of social networking content is instantaneous, and this can sometimes result in users reacting in the 'heat of the moment', and your content/comments may spread far from that of your own social network of friends. This is a major difference between the present and the past in which you would have written a letter which would have taken time and allowed for you to think again before sending. So never place a comment on the internet that you would not put in writing or say out loud to someone. To do so may breach Swim England Policy and the law.

3. Guidance for Parents

There have been occasions where parents of members have used social networking sites to criticise or verbally abuse a Club, its officers, officials, coaches, and/or members in an inappropriate and unacceptable manner. This has, in some cases, led to the person who is the subject of the abuse to take action through statutory agencies or statutory legislation to address the comments made.

Parents are expected to behave responsibly as a spectator at all training sessions, events and activities, and treat members, coaches, committee members and parents of other members of any aquatics Club, be that your child's Club or not, with due respect in order to meet Swim England's commitment to equality and diversity.

Parents should be aware that posting any content on a social networking site that breaches the above requirements may breach the Gloucester City Swimming Club (GCSC) Code of Conduct.

4. Guidance on Communicating with Children and Young People

When an adult in the Club communicates with children or young members, they must do so in an appropriate and safe manner whether that is in person, by phone or text, online or via a social networking site.

Wavepower provides guidance on how to react to a child if they disclose concerns or abuse to you in person. However, you may find a member uses other forms of communication to do so, even if you have followed Swim England guidance and not shared your phone, e-mail address or social networking details with that person. Should that happen, we do not want you to stop that communication as it breaches our guidance, but you should advise the Welfare Officer of the contact immediately and follow the guidance in Wavepower as to how to deal with any disclosure or concern raised.

Generally speaking, if you do not share your contact information with members, they will not find your phone number, e-mail or social network site details. However, if this should happen and they are not disclosing concerns as outlined above, it is important you make them aware that you will not be communicating with them on this medium and inform the Welfare Officer immediately. The Welfare Officer will take action as required, ensuring contact by the member is not repeated.

There are exceptions to every rule, and this is outlined in our guidance. However, all those in a position of responsibility in the Club must remember that they have to ensure they are appropriate at all times with individuals under the age of 18 and maintain appropriate, professional relationships to safeguard the young people and themselves.

5. Guidance on the use of electronic communication

Mobile phones, text messaging, e-mail and other forms of electronic communication, have become a regular feature of the sporting landscape and there is a need to define what is and what is not permissible when communication is required between adults and children or young people.

The purpose of this guidance is to provide a recommendation of best practice to coaches and those in a position of trust regarding:

- The use of mobile phones whilst having responsibility for the supervision and safety of young people.
- Direct communication between coaches and young members of the Club via mobile phones and e-mail.

6. Phoning, texting or e-mailing a young person

Coaches should not personally hold the mobile phone numbers or e-mail addresses belonging to young members of the Club.

Coaches can hold the phone numbers and e-mail addresses of members' parents with their consent, in order to get messages to members. It is then the responsibility of the parent to inform the child of the message.

In limited circumstances, it may be necessary for coaches, team managers or chaperones to have mobile phone contact details of the members, e.g. at an away camp for safeguarding reasons. In such circumstances, the individual holding the contact details must be DBS checked, have undertaken appropriate safeguarding training and have the consent of each member's parent or guardian to temporarily hold that information for the purpose of the event. The members' phone numbers should then be deleted after the event.

Coaches of elite athletes under 18 but over 16 may, with the consent of the athlete's parent or guardian, use text messaging or e-mail to communicate with the athlete for training and competition purposes only. It is recommended that such communications are also copied to a parent or guardian to safeguard the member and the Coach.

7. Use of a Mobile Phone by Coaches

Coaches should not take or make calls whilst supervising young members in a teaching or training session. It is permissible for a coach to make or take a call during an event, providing they are not the sole supervisor of the members and are not actively engaged during warm up or swim down at the time of the call.

Coaches who have mobile phones with camera facilities must fulfil the obligations set out in the Swim England Photography Guidance on Wavepower.

Mobile phones must not be taken into changing rooms

The publishing of a photograph of a member under 18 years should only be done with the parent's consent and it should be noted that parents and guardians have the right to refuse to have their child photographed.

In the event of a member showing a coach a text message or image, which is inappropriate for a child to have, the Coach must advise the nominated person at the Club, most likely the Welfare Officer.

If a coach aged 18 to 21 had phone and/or e-mail details who were/are swimmers aged between 16 and 17 prior to undertaking the role of coach, Swim England does not expect them to remove those members from their contact list.

However, the Coach is advised to inform the Welfare Officer and the Head Coach.

The Head Coach should make every effort to ensure the Coach is not the primary coach for those specified young persons except on an occasional basis.

8. Further Information

Further information and more in-depth guidance on social networking considerations can be found in Swim England's Wavepower publication, as well as from the Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU) of the NSPCC. Links to these resources are provided in section 1 of this Policy.

9. What to do if you have concerns

As a user of a social networking site, whether you are a child or an adult, you may at some time have a concern about what you are seeing or being told about by another user. Concerns may range from negative or abusive comments and cyber bullying, to suspected grooming for sexual abuse.

In the first instance, any concerns should be raised with the club Welfare Officer. Alternatively, a list of alternative agencies is provided below that you can contact, anonymously if you wish, where you can raise such concerns:

- The National Crime Agency: CEOP Command (formerly the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre) at www.ceop.gov.uk or by pressing the CEOP button on Facebook or on the ASA Child Power website.
- Swim England Child Safeguarding Team – 01509 640 270
- NSPCC helpline – 0808 800 5000
- ChildLine – 0800 1111 or <https://www.childline.org.uk/get-involved/childline-social-media>

- Childnet International – <https://www.childnet.com/>. Childnet is a registered UK charity that aims to make the internet a safe place for children and young people.
- The local police or Children’s Services – their number appears in the phone book, or dial 101.
- The Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) – <https://www.iwf.org.uk/>. The IWF was established to provide a UK internet hotline which can be anonymous for the public and IT professionals to report criminal online content in a secure and confidential way.