

Text and Email messaging - Safeguarding Guidelines

Text messaging and emails can help improve the success of rowing clubs, affiliated organisations and junior programmes. This may be by helping to remind young people about the sport and activity sessions that they have signed up to, and by promoting additional activities.

The significant benefit of text messaging and emails are that they are not only cheap, but they are one of the most direct forms of communication as most young people have mobile phones with them at all times and are competent at using computers.

However, for children and young people there are safeguarding risks associated with texting and emails including:

- inappropriate access to, use or sharing of personal details (e.g. names, mobile phone numbers, email addresses)
- unwanted contact with children/young people by adults with poor intent; text bullying by peers
- being sent offensive or otherwise inappropriate materials
- grooming for sexual abuse
- direct contact and actual abuse.

For adults involved risks include:

- misinterpretation of their communication with young people
- potential investigation (internal or by statutory agencies)
- potential disciplinary action.

These guidelines, which are adapted from the Child Protection In Sport Unit's briefing document of the same title, will help to ensure that effective safeguarding measures are put in place to protect children and young people and to minimise risk.

1. Setting up a social networking service for your club or organisation?

1. Only coaches, volunteers or staff that have been through relevant safeguarding checks (e.g. enhanced level CRB checks and references) should use and have access to the text messaging system. Ideally these staff should also have undertaken a recognised safeguarding training (e.g. British Rowing 'Safeguarding & Protecting Children' workshop or an equivalent).
2. The numbers of personnel with access to the system, particularly data relating to young people, should be kept to a practical minimum, and their details recorded and maintained by the club welfare officer.
3. Consent must be obtained prior to sending the young people text messages. For young people aged 15 or under, specific consent must be obtained from their parents. Parents of younger children should

be offered the option to be copied into any texts their child will be sent. Although parental consent is not required for young people aged 16 and over, written consent must be obtained from these individuals themselves. Please note that for the over 16s (who are children as defined by the Children Act 1989) it is still recommended that their parents are also informed of the intention to send their children text messages, the reason for this, and that the club has taken steps to ensure their child's safety in this respect.

4. The young people's mobile phone numbers and email addresses should be stored in either a locked secure cabinet, or on an electronic system which is password protected, with access only available to the personnel identified in point 1 above. The contact details should not be shared with anyone else, and should only be used for the purposes of the text messaging system as part of rowing activities.
5. Bulk (or bundled) texting and emailing presents fewer opportunities for misuse and abuse than personal, one-to-one arrangements between coaches/volunteers and children which should be strongly discouraged. Although clubs may develop and operate their own systems, there are also commercial organisations that offer bulk/bundle texting services, so practical arrangements will vary. Where possible all messages must be sent via a bundle to a group of young people i.e. the same standard text message being sent to every member of the group. The messaging system should never be used to send messages on an individual basis (i.e. to just one person), or to less than 5 people.
6. All text messages sent must make it clear to the young people receiving it which organisation/club has sent the message, rather than simply giving the mobile phone number that the system uses to send the message.
7. Young people should not be given the opportunity to text or email back to the system. It should only be used as a one-way communication channel.
8. Any messages sent must never contain any offensive, abusive or inappropriate language.
9. All of the messages sent should include a sentence at the bottom which provides the young people with the opportunity to unsubscribe from receiving any further messages.
10. All messages sent to young people should also be sent to an external moderator – preferably some one with designated safeguarding responsibility in the club, such as the club welfare officer. Hence, it is essential that the moderator's contact details are included in every 'communication group' that is set up, and in every text messaging bundle that is sent out. The moderator's role will be to ensure that the messaging system is being used appropriately, and to respond to any concerns arising.
11. Consideration must be given to initiating the club's and British Rowing's child protection and disciplinary procedures should any breaches of this protocol arise, including consultation with or referral to statutory agencies if indications of illegal activity (e.g. grooming for abuse) come to light.

Texting and emailing individual children and young people

The use of text messaging to communicate with individual young participants increases the vulnerability of both the young person and (typically) the coach. However, there may be exceptional circumstances in which it is justified, subject to appropriate safeguarding considerations. For example the coach of an elite athlete who is not part of a group of participants may need to pass on information about practical training arrangements or feedback on competition results.

In these circumstances the following additional guidelines will apply:

1. The decision to use text/email messaging should not be made by a coach in isolation, and should be discussed and agreed with the club welfare officer. This will ensure that the club's safeguarding expectations and requirements can be clarified, and an undertaking given by the coach to comply with them.

The details of coaches using individual messaging should be recorded and maintained by the club welfare officer. A record should be made of the email address or mobile phone number/s which will be used to send the messages – ideally this should be a single contact used consistently.

2. The content should relate solely to sports activity. Messages should reflect the professional relationship between coach and athlete, and the coach's position of trust. **Text and email messages and mobile phones must never be used for any other reason or in any other way.**
3. The messages which are sent must never contain any offensive, abusive or inappropriate language, and care must be taken to avoid over-familiarity or language that could be misinterpreted or misconstrued.
4. All messages sent to young people should also be sent either to a parent or to an external moderator – preferably someone with designated safeguarding responsibility in the club such as the club welfare officer. The moderator's role will be to ensure that text messaging is being used appropriately in line with the club's procedures, and to respond to any concerns arising.
5. Young people should not be encouraged to text back; ideally it should only be used as a one-way communication channel. Young people should be made aware that if or when they choose or need to text the coach (for example to confirm attendance or advise on a travel delay), they should ensure that the content of messages relates only to matters relevant to the sports activity, and that they are (like the coach) required to copy in either a parent or the identified moderator (e.g. club welfare officer) to all communications.

Retrospective application

In circumstances where this guidance is being developed and applied retrospectively, clubs/organisations should take steps to identify where texting and emailing is already being used by club personal to communicate with young athletes, and to ensure that these guidelines are both effectively communicated to and agreed with all parties.

These guidelines have been adapted from the CPSU briefing document 'Text and Email Messaging – Safeguarding Guidelines'. The full document is available to download from www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/cpsu/Resources/Briefings/text_and_email_messaging_wdf66628.pdf