

CYBER GUIDANCE

Websites are a key part of the daily operation of most clubs. They are the most flexible way to communicate with members and anyone interested in joining a club. They also have the potential to be a very safe way to communicate with children, given their wide accessibility.

CLUB WEBSITES

However, in the same way that a club has responsibility for the physical safety of a junior member when visiting the club's premises, that club must also ensure that there is nothing on its website which could harm a child, directly or indirectly. A club is legally and morally responsible for the content of its website.

There are two key risks to guard against:

- Abusive or inappropriate content, such as photos, videos or text which are on the site itself, or linked sites, such as adverts and blogs, and;
- Disclosing personal information about a child to people accessing the website. This could include the child's name, address, or any information about the child's life which could help a stranger target the child, or engage them in a conversation

One aspect of inappropriate content is that it can be perceived as bullying. This could be material on the site which criticises or humiliates a child. It could also be information which places undue pressure on the child to participate in some aspect of a club's activities.

BLOGS

Blogs are a type of content becoming commonplace on websites. The creation of a blog is straightforward. It does not require technical or design expertise, and it can be updated remotely.

Blogs present two particular challenges, including:

- Content moderation. As blogs can be updated frequently and remotely, this can make it tricky to keep track of the content
- Association with the blog. If a club chooses to host or endorse a particular blog, the club cannot distance itself from the content of such blog. Therefore, if the blog contains inappropriate content or incorrect information, this will be associated with the club

LINKED SITES

Many sites contain links to other sites. This could be for commercial reasons, such as the sites of sponsors or advertisers, or simply to communicate information to be found on other websites. Before creating a link, a club should thoroughly check the content of the other website, both for child protection reasons, and ensure the content poses no other risk to the club's reputation. Once a link is included on the site, the club should check its content periodically, and remove any link immediately if concerns arise.

PHOTOS AND VIDEOS

Photos and video clips can make any child featured vulnerable to grooming if information about the child (name, address, activities or interests) is also disclosed. Furthermore, posting an image on the website carries a risk that the image could be taken and adapted for inappropriate use. Once an image is posted online, it is very hard to retrieve it.

MOBILE AND ONLINE COMMUNICATION WITH CHILDREN

There are now many ways for people to communicate online, including email, instant messaging or social networking sites.

The risks posed by such methods of communication arise from a variety of issues:

- the privacy provided
- the wide range of content that can be transmitted, including content of a violent, sexual or hateful nature
- the ease with which images can be forwarded onto others
- the difficulty in knowing truly who you are communicating with

In sport, there are additional risks: inappropriate pressure can be exerted by adults, particularly coaches, on children or inappropriate criticism of a child's performance. An official position or role within a club, such as a coach, can carry with it a level of authority, and engender a level of trust, that facilitates the control of a child.

Against this background, a club needs to establish rules covering how adults connected with that club communicate with children connected with that club. It is therefore recommended that:

- When communicating by phone, where possible volunteers should speak to the parent of a child
- Volunteers should not communicate with individual children by text or online at any time, on any matter, unless there is an immediate risk to the welfare of that child which can be lessened by such contact

- If a club needs to communicate club-related information to children by email (such as training or match details), it should use email groups comprising email addresses given by parents.
- Volunteers shouldn't communicate by email on a one-to-one basis with a child; if replying to an email from a child the parent should be copied into the response
- Volunteers should not communicate with children through social networking sites such as Facebook. Coaches should not be “friends” with the children they coach

CHILDREN-LED MESSAGING GROUPS

It is more than likely that children in your club, particularly those old enough to be active on social media and online messaging apps, will set up groups where they can message each other in privacy, commonly referred to as ‘group chats’. Group chats are often set up using WhatsApp, or other social media apps such as Facebook messenger, and Instagram.

While we do not want to prohibit children communicating with their peers, it is important that clubs educate children about how to do this safely. Clubs should encourage children to never:

- Share anything online that they would not want released into the public. Once an image is put online, whether via social media posts or shared in a group chat, it is very hard to retrieve it
- Engage in abusive or bullying behaviour towards another person in or out of the group chat
- Share images of a sexual nature, whether of themselves or others

Clubs should make it clear that if children are engaging in group chats while being part of the club, that these group chats are not an extension or representation of the club.

It is impossible to address every issue or cover every scenario a club or coach might encounter when communicating with children and it is appreciated that different ages will need to be treated differently. However, in all cases, the above guidelines should be considered when determining the most appropriate method of communication in any given circumstances.

In order to address these issues, it is recommended that a club devise written policies which cover its particular circumstances and meet its particular needs, then ensure the policies are followed fully and widely publicised.

CONTACT US

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