

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 the ASA 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.

The ASA 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.

These social networking sites permit users to chat online, post or send pictures, comment on and share content, and write ‘blogs’ or updates through the creation of an online profile. These can either be publicly available to all, or can be restricted to an approved circle of electronic friends.

Sites such as YouTube and Google provide a platform for uploading and viewing video clips, which with the latest cameras and mobile phones, becomes ever easier and can be almost instantaneous. More recent apps, such as Periscope and Meerkat, allow mobile phone users to stream content directly from their phones, bypassing some of the steps required in uploading videos to YouTube or to social networks such as Facebook.

In addition to these sites, Twitter is a social networking and micro-blogging service that enables users to send and read other users’ messages known as ‘tweets’. Tweets are online text messages of up to a maximum of 140 characters displayed on the author’s profile page. Tweets are publicly visible by default, however the sender can restrict message delivery to their followers list only.

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

Guidance for coaches, teachers and other staff

- As a coach, teacher or other employee or volunteer of the organisation, you should not be in contact with young people through social networking sites if they are a member of the organisation you work for.
- Should a young person in your organisation 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 an ASA 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 ASA organisations and to do so may be in breach of the ASA 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 ASA Photography Guidance on p. 76.

Coaches, teachers and other staff who are under 18

The ASA recognises that social networking sites can be a useful tool for teachers, coaches and other staff within the organisation to share information with other teachers, coaches or staff. If, however, the teacher, coach or staff member is under the age of 16, while they may be a colleague, the requirements of the first two points above must still be adhered to.

If the young coach/teacher/staff member is aged 16 or 17, it is the view of the ASA 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 the ASA.

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 organisation 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 the ASA or the statutory agencies if appropriate.
- Use the internet positively and do not place yourself at risk. Have a look at 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 make sure 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 wouldn't 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 on.
 - May be used by other people in a way you did not intend or want.
 - Other people may find inappropriate.

Coaches aged between 18 and 21

The ASA 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, the ASA 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, the ASA 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.
- Do not upload images of other members taking part in your organisation's training, activities or events as you may breach the ASA Photography Guidance (see p. 76). 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 organisation before taking any action. This will not prevent you having images of your friends from the organisation 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 ASA Policy and also the law.

Guidance to members of the organisation under the age of 18

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



Guidance to parents

Parents of members under the age of 18

There have been occasions where parents of members have used social networking sites to criticise or verbally abuse an organisation, its officers, officials, coaches, teachers, 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.

The ASA has produced a parent's Code of Conduct which can be found in Wavepower on p. 53.

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 organisation, be that your child's organisation or not, with due respect in order to meet the ASA'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 parent's Code of Conduct.

Parents who work at the same organisation attended by their children

Many parents are becoming 'friends' with their children on social networking profile for security reasons, to ensure the wellbeing of their own child by being able to view their child's profile. This may then give the parent access to the profiles of other children listed as 'friends' of their child. It would not be appropriate for the ASA to prevent a parent who is also an employee at the organisation where his/her child is a member from using this form of protection for their child's online activities.

Therefore, in such cases:

- The parent concerned should not have direct contact with members through the social networking site.
- Where the parent has access to their child's social networking site (i.e. knows the user name and password) they must not contact any other children under the pretence of being their child.
- The parent should not accept their child's friends as friends on their own social networking site.
- The parent should inform the welfare officer of this arrangement.

Further information

The CPSU Briefing Document *Social networking services, social media and sport: Guidelines for safeguarding children and young people (2009)* gives more in depth guidance on social networking sites and can be accessed via the Child Protection in Sport Unit website at www.cpsu.org.uk.

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.

The ASA has drawn up a list of agencies 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.
- Swimline ASA/NSPCC helpline 0808 100 4001.
- If you are under 18 use the 'Your Chance to Talk' form on the Child Power section of the ASA website.
- ChildLine 0800 1111 or www.childline.org.uk.
- www.childnet.org.uk which is an NSPCC support service specifically for young people.
- The local police or Children's Services – their number appears in the phone book, or dial 101.
- The NSPCC helpline 0800 800 5000 or www.nspcc.org.uk.
- The Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) www.iwf.org.uk. The IWF was established to provide a UK internet hotline which can be anonymous for the general public and IT professionals to report criminal online content in a secure and confidential way. They work in partnership with other agencies to minimise the availability of this content, specifically:
 - Child sexual abuse images hosted anywhere in the world.
 - Criminally obscene adult content hosted in the UK.
 - Incitement to racial hatred content hosted in the UK.
 - Non-photographic child sexual abuse images hosted in the UK.



Guidance on communicating with children and young people

When an adult in the organisations 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 the ASA 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 organisation 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.

