



Policy for social media usage & contacting athletes

Purpose of this document

The purpose of this document is to provide information on what the club deems as proper use of social media and communication with athletes. There is some general introductory information and definitions on page 2, followed by practical guidance and best practice on a number of topics as outlined in the contents below.

Contents:

	<i>Page</i>
Introduction:	
Purpose of guidance, definitions and further relevant policies/information	2
Specific guidance areas:	
1) Use of Facebook groups (or equivalent) for training squads	3
2) Personal contact with athletes outside of training	4
3) General use of social media and interaction with athletes on social media	6
4) Use of images/videos by coaches	6

Definitions

‘Social media’ in the context of these guidelines refers to a number of online platforms:

- Blogs (written, video, podcasts)/Micro-blogging websites e.g. Twitter, Tumblr
- Social networks e.g. Facebook (and Facebook Messenger), foursquare, LinkedIn,
- Forums/message boards
- Content-sharing (photos, videos, audio) e.g. Whatsapp, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, Flickr
- Any other website where user comments are an available feature

A **child** is anyone who has not reached their 18th birthday. ‘Children’ therefore means children and young people throughout. The fact a child has reached 16 years of age, living independently or is in further education, is a member of the armed forces, is in hospital or in custody, does not change his or her status or entitlement to protection under the Children Act 1989

Messages are defined as any form of communication to another person, including but not exclusive to texts, email, Facebook/Whatsapp messages and contact via any form of social media defined above and also extends to telephone conversations.

Coach Code of Conduct

Coaches are required to conduct themselves in accordance with the Coaches Codes of Conduct and Abingdon AC Welfare Policies. The behaviours covered in these codes of conducts and welfare extend to online behaviour, such as when using social media.

The Coach Code of Conduct was given to as part of your coach induction pack. If you need another copy of the induction pack this can be obtained from the Coaches’ Dropbox Folder or directly from the coaching coordinator.

Further Policies and information

Coach induction pack

Club rules [see club website]

Welfare policy [see club website]

UKA guidance documents and policies: <http://www.uka.org.uk/governance/welfare-and-safeguarding/guidance-documents-and-policy/>

England Athletics Welfare: <http://www.englandathletics.org/clubs--community/club-management/welfare---it-is-everyones-responsibility>

1) Use of Facebook groups (or equivalent) for training squads

Some training squads at the club utilise closed Facebook or WhatsApp groups in order to effectively communicate information, celebrate successes and provide coaching content to a larger group in one go.

To ensure a safe environment for athletes and coaches, a group for a training squad must have the following in place:

- i. The group must be a closed environment to ensure only people allowed by group administrators can view and post content
- ii. There must be at least 2 group administrators, all of whom are DBS checked club coaches/volunteers
- iii. In addition to the administrators, the group must have at least one other member in the group who meets one of the following criteria:
 - a) Coach with current DBS check
 - b) Welfare officer
 - c) Coaching co-ordinator
 - d) Committee member with current DBS check
- iv. Be mindful of use of images and videos on this group: see section 4) on this document for further guidelines on use of images/video by coaches
- v. Postings must be monitored by the group administrators. Any abusive or offensive content should not be tolerated and dealt with per the club rules/welfare policies

Note: If you have a different platform that you believe is more effective for your group, ensure same above guidelines are in place and make welfare officer and coaching coordinator aware you will be using that platform.

2) Personal contact with athletes outside of training

Where feasible, personal contact should be avoided with athletes. The preferred way to contact athletes for training arrangements would be via closed groups as outlined in item 1) or e-mails to whole groups where a number of DBS checked individuals are included in the message.

However we recognise that there are circumstances where personal contact is a necessary coaching requirement, particularly when working with athletes who may be set sessions or need further coaching support outside usual club training nights. When doing so, coaches should refer to the policies below which are informed by the briefing by Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU) of the NSPCC.

Note: Messages are defined as any form of communication to another person, including but not exclusive to email, Facebook/Whatsapp messages, texts messages, contact via any form of social media defined on page 2 and also extends to telephone conversations.

Guidelines:

Basic requirements

- i. Any coach interacting with athletes outside of training must have been through safeguarding procedures and hold an up to date DBS check. Ideally they should also have undertaken a recognised safeguarding training (e.g. sports coach UK 'Safeguarding & Protecting Children' workshop or an equivalent).
- ii. The decision to use messaging should not be made by a coach in isolation, and should be discussed and agreed with the organisation's designated welfare officer. This will ensure that the organisation's safeguarding expectations and requirements can be clarified, and an undertaking given by the coach to comply with them.

It is expected that messages are be sent to an external moderator as well as the recipient (see point ix.) in all but exceptional cases. Personal, one-to-one messaging arrangements without a moderator are strongly discouraged and will only be agreed under exceptional circumstances.

- iii. The details of coaches contacting athletes outside of training must be recorded and maintained by the club's designated welfare officer. A record should be made of the platform and account details or telephone number/s (as relevant) that the coach will use to send the messages.

Consent

- iv. Consent **must** be obtained prior to sending young people messages:
 - For young people aged **15 or under** specific consent must be obtained from their parents. Parents should be offered the option to be copied into any messages their child will be sent.
 - For young people **aged 16 or over**, although parental consent is not required, consent must be obtained from these individuals themselves – ideally in writing for a record of this consent. Please note that as for over 16's 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 coach and club has taken steps to ensure their child's safety in this respect.
- v. All young people and parents must be given the **opportunity to withdraw** from receiving any further messages.
- vi. Athletes and parents should be made aware of the '**child and young athlete' welfare website page** where they can see expectations of coaches and information is provided to the athlete about how to act if they believe someone is acting inappropriately.

Content of communication

- vii. Messages 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.
- viii. Content should relate solely to sports activity. Messages should reflect the professional relationship between coach and athlete, and the coach's position of trust.

Practical considerations

- ix. Wherever possible, coaches must ensure that all messages sent to young people are also sent either to a parent [where agreed – see iv.] or to an external moderator – someone with designated safeguarding responsibility in the organisation e.g. welfare officer or another coach who meets the criteria in i).

The moderator's role will be to ensure that messages are being used appropriately in line with the organisation's procedures, and to respond to any concerns arising. Coaches should preferably use a form of messaging that enables others to be copied in so that the message can go to athlete and a parent/moderator at the same time.

- x. Personal, one-to-one messaging arrangements without the safeguards in ix. above are strongly discouraged and should only be undertaken if the requirements in points ii) and iii) of this section have been fully complied with.
- xi. Young people should be made aware that if or when they choose or need to message 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 where agreed they may be (like the coach) required to copy in either a parent or an identified moderator to all communications.
- xii. Contact details of the athlete or parent must not be passed on without prior agreement

Breaches of Protocol

Consideration will be given to initiating the organisation's child protection and disciplinary procedures should any breaches of protocol arise, including consultation with or referral to statutory agencies if indications of illegal activity (e.g. grooming for abuse) come to light.

CPSU Outline of Key Risks

Detailed below are the key risks outlined per the CPSU briefing, which the above guidelines are intended to help minimise:

For children and young people the safeguarding risks associated with texting include:

- inappropriate access to, use or sharing of personal details (e.g. names, mobile phone numbers)
- 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

3) General use of social media and interaction with athletes on social media

- Coaches must avoid being friends with or following children on social media. On the rare occasions this might be required, a parent/carer must give consent for this and should also have the option to be able to see and be included in any communications. This should be a temporary measure and coaches should avoid staying friends/following athletes for longer than absolutely necessary.
- Avoid sharing photos/videos of athletes on a personal page of open social media sites– see item 4 for further guidance of use of photos/videos
- Remember that athletes may have access to your social media profiles. We recommend coaches consider carefully any communication made on public functionality where this is likely to be seen by Under 18s, and coaches should act in an appropriate way on these Social Media resources. To this end, consider ensuring your privacy settings are of a sufficient level

4) Coaches – use of images/videos of athletes

Images and video can be a legitimate coaching aid for coaches. There are full Abingdon AC Photographic Policies detailed in the club welfare policies which you should be aware of and act in accordance with. The below gives some practical guidance about how to act in line with these policies:

Using images/videos

- Make sure that children and their parents/carers have given consent, and understand that it is part of the coaching programme
- Use images/videos for coaching purposes only and once analysed delete unless absolutely essential or justifiable to retain
- If images/videos are retained, this should only be for as long as necessarily required and the athlete and parent/carer should be aware that such material has been retained. Coaches should ensure the images/videos are stored safely and are deleted/destroyed safely when they are no longer required for use

Sharing images/videos

- Coaches must not post images or video clips of junior athletes onto open social media sites or onto their personal social media accounts
- Where it is useful to share photos/videos as a coaching tool this should be done in a closed group e.g. training group Facebook page or a private message with athlete and their parent/carer subject to guidelines in section 2 of this document.
- Ensure you have permission of the athlete before sharing photo/video in this way
- Be mindful of sharing such images/videos where others are also visible

If in any doubts about use of images/videos of athletes, refer to the Abingdon AC Photographic Policy or consult with the welfare officer