Guidance on Digital Communications with Children and Young People (U18)

Introduction

Digital communication is a convenient and increasingly important part of how clubs, centres, and National Governing Bodies communicate with their participants, members, staff, and volunteers.

Digital communication (email, text, messaging apps, and social media) can enhance the delivery and facilitation of paddlesport activities, but it's important to note there are safeguarding considerations when using these forms of communication. Following good practice ensures that appropriate boundaries are maintained and that children and young people can recognise when poor or inappropriate practice occurs.

This guidance supports and advises adults involved in paddlesports (as a coach, volunteer, official, or other) to help them follow good practice when communicating with under 18s.

Our **Checklist** (see Appendix 1) provides a helpful summary of considerations for adults considering using digital communications with participants under 18.

Risks

For children and young people the safeguarding risks of digital communication are:

- inappropriate access to/use of/sharing of personal details (including images);
- cyber bullying by peers;
- exposure to offensive or otherwise inappropriate materials;
- glorifying activities such as drug taking or excessive drinking;
- grooming;
- unwanted contact and direct abuse.

For adults involved in digital communications with under 18s the risks of inappropriate use include:

- causing distress or harm to young person, even inadvertently;
- misinterpretation of their communication with young people;
- potential investigation (internal or by statutory agencies);
- potential disciplinary action.

Digital Communications Guidance for Coaches, Leaders and Volunteers

Good practice - Messaging

- Include a parent/carer when messaging a child or young person individually.
- For group messaging, offer parents/carers the option to be included in the group(s) involving their child (this should be particularly encouraged if the child is under 16).
- Include a minimum of one other responsible adult into any group communications with children or young people (e.g. a Welfare Officer).
- Before communicating digitally, explain to parents/carers the purpose and method for communicating with their child.
- If a parent/carer declines to be included in **group** communications, get informed consent in writing or via email before communicating via **group** messages with their child, and keep a record of this consent. Informed consent should include clarifying who else will be part of the group communications and whether those people will be able to contact their child.

- Always keep contact details safe and only accessible to those with a legitimate need.
- If sending bulk emails, use the blind copy (Bcc) function to keep contact details private, but describe which group the email has gone to so that recipients are aware who has received the communication (e.g., "*To all junior paddlers and their parents/carers*").
- Always be mindful of the [Code of Conduct for Coaching Workforce](#) - communicate respectfully and professionally, maintaining appropriate boundaries.
- Make sure messages are only in relation to specific programme or club related activities, e.g., training plans or activity arrangements. Photos or videos should only be shared if they are relevant to the group and if any individuals in the images have consented to them being shared (e.g., a photo of a training programme, or photos of paddlers on the water).

Good practice - Social Media

- Avoid connecting with under 18s on social media from personal accounts (unless they are a direct relation).
- If you have a social media account for your club or programme, make sure there are at least two responsible adults with administrator permissions who are able to oversee messages and comments, etc. See the section "Digital Communications Guidance for Clubs and Centres" below for more information.

Poor practice - Messaging

- You should not send irrelevant pictures, jokes, or personal messages to under 18s.
- You should not respond to digital communications from children or young people other than those related to programme or club matters and using the appropriate forums. If a child messages you directly, you should copy a parent/carer into your response (or another appropriate adult) and remind the child to use the group messaging function or to copy in a parent/carer (or another appropriate adult) to their messages.
- You must not use language that is directly (or could be interpreted or misinterpreted as being) racist, sexist, derogatory, threatening, abusive or sexualised in tone.

Poor practice - Social Media

- You should not encourage or pressure under 18s to follow/connect with you on social media.
- You should not communicate with under 18s on social media, e.g., 'likes', comments or direct messages (unless they are a direct relation, or if you're using a messaging platform for the purpose of group messaging in line with this guidance document).
- You should not follow or accept 'friend' or other such connection requests from under 18s on your personal social media accounts (unless they are a direct relation).
- If you have a public social media profile that under 18s from paddlesport 'follow', you should not 'follow' back. If you have under 18s from paddlesport following you, you should be mindful of the content you're posting.
- Remember personal accounts are for personal use. Consider if it's appropriate, and how it could be perceived, before connecting with parents/carers that you know through the children you work with. If you're unsure, contact your Welfare Officer or Safeguarding Lead.

Digital Communications Guidance for Clubs and Centres

- Clubs and centres should assess what they want to achieve by using digital communications or social media, and consider the potential safeguarding implications. Clubs and Centres should look at the privacy and safety tools and the terms of service to make sure it's appropriate for use, and that any necessary safeguarding settings are enabled (see the appendices for guidance on using digital communication platforms).
- All coaches, leaders or volunteers using the platform must follow the best practice guidance for coaches, leaders and volunteers in this document.
- Clubs and Centres should decide who will be responsible for setting up, managing and moderating the platform (the 'administrators'). These people could have online contact with the children and young people using the service, therefore, you must ensure their suitability.
- Clubs and Centres should ensure that online safeguarding issues are integrated into all existing safeguarding strategies, policies and procedures. These should include documents such as retention and management of personal information, use of photographs and Club/Centre codes of conduct.
- Clubs and Centres should take any allegation of online bullying between members seriously, and any concerns raised should be investigated and appropriate action taken. All members should be made aware that bullying of any type is unacceptable.

Reporting Concerns

If you have a concern relating to the use of digital communications, please speak to your Welfare Officer(s) who can advise and/or report it to British Canoeing or other statutory agencies as appropriate.

You can also speak directly to the Safeguarding Team at British Canoeing, details here.

Useful Contacts

Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU) www.thecpsu.org.uk
Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) www.ceop.police.uk
Childnet International www.childnet.com
Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) www.iwf.org.uk

E-Learning

You can take our Safeguarding Refresher e-learning course and Social Media module here.

Appendix 1. Checklist: Guidance on using Digital Communication Platforms

This checklist is designed to support coaches, leaders, instructors and welfare officers to ensure safeguarding risks are assessed and mitigated when using digital communications platforms.

- ☐ Have you checked whether the platform allows direct messaging (1:1 messages that are not public)?

- ☐ If direct messaging <u>is</u> available, is there a function to prohibit direct messaging to under 18s, or to ensure that parents/carers are able to view any direct messaging?
  If you're unsure, try typing this query into a search engine. Normally this query will be covered on the platform's Frequently Asked Questions page.

- ☐ If direct messaging of under 18s cannot be prohibited on the tool, do you have clear usage guidelines clarifying that direct messaging under 18s is not appropriate?
  To mitigate safeguarding risks, parents/carers should be copied in to messages and/or communications should occur within group messages involving a minimum of 2 responsible adults

- ☐ Have you checked the platform's terms of service for any limit on the age of its users?

- ☐ Have you provided clear guidelines on appropriate use of the platform?
  (You should include for example, appropriate content of messages, appropriate use of images or video, and behavioural expectations of group members)

- ☐ Have you made sure that the usage guidelines are clearly accessible <u>*at all times*</u> to existing and new users, and can be easily referenced by both group members and administrators?

- ☐ Have you captured *informed* consent from parents/carers of under 18 members?
  (Consent should include information on for example: the purpose of the group, the usage guidelines, the membership of the group, the capabilities in terms of direct messaging, whether the child's contact details are made public to group members, and the right to withdraw consent at any time)

Appendix 2. Summary of Common Digital Communication Platforms

This section summarises considerations relating to *some* of the common digital communications platforms - your coach, group, squad, club or centre may use other tools. This list is not exhaustive - please consider all of the safeguarding principles above when using <u>any</u> digital communications tools.

Spond (recommended)

- Spond allows users to post, comment, share videos, photos, documents, and messages.
- 'Guardian' accounts can be linked to under 18 accounts so that any messages to under 18s are viewable by their 'Guardian' (see our **set up guidance** to set this up correctly).
- Spond doesn't require a user's phone number. Contact details can be kept private.

WhatsApp

- WhatsApp lets you send messages, images and videos in one-to-one and group chats.
- It has the function to video and phone call, share your location, and send 'ViewOnce' images.
- WhatsApp's Terms of Service states that users must be over 16 (in the European Region).
- It shares users' photo and personal phone number with all members in all group chats.

Facebook

- Facebook lets you connect with others and share things like comments, photos, and videos.
- Facebook Messenger is Facebook's tool to message privately in groups or one-to-one.
- It has the functionality to live broadcast a video to your Facebook contacts.

Instagram

- On Instagram users post pictures or videos on their profile, or to their 'stories' (temporary).
- Instagram also has a live video streaming feature.
- Users can like and comment on other users' content. Users can also message each other privately one-to-one or in groups.

Twitter

- Twitter is a site where people communicate by posting short messages to their 'followers'.
- There has a function to message other users privately if both users 'follow' each other, and to create group messages with followers.

Snapchat

- Snapchat lets you send photos, short videos or messages to contacts.
- Photos appear temporarily before disappearing, but they can be captured via screenshots.
- It has a map feature which uses location tracking to show users where their connections are.

TikTok

- TikTok lets you create, share and discover videos. You can use music and effects.
- Users can browse other people's videos and interact with them.

Please Note: Digital communication platforms are ever-changing and so we are unable to provide an exhaustive list of all the tools available. This list summarises the functionalities of common platforms at the time of writing.