

Guidance on the use of Social Networking

There is a growing awareness of the increasing communication between adults and children and indeed their peers on social networking sites. There are risks associated with these developments and Swim England 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 customers and staff.

Swim England recognises that the use of social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, and instant messaging tools such as WhatsApp, TikTok and Snapchat, continue to grow rapidly and are increasingly being used as the communication tools of choice by children.

Increasingly, many sites provide a platform for uploading and viewing video clips, which with the latest cameras and mobile phones, becomes ever easier and can be instantaneous. More recent apps, such as Periscope, 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.

Whilst the ever-developing technologies provide exciting opportunities for our customers, they are accompanied by dangers and negative consequences if abused by users.

It is important to note that misuse/abuse conducted on social media may result in a criminal investigation and customers and staff are encouraged to directly refer criminal activity to police. This also includes action between customers or staff while engaged in a Swim England activity and in those circumstances such action may also breach the Codes of Conduct or Codes of Ethics and result in disciplinary action.

If “out of sport” inappropriate social media activity emerges, customers and staff are encouraged to report this directly to the social media platform provider.

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 children through social networking sites if they are a member of the organisation you work for.

If “out of sport” inappropriate social media activity emerges, customers and staff are encouraged to report this directly to the social media platform provider.

Should a child 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 a Swim England 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 customers, the organisation or members of staff and to do so may be in breach of Swim England Regulations.

The publishing of a photograph or video footage on any social networking site is governed by the same requirements as those contained in Swim England Photography Guidance.

Coaches, teachers and other staff who are under 18

Swim England 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 under 'Guidance for coaches, teachers and other staff' above must still be adhered to.

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

Therefore, if a parent/guardian of a child in a position of responsibility and they themselves request 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 child to the discussion of matters relevant to the child's role in the club.
- Ensure all such communications are shared with an identified third person (e.g. the child's parent/guardian or Club Welfare Officer).
- Ensure that if the child 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 Swim England or the statutory agencies if appropriate.

Staff aged between 18 and 21

Swim England recognises that many young staff aged between 18 and 21 will have been customers themselves before becoming a coach and have been friends with their fellow customers, some of whom will be between the ages of 16 and 17. It is therefore plausible they will have contact details for those customers and be friends with them on social networking sites and be able to communicate via other methods of electronic communication.

In this circumstance, Swim England accepts it would be inappropriate to require such friends to be removed from their social networking sites.

Therefore, in such cases:

- If a member of staff aged between 18 and 21 had friends on their social networking site that were/are customers aged 16 or 17 prior to undertaking the role, Swim England does not expect them to remove those customers from their listed friends.
- In such circumstances the coach is advised to inform the Welfare Officer and a member of the Senior Management.
- The Senior Management should make every effort to ensure the member of staff is not the primary staff member for those specified young persons except on an occasional basis.

Guidance to customers 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.
- Use the internet positively and do not place yourself at risk. Have a look at 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 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:
 1. May be hurtful, untrue or upsetting or that you may regret sharing later on.
 2. May be used by other people in a way you did not intend or want.
 3. Other people may find inappropriate.
- Do not upload images of other swimmers taking part in your organisation's training, activities or events as you may breach Swim England Photography Guidance. If you do wish to upload such content, you must first seek the advice and consent of your parents/guardians, the consent of the other child and their parents/guardians, 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/guardians, are happy for you to upload the image.
- Always be aware that social networking websites 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 Swim England Policy and the Code of Conduct.

Parents/guardians of customers under the age of 18

There have been occasions where parents/guardians of swimmers have used social networking sites to criticise or verbally abuse an organisation, its officers, officials, coaches, teachers, and/or swimmers in an inappropriate and unacceptable manner. This has, in some cases, led the person who is the subject of the abuse to take action through statutory agencies or statutory legislation to address the comments made.

It is recommended that parents/guardians actively monitor their children’s online activity, in line with Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command (CEOP) advice, which is proven to help prevent the risks of harm children may face online from peers and others they may know from a club environment.

Swim England has a parent’s/guardian’s Code of Conduct which can be found online. This includes expectations of behaviour in club activity online, and as a spectator at all training sessions, events and activities, in treating customers, coaches, committee members and parents/guardians of other swimmers of any of our sports’ organisations, be that your child’s organisation or not, with due respect.

Parents/guardians should be aware that posting any content on a social networking site that breaches the above requirements may breach the parent’s/guardian’s Code of Conduct.

Parents/guardians who work at the same organisation attended by their children

Many parents/guardians are becoming “friends” with their children on social networking profiles 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/guardian access to the profiles of other children listed as “friends” of their child. It would not be appropriate for Swim England to prevent a parent/guardian who is also an employee at the organisation where their child is a member from using this form of protection for their child’s online activities.

Therefore, in such cases:

- The parent/guardian concerned should not have direct contact with customers through the social networking website.
- Where the parent/guardian has access to their child's social networking website (i.e. knows the username and password) they must not contact any other children under the pretence of being their child.
- The parent/guardian should not accept their child's friends as friends on their own social networking website.
- The parent/guardian should inform the Welfare Officer of this arrangement.

What to do if you have concerns

As a user of a social networking website, whether you are a child or an adult, you may have a concern about what you are seeing or being told by another user. Swim England has drawn up a list of agencies that you can contact, anonymously if you wish, where you can raise such concerns.

O2 and NSPCC Online Safety website

o2.co.uk/help/nspcc

NSPCC Share Aware Resources

nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety

Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command

ceop.police.uk/safety-centre

Thinkuknow

Thinkuknow.co.uk

Our Safety Centre

oursafetycentre.co.uk

Childnet International

childnet.com

HM Government advice on keeping children safe online