

Using Social Networking Services and Social Media: Promoting Safe and Responsible Use

There are hundreds of social networking sites and chatrooms on the Internet. Nearly all UK households now have access to the Internet and statistics suggest that 10 million children between the age of 7 and 16 surf and use chat. The vast majority of children and adults using these sites will come to no harm, however the anonymity that some chatrooms provide can be used as a cover for less admirable members of society to verbally bully and abuse and potentially groom young people.

The CPSU have developed a comprehensive document for sports organisations on the use of social networking services. This is available to download from:

www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/cpsu/Resources/Briefings/social_networking_services_wdf69029.pdf

It is intended to help sports organisations wishing to set up social networking type websites to do so without compromising the safety of the children involved.

The following information is adapted from this document. You are strongly encouraged to study the full document and its appendices if you are considering using this medium to promote your club or organisation in particular your junior section.

1. Setting up a social networking service for your club or organisation?

As sports organisations become increasingly adept at communicating with young people it is critical that safeguarding protocols keep pace with the raft of communication methods young people use.

The CPSU's executive summary notes the following key areas that should be considered and addressed when using or planning to social networking services:

- Understand the safety aspects including what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour on a social networking service.
- Your organisation should follow relevant legislation and good practice guidance when engaging with social media companies.
- When engaging with social networking companies (e.g. Facebook, Bebo or MySpace) it is important to ensure that they adhere to relevant legislation and good practice guidelines.
- Ensure that online safeguarding issues are fully integrated into your existing safeguarding strategy, policies and procedures.
- Decide how your sports webpage/profile will be managed within your sports organisation.
- Registration or 'signing up' your sports club/organisation.
- Privacy and safety settings.
- Ensure that staff and volunteers, including coaches and athletes are aware of the need to protect their privacy online.

- Address safety when adding content to your webpage/profile.
- Promote your sports webpage/profile.
- Contacting the social networking provider.

Further details on these points are contained in the CPSU guidance. With networking services - as with any websites - always think before you post.

Consider any messages, photos, videos or information – do they comply with existing policies? E.g. use of photographs of children. Is the content e.g. photographs and text appropriate to the audience? Always seek young person/parental permission to use the photos of those featured before adding to the sports webpage/profile. Encourage your members –junior and senior - to think too before they post.

2. What are the potential risks to children and young people using social networking and other interactive services?

As with all emerging technologies there is the potential for misuse. Risks associated with user interactive services include: cyber bullying, grooming and potential abuse by online predators, identity theft and exposure to inappropriate content including self-harm, racism, hate and adult pornography. It is totally appropriate that children should use the Internet - it provides a wonderful resource - and schools have, in general, been very pro-active in educating their pupils about responsible use. Many schools take a very strong line in sanctioning pupils who misuse, bully or post offensive or obscene comments. Rowing clubs should take a similar stance with their members where unacceptable behaviour is reported.

The government’s Byron Review 2008, sets out the risks to children posed by the Internet and illustrated by the following grid:

	Commercial risk	Aggressive risk	Sexual risk	Values
Content	Adverts, spam, sponsorship, personal info	Violent or hateful; content	Pornographic or unwelcome sexual content	Bias; racist; misleading information
Contact	Tracking, harvesting, personal info	Being bullied, harassed or stalked	Meeting strangers; being groomed	Self-harm, unwelcome persuasions
Conduct	Illegal downloading, hacking, gambling, financial scams, terrorism	Bullying or harassing another	Creating and uploading inappropriate material	Providing misleading information or advice

Most children and young people use the Internet positively but sometimes behave in ways that may place themselves at risk. Some risks do not necessarily arise from the technology itself but result from offline behaviours that are extended into the online world, and vice versa.

Potential risks can include, but are not limited to:

- Bullying by peers and people they consider ‘friends’;
- Posting personal information that can identify and locate a child offline;
- Sexual grooming, luring, exploitation and abuse contact with strangers;
- Exposure to inappropriate and/or content;
- Involvement in making or distributing illegal or inappropriate content;
- Theft of personal information;
- Exposure to information and interaction with others who encourage self-harm;
- Exposure to racist or hate material;
- Encouragement of violent behaviour, such as ‘happy slapping’;

- Glorifying activities such as drug taking or excessive drinking;
- Physical harm to young people in making video content, such as enacting and imitating stunts and risk taking activities; and
- Leaving and running away from home as a result of contacts made online.

3. There have been a number of cases where adults have used online social networking sites to groom children for sexual abuse.

Online grooming techniques include:

- Gathering personal details, such as age, name, address, mobile number, name of school and photographs;
- Promising meetings with sports idols or celebrities or offers of merchandise;
- Offering cheap tickets to sporting or music events;
- Offering material gifts including electronic games, music or software;
- Paying young people to appear naked and perform sexual acts;
- Bullying and intimidating behaviour, such as threatening to expose the child by contacting their parents to inform them of their child's communications or postings on a social networking site, and/or saying they know where the child lives, plays sport, or goes to school;
- Asking sexually themed questions, such as 'Do you have a boyfriend?' or 'Are you a virgin?'
- Asking to meet children and young people offline;
- Sending sexually themed images to a child, depicting adult content or the abuse of other children;
- Masquerading as a minor or assuming a false identity on a social networking site to deceive a child;
- Using school or hobby sites (including sports) to gather information about a child's interests likes and dislikes. Most social networking sites set a child's webpage/profile to private by default to reduce the risk of personal information being shared in a public area of the site.

4. How can clubs avoid cyber bullying?

Cyber bullying and abusive postings on websites are a common and unfortunate by product of social networking services and open forums. Clubs should review their safeguarding policies and codes of conduct to ensure they address safeguarding issues and risks around online grooming and cyber bullying. Remember that personal and group disputes can easily overspill from the offline to the online world and vice versa.

5. How can clubs deal with online bullying?

British Rowing has an anti-bullying policy that applies to all members. Clubs must take seriously any allegations of online - or cyber - bullying between members of your club; any concerns raised should be investigated and appropriate action taken to deter or sanction anyone found bullying. All members should be made aware that bullying of any type is unacceptable and a breach of the British Rowing Codes of Conduct. Clubs who do not respond appropriately to complaints may be reported to the Officers of British Rowing.

6. Unofficial websites and chatrooms

It is very simple to set up an open online forum and there have been instances where club logos and insignia have been incorporated, giving the impression that the forum is 'official' and therefore safe. It is almost impossible to 'police' this practice. Clubs should encourage members and officers to use their official website or a secure discussion forum for communications

7. Reporting concerns about online content

- If you are setting up your own networking service reporting procedures should include the reporting of potentially illegal/abusive content or activity, including child sexual abusive images and online grooming. In addition to referral to the club's or organisation's designated person or CWO, concerns arising online should also be reported to Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) or the Police immediately in line with internal procedures. Law enforcement agencies and the service provider may need to take urgent steps to locate the child and/or remove the content from the Internet.
- In the UK, illegal sexual child abuse images should be reported to the Internet Watch Foundation at www.iwf.org
- Reports about suspicious behaviour towards children and young people in an online environment should be made to the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre at www.ceop.uk Where a child or young person may be in immediate danger, always dial 999 for police assistance.
- Concerns about inappropriate content or behaviour which potentially breaches the terms of service should be reported to the service provider. The terms of service set out the legal conditions concerning use of the service including the minimum age requirement. An acceptable use policy is usually included and this makes clear what behaviour is and is not acceptable on the service i.e. harassment, defamation, obscene or abusive language, the uploading of material which is libelous, defamatory, obscene, illegal, nudity, violent etc.