

## **Cornish Pilot Gig Association SPC Policy Guidelines G7**

### **Text, Social networking sites and Email messaging**

Text messaging, emails and social networking sites (like Face book) can help improve the success and efficiency of a club and its Junior section. Young people often need reminding about sessions they have been signed up for, or invited for extra activities, and cancellations often need to be made at short notice. They are cheap, one of the most direct ways of communicating, and young people have their phones on them all the time.

However, there are safeguarding risks for children and young people we need to be aware of:

- inappropriate access to, use or sharing of personal details (names, phone numbers, e mail addresses)
- unwanted contacts of the young people by adults with poor intent.
- text bullying by peers
- the opportunities for on line bullying.
- being sent offensive or other inappropriate materials
- grooming for sexual abuse
- direct contact and actual abuse

For the adults involved in their care at the rowing club, risks include:

- misinterpretation of their communication by young people
- potential investigation (internal or by statutory agencies)
- potential disciplinary action

These guidelines, adapted from the documents listed below, are to promote good practice in your club and minimise the safeguarding risks for everybody.

#### **Social networking systems within your club**

- Only coaches, volunteers or staff with CRB checks should use and have access to a text messaging system involving children and young people. Ideally they should also have undertaken a recognised safeguarding training (e.g. British Rowing 'Safeguarding & Protecting Children' workshop or an equivalent).
- The numbers of people with access to the system, particularly data relating to young people, should be kept to a practical minimum, and their details recorded and maintained by the club welfare officer.
- Consent must be obtained prior to sending the young people text messages.
  - For young people aged 15 or under, specific consent must be obtained from their parents.
  - Parents of younger children should be offered the option to be copied into any texts their child will be sent.
  - Although parental consent is not required for young people aged 16 and over, written consent must be obtained from these individuals themselves.
  - Please note that for the over 16s (who are children as defined by the Children Act 1989) 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 club has taken steps to ensure their child's safety in this respect.

- The young people's mobile phone numbers and email addresses should be stored in either a locked secure cabinet, or on an electronic system which is password protected, with access only available to the people identified above. The contact details should not be shared with anyone else, and should only be used for the purposes of the text messaging system as part of rowing activities.

**Group texts and emailing** presents fewer opportunities for misuse and abuse than personal one-to-one arrangements between coaches/volunteers and children, which should be strongly discouraged.

- Where possible all messages must be sent via a bundle to a group of young people i.e. the same standard text message being sent to every member of the group.
- The messaging system should never be used to send messages on an individual basis (i.e. to just one person), or to less than 5 people.
- All text messages sent must make it clear to the young people receiving it which organisation/club has sent the message, rather than simply giving the mobile phone number that the system uses to send the message.
- Young people should not be given the opportunity to text or email back to the system. It should only be used as a one-way communication channel.
- Any messages sent must never contain any offensive, abusive or inappropriate language.
- All of the messages sent should include a sentence at the bottom which provides the young people with the opportunity to unsubscribe from receiving any further messages.
- All messages sent to young people should also be sent to an external moderator – preferably some one with designated safeguarding responsibility in the club, such as the club welfare officer. Hence, it is essential that the moderator's contact details are included in every 'communication group' that is set up, and in every text messaging bundle that is sent out. The moderator's role will be to ensure that the messaging system is being used appropriately, and to respond to any concerns arising.
- Consideration must be given to initiating the club's and CPGA's child protection and disciplinary procedures should any breaches of this protocol arise, including consultation with or referral to statutory agencies if indications of illegal activity (e.g. grooming for abuse) come to light.

**Texting and emailing individual children and young people** increases the vulnerability of the young people and (usually) the coach. However, if individual information is unavoidable the following guidelines apply:

- The decision to use text/email messaging should not be made by a coach in isolation, and should be discussed and agreed with the club welfare officer. This will ensure that the club's safeguarding expectations and requirements can be clarified, and an undertaking given by the coach to comply with them.
- The details of coaches using individual messaging should be recorded and maintained by the club welfare officer. A record should be made of the email address or mobile phone number/s which will be used to send the messages – ideally this should be a single contact used consistently.

- The content should relate solely to sports activity. Messages should reflect the professional relationship between coach and athlete, and the coach's position of trust. Text and email messages and mobile phones must never be used for any other reason or in any other way.
- The messages which are sent 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.
- All messages sent to young people should also be sent either to a parent or to another responsible adult – preferably someone with designated safeguarding responsibility in the club such as the club Welfare Officer. His/her role will be to ensure that text messaging is being used appropriately in line with the club's procedures, and to respond to any concerns arising.
- Young people should not be encouraged to text back; ideally it should only be used as a one-way communication channel. Young people should be made aware that if or when they choose or need to text 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 they are (like the coach) required to copy in either a parent or the identified responsible adult (e.g. club welfare officer) to all communications.

**How do you implement these guidelines if you do not have such systems already?**

The management committee of the club should take steps to identify where texting and emailing (and Face book\*) is already being used by club members to communicate with Junior rowers, and to ensure that these guidelines are effectively communicated to, and agreed by, all parties.

**Other documents:**

\* see also: Using Social Networking Services and Social Media WG 5.4 British Rowing

Safeguarding and Protecting Children Guidance WG5.5 British Rowing & adapted from

Text and Email Messaging – Safeguarding Guidelines CPSU available from download [www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/cpsu/Resources/Briefings/text\\_and\\_email\\_messaging\\_wdf66628.pdf](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/cpsu/Resources/Briefings/text_and_email_messaging_wdf66628.pdf)