



## **Online contact and communication with children**

**When an adult communicates with children, they must do so in an appropriate and safe manner, whether that is in person, by phone or text, online and via a social networking / messaging website**

Wavepower provides guidance on how to react to a child if they disclose concerns or abuse to you in person. However, you may find that a member uses other forms of communication to make a disclosure, even if you have followed Swim England guidance and not shared your phone, email address or social networking details with that person. Should that happen, we do not want you to stop that communication, but you should advise the Welfare Officer of the contact immediately and follow the guidance in Wavepower as to how to deal with any disclosure or concern raised.

Generally speaking, if you do not share your contact information with children, and take steps to make your social media accounts private, they will not find your phone number, email or social network site details. However, if this should happen and they are not disclosing concerns as outlined above, you must make them aware that you will not be communicating with them on this medium and inform the Welfare Officer immediately. The Welfare Officer will take action as required, ensuring contact by the member is not repeated.

Mobile phones, social media, text messaging, email and other forms of electronic communication have become a regular feature of the sporting landscape and there is a need to define what is and what is not permissible when communication is required between adults and children. That is the purpose of this policy.

### **Phoning, texting, emailing or messaging a child**

Coaches, Teachers or adults volunteering in Alton and District Swimming Club (ADSC) must not hold personal contact details belonging to children on any personal device, or be connected through any social media site or apps. This includes apps such as WhatsApp where a child's number is displayed and visible to a group.

Coaches, Teachers or adults volunteering in ADSC can hold the phone numbers and email addresses of members parents/guardians with their consent, in order to provide information to members. It is then the responsibility of the parent/guardian receiving any such messages to inform the child.

There are a number of team communication systems used by Swim England clubs (for example, Team Unify) which allow a 'non-position of trust' administrator(s) to ensure messages sent on behalf of coaches or teachers are copied to parents/guardians, or are openly visible on a team feed which allows instant messaging. They also include 'push notifications' for immediate attention of a recipient. Systems such as this can prevent direct messaging from a person in a position of trust, preventing suggestions of misconduct, protecting all involved.

In limited circumstances it may be necessary for coaches, team managers or chaperones to have a mobile phone contact details of the members, for example at an away camp for safeguarding reasons. In such circumstances, the individual holding the contact details must be Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checked, have undertaken appropriate safeguarding training and have the consent of each members parent/guardian to temporarily hold that information for the purpose of the event. The members phone numbers must then be deleted as soon as possible after the event.

Apps or social media messaging which are not capable of storing messages, such as Snapchat, are NOT recommended in order to communicate with children, as they have limited safety functionality. Nor indeed are platforms that reveal

children's numbers and online identities such as WhatsApp and Instagram.

### **Coaches aged 18 to 21**

Swim England, and ADSC, recognises that many young coaches aged 18 to 21 will have been members themselves before becoming a coach or teacher, and will be friends with their fellow members, some of whom will still be aged 16 or 17. It is therefore plausible that they will have the personal contact details for those members, or be connected with them on social media sites. It is accepted that it would be inappropriate to require young coaches or teachers to remove the details of those members from their contact lists or social media profiles.

Therefore, if a coach or swimming teacher aged 18 to 21 has the phone and/or email details for members, or is connected to them on social media, who are aged 16 or 17 upon undertaking the role of coach or swimming teacher, Swim England and ADSC does not expect them to remove those members from their contact list, **unless** the coach or swimming teacher is the primary coach or teacher for any of the members in question.

The coach or teacher must inform the Welfare Officer and the Head Coach (if applicable) that they hold these contact details.

### **Use of social networking**

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

Social networking sites provide a platform for uploading and viewing video clips, as well as options for private messaging and public commenting.

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

If 'out of sport' inappropriate social media activity emerges, members are encouraged to report this directly to the social media platform provider, or seek advice from the Professional Online Safety Helpline.

### **Use of social media by coaches, teachers, staff and volunteers**

As a coach, teacher, or other employee, or volunteer of ADSC, you should not be in contact with children (unless a family member) through social networking sites if they are a member of ADSC.

Should a child in ADSC 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 ADSC; or
- Your contact with the child is through ADSC 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 members of ADSC or other Swim England organisations 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 the ADSC policy on *Photography*.

## Coaches, teachers and other staff who are under 18

Swim England and ADSC recognise that social networking sites can be a useful tool for teachers, coaches and other staff within ADSC to share information with other teachers, coaches or staff. If, however, the teacher, coach or staff member is under the age of 18, whilst they may be a colleague, it is essential to mitigate the risks of such sharing.

ADSC recognises 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 at ADSC.

Therefore, if a parent/guardian of a child in a position of responsibility gives consent, and the child themselves request to have contact with an adult member of staff for the purposes of sharing professional information relevant to their role, ADSC must:

- 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 ADSC;
- Ensure all such communications are shared with an identified third person (e.g. the child's parent/guardian or Welfare Officer); and
- Ensure that if the child or adult is found to breach the above agreement, action will be taken by ADSC to address the concern and/or ensure that the breach is referred to Swim England or the statutory agencies if appropriate.

If the parent/guardian does not consent, or the child does not themselves request to have such contact, the usual requirements in this policy must still be adhered to.

ADSC, February 2024