

Communication

Communication involving young people should be safe and secure without exposing young people to risk of harm by allowing third party or unauthorised access to their personal details. Young people should also be able and know how to communicate with adults. There is mandatory and recommended information that clubs and regions must make available to young people.

General considerations

Communication between adults and young people is open to exploitation and misinterpretation and therefore any communication with young people must be open and transparent without crossing personal boundaries between an adult and child.

Where direct face to face communication takes place, a young person should feel comfortable in the surroundings. One to one adult/child conversations should be in an open environment whereas group meetings, depending on the need, can be in a separate room. This should be arranged in advance with the parents/carers.

Young people should be able to tell someone, a trusted adult e.g. their coach, parent or Children's Officer if any communication makes them feel uncomfortable. Leaders should ensure that common sense principles apply e.g. encouraging young people to not give their phone numbers or email to people they don't know and ensuring the parents' permission has been sought when storing young people's details.

Verbal expressions do not always translate well into the written word, i.e. as sent in an e-mail or in a text message. Language used for texting can be very different from usual words. Leaders should be careful with written messages and the language used to avoid any misinterpretation.

Effective methods of communication ensure everyone has access to information with a way to feedback or respond when necessary. Any chosen method of communication should be stated in the club or regional information.

Example to include in a club or regional handbook:

General information will be sent via text messaging and/or email. Any information sent by e-mail to members under 18 will be copied to a parent/carer. Any text message will be sent to the general list. Adults should not reply to individual members under 18, save to acknowledge the receipt of a message. Young people are encouraged to say if any communication is upsetting. Any use of inappropriate language or incidents will be investigated through the disciplinary process.

Communication with young people

Coaches, teachers and/or leaders need to communicate with young people either individually or as a group as part of their development in the sport. Any communication with young people and any contact should be direct, open and honest. Adults should be aware of the language and tone of voice used as these can be interpreted in a variety of ways by different people. Any request by a young person to talk should be responded to appropriately.

Information can be sent as a mass communication to young people as a group. However, where a young person under 18 years of age needs specific individual information this should be copied openly to another responsible person, usually their parent. Where members reach the age of 18, they should receive direct communications. However, leaders should ensure this is appropriate as an imbalance of power still exists and, despite their age, the young person may still be vulnerable.

Professional individuals (doctors, psychologists etc.) will communicate in line with their professional codes of conduct consistent with their qualifications, e.g. a doctor may see/communicate with a 16/17 year old individually within their professional code of ethics.

Displayed information

Certain information must be displayed and available to all members, including young people, as required legally and by Swim Ireland.

Mandatory information to display

Child Safeguarding Statement including contact details for the Relevant Person

Name and contact details of the Children's Officers

Duty rota for all pool and dry land training sessions with parent name clearly indicated

Contact details for the club, usually the Secretary

Recommended information to display

Anti-bullying Promise

Club ethos and logo

Qualifying and event information

Squad selection criteria

Methods of communicating

There are various methods of communications, however leaders should note that often the method chosen only permits one way communication. Swim Ireland, regions and clubs should make sure that young people have a way of raising their views and opinions. Leaders should participate in the Youth Engagement CPD to explore ways of engaging and acknowledging the voice of young people. The mandatory and recommended information should be available to all members including young people via any chosen communication method.

Notice boards

Clubs should have a noticeboard in the facility where most sessions take place. This is accessible to every member and can be easily seen by young people without the need to ask or have access technology. However, the information can also be seen by members of the public. Where more than one facility is used make sure every young person has the opportunity to see the noticeboard; in some case this may require a noticeboard in each facility.

Post

The use of the post provides a direct line of communication with an individual. Letters for young people should be addressed to their parents or where the letter is sent directly to a young person the parents must receive a letter informing them of this together with a copy of the letter sent to the young person. Young people should receive positive information concerning them directly, i.e. obtaining a place on a squad, an achievement of a personal best, etc.; just remember to copy their parent on all correspondence. It is possible for letters to be lost in the post and there is a stamp fee for each letter sent.

E-mail

E-mails are an individual method of communication and may be used for personal communication especially if access to the email account is password protected. E-mails tend to be a cheap form of disseminating information to many people. An e-mail sent to a young person should be sent as part of a group or as an individual response to a direct communication. Where it may be necessary to e-mail an individual young person, the e-mail must be copied to another responsible person.

Phone/mobile phones

Using a telephone of any type is a personal interaction. Mobile phones can be a safe and efficient way to communicate, however they can be used for very personal communications. Phone calls with any young person should be at the instigation of the child and preferably with a parent present. It is not possible unless on a conference type call or on speaker phone to have a third party present to monitor the conversation between an adult and a child. Mobile phones can also be used to text individuals and groups with short written messages. The use of group text reduces the risk of an individual message causing upset and misinterpretation.

Mobile phones are often given to children for security; they allow parents to keep in touch and to make sure their children are safe. Mobile phones should not be used at unsuitable times or in certain locations, e.g. changing rooms or where the use of a camera is not allowed. The allowed use of a mobile phone during Swim Ireland, regional and club activities must be specified to the young person and to their parents, including any possible sanction arising out of misuse; e.g. it may be required that mobile phones are switched off at night to avoid disturbance; and if not adhered to permission may be sought to remove the mobile device.

Mobile phones with a camera function are not allowed to be used in changing room areas due to the possible inappropriate use.

Safe sending and replying of text and e-mail

Safe sending

Obtain the permission of the parent and young person. This should be included in any membership information at registration

Use appropriate words or phrases in messages without endearments

Send messages to a group

Where an individual message is required copy the communication to another responsible person usually a parent

Safe replying

Use appropriate language without the use of endearments

Only reply to an individual young person in response to their message; e.g. a child sends a text to a coach to say they will be late for a training session; coach should reply acknowledging the message,

Copy e-mail replies to a responsible person, usually a parent, unless to do so would cause the child distress, in which case consult with a CO

Deal with issues or problems verbally with a young person including the parent in any discussion

Web/Internet based social media communications

There are options to communicate using web based or social networking sites where individuals can have their own page/account and information, or conversations and replies are posted online. These sites can be viewed privately or can be open to the general public. Where a site is public it should be used to transmit very general information only and not to become a personal conversation. Social media sites should be used safely, and any information posted should not contain any personal facts or details and should be positive in nature. Young people must be encouraged to be careful with the type of information they share online and actively discouraged from private exchanges with unknown individuals. Leaders should not interact with a young person in an inappropriate manner. Online content is available and can be easily accessed by unauthorised persons and content must be moderated by a responsible person, preferably more than one person has access to a site's content.

Who to turn to?

Young people need to know how they will get information they need, and how they might be contacted. Young people should be encouraged to know who to speak to if any communication makes them feel uncomfortable, i.e. a trusted person who may be their coach, parent, club or squad captain or even a friend. These trusted people must know how to contact the Children's Officer to help deal with any inappropriate communication. Any information regarding inappropriate communication must be treated seriously. In many instances the matter can be dealt with informally, however if the matter is more serious or there is any intention to cause harm this should be dealt with as a breach of the code of conduct or by the statutory authorities, depending on the severity of the risk.