

GOOD PRACTICE GUIDELINES ON THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

There has been a rapid rise in the use and prevalence of social media, and it can be difficult to keep up with the new sites and/or apps. Parents have concerns around online safety for their children, and clubs mirror these concerns and are keen to uphold and protect their club image and how they are portrayed by their members. The RFL receives more and more complaints and concerns about the use of social media, and there have been related safeguarding and disciplinary cases.

Facebook, X, Instagram, Snapchat or TikTok are commonly used by Clubs, Parents and Players as a way of communicating with each other. Young people (and many adults) may use one or more of the many group chat apps, such as WhatsApp. Although this form of communication can be a good, quick way of communicating, it brings problems too, as the message is instant and once sent is difficult to retrieve. There have been several instances where children and young people have been victims of bullying on social media, and CWOs should be aware of how to advise children and their parents if they report this to them.

All rugby league clubs should adopt a Social Media Policy that is made clear to all members and users of the club.

GUIDELINES FOR COACHES

Coaches should not be in contact with children and young people under the age of 18 on any social networking site, Other than a club's Private Facebook group page used for communicating training times and changes etc.

Coaches should not accept friend requests from their players or other children within the club and should not send friend requests to young players or children.

Coaches should not post photographs or videos of their team or individual players on their social media accounts without the explicit permission of the child's parents or guardians (parental consent forms for the use of images should be gained at the beginning of each new season).

Coaches must never use their personal account or club social networking site to criticise their club, players, teams, opposition, parents, league or the RFL.

Coaches must never post anything that would be considered to be discriminatory to any individual or group, and this includes reposting/retweeting.

It is illegal to share explicit images of anyone under eighteen, and this includes sharing any explicit images where U18s may be able to view the material or exposing young people to explicit images of children or adults.

Under 18 Coaches/Match Officials and other volunteers

The RFL recognise that adult Coaches/Match Officials, etc., may need to include U18 co-workers in postings and online communication to share working and volunteering opportunities. In such cases explicit permission from the parent/guardian of the young person should be given in writing. The parent/guardian should be advised that any communication between the young person and the adult must be relevant to their roles. The Club/Society Welfare Officer should be aware of these arrangements and their advice sought if issues arise.

Young Coaches/Match Officials and U18 players

It is recognised that young Coaches may have friends/family friends who have been friends with them for a long period. It would not be a requirement to 'defriend' these people from Facebook, etc. but the Coach should inform the Welfare Officer of these friendships and should never be the lead coach for these other young people.

Guidelines for Children and Young People

Do not send friend requests to Coaches or other adult members of your club – they will have to refuse your request (this will be the same for your teachers, too).

Be careful who you accept friend requests from and never accept from someone you do not know.

Think before you invite people to become your friend, do you know them?

Remember that other people may end up seeing things you have posted or pictures you have shared with 'friends' – it all depends on the privacy settings of you and others who can see your posts.

If you ever feel uncomfortable with anything online speak to your parent, coach, teacher or another trusted adult who will be able to help you.

Never share pictures of yourself that may make you vulnerable and never share photos of other people without their permission. This includes photos of your teammates – you should ask the club, coach or team manager if it is ok for you to do this.

You should never post anything that may be hurtful or untrue and may cause someone else to be upset by it. Before you post anything, think, would it be considered abusive or bullying to another person? If in doubt, do not post.

Never post when you are feeling angry or upset; take time to consider your postings.

Posting on social network sites does not mean you can do what you want, the laws still apply to online material.

It is illegal to take, possess or share 'indecent images' of anyone under 18, even if you're the person in the picture. Remember - if you wouldn't show it to your parents or your gran, you probably shouldn't share it online!

If you would like information on how to stay safe online, visit the thinkuKnow website by clicking on this link <https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/>

Guidance for Parents/Guardians

All people involved in rugby league should work towards promoting the game, their club and the sport. Negative postings about your child's club or coach could result in legal proceedings and/or expulsions. If you have any issues or concerns these should be reported to the RFL.

Do not post photos of other players without the relevant permission.

Check your child's accounts to ensure they are both safe and sensible in their postings and friendship groups.



Be aware that children can experience online bullying, and this can be a very isolating experience for a child. Check that your child is safe online by visiting the thinkuknow website by clicking here <https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/>

The Child Protection In Sport Unit (CPSU)

The CPSU is the unit responsible for sport within the NSPCC. They provide good briefing messages and guidelines for safeguarding children in sport and give more information on social networking sites. You can view their resources and information by clicking on this link <https://thecpsu.org.uk/>