

Gosforth Rugby Club



Cyber Policy and Guidance

This Policy and Guidance applies to children, vulnerable adults and all adults associated with the club including members, players, coaches, volunteers and parents.

Websites, mobile phones and social media are a key part of most people's lives and clubs today. They are the most flexible way to communicate with members and those interested in joining a club. They also have the potential to be a very safe way to communicate with children, given their wide accessibility.

Club Websites

However, in the same way that a club has a responsibility for the physical safety of a junior member when visiting a club, the club must ensure that there is nothing on its website which could harm a child directly or indirectly. All people involved in a club need to realise that a club is legally and morally responsible for the content of its website.

There are two key risks to guard against, abusive or inappropriate content (photos, video or text) on the site itself or on liked sites, including adverts, especially from Google or other sponsored links. Secondly, disclosing information about a child to people accessing the website. This could be the child's name, address or any information about a child's life, interests or activities which would help a stranger target a child, or engage that child in conversation.

Another aspect of inappropriate content can be perceived as bullying. This could be material on the site which criticises or humiliates a child. It could also be information which places undue pressure on the child to participate in some aspect of a club's activities.

Club members and adults also have a responsibility to ensure that they never publish material on a club website that may cause offence to any another person both inside and outside a club.

Blogs

Blogs are a type of content becoming common place on a website. The creation of a blog is straightforward. It does not require technical or design expertise and can be updated remotely.

Blogs present two particular challenges. A central part of the attraction of a blog is that it is updated frequently. However the same risks apply to its content as apply to all other content on the site. A club cannot distance itself from the content of a blog it chooses to include on its site. Secondly, blogs often contain a lot of opinion as opposed to purely factual information and this is where problems can occur.



Linked Sites

Many sites contain links to other sites. This could be for commercial reasons, such as sites for sponsors or advertisers, or simply to communicate information to be found on other websites. Before creating a link, a club should thoroughly check the content of the other website, both for child safeguarding reasons and to ensure that the content poses no other risk to the club's reputation. Once a link is included on the site, the club should check its content periodically and remove any link immediately if concerns arise.

Photos and video

Photos and video clips can make any child featured vulnerable to grooming if information about the child such as name, address, activities or interests is also disclosed. Furthermore, posting an image on the website carries a risk that the image could be taken and adapted for an inappropriate use. For further guidance on photographs see the section on Photographic Images in the RFU Safeguarding Toolkit.

Mobile and on-line communication with children

Technology is moving very fast in this area. There are now many ways for people to communicate. Online communication can be by email, texting or social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

The risks posed by such methods of communication arise from a variety of issues: the privacy provided, the wide range of content that can be transmitted, including content of a violent, sexual or hateful nature, the ease with which images can be forwarded on to others and the difficulty in knowing exactly with whom you are communicating.

In sport there are additional risks: inappropriate pressure can be exerted by adults, particularly coaches, on children or inappropriate criticism of a child's performance. An official position or role within a club, such as a coach, can carry with it a level of authority and develop a level of trust that facilitates the control of a child.

Against this background, a club needs to establish rules covering how adults connected with that club communicate with children involved with that club. They need also to have rules how adults communicate with each other.

It is therefore recommended that:

- ✦ When communicating by phone, where possible, club officials and coaches should always speak to the parent or guardian of a child or vulnerable adult
- ✦ Club officials and coaches should not communicate with individual children by text or on-line at any time, on any matter, unless there is an immediate risk to the welfare of that child which can be lessened by such contact
- ✦ If a club needs to communicate club related information to children by email,

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such as training or match details, it should use email groups comprising email addresses given by parents or guardians. It is inadvisable for a coach to communicate by email on a one to one basis with a child. When replying to an email from a child, the parent should be copied in to the response

- ⚡ Coaches and club officials should not communicate directly with children through social networking sites such as Facebook or Twitter. Coaches should not be 'friends' with the children they coach and they should not comment on their status as this can open a coach up to allegations. Social networking group pages where all communications are open, visible to parents and transparent may be acceptable, where appropriate
- ⚡ When using an official club website or any other form of club communication members must not use aggressive or abusive language directed at; either club members nor anyone outside the club including referees and players from another club. This also includes e-mails, texting and when using social network sites including Facebook and Twitter. This also applies to the parents or guardians of children involved with the club

It is impossible to address every issue or cover every scenario a club or coach might encounter when communicating with children and it is appreciated that different ages need to be treated differently. However, in all cases, the above guidelines should be considered when determining the most appropriate method of communication in any given circumstances.

In order to address these issues, it is recommended that, if necessary, clubs produce written policies which cover its own particular circumstances and meet its particular needs. It must then ensure that the policies are widely published and fully complied with by all those involved with the club, including parents.