



Good Practice Guidelines on the use of Social Networking Sites by British Gymnastics Clubs and Club Members

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Background

There has been a growing awareness in sport of the increasing communication by adults and young people on the rapidly developing social networking sites and how this media has become a feature of social communication. There are both positive and negative aspects to using social networking sites that BG clubs and members should be aware of. It is important to acknowledge that if used properly, social media can be a very effective tool. However, British Gymnastics has identified a number of issues that have led to both disciplinary and safeguarding concerns which stem from the improper or inappropriate use of such sites by its members.

Introduction

BG recognise that the use of social networking sites such as My Space, Bebo, Facebook and Twitter is a rapidly growing phenomenon and is increasingly being used as a communication tool of choice by young people and more recently by adults. Facebook is the largest such site whose “mission is to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected”.

These sites permit users to chat online, post pictures, and write ‘blogs’ etc, through the creation of an online profile, that can either be publicly available to all or restricted to an approved circle of electronic friends.

Sites such as You Tube and Google provide a platform for uploading and viewing video clips, which with the latest cameras and mobile phones becomes ever easier and can be almost instantaneous. In addition to these sites, Twitter is a social networking and micro blogging service that enables users to send and read other user messages called tweets. Tweets are like online text messages of up to a maximum of 140 characters displayed on the author’s profile page. Tweets are publicly visible by default however the sender can restrict message delivery to their friends list only.

Social networking can be a great tool to promote yourself or your club if used in the correct way. For example, British Gymnastics uses Facebook to link to web stories, provide videos and photos to its members and promote events and activities with the click of a button, instantly reaching over 45,000 people. The BG twitter account adds another dimension as it allows access to a larger audience, promoting the sport through various channels and connections.

Whilst these technologies provide exciting opportunities, they are accompanied by dangers and negative consequences if abused by users.

The purpose of this guidance is to provide a recommendation of best practice to all BG club members and parents on the use of social networking sites as they relate to that individual’s role in the BG club. It is important to understand however that if used correctly, social networking can be a fun, safe and productive activity.

Note: Throughout this guidance a young person/children is anyone under the age of 18.

Guidance for Coaches, Judges, helpers/volunteers and other officers in a position of trust and responsibility in respect of children in a BG club

1. BG members in a position of trust and/or responsibility (as defined in the BG Safeguarding and Protecting Children Policy) should not be in contact with young people through social networking sites if they hold such a position in respect of that individual young person.

2. Should a young person in your club request to become a named friend on your Social Networking Page or request that you become a named friend on the young person's Social Networking Page you should decline if any of the below apply:

- You are in a position of responsibility in respect of that child.
- You hold a position of trust and responsibility in the club.
- Your contact with the child is through a BG club **and** the parent/guardian of the child does not give their consent to such contact.

3. Social networking sites should never be used as a medium by which to abuse or criticise BG, BG members or BG clubs and to do so would be in breach of BG Standards of Conduct.

4. The publishing of a photograph or video footage on a social networking site is governed by the same requirements as any other media – see the BG Photography Policy in the Safeguarding and Protecting Children Policy.

Guidance to coaches who have children that they coach in the club.

The issue has been raised that parents are becoming members of social networking sites that their children sign up to for security reasons in order to ensure the wellbeing of their own child by being able to view their child's site. This will give the parent access via their child's site to all children listed as friends of their child. It would not be appropriate for BG to prevent a parent who is also a coach in his/her child's club from using this form of protection for their child's online activities.

Therefore in such cases the coach can:

- Have gymnasts in the club on the site he / she is accessing providing the BG under 18 year old club members on the site are listed as friends of his / her child;

However, in this case the following also applies:

- The coach concerned should not have direct contact with gymnasts other than their own child through the social networking site;
- The coach should not accept such gymnasts as friends on his / her home site; and
- The coach should inform the Club Welfare Officer of this arrangement.

Coaches/Judges/Club officials who are under 18.

BG recognise that social networking sites can be a useful tool for judges, coaches and officials within BG clubs to share information with other judges, coaches or officials. If, however, the judge, coach or official is under the age of 18 while they may be a colleague, the requirements of 1 and 2 above must be adhered to.

However, for young people aged 16 or 17 it is the view of BG, that to restrict the ability to share professional information with them from other coaches, judges or officials may be detrimental in their professional development in their role in BG.

Therefore in such cases if the parent of a young person in a position of responsibility aged 16/17 and the young person themselves requests to have contact with an adult club officer or coach for the purposes of sharing professional information relevant to their role the club should:

Gain written consent of the parent/guardian and young person to have such contact naming the individual adult and social networking site concerned;

- The named adult must sign an agreement to keep the contact with the young person to the discussion of matters relevant to the young person's professional role in the club;
- All such communications should be shared with an identified 3rd person (e.g. the young person's parent/guardian or club welfare officer); and
- If the young person or the adult is found to breach the above agreement, action must be taken by the club to address the concern and/or the breach referred to BG or the statutory agencies if appropriate.

Guidance to BG members under the age of 18

1. Do not ask your coach, judge, helper/volunteer or club official to be your social networking site friend – they will refuse as that would breach good practice and the BG Safeguarding and Protecting Children Policy.

2. Use the internet positively and do not place yourself at risk. Have a look at www.ceop.gov.uk for some useful tips.

3. Consider who you are inviting to be your friend and follow the good advice of the social networking sites to ensure you are talking to the person you believe you are talking to.

4. Always remember that anything you say including photos, pictures and video clips posted on your site may be shared with people other than those for whom it was intended.

5. Never post or send any photographs, videos or make comments that may be:

- Hurtful, untrue and upsetting and you may regret sharing later on; or
- Used by other people in a way you did not intend or want.

6. Do not put pictures of other club members on the site within the club setting as you may breach the BG Photography Policy. If you do wish to upload such a picture you must get advice and consent of your parent, the other young person and their parent and a club officer before even considering uploading such a photo. This will not prevent you having pictures of your gymnastics friends on your site taken outside of the sporting arena but it is good advice to always ensure they and their parents are happy with any picture you have of them on your site.

7. Always be aware that social networking sites are a method of communication like letter writing and the spoken word. They are bound by the same laws and rules. Such technology is instant and this allows you as the user to react in the 'heat of the moment', where in the past you would have been required to write a letter which would have taken time and allowed for you to think again before sending. So never place a comment on the internet that you would not put in writing or say to the individual concerned as to do so may not only breach BG Policy but also the law.

Guidance to parents of BG members under the age of 18

As children grow up, parents and carers have to teach them a variety of things to ensure that they are equipped to face the challenges of the modern world. We have to teach them how to cross the road safely, how to deal with strangers and how to engage with other children and adults appropriately in a variety of different settings, including the home, school and in the world at large.

When our children go out to play we want to know where they are going. We satisfy ourselves that they know how to get there without any mishaps or being exposed to any real dangers en route, that they will be safe when they get there and that they will be with responsible people throughout. Typically, when our children come home we ask them if everything was OK. We take a very close interest.

Using the internet safely requires similar skills, which is why it is important that parents and carers find out more about the internet for themselves.

In the overwhelming majority of cases, the benefits of the internet easily outweigh any drawbacks. To keep it that way, parents and children need to know that there are places on the internet which promote racial hatred, contain violent images or pornographic material all of which adults, as well as children, may find distressing. Regrettably it is also true that certain sites will attract a number of adults with a highly inappropriate interest in children.

Beyond these dangers, other websites have the potential to harm impressionable young people through the presentation of extremist views. Sites may be very disrespectful of other people's religious beliefs or cultural backgrounds or seek to distort history. Sites may also promote anorexia or self-harming, for example, in ways which might attract the attention of a particular child who could, at that moment, be going through a vulnerable or difficult phase in their life. There are other more insidious threats around too. Without the experience to distinguish between genuine and misleading messages, children may be fooled by scams of various kinds.

There are however, a few simple steps which parents can take to help their children use the internet safely.

Some simple ways to keep children safe online

- Get to know your child's online habits. Children are inquisitive. They will look to explore the internet as much as they do the real world. Knowing the sites they go to, the people they meet there and what they do will help to keep children safe.
- Stay alert to any sudden changes in mood or appearance, or to any major change in habits or to increased secretiveness. These are often tell-tale signs that something is not right.
- Keep lines of communication open - tell your child they can always talk to you or another trusted adult, such as a teacher, if they do end up in some sort of trouble on the internet. Make children aware that there are things on the internet which may distress them.
- Spend some time surfing the internet yourself. The more that you know about the internet, the better able you are, in turn, to help your child navigate around it without coming to any harm.
- Install internet filtering software showing a Child Safety Online Kitemark on your computer. Filtering products with a Kitemark have been independently tested to provide a simple and effective means of support to parents, helping to ensure that a child's online experience is a safe one. The Kitemark scheme is sponsored by the [Home Office](#) and [Ofcom](#).

There have also been occasions where parents of BG members have used social networking sites to criticise or verbally abuse gymnastics clubs, its officers, officials, coaches, judges, and gymnasts in an inappropriate and unacceptable manner. This has in some cases led the person who is the subject of the verbal abuse to take action through statutory agencies or statutory legislation to address the comments made. BG members found to be abusing or working outside of these good practice guidelines, may be subject to disciplinary action or investigation by BG as outlined in the BG Complaints & Disciplinary Procedures.

Social networking services, social media and sport: Guidelines for safeguarding children and young people

The CPSU Briefing Document “Social networking services, social media and sport: Guidelines for safeguarding children and young people” gives more in depth guidance on social networking sites. It can be accessed via the Child Protection in Sport Unit website at: www.cpsu.org.uk

What to do if you have concerns

As a user of a social networking site, whether you are a child or an adult, you may at some time have a concern about what you are seeing or being told about by another user. Concerns may range from negative or abusive comments, and cyber bullying to suspected grooming for sexual abuse. BG has drawn up a list below of agencies that you can contact, anonymously if you wish, where you can raise such concerns.

- www.thinkuknow.co.uk: the main UK Government website with advice for parents on how to keep children safe online
- www.ceop.police.uk: the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) is the Government body dedicated to eradicating abuse of children. Concerns about inappropriate contacts between a child and an adult, including online, can be reported directly to CEOP. Reporting can be accessed by pressing the CEOP button on the BG website’s CEOP page.
- www.iwf.org.uk: the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) works to remove illegal material from the internet. If you have found any material you believe to be illegal e.g. child sex abuse images, other obscene material or material which incites racial hatred, you can report it to the IWF.
- A number of specialist websites contain general advice that may be of help to parents. These include www.nspcc.org.uk, www.nch.org.uk, www.barnardos.org.uk, and www.beatbullying.org.
- Other sites can offer parents support on broader issues. These include www.parentlineplus.org.uk
- BG through the Ethics and Welfare Department on 0845 129 7 129 ext 2347

- Childline 0800 1111 or www.Childline.org.uk is another NSPCC support service. Using this website, children can talk confidentially to NSPCC advisors online about any issues or problems they may be experiencing, using an application similar to Instant Messenger (IM).

- Stop It Now freephone 0808 1000 900 or www.stopitnow.org.uk

- The Local Police or Children’s Services – their number appears in the phone book.