

# SAFEGUARDING: PROTECTING YOUR GROUP ONLINE

Essential safeguarding considerations for moving your group online



Groups involved in the delivery of physical activity for children and young people are increasingly using the internet and social media to promote themselves and to communicate with their participants.

Taking a group online has a number of benefits ranging from connecting your team, to accessing new members, to keeping stakeholders up-to-date. However, it can also pose potential safeguarding risks and those need to be considered.

Just as important as safeguarding in face-to-face encounters, online interactions require a high-level of attention. Your safeguarding policy should generally take into account online/social media, however there are additional measures which are recommended.

This guide aims to highlight the key considerations staff and volunteers should take into account in order to protect themselves and the group online.

## 10 simple steps to create a safe environment online

1. Establish an [Online Safety Policy](#) separate to a safeguarding policy that provides clear guidelines for engaging with members online.
2. Create an [Acceptable Use Statement](#) for children and their parents to safeguard everyone connected to the group.
3. Ensure that everyone involved – including coaches, volunteers, administrators, parents and children – understands and complies with their responsibilities in the policies.
4. Address any instances of misconduct online in accordance with your online safety policy.
5. Report any safeguarding concerns that appear online in the same way you would during a face-to-face delivery and following safeguarding procedure/policy.
6. Always have two staff/volunteers on the call with young people. Just as you would not in a face-to-face session ever put yourself in a 1-2-1 situation online with a young person.
7. Consider the room background on the call for staff/volunteers, but also for the participants. Check if they have personal photos in the background or something they don't wish to share to avoid breach of personal information. Consider using a virtual background if possible, to help with privacy.
8. Record the sessions if possible so any comments, interactions and concerns can be monitored and kept on record.
9. Ensure staff/volunteers control those entering the session via safe sharing of access details. Always have an adult as the first to start the call and the last to leave the call so young people are not left in an online chat forum unsupervised.
10. If new volunteers start to support online sessions and communication with young people, whether they are already known to the group or not, they should still go through the same background checks process, as they would to support a face-to-face delivery.

## GDPR and personal data

Personal data is another major component of safeguarding online. All organisations must continue to follow the rules set out by the [General Data Protection Regulation \(EU\)](#) in order to protect people's data and privacy online and offline. If an organisation holds personal data on anyone (e.g. service users, members, donors, employees and volunteers) this legislation applies.

It is recommended that all organisations have a Data Protection/GDPR Policy that covers both online and face-to-face interaction with participants, data collection and sharing of information.

Note: Sport and Recreation Alliance has produced a free [GDPR toolkit for the sports sector](#), complete with templates, resources and guidance notes to help.

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## Top GDPR-Specific considerations for communicating online:

- Take care not to share contact details when emailing multiple people. You can hide contact details from those on the list by putting them in the 'bcc' field within emails
- Be careful when sharing usernames and other personal data for access to online resources
- Ensure access to any data collection system is secure and password protected
- When hosting an online call, ensure that full names of participants are not visible for everyone to see on the screen
- o personal data should be shared on unsecure platforms
- When communicating internally, regarding a young person or a safeguarding issue, always use the person's initials and do not write the full name in the email trail
- Ensure all parental permission has been received for the use of any photos, videos or personal information of participants on an online platform - ask for written permission and store safely.

## Additional links for reference

Below you can find additional resources and useful information for safeguarding online.

### NSPCC – Child Protection in Sport Unit

CPSU is a partnership between NSPCC, Sport England, Sport NI and Sport Wales. It has a wide range of resources including policies, best practice, webinars and more. A free self-assessment tool is available.

<https://thecpsu.org.uk/help-advice/topics/online-safety/>

### NSPCC – general website

A UK-wide charity dedicated to protecting children. The website has a range of information and resources for safely protecting young people online.

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk>

### Net Aware

The website from O2 and NSPCC contains support for parents and carers, including a guide to social networks, apps and games.

<https://www.net-aware.org.uk>

### Childline

A free, private and confidential service to help anyone under 19 in the UK with any issue they're going through. The website provides resources tailored to young people for online and mobile safety.

<http://www.childline.org.uk>

### ThinkUKnow

ThinkUKnow is the education programme from National Crime Agency – CEOP, a UK organisation which protects children both online and offline. The website has age-specific advice about staying safe from age 4 up to adults.

<https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk>

### London Youth

The London network of youth organisations has developed a Risk Assessment Template for working online with children.

[Londonyouth.org](http://Londonyouth.org)

If your sport is affiliated to a National Governing Body (NGB), it will have requirements guidelines and procedures around safeguarding for you to follow. Contact them directly to find out what their specific requirements are and what tools and policies they have to support you around online safeguarding, as well as face-to-face safeguarding.

## Example documents

The Child Protection in Sport Unit has developed two examples:

- [Sample Online Safety Policy](#)
- [Sample Acceptable Use Statement](#)