

Bromley Canoe Club recognises many coaches and volunteers are keen to utilise text and email messaging systems to help their communication with young paddlers. The significant benefits are that this is the most effective form of contact for most young people.

To help to ensure that effective safeguarding measures are put in place and to minimise risk the following guidelines have been produced to help coaches and volunteers when using text and/ or messages to communicate with young people.

Bulk (Bundled) Messages vs. Individual Messages

Bulk texting and emailing (i.e. the same message being sent to several young people) presents fewer opportunities for misuse and abuse than individual arrangements between coaches/volunteers and children. Clubs and organisations are encouraged to use a bulk messaging system wherever possible.

There may be exceptional circumstances in which it is justified to send an individual text or email, subject to appropriate safeguarding considerations. For example the coach of an elite athlete who is not part of a group of participants may need to pass on information about practical training arrangements or feedback on competition results.

General Guidelines

1. The numbers of individuals with access to data relating to young people will be kept to a practical minimum, and their details recorded by Bromley Canoe Club's lead child protection/welfare officer. Contact details that will be used to send messages should be recorded.
2. If texting an individual child, the decision to use text messaging should not be made by a coach in isolation, and should be discussed and agreed with Bromley Canoe Club's designated safeguarding/welfare officer. This will ensure that Bromley Canoe Club's safeguarding expectations and requirements can be clarified, and an undertaking given by the coach to comply with them.
3. The young people's mobile phone numbers/email address should be stored in either a locked secure cabinet, or on an electronic system which is password protected, with access only available to the individual identified in point 1 above. The contact details should not be shared with anyone else.
4. Consent must be obtained prior to sending young people text/email messages. For young people aged 15 or under, specific consent must be obtained from their parents. Parents of younger children should be offered the option to be copied into any messages their child will be sent. Although parental consent is not required for young people aged 16 and over, written consent must be obtained from these individuals themselves and it is still recommended that their parents are also informed of the intention to send their children text/ email messages.
5. When sending group messages they must be sent via a bundle to a group of young people i.e. the same standard message being sent to every member of the group. The text/email messaging system should never be used to send messages on an individual basis (i.e. to just one person), or to less than 5 people.

6. All messages sent must make it clear to the young people receiving it which organisation has sent the message.
7. Bulk messages should only be used as a one-way communication channel. Young people should not be given the opportunity to text or email back to the system. Where individual messages have been sent then replies should also be discouraged. Young people should be made aware that if they need to text the coach (for example to confirm attendance or advise on a travel delay), they should ensure that the content of messages relates only to matters relevant to the sports activity, and that they are (like the coach) required to copy in either a parent or the identified moderator (e.g. club welfare officer) to all communications.
8. The messages which are sent must never contain any offensive, abusive or inappropriate language. When sending individual texts or emails care must be taken to avoid overfamiliarity or language that could be misinterpreted or misconstrued.
9. The content should relate solely to sports activity. Messages should reflect the professional relationship between coach and athlete, and the coach's position of trust. Text messages, mobile phones and emails must never be used for any other reason or in any other way.
10. All bulk messages that are sent should include a sentence at the bottom which provides the young people and parents with the opportunity to unsubscribe from receiving any further messages.
11. All bulk or bundled text/email messages sent to young people should also be sent to an external moderator – preferably someone with designated safeguarding responsibility in the organisation e.g. a Club Welfare Officer. The moderator's role will be to ensure that the system is being used appropriately, and to respond to any concerns arising.
12. When sending bulk email use blind copy (Bcc) facility so addresses are kept private, include a circulation list in the email.
13. Information to young athletes and parents should include details of how any concerns arising from the use of text/email messaging can be reported in line with the organisation's safeguarding policies and procedures.