

Title: Safeguarding in a Virtual Learning Environment
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We are all spending more time online, and transforming how we interact, due to social distancing. These guidelines are further considerations during this time and should be applied alongside the policies and procedures which usually govern best practice standards and legal requirements in Special Olympics. Volunteers must continue to fully comply with the registration process and receive clearance to work as a volunteer in a virtual world. Adherence to the Individual Codes of Conduct, Social Media Guidelines and General Data Protection Policy must also be applied. As this is a changing environment, and an ongoing learning process, Special Olympics will continue to update and adapt this document and welcome feedback from our member experiences.

Guidelines

- Consider the safety and accessibility of ~~your~~ athletes
- Choose a platform you can use effectively and safely.
- Test the platform and explore the capabilities and risks before launching with participants
- Use the maximum security features in order to ensure the highest levels of safety
- If you choose to record online sessions you will need to fully consider and manage the risk of doing so. If you are certain that it is necessary to record or stream something live, please ensure all participants and their parents/guardians are informed. Consent must be sought, and stored, prior to the event. Consider an online form (sample attached)
- Engage parents/guardians to ensure security measures and safeguarding standards are met in the physical environment. Some useful links for parents/guardians:
 1. Digital age of consent [ROI NI](#)
 2. [Online Safety Advice for Parents](#)

Planning

- Think about numbers and what is suitable for good interaction
- Consider the age of your participants and remember some platforms may have minimum age requirements and the digital age of consent in Ireland and UK
- Ask participants to re-familiarize themselves with the relevant code of conduct
- Consent should be sought for all participants. An online form is an easy way to gather this.
- You might consider building in an online code of conduct into this form, if necessary
- Keep records of attendance
- Include supports prior to the activity – clear instructions, real time support logging on, a moderator to answer any questions etc.
- Request contact information for a parent/guardian who will be physically present with the participant during the activity
- Send the Club Safeguarding Officer and chairperson contact information to parent/guardian and participant in advance of the activity; in the event anything comes up during the activity
- Participants should be advised of their right to leave the activity if they are feeling uncomfortable or agitated and signposted to the Club Safeguarding Officer and Chairperson
- Consider your ratios and have an adequate number of moderators* i.e. min of 2 volunteers

The Environment

- Athletes should be in a shared and open space i.e. living room, dining room, and kitchen not bedroom. However, also be mindful that other young people, who may be in the room, are not visible on screen
- A parent/guardian should be present during the activity. They do not need to be on camera but should be in the same space for the duration of the activity
- Participants/Leaders should be advised of using appropriate background imagery, if applicable to the platform being used
- Other household members should also be aware that there is a camera on in the event that they may cross the camera or their voice may be picked up on the microphone
- A virtual “waiting room” will allow you to screen participants before admitting them
- Consider disabling private chats for attendees
- Consider automatically switching off cameras or microphones if not needed

Maintaining professional relationships

- Re-familiarize yourself with the Code of Conduct as this still applies in a virtual/online setting
- It is recommended that Club accounts are set up and you avoid using personal accounts
- Ensure that more than 1 person has access to club accounts for safeguarding purposes
- Establish clear boundaries around communication with you in a virtual environment eg Times you are available for questions and how you should be contacted

Disclosures

A young person may choose to make a disclosure in a virtual or online platform, please remember the usual safeguarding processes and procedures still apply. We would recommend that you re-familiarize yourself with these prior to the activity. Leaders and moderators should be aware that online or virtual activity may evoke certain reactions which will need to be managed by someone physically present with the participant. Consider the following:

- Begin each activity by reminding participants that their Club Safeguarding Officer and chairperson can be contacted if needed
- If a participant becomes agitated or uncomfortable you should call the emergency contact person and arrange to end the call safely
- Advise the Club Safeguarding Officer of all activities in advance and follow up if needed

REMEMBER not everyone has the ability to be online, this may be due to:

- Parental choices not to allow internet access
- Lack of access to digital devices
- Data limitations and costs may make accessing a live platform difficult
- Remote location may mean poor accessibility to internet

Activity Leader/Facilitator should:

- Welcome the group – Introduce the other moderators online
- Advise that private information should not be shared
- Inform participants how and when to ask questions during a session
- Note if there will be breaks during the session
- Outline any rules necessary for the activity to go smoothly and consequences of a breach
- Tell participants what to do if the session needs to end early due to emergency etc.
- Give safeguarding contact information on screen
- Advise what happens should a safeguarding issue arise. A moderator will contact your parent/guardian by mobile

Moderators should:

- Be familiar with the platform being used
- Support participants/Facilitator/Leader to log on to the platform
- Help with specific features e.g. raising your hand, muting microphone
- Assess participants during the session to note any concerns
- Address any disciplinary issues during the session e.g. via chat function with the individual or via the emergency contact for that participant

Related Policies

Code of Conduct

Social Media Policy for Clubs

General Data Protection Policy

Useful links

- [Online safety](#) – CPSU topic page
- [Undertaking remote teaching safely](#) – NSPCC Learning
- [Coronavirus advice and support for parents and carers](#) – NSPCC
- [Coronavirus – safeguarding and child protection](#) – NSPCC Learning