
Club Communications

Clubs have a duty to ensure that all communication takes place in a safe manner and does not place young people or athletes at risk of harm. Any communication that takes place between adults and young people or adults and athletes should be open, transparent and relative to the club and sport. Having effective communication methods allows all stakeholders to engage and hear about your club's activities.

Communication

One of the key components of running a successful club is effective communication which may be broken down into distinct categories: Internal and External.

It is important to ensure that everyone who needs to access information can do so and any additional needs they may have; consider this when choosing the method of communication and how it will be displayed.

Internal Communication

In any club there are a number of groups who will need to be communicated with:

- Club Management Team and Sub Committees
- Athletes
- Volunteers
- Families
- Coaches
- Fundraising and Supporters
- Regional Office Staff

It is vital that for each grouping the club identifies the following:

- Who will take responsibility for managing communication?
- What are the best method(s) for communication with each specific group; usually Email, Text message, newsletter or notice board?
- Who will develop and maintain contact lists for each communication group?
- Who will oversee and monitor the ongoing communication?

A Club Induction Pack should be given to all new members of a club on their first visit, which should include training times, Club Management Team structure/contacts, reporting procedures and a code of conduct to be signed and returned. It is important that all stakeholders know what the club communication channels are and where they can feedback, this helps to reduce and manage issues in the club.

External Communication

While it is important to have effective internal communication, it is also important to build good, positive communication channels with the local community. There is tough competition for radio and newspaper space but if clubs provide relevant, efficient and dependable news in the right format, it should be possible to get coverage in the following:

- Social Media Website
- Website
- Local Press
- Newsletters
- Radio and TV
- Special Olympics Ireland Communications
- Links with external partners such as Local Authority Sports Development, Local Sports Partnerships and local schools can support clubs by signposting athletes or volunteers and providing alternative funding opportunities.

See Online Safety and Social Media Guidance for Clubs for further information.

Communicating with Young People and Athletes

If athletes are under eighteen years of age it is important that parent/guardian/carer consent has been given prior to communication via email or text message. Communication in this way should be open and transparent and preferably not one-to-one. If it is necessary to communicate with an individual who is under eighteen years of age another adult should also be copied, usually a parent.

Remember that tone is difficult to convey via text and email, ensure the language used is plain and simple and avoids using emojis or terms of endearment which may be misunderstood. Texts should be used for the purposes of reminding young people/athletes about upcoming events/training sessions. If it turns into a conversation, communication should be ended and suggest discussing the subject at the next event/training session.

When responding to messages received, do so to acknowledge receipt or answer direct questions e.g. what time is training? Conversations requiring more detailed responses should be done face-to-face and with a parent/guardian/carer present, if appropriate.

Coaches and volunteers should not use social media platforms to engage with young people or athletes. It is not appropriate to friend/follow athletes and this should be avoided. If an athlete sends you a request or a private message, you should only respond if you feel there is a safety or welfare concern. You should then proceed according to the club reporting procedures. Otherwise, you should not reply and instead talk to the athlete at the next event/training session; remind all athletes that you cannot accept friend requests in your role.

Athletes and young people should be encouraged, and feel the club is a safe place, to speak to someone if they have an issue or concern. Contact information for the Club Safeguarding Officer should be clearly available. Athletes, volunteers and parents/guardians/carers should be encouraged to contact the Club Safeguarding Officer if they need advice or have a concern about club practices.

Communicating with people with an intellectual disability

Communication may be more difficult for people with an intellectual disability, particularly if they are non-verbal. They may be unable to understand communications and/or communicate their own intentions in a way that you can understand.

When communicating with athletes:

- Speak slowly and clearly and leave pauses for the person to process your words and respond.
- Use one idea per sentence.
- People with an intellectual disability may not have as large a vocabulary as you.
- Use every day words and sentences.
- Use tools such as Lámh/Makaton/PECS.
- Use pictures.
- To communicate messages use:
 - voice tone
 - gestures
 - body language
- Do not use abstract phrases like throw it or shoot. Say "throw the ball" or "kick the ball"
- Do not shout as this does not help someone to understand what you are saying

Appendix 1

10 Communication Tips

1. Speak to me, not my parent/carer/guardian
2. Shake my hand
3. Identify yourself to a person who is blind
4. If you offer help, wait until I say yes
5. Treat adults as adults
6. Don't lean on or hang over someone's wheelchair
7. Listen carefully to someone who is speaking and let them finish
8. Talk at eye level
9. Tap a person who is deaf on the shoulder
10. Relax, don't be embarrassed, it doesn't matter what you say