**SECTION 9 COMMUNICATIONS AND SOCIAL MEDIA**

**This section of the Code of Behaviour (Underage) seeks to ensure that while we respect the rights of all members to use social media it is important to be mindful of the benefits and at times its negative impact can have on our members and particularly children and young people.**

**We should additionally be conscious that any inappropriate or contentious public postings or language used by members associated with any of the Gaelic Games Associations, regardless of what form of social media has been used, may lead to a negative perception by some of our Associations.**

Members of our Associations shall be held responsible for their use of social media and where such usage may at any time impact negatively on the general welfare of a child in our Association or on the ethos of our Associations disciplinary action may follow.

We therefore propose general guidance in the use of social media particularly for those who are working with children in our Clubs and Counties. We also seek the cooperation of parents, whose children may have access to such social media apps and seek to ensure that sensible use of social media, as it may impact on children, can be agreed with parents.

Messaging apps have developed rapidly in recent years from devices that were originally utilised for making calls and texting to current usage of mobiles for messaging, sharing pictures, videos, web links, e-documents and other such message sharing apps. While technology was advancing so also should have our vigilance, particularly in respect of the involvement of young people. With such regular access to new and easy to use technology certain ground rules relating to communication and the taking of photographs or recording of images may unfortunately be overlooked.

The Code of Behaviour (Underage) seeks to give guidance, not in a manner that may prohibit the use of such modern communication and recording technologies, but to urge caution and to have certain safeguards in place so as to prevent instances of harm or unacceptable behaviour. We seek in this Code to ensure as far as is practicable to avoid the misuse of social media apps so as not to impact negatively on any child and on those who work with them.

**COMMUNICATIONS IN RELATION TO UNDERAGE TEAM ACTIVITIES**

All coaches should make it known that our Associations’ preferred option of communicating team information for underage teams is via the parental/guardian mobile phone of each players and not via the mobile phone of the child.

If requested by a parent to send messages regarding games or training via the mobile phone of the child the coach/club should enquire as to the rationale of such requests and if in agreement must receive any such request in writing. Upon any agreement any messages sent to the child can only be as part of the team group text that will also go to their parents and to all other members of that group text.

Coaches are not permitted to communicate individually via social media with underage players. Our Associations do not approve of Clubs or coaches engaging in or facilitating messaging apps in which players and coaches participate nor do we approve of the creation of Club messaging forums for underage players. Many such social media platforms have been shown to be most insecure, lack controls and are poorly managed and monitored in some instances. Such insecure usage should give cause for concern and by their nature may be susceptible to accessing or misuse by unscrupulous individuals quite often outside of our control.

Experience has also shown that uncontrolled messaging apps, unfortunately have a greater chance of being used as a forum of exchanging inappropriate messages and images between children. Any form of individual social media communication by a coach with an underage player shall be deemed a serious breach of the Code of Behaviour (Underage).

**GUIDELINES FOR PHOTOGRAPHIC / RECORDED IMAGES**

It should be noted that having photographic and filming guidelines is not about preventing parents and guardians from taking pictures, but rather to ensure that only those who have a right to take photographs do so and that all images are captured in a sensible and non-intrusive way.

These safeguards should still permit and facilitate the recording of relevant and suitable materials, should allow us to photograph the enjoyment gained by participating in our games, should enable coaches to use the latest technology in the delivery of training skills and should also enable Clubs to promote their activities in a safe and non-threatening manner.

A common sense approach is required when deciding on what may or may not be appropriate as we do not wish to prohibit the recording of games, coaching or celebrations at club level through the use of photography or by recording on video equipment.

The key issues that we should address regarding the use of images and photographs of children/young people are:

• Ensuring agreement and permission of parents/ guardians in the taking and any use of images/ photographs

• Seeking such agreement as part of the annual membership affiliation process or by use of parental consent forms

• Avoiding the individual identification of children in group or team photographs unless by agreement e.g. for special events, an award or achievements ceremony

• Ensuring prior accreditation is given to ‘professional photographers’ who may attend your games or events

• Ensuring that images/photographs chosen are suitable and in good taste with the images chosen or recorded focussing on activity rather than a particular child

• Clubs, coaches and volunteers permitting the use of video equipment as a legitimate coaching aid and as a means of recording special occasions; however, care should be taken in the dissemination, storage and use of such material

• Parents and spectators taking photographs/recordings should where possible seek permission in advance from the Club/County Board and should also be prepared to identify themselves if requested and state the purpose for their photography/filming.

If Club/County Board personnel are unhappy about any matter relating to such photography the permission granted may be withdrawn immediately It should be noted that we have little or no influence on what photographs may be taken and published in local or national newspapers as such photography is covered by a different set of guidelines.

Should we ever be unhappy with the publication of such photographs or images we can address this matter with the individual newspaper or the Press Council of Ireland and the Office of the Press Ombudsman.

**SOCIAL MEDIA SITES**

The world of social and digital media is an enjoyable and engaging place and is in itself a useful asset in promoting our Clubs and activities within the membership and to a wider audience. We must be aware that while these communication tools can be used to our advantage vigilance is also required to ensure that our use of such communication methods shall at all time be appropriate.

• Each individual is responsible for any posting, comments or their conduct while engaging with such sites

• Any social media site approved or promoted by a Club/County must be subject to terms and conditions regarding its usage and must also be under the direct monitoring of a nominate person

• Agree a club policy on reporting of games, club news and use of images or photography

• Club sites may be used to promote training times, fixtures and events

• Content published on Club web sites or social network pages should at all times be factual and follow the parameters of good behaviour

• Clubs should ensure all members are aware of acceptable usage policies regarding communication between coaches or other adults and underage players

• Social media sites should not be used as a forum for exchanging views between other clubs or irate members. Such usage should be terminated by the site controller.

**MOBILE PHONES**

Except in exceptional circumstances, or in the case of very young children, most underage players attending our training or games generally have a mobile phone or access to a phone. While the ownership and general use of the mobile is primarily a matter between the child and their parents the use or accessing of the mobiles at our events or in our clubhouses or dressing rooms is a matter for us to monitor and or pursue and if need be to agree with parents. While we never wish to curtail the rights of a child we can in relation to the use of a mobile limit the use of mobiles on our premises and if doing so we should inform the parents in advance. Guidance in relation to mobile phone usage includes:

• Do not permit the use of any phones in dressing rooms or shower area

• Avoid any instances of individual communication via mobile phone with any of the underage players

• If in agreement with other coaches seek parental permission for all phones of underage players to be ‘bagged’ prior to a game and returned to the players after each game

• Be vigilant as to the use, or excessive use, of a mobile phone by any underage player while they are under your care

• Advise children if they receive an offensive photo, email or messages, not to reply, but to save the offensive materials, note the time and date of receipt and that they should inform their parents.

Should any such incident regarding the use of mobile phones occur during their attendance at the Club the team coach should note this and report the matter to the Club Children’s Officer.

**WEB SITE CONTENTS POLICY**

• The Club/County Board Website and its operator must make all reasonable attempts to insure that web pages are in keeping with the ethos of our Associations and do not contain unacceptable content or any links to questionable material. Links to external websites are meant for convenience purposes only.

• No endorsement of any third party products or services should be expressed or implied by any information, material or content referred to or included on, or linked from the Club website.

• Agree a Club/County Board web site content policy, following discussions at your Club Management or Executive Committee and with members, including the underage members of the Club. This content policy will promote your strategy on the safe use of the Internet and also outlines the parameters of behaviour and specifies the consequences of breaching those parameters.

• Content published on web site or social network page should at all times be factual and follow the parameters of good behaviour.

• All decisions on the appropriate use of photographic images and other similar content should be in accordance with the Guidelines for Photographic/Recorded Images.

• Avoiding the individual identification of children in group or team photographs or images unless by agreement e.g. for special events, an award or achievements ceremony.

• Advocacy of or opposition to any politically or socially controversial subjects, issues, or candidates is prohibited on Club/county websites.

• Disparagement or promotion of any person or class of persons is prohibited.

• Content that may be considered not to be in keeping with the ethos and dignity of Associations is prohibited. The GAA will shortly publish new Social Media Guidelines available on [www.gaa.ie](http://www.gaa.ie)