



ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Preamble

1. Communication occurs through both face-to-face interactions and electronic interactions. Electronic communication can happen in a social medium (such as Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat) and in a non-social electronic medium (such as texting, virtual meeting platforms and email).
2. Softball Canada recognizes that communication between all Participants should be guided by principles that ensure the safety of the Participants and that maintain and strengthen effective relationships.
3. Softball Canada further recognizes that minor athletes, who are Vulnerable Participants, prefer in many cases to communicate through electronic interaction. Softball Canada strives to ensure that athletes are protected during electronic interactions with Persons in Authority and that they are not placed in a vulnerable situation.

Definitions

4. Terms in this Policy are defined as follows:
 - a) **Electronic Communication Media** – Communication media that is primarily for connecting with other users without a content-sharing or social networking purpose. Electronic communication media includes email, texting (SMS), Facebook messenger, video sessions, WhatsApp, virtual meeting platforms, and other similar applications.
 - b) **Interpersonal Communication** – Communication that occurs between two or more Participants within a communication medium.
 - c) **Participants** – Refers to all categories of individual members and/or registrants defined in the By-laws of Softball Canada as well as all people engaged in activities with, Softball Canada including, but not limited to Athletes, coaches, instructors, officials, volunteers, managers, administrators, committee members, and Directors and Officers. Participants are subject to the policies of Softball Canada.
 - d) **Person in Authority** – A Participant who holds a position of authority within Softball Canada including, but not limited to, coaches, managers, support personnel, supervisors, and Directors. There is typically a Power Imbalance between Persons in Authority and other Participants.
 - e) **Power Imbalance** – A Power Imbalance may exist where, based on the totality of the circumstances, a Participant has a duty of care or supervisory, evaluative, or other authority over another Participant. A Power Imbalance may also exist between an athlete and other adults who are Persons in Authority. Maltreatment occurs when this power is misused.
 - f) **Public Communication** – Communication that is or was posted publicly, such as on a Participant's social media platform.
 - g) **Responsible Coaching Movement** – A call to action for sport organizations, parents, and coaches to enact responsible coaching across Canada – on and off the field (<https://coach.ca/responsible-coaching-movement>)
 - h) **Social Media** – Communication media that permits users to create or generate content, share that content, and network with other users. Social media includes YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Tumblr, TikTok, Snapchat, Twitter, and other similar websites and applications.

- i) **Vulnerable Participants** – Includes children/youth (minors) and vulnerable adults (people who, because of age, disability or other circumstance, are in a position of dependence on others or are otherwise at a greater risk than the general population of being harmed by people in positions of trust or authority).

Context

5. The type and nature of Interpersonal Communication depends on the context in which the communication occurs. Interpersonal Communication may change when different stakeholders are involved. For example, expectations surrounding adult-adult communication are different than adult-teen communication (which carries the most risk of maltreatment). Further, a primary goal of the coach-athlete relationship in the high-performance stream is to create a positive and healthy training and competition environment.

Principles

- 6. The following principles reflect Softball Canada’s values, and guide this Policy:
 - a) Softball Canada is committed to the Responsible Coaching Movement and to making sport safer for everyone, particularly Vulnerable Participants.
 - b) Conduct and behaviour that occurs in Electronic Communication and Social Media – both Public Communication and Interpersonal Communication – is subject to the *Code of Conduct and Ethics* and *Discipline and Complaints Policy*.
 - c) Persons in Authority must use Electronic Communication and Social Media that are appropriate for the context in which the communication occurs.
 - d) Regular communication is an important requirement for nourishing effective and healthy relationships.
 - e) An open and observable environment facilitates healthy exchanges among the coach, athlete, and parent/guardian triangle which is necessary for communication with Vulnerable Participants.
- 7. The table below has been developed to guide Persons in Authority in their interactions with athletes of various ages. The table assesses the vulnerability of the athlete due to their age, the frequency of contact needed with the athlete due to their context, and their risk of maltreatment. The final column of the table determines whether (and how) the Person in Authority should be communicating with their athletes on Electronic Communication Media (“ECM”) and/or Social Media (“SM”).
- 8. It is expected that the contact needed between Persons in Authority and high-performance athletes would be more frequent because there is more information to convey to further the athlete’s development, and a closer relationship between athlete and coach is beneficial.
- 9. Maltreatment includes physical, psychological, and sexual maltreatment, as well as other types of misconduct such as neglect, grooming, retaliation, and other behaviours that are described in the *Code of Conduct and Ethics*.

AGE OF ATHLETE	COMPETITION STREAM (HIGH PERFORMANCE)			
	<u>Vulnerability Due to Age</u>	<u>Frequency of Contact Needed</u>	<u>Risk of Maltreatment</u>	<u>Communicate on ECM or SM?</u>
Athletes 13-18	Moderate	Moderate - High	High	Yes – with many conditions (Level 1)
Athletes 19+	Low	High	Moderate	Yes – with some conditions (Level 2)

Guidelines

10. The following guidelines (**Appendix A**) have been developed:

- a) Ideal Practices – Ideal (best) practices for Persons in Authority when they communicate with athletes of different ages and in different sport contexts.
- b) Guide for Persons in Authority – Specific tips for Persons in Authority (primarily coaches) to assist them with their communication in Electronic Communication and Social Media.
- c) Guide for Athletes – Specific tips for athletes to assist them with their communication in Electronic Communication Media and Social Media.
- d) Guide for Parents – Specific tips for parents/guardians to monitor, participate in, and/or be aware of the communication between Persons in Authority and their children.

General

11. An individual who believes that a Participant's Electronic Communication and/or Social Media activity is inappropriate or may violate Softball Canada's policies and procedures should report the matter to Softball Canada in the manner outlined in the *Discipline and Complaints Policy*.
12. Removing content from Social Media after it has been posted (either publicly or privately) does not excuse the Participant from being subject to the *Discipline and Complaints Policy*.

Appendix A – Ideal Practices and Guidelines

Ideal Practices – Competition Stream (High Performance Sport)

Medium	Athletes 13-18	Athletes 19+
	<i>Level 1</i>	<i>Level 2</i>
Email	Email athletes when necessary. Stick to non-personal communication. Alert or copy parents/guardians.	Email athletes when necessary.
Text	Text athletes when necessary. Stick to non-personal communication. Alert or copy parents/guardians.	Text athletes when necessary.
Facebook	Avoid initiating contact. Accept requests if necessary. All communication must be public. Inform parents/guardians.	Avoid initiating contact. Accept requests if necessary. All communication must be public.
Instagram	Avoid initiating contact. Accept requests if necessary. All communication must be public. Inform parents/guardians.	Avoid initiating contact. Accept requests if necessary. All communication must be public.
Twitter	Avoid initiating contact. Accept requests if necessary. All communication must be public. Inform parents/guardians.	Avoid initiating contact. Accept requests if necessary. All communication must be public.
Snapchat	Do not follow athletes on Snapchat. Block follow requests.	Avoid following athletes on Snapchat.
TikTok	Do not follow athletes on TikTok. Block follow requests.	Avoid initiating contact. Accept requests if necessary. All communication must be public.
Team Communication Platforms (e.g., TeamSnap)	Add athletes when necessary. Stick to non-personal communication. Alert or copy parents/guardians.	Add athletes when necessary.

Conditions and Exceptions

Level 1 – Communication with Many Conditions

Communication at this level is the riskiest. Because of the frequency of contact needed with high performance athletes, and recognizing that regular communication promotes more effective relationships, Persons in Authority can communicate with athletes on Electronic Communication Media and Social Media but must take several precautions when they do so. Communication should be open and observable whenever possible. If it is not possible to have open and observable communication on a particular medium, Persons in Authority should maintain a log or record of the communication and make it available to Softball Canada or to the athlete's parent/guardian whenever requested.

To communicate non-personal information, Electronic Communication should be used by Persons in Authority to inform athletes and their parents/guardians at the same time. For example, any emails should be copied to a parent/guardian, and team communication on WhatsApp should include parents/guardians. In some circumstances, non-personal communication can occur on these media without including a parent/guardian

(such as an athlete informing a coach that they will be late for practice) but parents/guardians must be aware that this communication may occur and they should know that they can ask for it to cease.

Persons in Authority can be available to the athlete to receive messages about personal issues on the athlete's preferred communication medium – but these messages must be logged and available to Softball Canada and/or to the athlete's parent/guardian. Persons in Authority should avoid initiating contact on Social Media but may accept 'friend' or 'follow' requests provided any communication that occurs on Social Media is restricted to content and material that furthers the development of the athlete's athletic goals or experience (such as training videos or comments about the sport). These interactions must be Public Communication (not private messaging) and parents/guardians must know that it may occur. A Social Medium that defaults to automatically deleting content after a set time period (such as Snapchat) cannot be used.

Level 2 – Communication with Some Conditions

At this level, communication on Electronic Communication Media and Social Media is permitted but Persons in Authority should take some precautions. All communication should be Public Communication, whenever possible, and should be open and observable. However, recognizing that Persons in Authority and athletes at this level are adults, communication that is of a personal nature may occur on an Electronic Communication Medium and it is not necessary to copy a second adult. This communication should be logged and available to Softball Canada if requested.

To protect the integrity of the coach-athlete relationship, Persons in Authority should avoid initiating contact on Social Media but can be available to the athlete to receive messages about personal issues on the athlete's preferred communication medium. Persons in Authority may accept 'friend' or 'follow' requests provided any communication that occurs on Social Media is Public Communication (not private messaging). A Social Medium that defaults to automatically deleting content after a set time period (such as Snapchat) should be avoided.

Guidelines for Persons in Authority

General – All Levels

- a) You must model appropriate behaviour befitting your role and status in connection with Softball Canada.
- b) Ensure you host an information session for parents/guardians and athletes at the beginning of your season that clearly outlines communication standards and how you will be communicating with the athletes throughout the season.
- c) Ensure all electronic and social communication is professional, unambiguous, and on-topic. Avoid emojis and unspecific language that can be interpreted in multiple ways.
- d) Be aware that you may acquire information about an athlete that imposes an obligation of disclosure on your part (such as seeing pictures of underage athletes drinking during a trip).
- e) Athletes will search for your Social Media accounts. Be prepared for how you will respond when an athlete attempts to interact with you on Social Media.
- f) Annually review and update the privacy settings on all your Social Media accounts.
- g) Consider creating separate Social Media accounts for the express purpose of communicating with Vulnerable Participants. Access should be provided to other Persons in Authority and to Softball Canada so that the accounts are open and observable.
- h) Consider monitoring or being generally aware of athletes' public Social Media behaviour to ensure compliance with the *Code of Conduct and Ethics* and this Policy.
- i) Persons in Authority may not demand access to an athlete's private posts on Twitter, Instagram, or Facebook.
- j) Avoid adding athletes to Snapchat and do not send snapchats to athletes.

- k) Do not post pictures or videos of athletes on your private Social Media accounts.
- l) Keep selection decisions and other official business off Social Media.
- m) Never misrepresent yourself by using a fake name or fake profile.
- n) Avoid association with Facebook groups, Instagram accounts, or Twitter feeds with explicit sexual conduct or viewpoints that might offend or compromise your relationship with an athlete.
- o) Do not delete your communication history with Vulnerable Participants in any medium.
- p) Be prepared to accept that Softball Canada (or parents/guardians) may request logs or records of your communication history. Become familiar with some of the methods to save and download messages:
 - i. [Saving and Printing Instagram Messages](#)
 - ii. [Download Instagram Messages \(chrome plugin\)](#)
 - iii. [Saving Chat History \(WhatsApp\)](#)
 - iv. [Transferring iPhone Messages](#)
 - v. [Saving Text Messages](#)

Level 1

- a) Ensure that parents are aware if some interactions may take place on Social Media and Electronic Communication Media and the context for those interactions.
- b) Attempt to make communication with athletes on Electronic Communication and Social Media as one-sided as possible. Be available for athletes if they initiate contact – athletes may wish to have this easy and quick access to you – but avoid imposing yourself into an athlete’s personal media space.
- c) Never accept communication from one athlete while blocking another athlete. Be consistent in your use of Social Media to communicate with all athletes.
- d) Consider using TeamSnap or another league and team management application that allows non-personal communication to occur through the application/website and be directed at both parents/guardians and Vulnerable Participants at the same time.
- e) Do not initiate “friend” or “follow” requests with athletes on Facebook. Never pressure athletes to “friend” or “follow” you.
- f) Consider managing your Social Media so that athletes do not have the option to follow you on Twitter or Instagram or send you a “friend” request on Facebook.

Level 2

- a) Choosing not to engage with Social Media is an acceptable strategy. Be prepared to inform athletes why you will not engage in this space and explain which media you will use to communicate with them.
- b) Never *require* athletes to join Facebook, join a Facebook group, subscribe to a Twitter feed or Instagram account, or join a Facebook page about your group or organization.
- c) If you use a Social Medium to communicate, do not make the Social Medium the exclusive location for important information. Duplicate important information in Electronic Communication Media (like on a website or via email).
- d) Exercise appropriate discretion when using Social Media for your own personal communications (with friends, colleagues, and other Persons in Authority) with the knowledge that your behaviour may be used as a model by athletes.

General – Video Sessions

- a) Video sessions should be recorded, when possible. Recording video sessions documents the interaction and serves to ‘open’ the environment. Your sport organization, the athlete and/or a minor athlete’s parent/guardian (when applicable) should be permitted to view the recording.
- b) Video sessions with groups of athletes (such as a team) should be attended by at least two adults

(preferably coaches). One-on-one video sessions should be either recorded with permission and/or attended by another adult and/or the athlete's parent/guardian (when applicable). No one-on-one video session with a minor athlete should take place without a parent/guardian's knowledge.

- c) Provide a clear statement of professional standards expected of all attending individuals prior to any video session. Provide an outline and agenda of the video session to athletes and to the athlete's parent/guardian (when applicable) prior to the session. Any breaches of professional standards that occurred during the session must be communicated to parents/guardians of minor athletes after the session.
- d) Sessions should avoid overly personal communication and focus on training/coaching.
- e) Video sessions should be held in a professional setting. Your video stream must show a neutral background (avoid bedrooms and bathrooms).
- f) Dress professionally (to the point of over-dressing) and reduce socialization.
- g) Inform your sport organization that you intend to communicate with athletes via video session. If you intend to provide instruction or skills training, your organization may need to sanction the session and/or parents/guardians of minor athletes may need to sign an agreement or a waiver.

Guidelines for Athletes

General – All Levels

- a) Set your privacy settings to restrict who can search for you and what private information other people can see.
- b) Coaches, teammates, officials, or opposing competitors may all add you to Facebook or follow you on Instagram or Twitter. You are not required to follow anyone or be Facebook friends with anyone.
- c) Avoid adding Persons in Authority to Snapchat and do not send snapchats to Persons in Authority.
- d) If you are under the age of 18, make sure that your parent/guardian is aware of any Electronic Communication and/or Social Media interactions that you have with your coach or another Person in Authority.
- e) If you feel harassed by someone in an Electronic Communication Media and/or Social Media interaction, report it to your parent/guardian, a Person in Authority, or to Softball Canada.
- f) You do not have to join a fan page on Facebook or follow a Twitter feed or Instagram account if you do not want to.
- g) Content posted or shared on Social Media, relative to your privacy settings, is considered Public Communication. In most cases, you do not have a reasonable expectation of privacy for any material that you post or share.
- h) Content posted on Social Media is almost always permanent – consider that other individuals may take screenshots of your content (even snapchats) before you can delete them.
- i) Avoid posting pictures of, or alluding to, participation in illegal activity or banned substances such as: speeding, physical assault, harassment, drinking alcohol (if underage), smoking marijuana, etc.
- j) Model appropriate behaviour in Social Media befitting your status as a) an athlete, and b) a participant within Softball Canada. As a representative of Softball Canada, you have agreed to the *Code of Conduct and Ethics* and must follow that Code when you post material and interact with other people through Electronic Communication and Social Media.
- k) Be aware that your public Facebook page, Instagram account, or Twitter feed may be monitored by your coach or another Person in Authority, or by Softball Canada. Content or behaviour on Social Media may be subject to sanction under the *Discipline and Complaints Policy*.
- l) If you attend a video session, your video stream should show a neutral background (avoid bedrooms and bathrooms).

Guidelines for Parents / Guardians

General

- a) You can request copies of any communication that occurs on Electronic Communication Media between a Person in Authority and your Vulnerable Participant.
- b) You can request that any communication that occurs on Electronic Communication and/or Social Media between a Person in Authority and your Vulnerable Participant be logged and available to you.
- c) You can inform Persons in Authority that they are not permitted to contact your Vulnerable Participant on any (or a specific) Social Medium.
- d) Inform Softball Canada if a Person in Authority interacted with your Vulnerable Participant in an Electronic Communication Medium or Social Medium without your knowledge.
- e) Inform Softball Canada if a Person in Authority initiated an interaction with your Vulnerable Participant on a Social Medium.

Level 1

- a) Be aware that Participants between the ages of 13 and 18 often prefer to discuss personal and non-personal matters on Electronic Communication Media or Social Media rather than face-to-face. Permitting your Vulnerable Participant to have this option (with certain conditions) to connect with a Person in Authority may improve their athletic experience and personal development.
- b) Consider joining any Public Communication that occurs on a Social Medium between a Person in Authority and your Vulnerable Participant (such as by tagging a coach and your athlete on a Twitter thread or by adding a comment to an Instagram post).