



MODEL POLICY: ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION

As part of USA Fencing’s emphasis on participant safety, communications involving our minor participants should be appropriate, productive, and transparent. Effective communication concerning practice, event and administrative issues among coaches, administrators, athletes and their families is critical.

However, the use of mobile devices, web-based applications, social media, and other forms of electronic communications increases the possibility for improprieties and misunderstandings and also provides potential offenders with unsupervised and potentially inappropriate access to participants. The improper use of mobile and electronic communications can result in misconduct. Adherence to the Social Media and Electronic Communications Policy helps reduce these risks.

All electronic communication between coach and athlete must be for the purpose of communicating information about fencing activities. Coaches, athletes and all administrators must follow common sense guidelines regarding the volume and time of day of any allowed electronic communication. All content between coaches and athletes should be readily available to share with the public or families of the athlete or coach. If the athlete is under the age of 18, any email, text, social media, or similar communication must also copy or include the athlete’s parents.

Template for Club: **Electronic Communication Policy of the [insert the name of the club]**

PURPOSE

The [insert the name of the club] (the “Club”) recognizes the prevalence of electronic communication and social media in today’s world. Many of our fencers use these means as their primary method of communication. While the Club acknowledges the value of these methods of communication, the Club also realizes that there are associated risks that must be considered when adults use these methods to communicate with minors.

GENERAL CONTENT

All communications between a coach or other adult and an athlete must be professional in nature and for the purpose of communicating information about team activities. The content and intent of all electronic communications must adhere to the USA Fencing Code of Conduct regarding Athlete Protection.

For example, as with any communication with an athlete, electronic communication should not contain or relate to any of the following:

- drugs or alcohol use;
- sexually oriented conversation; sexually explicit language; sexual activity
- the adult's personal life , social activities, relationship or family issues, or personal problems; and
- inappropriate or sexually explicit pictures
- Note: Any communication concerning an athlete's personal life, social activities, relationship or family issues or personal problems must be transparent, accessible and professional.

Whether one is an athlete, coach, board member or parent, the guiding principle to always use in communication is to ask: "Is this communication something that someone else would find appropriate or acceptable in a face-to-face meeting?" or "Is this something you would be comfortable saying out loud to the intended recipient of your communication in front of the intended recipient's parents, the coaching staff, the board, or other athletes?"

With respect to electronic communications, a simple test that can be used in most cases is whether the electronic communication with fencers is **Transparent**, **Accessible** and **Professional**.

Transparent: All electronic communication between coaches and athletes should be transparent. Your communication should not only be clear and direct, but also free of hidden meanings, innuendo and expectations.

Accessible: All electronic communication between coaches and athletes should be considered a matter of record and part of the Club's records. Whenever possible, include another coach or parent in the communication so that there is no question regarding accessibility.

Professional: All electronic communication between a coach and an athlete should be conducted professionally as a representative of the Club. This includes word choices, tone, grammar, and subject matter that model the standards and integrity of a staff member.

If your communication meets all three of the **T.A.P.** criteria, then it is likely your method of communication with athletes will be appropriate.

FACEBOOK, MYSPACE, BLOGS AND SIMILAR SITES

Coaches may have personal Facebook (or other social media site) pages, but they should not have any athlete member of the Club join their personal page as a "friend." A coach should not accept any "friend" request from an athlete. In addition, the coach should remind the athlete that this is not appropriate. Coaches and athletes should not "private message" each other through Facebook. Coaches and athletes should not "instant message" each other through Facebook chat or other IM method.

The Club has an official Facebook page that athletes and their parents can "friend" for information and updates on team-related matters.

Coaches are encouraged to set their pages to "private" to prevent athletes from accessing the coach's personal information.

TWITTER

Best Practice: The Club has an official Twitter page that coaches, athletes and parents can follow for information and updates on team-related matters. Coaches are not permitted to follow athletes on Twitter. Likewise, athletes are not permitted to follow coaches on Twitter. Coaches and athletes are not permitted to “direct message” each other through Twitter.

Alternative Option: Coaches and athletes may follow each other on Twitter. Coaches cannot retweet an athlete message post. Coaches and athletes are not permitted to “direct message” each other through Twitter.

TEXTING

Subject to the general guidelines mentioned above, texting is allowed between coaches and athletes during the hours from 7am until 9pm. Texting only shall be used for the purpose of communicating information directly related to team activities.

EMAIL

Athletes and coaches may use email to communicate between the hours of 7am and 9pm. When communicating with an athlete through email, a parent, another coach, or a board member must also be copied.

REQUEST TO DISCONTINUE ALL ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS

The parents or guardians of an athlete may request in writing that their child not be contacted by coaches through any form of electronic communication.

Athlete Electronic Communication Best Practices of the [insert name of club]

PURPOSE

USA Fencing member clubs are required to have an electronic communication policy for coaches and non-athlete members to follow. Similarly, athletes should be made aware that there are certain standards for electronic communication for all individuals associated with the club. The ability of coaches and non-athlete members to adhere to the required policy relies, in part, on the ability of athletes to respect the boundaries established for healthy electronic communication with the team.

Athletes should remember that fencing for the club is a privilege, and they are expected to portray themselves, their team, and their community in a positive manner at all times.

EXPECTATIONS

The club holds the following expectations of athletes:

- Athletes will not use derogatory language, including sexist, racist, homophobic, obscene, or profane material of any kind.
- Athletes will not use social media to degrade, demean, or attack any person, team, or organization.
- Athletes will not use social media to contact his/her coach(es) and will instead post appropriate material to the club’s profile.
- Athletes will not call or text their coach, except in an emergency or if a parent/guardian is included in the communication.

- All communication between athletes and coaches will be related to the activities of the team and should, whenever possible, be limited to in-person communication during team practices or events.

THINGS TO REMEMBER: TEXTING

- Text messages and photos can be saved or screen-shot. Once the message is transmitted, the sender does not have control.
- Texting between athletes and coaches is not okay unless it is an emergency situation or another adult (such as a parent/guardian or another coach) is copied on the text.
- It is typically more effective to discuss an issue in person than via text.

THINGS TO REMEMBER: SOCIAL MEDIA

- Once you post something online, it is public and permanent--even if you delete it.
- Many employers, college admissions officers, and athletic recruiters review social networking sites as part of their evaluation of an applicant. Carefully consider how others may perceive the information and content that you share about yourself.
- Never post your email address, home address, phone number, or other personal information, as it could lead to unwanted attention, stalking, or identity theft.