

Social Media and Electronic Communications Policy

As part of USA Hockey's emphasis on safety, communications involving any Participant, and especially Minor Athletes, should be appropriate, productive, and transparent. Effective communication concerning travel, practice or game schedules, and administrative issues among coaches, administrators, players and their families is crucial. 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 Minor Athletes. The improper use of social media, mobile and electronic communications can result in misconduct. Adherence to the Social Media & Electronic Communications Policy helps reduce these risks.

All electronic communication originating from Adult Participants to Minor Athletes must be Open and Transparent and professional in nature. Unless an exception exists (see below), if an Adult Participant communicates directly with a single Minor Athlete via electronic communications (including email, phone, text, or any social media), the Minor's legal guardian, another family member, or another adult Participant must be copied. If a Minor Athlete communicates to the Adult Participant privately first, said Adult Participant should respond to the Minor Athlete with a copy to another Adult Participant, the minor's legal guardian, or another adult family member of the Minor Athlete. When an Adult Participant communicates electronically to more than one Minor Athlete (or the team), said Adult Participant must copy another Adult Participant or at least one parent/guardian of each Minor Athlete.

Pursuant to these requirements, all electronic communication between coach and player must be for the purpose of communicating information about team activities. Coaches, players and all team personnel must follow common sense guidelines regarding the volume and time of day of any allowed electronic communication. All content between coaches and players should be Open and Transparent and readily available to share with the public or families of the player or coach. Where possible, a coach should be provided and use the organization web site email center (the coach's return email address will contain "@organization.com") for all communications with the team, players, and player's parents.

Exceptions: The prohibitions on social media or electronic communication between an Adult Participant and a Minor Athlete do not restrict such communications if any of the following exceptions apply

- A Dual Relationship exists;
- The Close-in-Age exception applies;
- The Minor Athlete needs a Primary Care Assistant; or
- in emergency situations.

Social Media

Social media makes it easy to share ideas and experiences. USA Hockey recognizes, however, that social media, mobile and other electronic communications can be especially concerning where

Minor Athletes are involved. Coaches are prohibited from having Minor Athletes joined to or connected through their personal Facebook page, Instagram or any other similar social media application, unless an exception exists. To facilitate communication, an official organization or team page may be set up and players and parents may join (i.e., “friend”) the official organization or team page and coaches can communicate to the team through that site.

Web-Based Conferencing and Similar Communications

Coaches, team managers, and others may use web-based conference software (i.e. Zoom, Google Hangouts, Microsoft Teams) to meet with, train, or otherwise communicate with Minor Athletes. All web-based conferences of any kind between a coach (or any Adult Participant) and a Minor Athlete(s) must be non-personal in nature and be for the purpose of training, communicating information about team activities or for team-oriented motivational purposes. Any invitation to such communication to any Minor Athlete must include the player’s parents or legal guardians and must adhere to all of the requirements found elsewhere in this Handbook as if the virtual meeting were being held in person, including the One on One Interactions Policy and the minimum attire policy (found within the Locker Room Policy). Virtual lessons or live stream videos should be Observable and Interruptible. Coaches, team managers, and players may send pre-recorded techniques or training videos, but must copy at least one other Adult Participant. Best practices for web-based conferencing with a team should include use of passwords for entry and/or other security precautions.

Social Media and Group Chats Among Players

Minor Athletes often create group chats through texting or other social media applications. Such group chats are concerning because Minors may engage in bullying behavior, sexual misconduct, harassment, threats, discriminatory and other inappropriate conduct that may violate policies of USA Hockey. Group chats among Minor Athletes should be supervised by an adult to mitigate these risks.

Request to Discontinue All Electronic Communications or Imagery with Athlete

Following receipt of a written request by the parents of a Minor Athlete that their child not be contacted through any form of electronic communication by coaches or other adults in the program, the Member Program, team, coaches and administrators must immediately comply with such request without any repercussions for such request.

Abuse and Misconduct

Social media and other means of electronic communication can be used to commit abuse and misconduct (e.g., emotional, sexual, bullying, harassment, and hazing). Such communications by any employee, volunteer, independent contractor or other Participant of a USA Hockey Member Program will not be tolerated and are considered violations of USA Hockey’s Safe Sport Program.

A USA Hockey Participant who violates this Social Media & Electronic Communications Policy is subject to appropriate disciplinary action including but not limited to suspension, permanent suspension and/or referral to law enforcement authorities.