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# Good Practice Guidelines on the use of Social Networking Sites

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for AT&FCA Vic  
Coaches and their  
Athletes

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*AT&FCA Victoria*  
*- August 2012*

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# Good Practice Guidelines on the use of Social Networking Sites by Coaches and their Athletes

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## Background

There has been a growing awareness in sport of the increasing communication by adults and young people on rapidly developing social networking sites and how these media have become a feature of social communication. There are risks associated with these developments, and ATFCA Vic has identified a number of issues that could lead to both disciplinary and safeguarding concerns which stem from the improper or inappropriate use of such sites by its members.

These guidelines should be read in conjunction with the ATFCA "[Code of Ethics for Coaches](#)"<sup>i</sup>, and the Australian Sports Commission's "[Coach's Code of Behaviour](#)"<sup>ii</sup>

## Introduction

ATFCA Vic recognise that the use of social networking sites such as *My Space*, *Facebook* and *Twitter* is a rapidly growing phenomenon and is increasingly being used as a communication tool of choice by young people<sup>1</sup> and more recently by adults. Facebook is the largest such site whose "mission is to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected", and is reported to have in excess of five hundred million active users worldwide.

These sites permit users to chat online, post pictures, and write 'blogs' etc, through the creation of an online profile, that can either be publicly available to all, or restricted to an approved circle of online friends.

Sites such as *You Tube* and *Google* provide a platform for uploading and viewing video clips, which with the latest cameras and mobile phones becomes ever easier and can be almost instantaneous.

In addition to these sites, Twitter is a social networking and micro blogging service that enables users to send and read other user messages called tweets. Tweets are like online text messages of up to a maximum of 140 characters displayed on the author's profile page. Tweets are publicly visible by default, however the sender can restrict message delivery to their friends list only.

Whilst these technologies provide exciting opportunities, they are accompanied by dangers and negative consequences if abused by users.

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<sup>1</sup> Note: Throughout this guide a young person/child is considered to be anyone under the age of 18.

The purpose of this guide is to provide a recommendation of best practice to all ATFCA Vic Coaches and their Athletes (and parents) on the use of social networking sites as they relate to that individual's role in ATFCA Vic and its associated activities.

## **Guidance for Coaches, Presenters and other ATFCA Vic Officers in a Position of Trust and Responsibility in respect of Youth**

1. ATFCA members in a position of trust and/or responsibility should not be in contact with young people through social networking sites if they hold such a position in respect of that individual young person.
2. Should a young person in your coaching group request to become a named friend on your Social Networking Page or request that you become a named friend on the young person's Social Networking Page you should decline if any of the below apply:
  - You are in a position of responsibility in respect of that child.
  - You hold a position of trust and responsibility in the associated athletics club.
  - Your contact with the child is through an athletics club and the parent/guardian of the child does not clearly give their consent to such contact.
3. The social network site should never be used as a medium by which to abuse or criticise Coaches or club members.
4. The publishing of a photograph or video footage on a social networking site is governed by the same requirements as any other media<sup>iii</sup>.

## **Guidance to Coaches who have Children that Participate in the Club where they Coach**

The issue has been raised that, for security reasons, parents are becoming members of social networking sites that their children sign up to in order to ensure the wellbeing of their own child by being able to view their child's site. This will give the parent access via their child's site to all children listed as friends of their child. It would not be appropriate for ATFCA Vic to prevent a parent who is also a coach in their child's club from using this form of protection for their child's online activities.

Therefore in such cases:

- the coach can have athletes in the club on the site they are accessing, providing athletes under 18 year old on the site are listed as friends of their child;
- the coach concerned should not have direct contact with those athletes through the social networking site;
- the coach should not accept such athletes as friends on their home site; and
- the coach should inform the club and the ATFCA Vic Secretary of this arrangement.

## Coaches/Presenters/Officials who are under 18.

ATFCA Vic recognises that social networking sites can be a useful tool for coaches, presenters and officials within ATFCA to share information with other coaches, presenters or officials. If, however, the coach, presenter or official is under the age of 18, while they may be a colleague, the requirements of 1 and 2 above must be adhered to.

However, for a young person aged 16 or 17 who is officially coaching as a member of ATFCA Vic, restricting their ability to share professional information with other coaches or officials may be detrimental to their professional development. Therefore, in such cases if the parent of a young person in a position of responsibility aged 16/17 and the young person themselves requests to have contact with an adult coach for the purposes of sharing professional information relevant to their role, the coach and club should:

- gain written consent of the parent/guardian and young person to have such contact, naming the individual adult coach and social networking site concerned;
- obtain a signed agreement to keep the contact with the young person to the discussion of matters relevant to the young person's professional role in the club and ATFCA;
- ensure all such communications are shared with an identified third person (e.g. the young person's parent/guardian or club welfare officer); and,
- if the young person or the adult coach is found to breach the above agreement, action must be taken by the club to address the concern and/or have the breach referred to ATFCA Vic or the statutory authorities if appropriate.

## Guidance to Athletes under the Age of 18

1. Do not ask your club coach or teacher to be your social networking site friend – they will refuse as that would breach good practice.
2. Use the internet positively and do not place yourself at risk. Have a look at [ThinkUKnow Australia - for Youth](#) for some useful tips.
3. Post only events that have already happened. Do not post items that describe your or your friends' personal plans and future movements.
3. Consider who you are inviting to be your friend and follow the good advice of the social networking sites to ensure you are talking to the person you believe you are talking to.
4. Always remember that anything you post online, including photos, pictures and video clips posted on your site, may be shared with people other than those for whom it was intended.
5. Never post or send any photographs, videos or make comments that may be:
  - hurtful, untrue and upsetting and you may regret sharing later on; or,
  - may be used by other people in a way you did not intend or want.

6. Do not put pictures of other athletes on the site within the coaching or athletic club setting as you may breach club or ATFCA Vic photography policy. If you do wish to upload such a picture you must get advice and consent of your parent, the other young person and their parent and a club officer before even considering uploading such a photo. This will not prevent you having pictures of your athletics friends on your site if they are taken outside the sporting arena but it is good advice to always ensure they and their parents are happy with any picture you have of them on your site.

7. Always be aware that social networking sites are a method of communication like letter writing and the spoken word. They are bound by the same laws and rules. Such technology is instant and this allows you as the user to react in the 'heat of the moment', where in the past you would have been required to write a letter which would have taken time and allowed for you to think again before sending. So never place a comment on the internet that you would not put in writing or say to the individual concerned as to do so may not only breach club or ATFCA policy but also the law.

## Guidance to Parents of Athletes under the Age of 18

There may be occasions where parents of athletes have used social networking sites to criticise or verbally abuse athletic clubs, its officers, officials, coaches, and presenters in an inappropriate and unacceptable manner. This can in some cases lead the person who is the subject of the verbal abuse to take action through statutory agencies or statutory legislation to address the comments made.

Your child's athletic club should have produced a parent's code of conduct. This would be expected to state that parents are expected to:

*“Behave responsibly as a spectator at training and treat athletes, coaches, technical (athletics) officials, committee members and parents of yours and other clubs with due respect, meeting the club's and ATFCA Victoria's commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion”.*

Parents should be aware that posting messages, comments or any other media on a social networking site that breaches the above requirement of a parent in an athletic club will breach ATFCA Vic and the club's Parents Code of Conduct.

## What to do if You have Concerns

As a user of a social networking site, whether you are a child or an adult, you may at some time have a concern about what you are seeing or being told about by another user. Concerns may range from negative or abusive comments, and cyber bullying to suspected grooming for sexual abuse.

ATFCA Vic have drawn up a list below of agencies that you can contact, anonymously if you wish, where you can raise such concerns.

- [ThinkUKnow Australia](#) is an Internet safety program delivering interactive training to parents, carers and teachers through schools and organisations across Australia using a network of accredited trainers. Created by the UK Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) Centre, ThinkUKnow Australia has been developed by the Australian Federal Police (AFP) and Microsoft Australia.
- [ThinkUKnow Australia - for Youth](#) includes step-by-step guides on staying safe online.
- Local Police and children's services.
- The [Virtual Global Taskforce](#) is made up of police forces from around the world working together to fight online child abuse. The website contains a lot of information for young people and adults about internet safety, as well as a button for reporting abuse.
- The Australian Government's ['Stay Smart Online' web site](#).



They work in partnership with other agencies to minimise the availability of this content, specifically:

- child sexual abuse images hosted anywhere in the world.
- criminally obscene adult content hosted in Australia
- incitement to racial hatred content hosted in Australia
- non-photographic child sexual abuse images hosted in Australia

## Acknowledgement

This document is adapted from “Good Practice Guidelines on the use of Social Networking Sites by ASA Clubs and Club Members” – by the ASA. The ASA is the governing body for swimming in England.

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i ATFCA Code of Ethics for Coaches: <http://www.atfca.com.au/codeofethics.ews>

ii ASC Coach's Code of Behaviour: <http://www.ausport.gov.au/.../Guidelines/policy/coachbehaviour>

iii In Australia, generally speaking, there is no law restricting photography of people (including children) in public spaces as long as the images are not:

- indecent (such as 'up skirt' or 'down blouse' photographs taken covertly);
- being used for voyeurism;
- protected by a court order (eg, child custody or witness protection);
- defamatory; or,
- being for commercial purposes (person's likeness is used to endorse or entice people to buy a product).

Only use appropriate images of the child, relevant to the sport or activity, and ensure that the athlete/child is suitably clothed.

Ensure the coach informs any athlete and their parent if the coach wants to video the athlete as a tool to analyse and improve performance. Before approving photo or video sessions outside the event venue, obtain the consent of a parent or guardian and their agreement to be present.

Where a sporting event is held on a club's private property, privately owned land, a school, or council owned facilities, the owner of the private property or the venue is able to restrict, ban or require permission of photography anywhere in their venue.