Sandycove Tennis & Squash Club

Social Media Appendix 1: WhatsApp Guidelines

Introduction

Sandycove Tennis & Squash Club have increasingly been using WhatsApp as a primary real-time communication tool to foster our tennis community, coordinate matches, events and broadcast announcements, complementing traditional methods like email (e.g. weekly newsletter) and websites. Information updates can be shared quickly via WhatsApp such as updates between committees and members on court conditions, safety requirements, facility upgrades, late availability of courts and facilitating social events.

Key Features and Capabilities

- Communication Methods: Send text messages, audio files, videos, documents, GIFs, and user locations.
- Voice and Video Calls: Free, secure, high-quality voice and video calls (up to 32 people).
- Group Chats: Allows creating large group chats that can be named and customised, ideal for organisations and events.
- Security: All personal messages and calls are protected by end-to-end encryption, ensuring only the intended recipient can read or listen to them.
- Platform Versatility: Works on both mobile (Android/iOS) and desktop (Windows/Mac), enabling synchronisation across devices.
- Additional Tools: Includes features like "Status" (disappearing updates), voice messages, and link-sharing for video calls.
- Organisational & Administrative control: Groups can be managed by assigned administrators, who control user membership and group permissions efficiently
- Professional Collaboration: Used widely for rapid, real-time coordination and information sharing in group settings.

Using WhatsApp for communication in a tennis/sports club environment, particularly with young members, presents significant safeguarding risks due to its nature as a private, informal, and end-to-end encrypted platform. The minimum age to use WhatsApp in Ireland is 13 years of age.

Safeguarding Concerns when using WhatsApp for Club Communications

Key safeguarding concerns, aligned with industry standards and best practices, include:

- Encrypted messages pose a risk to young people, which means that only the sender and recipient can see messages, making it impossible for the club to monitor for inappropriate, harmful, or grooming behaviour.
- Disappearing Messages/View Once: Features like "view once" or vanishing messages can be misused to share inappropriate images or content without leaving a trace.
- Direct Private Messaging: Adults can message Children privately, removing parental supervision and transparency
- Phone Number Sharing: When in a group chat, all members (including other parents and children) can see each other's personal phone numbers and profile pictures, which is a major data protection (GDPR) concern.
- Group invite links can be shared, allowing unauthorized individuals to join chats, or people can be added without their explicit consent.
- There is a risk of inappropriate images or videos being shared within the group, exposing children to harmful content.

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- There is no centralised record or audit trail, as WhatsApp conversations are not saved in a central database, making it impossible for tennis/sports clubs to audit and fully investigate communications in the case of a complaint or safety concern
- The "Live Location" feature on the sharing locations could be misused, exposing a young person's real-time location.
- GDPR Non-Compliance: Privacy experts and national governing bodies advise against using WhatsApp for official, formal communication because it makes complying with data protection laws challenging.

Due to GDPR compliance risks, WhatsApp is not approved for official club business. Please use dedicated club emails, SMS services, or platforms aligned with our social media Policy.

Safer Club WhatsApp Groups

There is a clear, actionable framework for safe and effective communication within a sports, tennis, or club setting using WhatsApp. Following these dos and don'ts guidelines helps maintain compliance with safeguarding, GDPR, and child protection requirements.

Important Safety & Privacy Notes

- **Junior Members:** Minors (under 18) must not be added to any WhatsApp groups. Parents or guardians must join the group to represent the minor. A minor may only join if their parent or guardian is also present in that exact group. Personal contact details of minors must never be shared or made visible in group chats.
- **GDPR Privacy:** Be aware that WhatsApp group members can see each other's phone numbers.
- **Removal:** Administrators must be prepared to remove individuals who do not comply with the rules.

✅ **Do...**

- **Establish Adult Supervision:** Ensure an adult (Coach, Tennis Captain, or Staff) sets up the group and holds administration rights.
- **Appoint Multiple Leads:** Have at least 2 trusted adults as admins who are accountable to each other and adhere to the club's code of conduct and safeguarding procedures.
- **Broadcast-by-Default:** Configure WhatsApp groups to **"Only Admins"** posting to prevent message clutter and unwanted comments. ***Exceptions:*** Reserve open-posting formats strictly for groups that require active, multi-party collaboration.
- **Define Purpose & Scope:** Clearly inform participant members and parents about what the app is and is not to be used for (e.g., only event logistics).
- **Obtain Agreement:** Get members to agree on intended use (e.g., event-specific, scheduling).
- **Maintain Professionalism:** Use appropriate, respectful language and discuss only relevant topics.
- **Provide Reporting Mechanisms:** Ensure members know how to report inappropriate content immediately.

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- **Verify Compliance:** Ensure all administrators are Garda vetted (if applicable), have completed safeguarding training, and understand online safety policies.
- **Opt-in Setup:** Ensure participation is on a voluntary, opt-in basis, and that members understand their phone numbers are visible.
- **Support:** Signposted young people to helpful resources, websites and support (for online safety and social media usage) and letting young people, parents and carers know who they can go to if they have any worries, concerns or need any help.

❌ **Don't...**

- **Use for Private Messaging:** Do not use group chats for private conversations, especially between coaches and individuals.
- **Replace Official Communication:** Do not use WhatsApp to replace formal feedback, urgent safeguarding issues, or official correspondence.
- **Mix Organisations:** Do not use the app for non-organisation or unrelated social messaging
- **Air Grievances:** Do not discuss complaints or personal grievances in the group chat.
- **Message Children Directly:** Coaches and leaders should not send direct, individual messages to children or young people.
- **Share Personal Data:** Avoid sharing personal data, including photos of children other than your own, without consent.
- **Allow Unrestricted Access:** Do not allow members to post inappropriate content, promotions, or spam.

For safeguarding support and child protection queries, please contact your Club Children's Officer (CCO) at child.protection@sandycovetsc.ie

Important Note: *The Club Children's Officer (CCO) acts as the link between children and adults regarding safeguarding. If the concern is an emergency, it should be reported to Tusla or local An Garda Síochána immediately.*

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