

Advice on Chat-room use

Ulster Branch Tennis Ireland is fully committed to safeguarding the well being of its members.

Every individual in the organisation should, at all times, show respect and understanding for their rights, safety and welfare, and conduct themselves in a way that reflects the principles of the organisation and the guidelines contained in the Code of Ethics and Good Practice for Children's Sport

With our commitment to safeguard child and young people in mind we have consulted with the NSPCC's Child Protection in Sport Unit www.thecpsu.org.uk and considered information provided by Stop It Now! UK & Ireland www.stopitnow.org.uk and the Child Exploitation On-line Protection Service www.ceop.gov.uk. to produce the following information on the use of chat-rooms.

Why do we need to know about the new technologies and how they may be used to harm children?

Friendship websites 'exposing children to porn and bullying'

Recent research by Computing Which? has found examples of pornography and cyber-bullying in internet chat-rooms aimed at young people. An adult researcher easily set up an account for one of the chat-rooms as a 14-year-old without having to prove their age or identity. The websites also contained several pornographic profiles, which researchers were able to access minutes after logging on. The Government's Child Exploitation Centre has recently said that it is collaborating with the relevant websites on this issue.

Daily Telegraph 14 September 2006 P17

The following text is adapted from Stop It Now! guidelines on Safeguarding Children who use new technologies.

Over the past twenty years, we have come to understand the true extent of child sexual abuse and the impact that it has both on the child victims and on the wider family. We know that children are unlikely to tell anyone if they have been sexually abused and that the harm sexual abuse causes can impact on them for the rest of their lives. The sooner abuse is identified, the sooner the healing process can begin for all concerned.

Since the recent introduction of computers, mobile phones and digital cameras, we are beginning to understand the ways in which the new technologies may be used to sexually abuse children and young people. We are also learning how children and young people who use the new technologies may place themselves at risk and be vulnerable to abuse. When communicating with people via the internet and mobile phones, young people tend to become less wary and will talk about things far more openly than they might when communicating with someone face to face.

Young people may not always follow 'keep safe on the net' advice. By the very nature of their age and development, they tend to be adventurous, prepared to take risks and become less wary when communicating with people via the internet. They are often fearful of their parents, carers, other important adults in their lives and even their friends finding out about what they may have said to other people whilst communicating on the "net".

It is important that all adults are aware of the potential dangers to children and young people and are able to prevent them from being harmed. We can do this by being aware of the warning signs to look out for and, if we are concerned about the attitudes and behaviours of people we live with or know, by being prepared to challenge and question their behaviour.

What Coaches Must Avoid

Communicating and forming a “friendship” with children online with the intent of arranging to meet them in the ‘real world’ to sexually abuse them.

This process of developing a relationship with a child online is called manipulation or “grooming” and chat-rooms are the most likely place for such behaviour to start. The ‘real time’ nature of chat offers particular opportunities for direct and immediate contact.

Children may be encouraged to go off into a private conversation and also to use a webcam and voice technologies.

In some cases, relationships may be initiated in a chat room and continued through instant messaging, email and telephone (often mobile) contact.

Instant messaging differs from ordinary email in that the messages are delivered immediately making dialogue much easier. It also offers the facility for private chat-rooms and file transfer in which you can send and receive computer files.

Encouraging children to hold sexual conversations in which the abuser instructs the child to engage in, and talk about, sexual behaviour – this is sometimes referred to as cybersex

Again, the most common places for an abuser to commence targeting and grooming children for these purposes are teen chat-rooms. Such behaviour takes place online, without physical contact between the abuser and child. Despite the lack of physical contact, children can be frightened and traumatised by such behaviour.

How is the grooming of children different online?

Grooming online is faster and anonymous and results in children trusting an online ‘friend’ more quickly than they would someone they had just met ‘face to face’. Those intent on sexually harming children can easily access information about them and they are able to hide their true identity, age and gender. Groomers may not be restricted by time or accessibility to a child as they would be in the ‘real world’.

If you are worried that someone is using the new technologies in a way that may be harmful to children, we need to take some action. It is very disturbing to suspect someone we know of sexually abusing a child, especially if the person is a friend, member of our family or coach. It is much easier to dismiss such thoughts and put them down to imagination. But it is better to talk over the situation with someone than to discover later that we were right to be worried.

Contact the Stop it Now! Helpline **Freephone 0808 1000 900**

A Sports Leader involved in TENNIS will have agreed to the TENNIS IRELAND code of conduct and in particular the following points to ensure the safety of children and to protect their own integrity.

1. Treat all students fairly within the context of their sporting activities, regardless of gender, race, place of origin, athletic potential, colour, sexual orientation, religion, political beliefs, socio-economic status, and any other condition.
2. Encourage students to respect one another and to expect respect for their worth as individuals regardless of their level of play.
3. Be acutely aware of the power that you as a coach develop with your students in the coaching relationships and avoid any sexual intimacy with students that could develop as a result.
4. Never ask anyone to keep secrets of any kind.
5. Actively discourage the use of performance- enhancing drugs, the use of alcohol and tobacco and any illegal substance.
6. At all times act as a role model that promotes the positive aspects of sport and of ULSTER BRANCH TENNIS IRELAND by maintaining the highest standards of personal conduct and projecting a favourable image of TENNIS and of coaching at all times.
7. Do not exploit any coaching relationship to further personal, political, or business interests at the expense of the best interest of your students.
8. Encourage students and other coaches to develop and maintain integrity in their relationships with others.