

# LTA INTERIM GUIDELINES FOR REMOTE COMMUNICATION WITH PLAYERS

As a result of social distancing measures currently in place, some practitioners (such as tennis coaches, psychologists, physiotherapists, strength and conditioning coaches, performance lifestyle advisors, etc.) will be required, as part of their job, to support players remotely through the use of digital communication.

This document sets out guidelines on how these practitioners should operate when needing to provide remote support to players under the age of 18.

## CONTEXT

It is important for practitioners to build effective relationships with players in the performance environment. This requires support that meets the needs of both the “person” and the “performer”. It is important to understand the context on the type of conversations some roles might be expected to facilitate whilst working with a player. These are roles which may typically engage in conversations with players that are more pastoral in nature. For example, a tennis coach may need to better understand a player’s performance by having a conversation with them about their home life or school life.

Practitioners are to ensure that communication with players outside of scheduled sessions (e.g. a counselling/coaching session) involves their parent/carer. If this is not possible, there should be a second practitioner present/included. There are some exemptions to these points as detailed in this document.

Some roles are directly positioned to support player well-being and are therefore delivered in one to one environments (upon receiving written parental consent). These are usually members of the well-being group (Performance Lifestyle Advisors, Sport Psychologists, Clinical Psychologist, Medical Doctor) and collectively have the expertise to support any concerns raised to player or staff well-being. Practitioners in this group may at times be required to maintain player confidentiality in regards to well-being support. This confidentiality may also extend to certain follow up communication, e.g. emails which relate to what was discussed in the session. This means that it may not necessarily be appropriate to include parents or other practitioners in the sessions or related communications.

Whatever the role or set of circumstances, clear boundaries must be maintained to ensure communication is at all times professional. The content of any conversation or communication should at all times be professional, respectful and related to the player’s tennis development.

## TYPES OF COMMUNICATION

With the above in mind, we have set out the primary types of communication that we anticipate practitioners will have with players.

Prior to any remote communication taking place, practitioners should make the player/family aware that any safeguarding concerns can be reported , to the LTA Safeguarding Team online at <https://safeguardingconcern.lta.org.uk/> as well as to the police in an emergency (999).

## **Texting**

Text messages can be sent to players if this is done through a WhatsApp group that includes their parent(s) and is for tennis related matters. However, practitioners must not give players their personal mobile number.

If a practitioner only has one mobile phone, and it is not possible to have a second, they must ensure the parents and player understand this and agree and adhere to clear boundaries.

In some circumstances it may be necessary for practitioners to text players directly for logistical reasons and if it is impractical to text the parents. For example, cancelling or rescheduling a session, or sending the address of a venue.

Where this type of one to one communication by text message is needed, the messages are not to be deleted from the device. This will help ensure an audit trail of messages exists.

Routine arrangement of lessons must not be made directly with children, unless parents are also contained within the communications group i.e. WhatsApp, email, etc.

## **Telephone calls**

One to one telephone calls are fine if the practitioner is required as part of their role to have the same type of conversation with the player in person and are either unable to do so, or because telephone calls form part of the support package. For example, a counselling session or follow up call to check in on a player. We would not expect practitioners to routinely call (or text, email, etc.) players if the conversation can/should be done in person, so as to help limit unnecessary digital communication.

In some circumstances it may be necessary for practitioners to call players for logistical or pastoral reasons. For example, to let them know they are running late, to cancel or reschedule a session, or when on a trip it becomes necessary to call the player.

## **Email**

Emails to players should copy in the parent/carer and must always be about tennis related matters. Practitioners must not give players their personal email address.

Practitioners who do not already have a business email address should create one, for example, using an email provider such as Gmail.

Where one to one communication by email is needed, the messages are not to be deleted. This will help ensure an audit trail of messages exists.

## **Video Calls**

Use an appropriate and professional platform, e.g. Microsoft Teams, Zoom, PowWowNow or Skype.

Practitioners are to use their professional email to create an account on these platforms. If they already have an account on a platform that uses their personal email, they should create a second one using their professional email or change the account contact details.

There have been reports of people hijacking video meetings and showing graphic and disturbing material. It is therefore strongly recommended that practitioners do not publicly share the meeting ID for any video meetings they plan to run. The best advice is to provide the meeting ID and password just prior to the meeting. We recommend that practitioners familiarise themselves with the platforms' privacy settings and know how to report any offensive or abusive content.

Whenever a video call with a player is required their parent must be informed and asked to provide their written consent for it to happen (if there is a schedule of sessions, overall consent can be provided). Video calls should involve another adult (this could be another practitioner or a parent depending on what is most appropriate/possible).

Roles which are directly positioned to support player well-being (Performance Lifestyle Advisors, Sport Psychologists, Clinical Psychologists, Medical Doctors) and operate in one to one settings can have one to one video calls without the parents or another practitioner being present. Written parental consent must have been obtained.

## RECORDING VIDEO SESSIONS

We recommend that practitioners working in a psychosocial role (e.g. psychologists, counsellors, Performance Lifestyle Advisors) do not record any video sessions. Given the confidential and personal nature of the sessions, there are high risks associated with recording sessions, such as:

- Recording sessions removes privacy and confidentiality and could lead to players opting out of the support.
- Recording sessions could also lead players to withhold information, which could restrict the ability of the practitioner to support the player.
- If a recording were disclosed to others it could have serious implications for the player, practitioner and organisation.

If other practitioners who do not work in a psychosocial role wish to record any non-counselling sessions (such as a coaching lesson), we would suggest that they only do so if they consider it necessary and proportionate, after conducting a written risk assessment. Any risk assessment should weigh up the risks of recording against the risks of not recording. The inadvertent recording or disclosure of confidential information must be included in the risks associated with recording. They must also make sure that they have the appropriate policies and systems in place to make and store the recording in accordance with the relevant data protection laws.

The relevant practitioner leading the meeting will be responsible for any recording of the video calls and making a record of any summary notes and where appropriate sending to the player.

Practitioners should avoid taking photos of video sessions, especially when players are visible. If photos need to be taken, the appropriate consent must be in place. Identifying details of players must be kept to a minimum – for more information please review the [guidance on photography and filming](#).

## COMMUNICATION LOG

Practitioners are advised to complete a central communication log at the end of each day that summarises the details of all remote communications with players during any week. Any communication completed outside of this guidance would be considered a breach of safeguarding policy.

## EXPECTATIONS OF PRACTITIONERS

- you will follow this guidance to help ensure good practice
- you will seek advice from your Welfare Officer and/or the LTA Safeguarding Team if you have any concerns about communications
- you will not 'friend' or 'follow' players on social media
- you will make sure any communication is accurate and appropriate
- you will not engage in (or otherwise encourage others to) sexting, or sending pictures or messages that are abusive, obscene, inappropriate, indecent or menacing to anyone
- you will sign off any communication in a professional manner, avoiding the use of emojis or symbols such as kisses (“X’s”)
- if a player tries to engage you in a conversation which is not tennis related and falls outside the remit of your role to engage in, you will:
  - respond professionally and in accordance with professional boundaries
  - let the player know they cannot continue the conversation
  - make the Welfare Officer (or the LTA Safeguarding Team in their absence) aware as soon as possible so that advice can be provided
  - if the player indicates or is felt to be at risk of harm to themselves/at risk of harming others, or that they are in danger of harm from others, you should:
    - ❖ Call 999 in an emergency
    - ❖ inform the LTA safeguarding team as soon as possible
    - ❖ Keep a record of conversations
- you will ensure any safeguarding concerns are reported to the LTA Safeguarding Team at <https://safeguardingconcern.lta.org.uk/> and to the police in an emergency (999). Examples of concerns which might arise during online meetings might include:
  - seeing or hearing something worrying
  - a player discloses abuse during a session
  - inappropriate behaviour or messages are used/sent during (or outside of) a meeting

### Remember:

Operating in high performance environments is at times complex, and there may be times when you feel unclear if something is a safeguarding concern or worried if a particular type of practice will cause an issue. However you should never feel alone and the best course of action is to seek advice. If you have any questions please reach out to the LTA Safeguarding Team.