

# GROUP CHAT POLICY

**Responsibility:** Board of Directors

**Scope of Policy:** All club staff, volunteers, and athletes

**Adopted:** March 2025

**To be reviewed:** Within two years of being adopted



**This is a new policy. Please review and provide feedback you may have.**

Online chat applications are used widely by members of our community to facilitate team building, communication and coordination. These powerful tools benefit from well-informed safety and security considerations, and adherence to common etiquette.

The following are some helpful guidelines to help create safe online spaces, while maintaining efficient, effective club and team communication.

## 1. Purpose

The purpose of chat groups is to communicate club information, foster club unity and community, and celebrate the achievements of VWPC athletes.

The safety and security of our athletes is a fundamental priority when using online tools for communication.

## 2. Helpful Policy

Communication between Vortex Water Polo Club members is informed by a number of policies. Please take a moment to review them, as they contain important information and helpful guidance. Material from these policies is also integrated into this guidebook.

**Policies include, but are not limited to, the following:**

- [Coaching Association of Canada, The Rule of Two](#)
- [Coaching Association of Canada, Responsible Coaching Movement, Electronic Communications and Social Media Use Guidelines](#)
- [MWPA Athlete Protection Guidelines](#)
- [MWPA Social Media Policy](#)
- [Water Polo Canada Social Media Policy](#)

### 3. Safety and Security

There are inherent risks for children and youth with the use of popular online communication tools. They intertwine communication with a variety of content and services that put children at greater risk for exposure to harmful content and contact by individuals seeking to harm kids, but with few meaningful protective measures. As such, youth are vulnerable to cyberbullying, unwanted sexual messages or images, intimate image abuse, grooming, sextortion and other forms of harmful or abusive content on these platforms.<sup>1</sup>

While no online platform is completely secure for kids, there are services that provide avenues for online communication that are much less likely to be targeted by those wishing to harm children.

**Paid services** often provide better safety and security for users since ‘free’ services are user-volume and engagement driven in their financial models. These paid services not only provide barriers to entry but also limit the push and ability to engage with a larger set of unknown users.

**Sport-focused apps** narrow the content and connection available to kids as well as focus the network/channels that children communicate in. They also allow parents to be connected through the same closed, team-specific networks as their children, providing an additional layer of oversight in the online environment.

Apps or services selected by VWPC or individual teams should:

- Have terms of service with age restrictions in line with the ages of those athletes utilising the app or service
- Limit connections outside of the closed network of the team
- Minimise exposure to harmful content
- Provide straightforward mechanisms for reporting abuse
- Allow avenues for parental control, oversight and engagement

### 4. The Rule of Two Online

Vortex Water Polo Club adheres to [The Rule of Two](#), which serves to guide all interactions between athletes and adults. Its safeguarding principles are applied not only in-person interactions, but also to online communications between athletes and any “Persons of Authority”<sup>2</sup>, as defined by the MWPA.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/online-grooming-crimes-reach-record-levels-nspcc-says-OLBY7WT3SFO5ZFWO7LI5HUIQDQ/>; <https://www.theverge.com/2024/10/1/24259653/snap-new-mexico-ag-lawsuit-csam-kids-safety>; <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2024/nov/30/instagram-actively-helping-to-spread-of-self-harm-among-teenagers-study-suggests>; <https://www.cypnow.co.uk/content/news/childrens-safety-campaigners-call-for-whatsapp-to-reverse-age-limit-reduction/>; <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/online-groups-persuading-youth-self-harm-1.7107885>; <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/security/telegram-ceo-pavel-durov-child-safety-rcna168266>

<sup>2</sup> [MWPA Athlete Protection Guidelines](#), Section 1, Definitions: “Any Participant who holds a position of authority within the Organisation, including, but not limited to, coaches, instructors, officials, managers, support personnel, chaperones, committee members and Directors and Officers.”

There are three key principles of The Rule of Two: open, observable and justifiable. According to the [Coaching Association of Canada](#), those principles apply in the following fashion to online communications:

1. **Open** - Preferred communication methods should be documented and communicated at the beginning of the season to all participants. Clear expectations for online behaviour, in line with the club's Code of Conduct, should also be set out. The schedule, purpose and format of any online communication should be available to parents/guardians and the sport organisation.
2. **Observable** - As with the Rule of Two in person, two trained and screened coaches should be present for all online communications. Exchanges on social media should be "public", and one-on-one communication is discouraged. All electronic communications and interactions should be logged/recorded, and regularly shared with parents/guardians and/or the sports organization. At the end of the life of each group chat, the record that be saved by the club in a confidential manner for one year after the end of the group chat.
3. **Justifiable** - Communication should be necessary, administrative, and/or focus exclusively on supporting athlete engagement and development. Communication of a personal nature, or closed/private communications, is discouraged.

The above principles and policies should be followed when communicating with athletes via any online means. These include, but are not limited to the following, as defined by the Coaching Association of Canada:

**Electronic communications** - media that is primarily for connecting with other users without content-sharing or social networking functionality. Includes email, text messaging (SMS), video sessions, virtual meeting platforms and similar applications.

**Social media** - platforms that permit users to connect and create, access, and exchange user-created content. They include Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, LinkedIn, Twitter, WhatsApp, TeamSnap and similar web or mobile-based applications.

## 5. Chats with Athletes

Online communication can enhance team bonding, clarify expectations, encourage participation and excellence, and much more. Use the following helpful policies and guidelines when creating and using an online space to communicate with athletes.

### Parental Requests

Parents/guardians may request that underage athletes not be contacted via any form of online communication. In such cases, important club/team information must be provided to parents/guardians via a separate communication channel (within reason, ex. not by snail mail).

### Communicating with Athletes

In this section, all adults are equivalent to “Persons of Authority”. According to the MWPA, when communicating with athletes via digital means, adults must specifically:

- Only communicate with athletes when necessary, and only about club or team matters
- Always maintain a professional tone and remain on topic
- Avoid using emojis and unspecific language that can be misinterpreted
- Avoid all communications of a personal matter unless circumstances justify otherwise, in which case the messages must be available for review by parents/guardians/other adults
- Avoid all one-on-one communication with athletes
- Message only between the hours of 6 am and midnight, unless circumstances justify otherwise, ex. team is travelling together after midnight
- No messaging about alcohol or drugs, unless regarding prohibition
- No sexually explicit or suggestive language, or imagery, or sexually oriented conversation of any kind
- Never request that an athlete to keep a secret

## 6. Community Digital Etiquette

Most of us are aware of common digital etiquette guidelines, and use them on a daily basis. VWPC encourages everyone to continue to behave in a measured, thoughtful and polite manner whenever interacting with fellow members in group chats, always remembering that our online community is an extension of our real life community.

### General

- Participation in chat groups is optional
- Chats will only be used to communicate about water polo and club-related activities
- Keep the chat positive, and focus on enhancing club morale
- Participation is open to all members of the intended group, ex. all parents/guardians of a given team of athletes
- Individuals who are not members of an intended group are not permitted to join, ex. athletes who are not on the U16 girls team may not join the U16 girls chat group
- Absolutely no promotions, spamming or using member information for any purpose outside those of the chat
- Take complaints about the club directly to the appropriate staff, coach or director
- Consider using the “[24 Hour Rule](#)” when raising concerns or complaints
- Any language or behaviour that violates the VWPC Code of Conduct is strictly forbidden and will result in being removed from the chat

### Messaging

- Communicate as clearly and concisely as possible
- Avoid posting misleading comments, unverified/uninformed information
- Maintain a professional tone
- Be careful when using emojis or humour as it can be misinterpreted
- Proofread your messages before sending
- Read the chat to stay abreast of news, questions and discussions

- Answer questions, participate in surveys, and share information if it is requested of you
- Be mindful of changing or introducing a new topic if there is an active discussion
- Avoid texting at off-hours unless necessary or expected, ex. communicating from a tournament in a different time zone

## **Privacy**

- Group chat members should not:
  - Directly discuss the performances of players on the team
  - Directly criticise (or name) players or coaches
  - Directly criticise (or name) players on opposing team
  - Directly criticise opposing teams
- Group chats are private, and members should not take or share screen shots of group conversations
- Imagery shared through chat that aligns with the VWPC Code of Conduct should never be downloaded, screen captured, altered and/or shared outside the context of the chat or service it was originally posted to

## **7. Setting Up a New Group Chat**

If a new chat group needs to be set up for a group, such as for an out-of-town tournament or for a new team, consider the following helpful guidelines:

- Participation in any chat group is optional
- Clearly articulate what purpose it will serve, and who should join
- Use an app with appropriate security and safety features, especially for chats with underage athletes
- Use an appropriate app that is already widely used by intended participants - avoid adding to digital clutter
- Try to create chat names that are concise and fully visible on the chat list: ex. “Vortex 18U Boys SK Tournament” vs. “VWPC 18UB Sask”

Group chats are a common part of participating on a sports team, or having a child who participates on a sports team. By adhering to the VWPC Group Chat Policy, we hope that group chats will continue to be valuable tools in safeguarding athletes, and helping build community, unity, and good communication.

**[PROVIDE FEEDBACK HERE](#)**