

Athletics Ireland WhatsApp Guidelines

WhatsApp ***should not*** replace your club's official source of formal sharing of information i.e. email and SMS.

WhatsApp is an instant messaging app that has become a popular way of sharing information in sport. It is often used to communicate training times to groups, share information on events as well as general dissemination of information to parents and coaches. The proprietary, cross-platform app uses the Internet to send text messages, images, video, user location and audio media messages. It has become very popular in clubs and societies who use it to communicate to groups. WhatsApp use is informal in its nature. There will be members who do not and will not wish to join the club's parent or adult training WhatsApp groups. These members will still rely on formal notifications from the club regarding their training or the training of their children.

If your club decides to use WhatsApp as an informal means of communication (in addition to official club channels), you must do so with explicit consent from the person to be included in the WhatsApp group. Please take time to research which is the safest format for your members and ensure that the groups intended use is clear from the outset. When setting up new groups it is imperative that the participants **consent is always sought** through a formal request to join and an option to decline. Participants should never be automatically added. This is a requirement under GDPR legislation.

Here are two ways to facilitate this if you wish to set up a WhatsApp group in your club.

- **WhatsApp Broadcasting** - A Broadcast List "allows you to create, save and message a list of contacts instantaneously. Recipients receive your message like a regular message. However - recipients do not know who else received the message Broadcast List. When they respond, they only respond to you individually. (like an email bcc)
- **WhatsApp Groups Invite Link** Members/Parents receive a text message prompting them to click on a link to join a WhatsApp group. Options offered are Cancel or Join Group.

The groups Administrator, generally the Sports Leader/Coach or Manager must be an adult. They will name the group and control who is invited to join and where necessary is responsible for removing people. The Admin is responsible for the members content and therefore should outline what the group will be used for from the outset. We would advise that you keep the content of your WhatsApp messages as short and straightforward as possible. WhatsApp is not the correct medium for messages which are numerous lines long. Groups should not be used for private conversations with anyone else using the group. Children (U18) should not be included in WhatsApp groups.

There are some concerns surrounding the use of WhatsApp for our Athletic Groups.

- General WhatsApp groups can add participants without their prior consent
- Participants telephone numbers are visible on the group as is their profile picture. This is a GDPR concern
- Unsuitable material is often posted to a WhatsApp group and can be difficult to remove
- Photographs and Videos shared on the group remain in the camera roll on all participants phones
- The Administrator does not have the ability to audit the groups content

In summary we suggest that you -

- Set up Groups which require participant consent
- Never use WhatsApp to communicate with your Juveniles
- **Children (u18) should never be part of a WhatsApp group.** The safeguarding concern is that users can see personal phone numbers of users and their pictures
- Inform participants of its intended use and how it should be used
- Ensure members have a mechanism to report inappropriate content

WhatsApp is not recommended to replace email or SMS as an official communication channel. If your club does use WhatsApp to communicate informally with its member's please use this guidance to ensure good practice.