

## Group Chat & Messaging Guidance

### Purpose

Group messaging apps can be effective for sharing information during trips, training camps, and events. Spond is the recommended group messaging App however, it is recognised that there are other messaging apps available and this guidance ensures their safe and appropriate use.

### Age restrictions

- **For members under 13**
  - clubs must work with parents/carers to agree safe communication methods and provide online safety resources suitable for their age
  - must not be added to group chats or messages.
- **13 – 17-year-olds** – may join group chats if;
  - Prior written parental consent obtained
  - Everyone in the group must be aware that under 18's are in the group.
  - Clearly established rules and expected standard of behaviour are maintained
  - A British Orienteering staff member is in the group, with admin rights.
  - A parent/carer for each child is in the group to allow them to monitor activities.
- **No one-to-one private messaging:** Staff, coaches and volunteers must not use personal private messaging to contact under-18s one-to-one. If a private message is necessary, use an organisational account, copy in a colleague/parent/carer, or move the conversation to a supervised platform.

### Parental consent – for any child aged 13-17 (see appendix 1)

- Parents and/or carers should be informed and engaged in advance, not just to seek consent.
- Parents must sign and return the consent form to acknowledge;
  - some private mobile phone numbers may be visible
  - they won't use these mobile phone numbers for private purposes
  - some of the group participants are under 18
  - they are added to the group to allow them to monitor the content

### Group setup (see group admin checklist, appendix 2)

- Groups should only exist for the duration of the trip/event and must be deleted promptly afterwards.
- If using Whatsapp, the use of "Community" groups is recommended as they allow admin to deactivate disappearing messages and block visibility of group members phone numbers.

- At least two adult “admin” per group – both of whom should be DBS checked and have completed up to date safeguarding training (British Orienteering Introduction to Safeguarding training, as minimum). These may be British Orienteering staff members.
- No one else should be given admin rights.

## Content standards

- Prohibit use of disappearing messages, read once and live location (or similar) features
- Hide personal mobile phone numbers where possible.
- Only share information relevant to the group purpose - Be respectful; no personal attacks, offensive language, or reputational harm.
- Do not post or link to content that contains illegal or indecent content, including misleading and deceptive content within the group.
- Do not share messages and/or content (including images or videos) without permission has been granted by the group administrator
  - For clarity, the group administrator may use the group to share photos of the event/ activity which can be shared wider with their permission
  - Any individual has the right to request that any photos where they appear are not shared publicly. If an individual wishes their image not to be used/ shared, they must inform the group administrator.
- Avoid sharing personal or sensitive information, including mobile phone numbers, this could be a GDPR breach.
- Neither write or say anything damaging to the reputation of British Orienteering, nor make any public statement which constitutes a “personal attack” upon another sporting competitor or official.

## Non-compliance

- Conduct must be in line with the British Orienteering’s **Code of Ethics and Behaviour** and **Codes of Conduct**.
- Non-compliance will result in prompt removal of the post and/or individual from the group and referral under disciplinary and/or safeguarding procedures.
- If a young person tries to engage in one-on-one staff/volunteer chat, do not reply and discuss face to face at the next meeting why this is inappropriate. If necessary, report to the Club Welfare Officer or British Orienteering Safeguarding Lead.
- Any incidents should be reported to the Lead Safeguarding Officer on 07891 091662, (safeguarding@britishorienteering.org.uk) or by using the Safeguarding Reporting Form on the British Orienteering website.

## Appendix 1 - Parental Consent for 13 –17 Year Olds (Group Chats)

**Childs Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

I give permission for my child (aged 13–17) to be included in official British Orienteering group chat or messaging app.

I understand: -

- A parent/carer will also be added to the group for each child in the group
- At least two adult administrators will monitor the group
- The group will be deleted once the trip/event ends
- The purpose of being included in the group is to allow me to monitor the content

I will not: -

- store personal numbers of other members of the group
- privately message any under 18's within the group (other than my own children)

I have read and understand the British Orienteering [Guidance on Group Chats and Messaging](#) and agree to abide by the British Orienteering's [Code of Ethics and Behaviour](#) and [Codes of Conduct](#).

**Parent/Carer Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 2 - Group Admin Checklist

### Which platform should I use?

- Does the platform allow direct messaging (1:1 messages that are not public)?
- If direct messaging is available, is there a function to prohibit direct messaging to u18s, or to ensure that parents/carers can view any direct messaging?
- If direct messaging of u18s can't be prohibited, do you have usage guidelines clarifying that direct messaging u18s is NOT appropriate?
- Have you checked the platform's terms of service for any limit on the age of its users?

### Before creating a group:

	Confirm purpose of the group and clear guidelines for use
	Engage and inform parents - Are they aware of the purpose and content of group, who the administrators are, the expected levels of conduct and who to report concerns to?
	Add group description with purpose, rules, and admin contacts, is always it clearly visible, to new and existing group members?
	Gain written parental consent for all 13–17 year olds
	Add at least two adult administrators (may be member of British Orienteering staff), including at least one British Orienteering staff member.
	Admin to have up to date DBS check and have completed British Orienteering Introduction to Safeguarding training, as minimum.
	Disable live locations, disappearing text measures and hide private numbers, if possible.
	Add parent/carer for each child included
	Remind members about behaviour expectations and safeguarding rules
	Plan group closure date (delete group after event)

### During group use:

	Monitor content regularly
	Remove inappropriate posts immediately and log action taken
	Report safeguarding concerns to British Orienteering Lead Safeguarding Officer

### After the event:

	Download any relevant evidence/logs if needed
	Delete group promptly