



Adult-to-Minor Contact Policy

How contact between adults and young athletes is controlled on the Platform.

VERSION	1.1
EFFECTIVE FROM	26 August 2026
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POLICY OWNER	Charles Heffron, Director and Designated Safeguarding Lead
NEXT REVIEW	26 August 2027, or sooner following a significant change or incident
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7.1 Purpose

The Platform exists so that young athletes can be found by the people who offer sporting opportunities. That means adults searching for and contacting people under 18. This is the core function of the service and also its principal safeguarding risk.

This Policy sets out how that contact is controlled: what an adult must do before they can approach a young athlete, what a young athlete controls, what is prohibited, and what happens when someone tries to work around the controls.

It applies to every adult user of the Platform, whether registered as a coach, scout, agent, club, institution or individual, and to anyone acting on behalf of The Sporting Network LTD. It should be read with the Safeguarding Policy, the Community Guidelines and the Coach and Scout Verification Policy.

7.2 The Controls

Contact between an adult and a user aged 13–17 is governed by four controls that operate together. No one of them is sufficient alone, and they are deliberately arranged so that an adult must pass each in turn.

Control 1 — Visibility is off by default

An account held by a user aged 13–17 is **private from the moment it is created**. A private profile is visible only to accounts the young person has accepted as connections. It does not appear in search of any kind, including scout search; it cannot be opened by following a link; and no account type can see past it — a verified coach or scout sees exactly what any other non-connection sees, which is nothing.

A young person may choose to make their profile public, and may make it private again at any time. Accounts held by users aged 18 and over are public by default. This is a recorded decision, explained at section 6.6 of the Safeguarding Policy.

An under-18 account also **cannot generate or share a profile link at all**, whether the account is private or public, and there is no setting that enables it. An under-18 profile therefore exists only inside the Platform and cannot be sent, posted, embedded or circulated anywhere else.

Control 2 — Verification gates both search and contact

An account registered as a coach, scout, club, academy or team must complete identity verification through Persona before it can:

- start a new conversation with any user on the Platform; or
- use scout search — the filtered search of athletes, including searching by location, level and sport.

An unverified coach, scout or team account cannot approach a young athlete by any route, and cannot identify and filter young athletes at scale. Verification confirms identity only; it is not an endorsement, and it does not establish that an adult's interest is legitimate.

Control 3 — Acceptance gates the conversation

No adult can hold a conversation with a young athlete they are not connected with. Any message sent to a user who has not connected with the sender goes to a request inbox. It does not appear in the young person's conversations, and it does not reach them as a normal message, unless and until they accept the request.

Control 4 — The approach itself is screened

The introductory message attached to a contact request is **automatically screened for links, social media handles and telephone numbers** before it is delivered. All messages on the Platform additionally pass an automated check against a list of prohibited terms. These checks run on our servers rather than in the app, so they apply to every message and cannot be avoided by modifying the software used to access the Platform.

This control exists because the single most common route out of the protections in this Policy is an adult persuading a young person to continue the conversation somewhere we cannot see. Soliciting off-platform contact is prohibited by section 7.4; this is the check that looks for it in the first thing an adult writes.

These checks are automated and no person reads your messages as part of them. Section 7.6 sets out when a member of our team reads message content.

The effect of the four together. A young athlete is not visible unless they choose to be. An adult cannot search for young athletes at scale, or open a conversation with anyone, without a verified identity. Even then, the approach lands in a request inbox that the young person controls and is never obliged to answer. And the first thing that adult writes is screened for the contact details that would move the conversation somewhere our controls do not reach.

7.3 What a Young User Controls

CONTROL	WHAT IT DOES
Stay private, or choose to be public	Accounts held by users aged 13–17 are private by default. A private profile cannot be seen, found in search, or reached by a link, by anyone the young person has not accepted as a connection, and no account type can bypass that. The young person may make their profile public in order to be discovered, and may make it private again at any time.
Make individual fields private	Any part of a profile — physical metrics, posts, achievements, academic grades and others — can be set to private on its own, without making the whole account private. A young person who wants to be discoverable does not have to choose between publishing everything and publishing nothing. These controls apply whether the account is public or private and cannot be bypassed by any account type.
Accept, decline or ignore a request	No young user is ever required to respond to an approach. Ignoring a request is a complete answer, and there is no notification to the sender that a request has been read.
Report	Any profile, post, comment or message can be reported, including a message sitting in the request inbox that has never been accepted. A report concerning a user under 18 is flagged for same-day handling when it reaches us.
Withhold information	Date of birth is never displayed publicly. Location is optional and coarse. No young user is required to publish anything beyond what they choose.
No link to their profile exists	An under-18 account cannot generate or share a profile link in any visibility state. Their profile cannot be circulated outside the Platform, by them or by anyone else.

7.4 Prohibited Conduct by Adults

The following are prohibited, and are grounds for immediate termination and referral to law enforcement:

- **Sexual communication** of any kind with a user under 18, or any communication with a sexual purpose, however framed.
- **Grooming behaviour** — building trust or emotional dependence with a view to abuse or exploitation, including flattery about a young person's prospects used to obtain compliance.
- **Requesting images beyond ordinary sporting footage.** This includes physique, weight, body-composition or "assessment" photographs. There is no legitimate scouting reason to ask a young athlete for such images through this Platform.
- **Moving the conversation off-platform** — asking a young user for a personal phone number, personal social media handle, private messaging app, or email address so that contact can continue where our controls do not apply. This is a recognised grooming indicator and is prohibited regardless of stated reason. Contact requests are automatically screened for links, handles and telephone numbers, as described at section 7.2.
- **Arranging to meet** a young user without the knowledge and involvement of a parent, guardian, school or club.
- **Secrecy** — asking a young user to keep contact, an opportunity or a conversation private from their parents, guardians or coaches.
- **Financial requests** — seeking payment for trials, representation, assessments, exposure or introductions.
- **Misrepresenting who you are** — claiming a coaching role, club affiliation, scouting position or qualification you do not hold.

7.5 Circumventing the Controls

Attempting to defeat these controls is itself a breach, and is treated as seriously as the conduct the controls exist to prevent. This includes:

- Publishing personal contact details in a profile, biography, post or comment so that young users can be reached outside the request system
- Using a second or unverified account to make approaches
- Registering with a false date of birth in order to appear to be under 18
- Asking a third party — including another young user, a teammate or a parent — to pass on contact details or a message
- Using coded, spaced or indirect language to solicit off-platform contact, including wording chosen to defeat the automated screening described at section 7.2
- Encouraging or assisting a user under 18 to register, or re-register, with a date of birth showing them as an adult

Where we identify circumvention, we terminate the account, check whether the same person has approached other young users, and refer the matter externally where there is any indication of risk.

A note on age. Every control in this Policy attaches to the age recorded on an account, and that age is self-declared. A user under 18 who registers as an adult places themselves outside all of the protections described

here. We treat encouraging a young person to do so as circumvention, and we treat an account we believe to be held by a young person as a young person's account regardless of the date of birth recorded on it.

7.6 What We Monitor

Automated checks

As described at section 7.2, all messages pass automated checks before delivery: message content is screened against a list of prohibited terms, and the introductory message attached to a contact request is screened for links, social media handles and telephone numbers. Where a message is caught by these checks it may be blocked or flagged for review. These checks are automated — a computer applying a rule to text — and no person reads your messages as part of this process.

Human review

We do not routinely read private messages. A member of our team will access and review message content, including messages sitting unaccepted in a request inbox, only in the circumstances set out in our Privacy Policy and at clause 3.7 of our Terms and Conditions. In summary, these are:

- Where a message, user or piece of content has been reported
- Where a message has been flagged by the automated checks above and a human decision is needed
- Where we have reason to believe a user under 18 is at risk of harm, in which case we may proactively review interactions involving that user
- Where we are required to by law, a court order or a regulator
- Where necessary to investigate a breach of our Terms, Community Guidelines or applicable law, or to address fraud or a security threat

Where an account is terminated for conduct concerning a young user, message records are preserved and not deleted, so that they remain available to the authorities.

7.7 Enforcement

Breaches of this Policy are handled under our Content Reporting and Removal Policy, with the following differences:

- **Reports concerning contact with a user under 18 are reviewed on the same day**, not within the standard 72-hour window. This is not left to memory: a report involving a young person is flagged as such when it reaches us, and that flag is carried through to the review queue.
- Where there is any indication of risk to a young person, **we act first and consider representations afterwards**. Accounts may be terminated immediately and without prior warning.
- Appeals against a termination issued for conduct posing a risk to a young person may be declined without substantive review.
- We refer externally in accordance with the Safeguarding Referral and Escalation Procedure. Referral does not depend on our being certain, and we do not investigate before referring.

7.8 Guidance for Young Athletes

If you are under 18 and using the Platform:

- **Your account starts private.** Nobody can see it, find it or open it except the people you accept as connections — and that includes verified coaches and scouts. You can make it public when you are ready to be found, and make it private again whenever you want. You can also keep individual parts of your profile private without hiding the whole thing.
- You never have to reply to anyone. Ignoring a request is fine, and no one is told you have seen it.
- A genuine coach or scout will be content to talk through the Platform, and will expect your parents, guardian or club to be involved. Anyone who wants to move the conversation somewhere private, or asks you to keep it to yourself, is not behaving as a professional should.
- No one legitimate needs photographs of your body, your weight or your physique to assess you as an athlete.
- You should not be asked to pay for a trial, for representation or for exposure.
- If something feels wrong, report it — even if you are not sure, and even if you accepted the conversation to begin with. You will never be in trouble for reporting something.
- Tell a parent, guardian or coach as well. You do not have to handle it on your own.

7.9 Guidance for Parents, Guardians, Schools and Clubs

You do not need an account to raise a concern with us. Contact main@thesportingnetwork.com and your message will be seen by the Designated Safeguarding Lead.

You can ask us to look into an approach made to a young person in your care, to remove content, or to explain what protections apply to their account. Where a young person is in immediate danger, contact the police on 999 first.

It is worth knowing that an account held by a 13–17 year old is private from the moment it is created, that a private profile cannot be seen or found by anyone they have not accepted — verified coaches and scouts included — and that an under-18 profile cannot be shared outside the Platform at all. If a young person in your care has chosen to make their profile public, they can reverse that at any time in their settings.

We work to the safeguarding procedures of any school, club or governing body we partner with, and will share information with a school's Designated Safeguarding Lead where a concern involves one of their pupils.

7.10 Review

This Policy is reviewed annually, and immediately following any incident in which the controls in section 7.2 failed or were circumvented. Where a control described in this Policy is changed or removed from the Platform, this Policy and the recorded decision at section 6.6 of the Safeguarding Policy must both be reconsidered before the change goes live.

Version history

VERSION	DATE	CHANGE
1.0	August 2026	First issue. Not published.

1.1	26 August 2026	First published version. Section 7.2 restructured from two controls to four: visibility off by default, verification gating both search and the starting of any new conversation, acceptance gating the conversation, and automated screening of the approach itself. Section 7.3 corrected — under-18 accounts are private by default, not public — and gains field-level privacy and the under-18 link-sharing restriction. Section 7.5 gains circumvention by a young user registering as an adult. Section 7.6 rewritten to separate automated checks from human review. Sections 7.4, 7.7, 7.8 and 7.9 updated consequentially.
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