# Mercury Swimming Policy On Electronic Communication

# (adapted from the USA Swimming Model Policy)

# PURPOSE

Mercury Swimming recognizes the prevalence of electronic communication and social media in today’s world. Many of our swimmers use these means as their primary method of communication. While Mercury Swimming acknowledges the value of these methods of communication, the club also realizes that there are associated risks that must be considered when adults use these methods to communicate with minors.

# GENERAL CONTENT

All communications between a Coach or other adult (e.g., Board Member) and an athlete must be professional in nature and only for the purpose of communicating information about team activities. The content and intent of all electronic communications must adhere to the USA Swimming Code of Conduct regarding Athlete Protection.

For example, as with any communication with a swimmer, electronic communication should not contain or relate to any of the following:

* drugs or alcohol use;
* sexually oriented conversation; sexually explicit language; sexual activity
* the adult’s personal life , social activities, relationship or family issues, or personal problems; and
* inappropriate or sexually explicit pictures
* Note: Any communication concerning an athlete's personal life, social activities, relationship or family issues or personal problems must be transparent, accessible and professional.

Whether one is a swimmer, coach, board member or parent, the guiding principle regarding communication is always to ask the following: “Is this communication something that someone else would find appropriate or acceptable in a face‐to‐face meeting?” or “Is this something you would be comfortable saying out loud to the intended recipient of your communication in front of the intended recipient’s parents, the coaching staff, the board, or other athletes?”

With respect to electronic communications, a simple test that can be used in most cases is whether the electronic communication with swimmers is **T**ransparent, **A**ccessible and **P**rofessional.

*Transparent*: All electronic communication between coaches and swimmers must be transparent. Such communication should not only be clear and direct, but also free of hidden meanings, innuendo and unstated expectations.

*Accessible*: All electronic communication between coaches and swimmers should be considered a matter of record. Whenever possible, another coach or parent should be included in the communication so that there is no question regarding accessibility.

*Professional*: All electronic communication between a coach and a swimmer should be conducted professionally (i.e., as a representative of the club). This includes word choices, tone, grammar, and subject matter that model the standards and integrity of a professional staff member.

If the communication meets all three of the **T.A.P.** criteria, then it is likely that the method of communication with athletes is.

# FACEBOOK, MYSPACE, BLOGS, AND SIMILAR SITES

Coaches may have personal Facebook (or other social media site) pages, but they are not permitted to have any athlete member of the club join their personal page as a “friend.” A coach should not accept any “friend” request from a current swimmer. In addition, the coach should remind the athlete that this is not permitted. Coaches and athletes are not permitted to “private message” each other through Facebook. Coaches and athletes are not permitted to “instant message” each other through Facebook chat or other IM method.

*Note: The Mercury Swimming has an official Facebook page that athletes and their parents can “friend” for information and updates on team‐related matters.*

Coaches are encouraged to set their pages to “private” to prevent athletes from accessing any coach’s personal information.

# TWITTER

Coaches and swimmers may follow each other on Twitter using the appropriate safeguards for public communication. Coaches cannot retweet an athlete message post. Coaches and athletes are not permitted to “direct message” each other through Twitter.

# TEXTING

Subject to the general guidelines for communication (the **T.A.P.** criteria) mentioned above, texting is allowed between coaches and swimmers during the hours from 8am until 8pm. Texting should only be used for the purpose of communicating information directly related to team activities.

# EMAIL

Coaches and swimmers may use email to communicate between the hours of 7am and 9pm. When communicating with an athlete through email, either a parent, another coach, or a board member should also be copied.

# REQUEST TO FORBID ALL ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS

The parents or guardians of an swimmers may request in writing that their children not be contacted by coaches through any form of electronic communication.