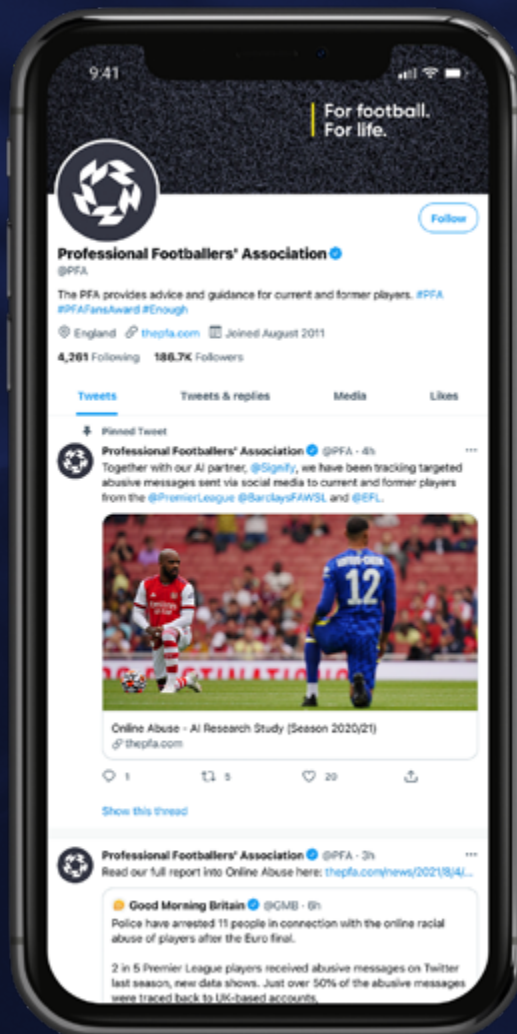


# SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDANCE



A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO MANAGING  
YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE

# INTRODUCTION



There are few better feelings than having thousands of people applaud your performance in the sporting arena. Similarly it can be deflating to be on the end of negative criticism when you have had a poor performance. This is often part of professional sport and we have learnt to take the rough with the smooth.

My generation of players were some of the first to suffer abuse not for our performance but for the colour of our skin. This behaviour was intended to demean and humiliate people for being different and was and still is unacceptable behaviour which is born out of ignorance or hate. It is deeply depressing that this abuse is still occurring today and that it is now taking place online with abusers thinking they are untouchable because they are anonymous.

I applaud the current generation of players who have taken a stand and said that enough is **#enough**. Racist, sexist and homophobic abuse, hate speech and threats to players and their families must have no place in sport, in our communities and online.

Player associations are working with sports bodies, social media companies and government to make social media less abusive by removing offensive content, banning offenders and bringing criminal charges when offences are committed.

This guidance provides information for players and their families on the law and how to report abuse effectively whether to the police, social media companies or your employers. It also shows how to use filters and settings on social media to reduce the amount of hate and negativity that players see are subjected to online.



**Brendon Batson OBE**

Chairman, Professional Players Federation

## UNITED AGAINST ONLINE ABUSE



# GUIDANCE FOR PLAYERS AND THEIR FAMILIES



## CONTENTS

### **01 HOW TO REPORT ABUSE**

A step by step guide to help players decide what action to take when they receive discriminatory abuse.

### **02 BLOCKING OUT THE NOISE**

How to adjust social media settings to reduce the offensive content players see.

### **03 EMOTIONAL SUPPORT**

Online abuse can severely impact the mental health of sportspeople and their families and it's important that players know where to go to receive support.

### **04 MANAGING YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH SOCIAL MEDIA**

Some helpful tips and advice from Sporting Chance on ways that players can maintain a healthy relationship with social media.

### **05 ADDITIONAL LEGAL ADVICE**

Some expert advice from Matt Himsworth (B5 Consultancy) on what player associations can do to support players based on the different type of abuse they receive.

Campaigns such as **#Enough** and **#StopOnlineHate** are raising awareness of abuse on social media

# REPORTING SOCIAL MEDIA ABUSE

IT IS A SAD FACT OF MODERN TIMES THAT A PROFESSIONAL ATHLETE IS LIKELY TO SEE NEGATIVITY, HURTFUL COMMENTS AND SOMETIMES EVEN ABUSE.

It is important you seek help and support when you suffer distress and anxiety as a result of the comments and messages you receive online.

Often something can be done – whether it be police action, legal action or other steps to be taken with your club, employer or player union.

This step by step guide shows you how to take action following a discriminatory incident. We always strongly recommend you get advice and support from your player association when you are considering these options.





**01 Contact the police** – If you feel threatened you should call 101, or in imminent danger, call 999 immediately.

**02 Report in App** – You must report any online abuse in-app on the social media platform. Platforms prioritise first person reports. **How to Report Abuse.**

**03 Get Support** – Any form of abuse can be difficult to report or speak openly about. If you have been affected, there are various ways you can see support (link to support section)

## IS IT CRIMINAL?

- Comments or messages which are derogatory regarding your race, nationality, religion, gender, sexuality or disability may be criminal
- Comments or messages which make threats, wish death or serious injury on you or your family, or mock tragedies may be criminal
- Comments, posts or photos/videos which are extremely graphic (sexual or violent) may be criminal
- Messages which blackmail you or threaten to do you emotional harm may be criminal
- Repeated messages or comments to you or about you which are nasty or likely to cause you distress may be criminal

## WHAT TO DO?

- Take evidence - screenshots of messages/comments, their profile. If you block the account then the account will stay in your block list which means the account can be tracked even if they change the username.
- Don't engage with the account. They may defend any prosecution by saying that you consented to the messages by engaging.
- Talk to your club, employer or player association about making a police complaint. You will usually report through your local force (especially if the club has a strong connection), however, the Met Police has **this guide** too.





## IS IT A BREACH OF YOUR OTHER LEGAL RIGHTS?

- Comments or messages which are lies, which relate to your private and confidential information (including screenshots of your messages) or which use your copyright (photos or videos that you have taken) may be a breach of your legal rights.
- You are also allowed to take legal action against people who send you criminal messages.

### WHAT TO DO?

- As with criminal messages take evidence, don't engage and report in-app.
- Talk to your club, employer or player association about getting legal advice. Your employer has a duty of care to ensure an internal process is actioned when their player is the victim of online abuse.
- You may be able to go to court to identify the person, you may be able to sue for damages and you may be able to get a court order (an injunction) to stop them. Legal action is often risky and expensive so make sure you get proper advice and support before making any decisions.

## REPORTING LINKS

If you have experienced or witnessed discrimination on social media, you can report it to Kick It Out through their [online reporting form](#) or via their reporting app available on both [iOS](#) and [Android](#). You should also make your local police force aware by filing a report [here](#).

You can also report posts to the respective social media channels by using the following links: [Facebook](#) | [Instagram](#) | [Twitter](#)

## IF IT'S NOT UNLAWFUL, CAN YOU DO ANYTHING?

- Yes, there are always options and actions. Just because something isn't illegal, it doesn't mean it doesn't hurt or is ok.

### WHAT TO DO?

- Discuss the content with your club, employer or union. If you are receiving content which is unacceptable then the individual may be in breach of club policies. If they behaved like that in the stadium, then they may be thrown out, the same applies online. Persistent abusers can have access revoked.
- Support is on hand through your player association and their emotional wellbeing support providers. Find out more about [Emotional Support](#).
- If you want to have a voice on social media but you don't want to see the negativity that exists out there then take a look at our step by-step guide to [Blocking Out the Noise](#).

# HOW TO REPORT

REPORTING ABUSIVE COMMENTS, POSTS OR ACCOUNTS ON INSTAGRAM IS ANONYMOUS.

## REPORT AN ACCOUNT ON INSTAGRAM

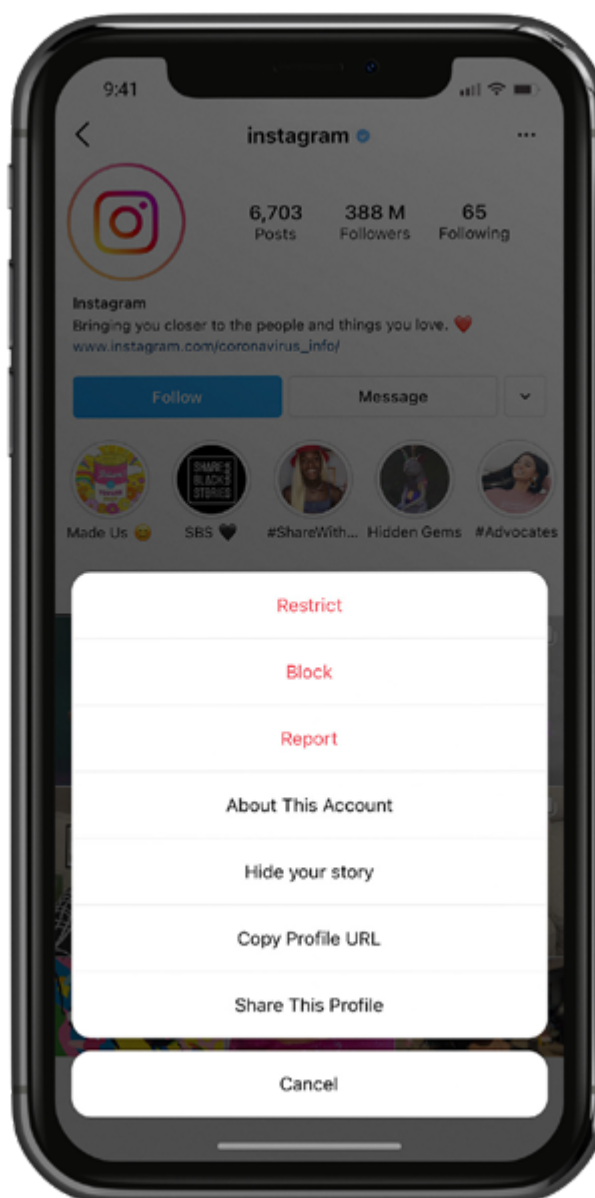
1. Press the three dots on the top right of the profile (...)
2. Press 'Report'
3. Then follow the on-screen instructions

## REPORT A POST ON INSTAGRAM

1. Press (...) above the post
2. Press 'Report'
3. Follow the on-screen instructions

## REPORT A COMMENT ON INSTAGRAM

1. Swipe over the comment
2. Press the (!) icon
3. Follow the on-screen instructions



## TWITTER

# HOW TO REPORT

YOU CAN REPORT ABUSIVE BEHAVIOUR DIRECTLY  
FROM A TWEET, ACCOUNT PROFILE OR A DM.

### REPORT AN ACCOUNT ON TWITTER

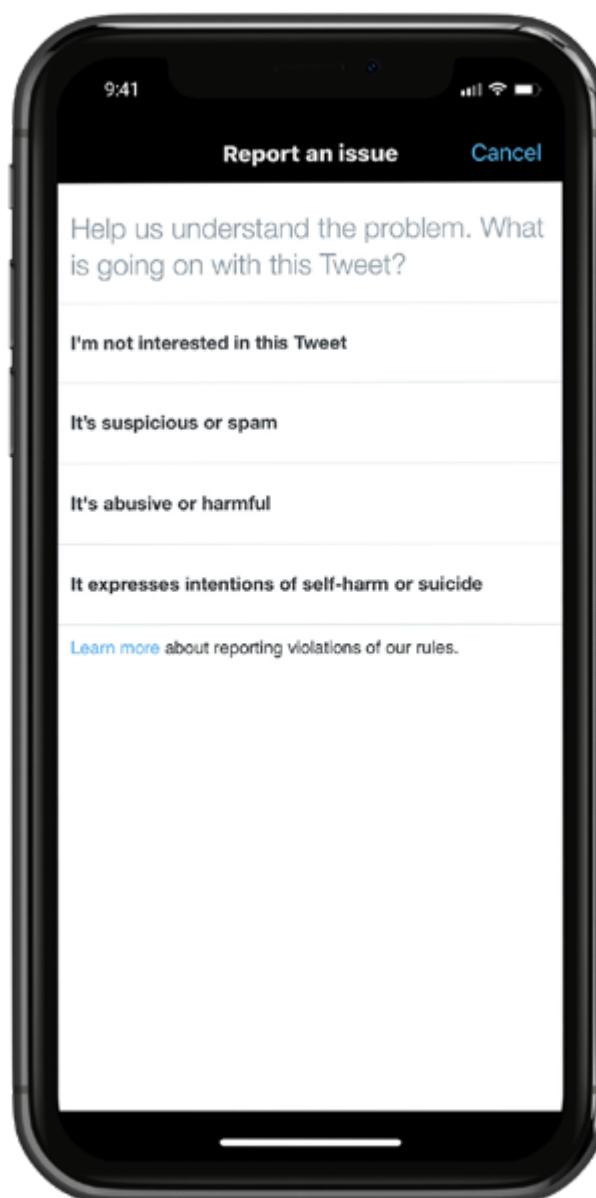
1. Press (...) on the top right of the account profile you want to report
2. Press 'Report'
3. Then follow the on-screen instructions

### REPORT A TWEET ON TWITTER

1. Find the tweet you want to report
2. Press the (...) icon
3. Click 'Report'
4. Follow the on-screen instructions

### REPORT A DM

1. Swipe left on the message and click the flag icon
2. Follow the on-screen instructions



# BLOCKING OUT THE NOISE

## HOW TO MANAGE DIRECT MESSAGES

Although the emphasis should not be on players to manage the abuse received online, there are tools available on social media platforms to help control your experience.

By blocking abusive accounts and filtering inappropriate words and language, you can limit the offensive material you see.

One of the most common ways that athletes get abuse on Instagram is through Direct Messages. You can shut your Direct Messages to everyone except people you follow by following these steps.



**EDIT PROFILE**



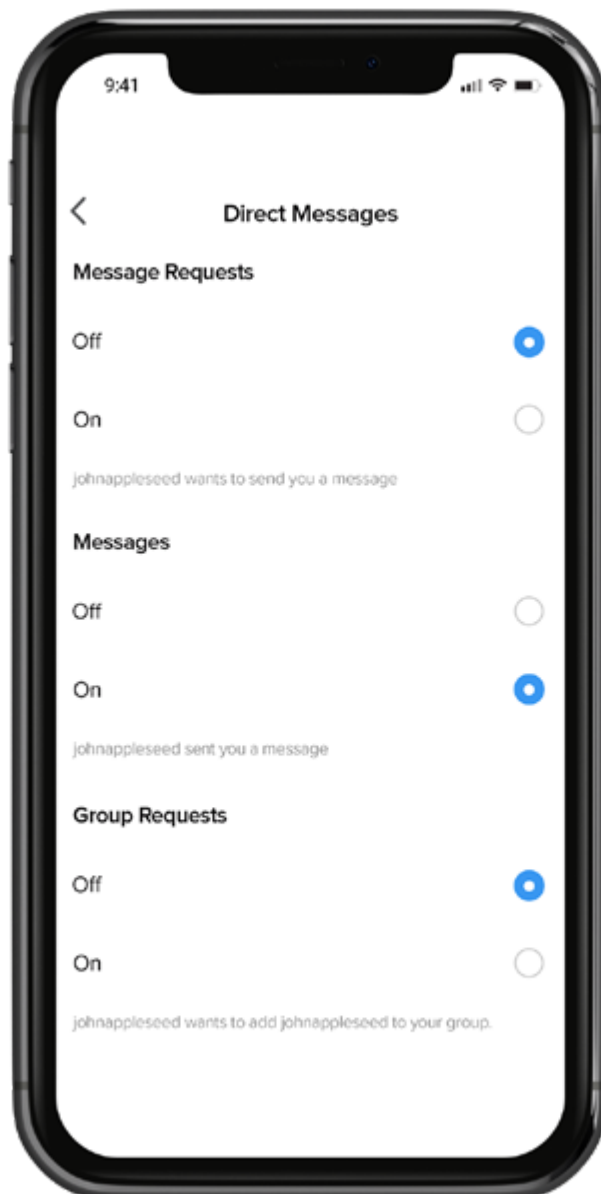
**SETTINGS**



**NOTIFICATIONS**



**DIRECT MESSAGES**



**THIS WILL STOP  
PEOPLE YOU  
DON'T FOLLOW  
FROM DIRECT  
MESSAGING YOU.**

**YOU CAN STOP  
ALL DIRECT  
MESSAGES BY  
TURNING THIS TO  
"OFF"**

**THIS WILL STOP  
PEOPLE ADDING  
YOU TO GROUP  
CHATS**

## INSTAGRAM

# BLOCKING OUT THE NOISE

## HOW TO MANAGE COMMENTS

You can limit the accounts who are able to comment on your posts. You can stop all comments on a post or can put filters in place to set it that only your followers, or your followers followers, can comment. This would reduce randoms popping up with abusive comments.



### ACCOUNT INFO



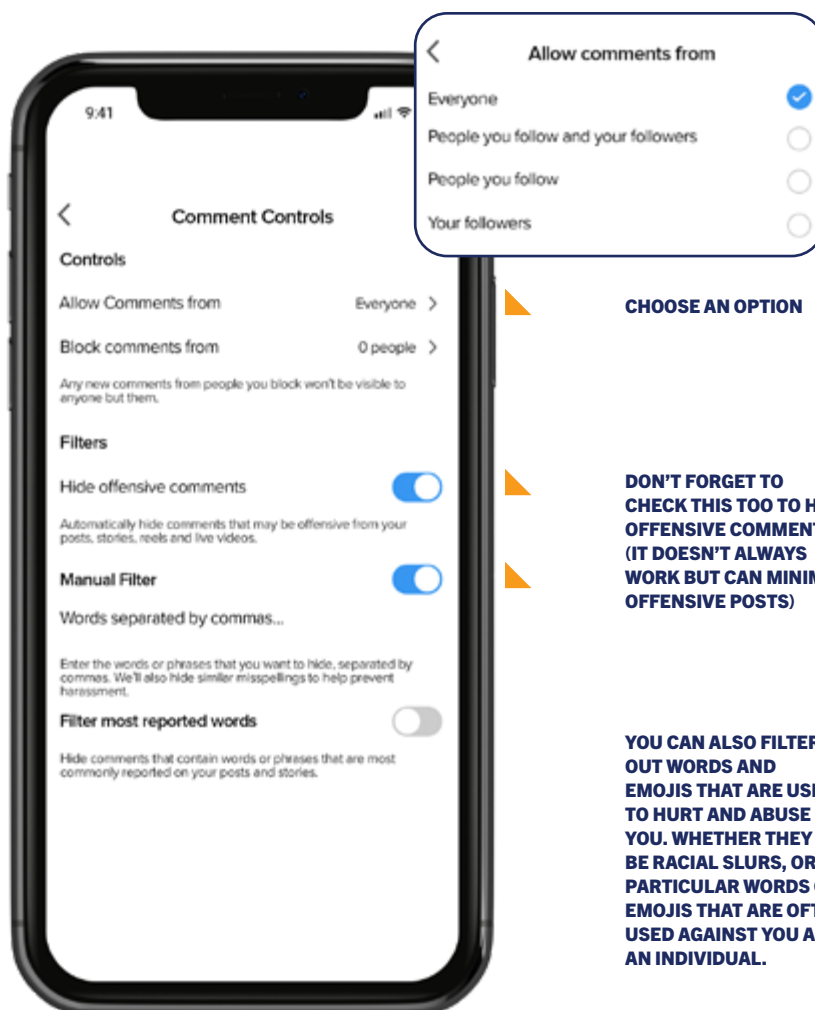
### SETTINGS



### PRIVACY



### COMMENTS



**CHOOSE AN OPTION**

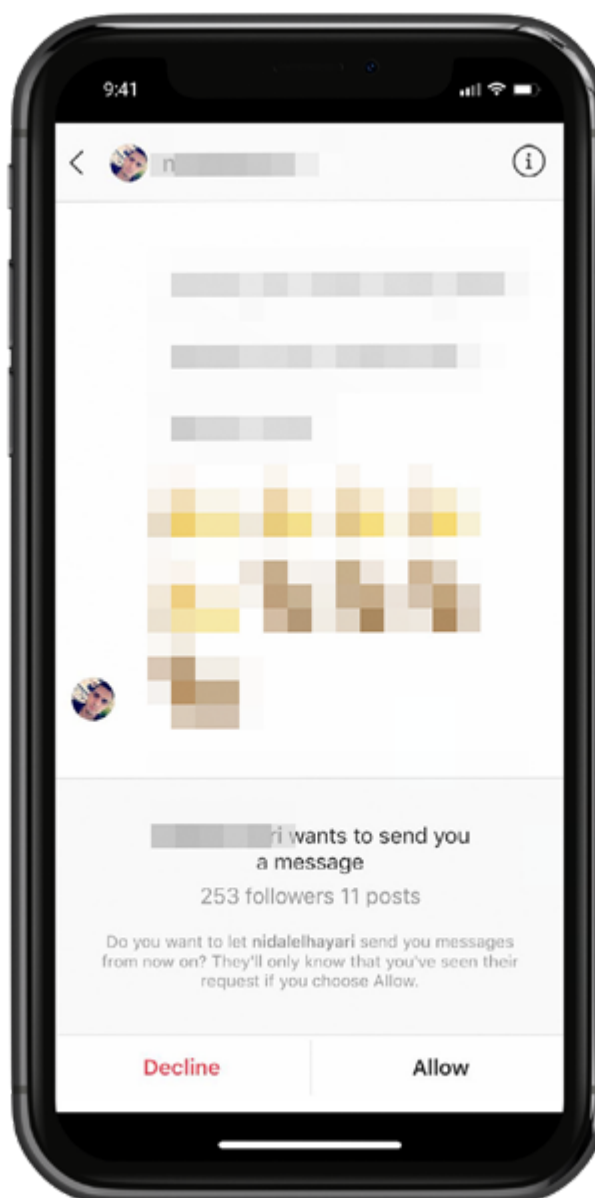
**DON'T FORGET TO CHECK THIS TOO TO HIDE OFFENSIVE COMMENTS (IT DOESN'T ALWAYS WORK BUT CAN MINIMISE OFFENSIVE POSTS)**

**YOU CAN ALSO FILTER OUT WORDS AND EMOJIS THAT ARE USED TO HURT AND ABUSE YOU. WHETHER THEY BE RACIAL SLURS, OR PARTICULAR WORDS OR EMOJIS THAT ARE OFTEN USED AGAINST YOU AS AN INDIVIDUAL.**

# BLOCKING OUT THE NOISE

## HOW TO FILTER ABUSIVE WORDS OR EMOJIS

- 01 Go to your profile picture  
(in the bottom right-hand corner)
- 02 Click the ☰ menu button
- 03 Click 'Settings'
- 04 Click 'Privacy' & then 'Comments'
- 05 Click and turn the 'Manual Filter' on
- 06 Enter specific words, phrases,  
numbers or emojis in the text  
box to filter out comments



# BLOCKING OUT THE NOISE

## HOW TO MANAGE NOTIFICATIONS

By blocking abusive accounts and filtering inappropriate words and language, you can limit the offensive material you see.

Low quality accounts are the ones that often send hatred and negativity. You can adjust your settings so that you only see content from accounts that you want to see by following these steps.



### ACCOUNT INFO



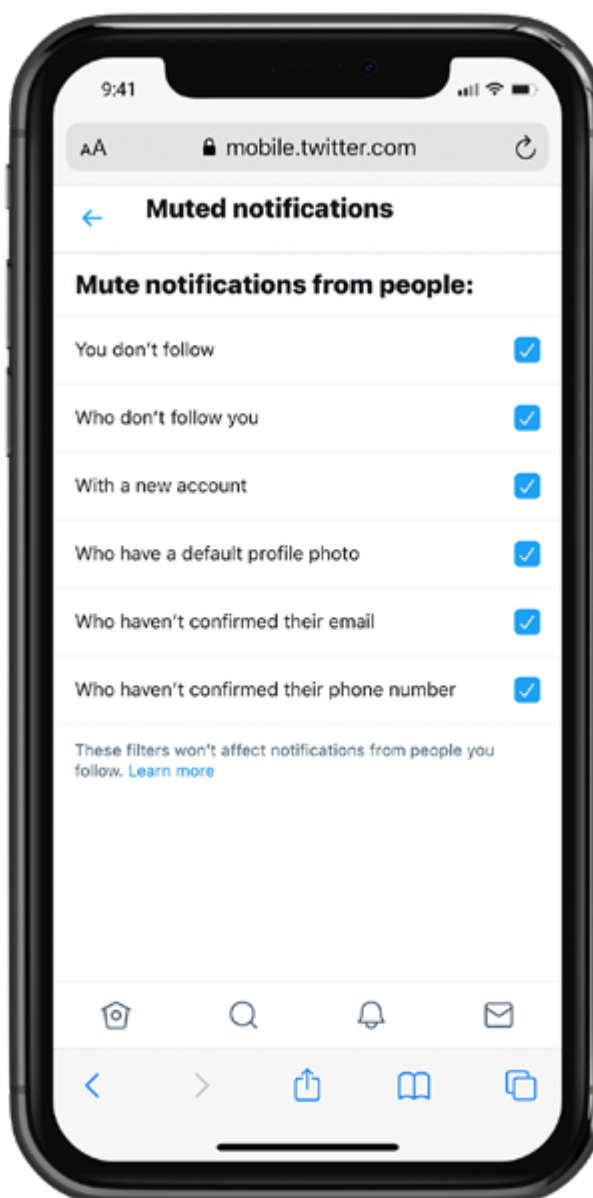
### SETTINGS AND PRIVACY



### NOTIFICATIONS



### ADVANCED FILTERS



# BLOCKING OUT THE NOISE

## HOW TO MUTE KEYWORDS, HASHTAGS & EMOJIS

- 01 Click 'More' from the side navigation menu, then click 'Settings and privacy'
- 02 Click the 'Privacy and safety' tab, then click 'Mute and block'
- 03 Click 'Muted words'
- 04 Click the plus icon
- 05 Enter the word or hashtag you'd like to mute
- 06 Select 'Home Timeline' if you wish to mute the word or phrase from your timeline
- 07 Select 'Notifications' if you wish to mute the word or phrase from your notifications
- 08 Specify 'From anyone' or 'From people you don't follow'
- 09 Under 'Mute timing', choose how long you would like to mute the word (24 hours, 7 days, 30 days or forever)
- 10 Click 'Save'



# EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

NO MATTER WHAT LEVEL OF ABUSE YOU HAVE RECEIVED AS A PROFESSIONAL SPORTSPERSON, YOUR EXPERIENCE WILL BE INTENSELY PERSONAL.

People experience situations, including abuse, in different and individual ways. This is based on:

- their personal history, personal beliefs and genetic make-up
- their relationship with shame, self-esteem, balance, pride & ego
- their societal, cultural and actual environment
- and the content of the abuse set in the context of the above

## TYPES OF SUPPORT AVAILABLE

For some people, contextualising the situation and the emotions attached to it, learning from the experience and changing any behaviours they want to may be achieved with shorter term support. For others, experiencing abuse will trigger pre-existing personal emotional wellbeing needs that may suit longer term therapy.

Regardless, your player association is able to ensure you and your family can seek the appropriate support – free and confidential - from a trained professional who has lots of experience of working with athletes in this area.

**Sporting Chance** is delighted to support many PPF members and their membership. Current stakeholders (or any other professional sporting organisation) are always welcome to contact Sporting Chance to discuss their needs in relation to emotional and mental health. This can include education and twenty-four-hour access to therapeutic support.

Athletes funded by Sporting Chance's existing stakeholders can access confidential support by visiting [sportingchanceclinic.com](https://sportingchanceclinic.com) and clicking '**GET HELP NOW**'.

Sporting Organisations interested in working with Sporting Chance can contact [info@sportingchanceclinic.com](mailto:info@sportingchanceclinic.com)

# YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH SOCIAL MEDIA

SOCIAL MEDIA IS NOW SUCH A BIG PART OF OUR DAY TO DAY LIVES,  
BUT IS IT ALWAYS GOOD FOR US?

Everyone's relationship with social media is different - it's a relationship you may be able to make work for you or one you might have to step away from. To understand how this applies to you, it's important to reflect regularly and honestly on how social media impacts your daily routine and how it's making you feel.

Firstly, it's important to start with the very basics - to ensure you control what you share and with whom.

Away from social media, we generally know who we're talking to and tailor what we say accordingly.

Make sure that you have the correct privacy settings online and that your personal information is protected and secure. All social media platforms will allow you the option of making your account public or private and often you can control who can see individual content.

## COPING WITH NEGATIVE COMMENTS AND ABUSE

**Resist the urge to respond immediately (or at all) and maintain perspective.**

**Remember your strengths.**

Don't let the opinions of others define your self-worth.

**Acknowledge your feelings.**

You are allowed to be upset but defending yourself against every unwarranted attack will impact on your mental health. Question whether it's worth your time and energy.

**Stay positive.**

Emotional reactions can feed the trolls. Remember to communicate with respect, tolerance and empathy.

**Report and block.**

If the abuse continues or is of a harmful nature, block the account and report them to the social media platform and the police. Save evidence such as screenshots if possible.





## TIPS FOR MAINTAINING A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP



- Clean up your feed - follow accounts that make you feel positive and happy rather than sad or down.
- Limit social media use before bed as this can impact on the quality of your sleep and your overall mood.
- Be more mindful and honest with yourself about why you're using social media.
- Try and be self-aware online, think about what you're posting and who you're interacting with.
- Try to avoid checking your social media before and after games. It is always better to take feedback from a coach or trusted friend than listen to people's comments on social media about your performance.

## GOOD HABITS

- Schedule time to use it and time to step away.
- Have a clear reason for looking at social media and stick to it.
- Separate professional from personal use.
- Follow accounts that inspire you and that make you feel positive.



## BAD HABITS

- Obsessively checking social media all the time.
- Comparing yourself to others and believing everything you see and read online.
- Continuing to interact with and follow accounts that damage your mental health

# ADDITIONAL LEGAL ADVICE

The PPF has teamed up with Matt Himsworth from the B5 Consultancy to provide some guidance to player associations who may be dealing with instances of social media abuse their members have received.

The following guidelines should help you decide what actions to take in response to different types of social media abuse and gives advice on how player associations can best support their members.

## **(1) The test for criminal social media messaging**

The base test for a criminal post or message is something which is “indecent, obscene or menacing”.

This means that messages which are, for example, racist or homophobic should fall under criminal liability. It should also include posts/messages that are threatening, wish harm on the recipient or their family, and can also include the sending of graphic sexual or violent content.

The inclusion of racist or homophobic (or other similar) slurs can increase the seriousness of the offence and thus increase the likely sentence.

## **Will the police prosecute?**

We know that police resources are limited and they have limited capacity and experience for dealing with social media abuse. We know that some forces will only investigate when there is a genuine threat of physical harm to the victim. It is important on these occasions to consider:

- a. Can relationships with individual forces be utilised. Many clubs and associations have pre-existing relationships with individual forces (who will wish to prioritise crimes against athletes playing in the local region).
- b. Can a union, club, employer or adviser assist the police force by providing a report and information which identifies the crime and the perpetrator. If the police force is handed a dossier of evidence then it makes it easier for them to investigate further.
- c. The athlete should be supported emotionally and also in relation to whether or not they wish to make a public statement. It is an unfortunate fact that the police are much more likely to investigate a social media post if the athlete or club has made the abuse (or some detail of the abuse) public. Any discussions on whether or not to make a public statement should be dealt with sensitively and with a strategy in place to help the player and also to ensure that they are supported in the event of any follow-up copycat abuse.

## **Other criminal offences**

### **Intimate image abuse**

Female athletes especially will often receive sexualised abuse online. The sending of unsolicited graphic sexual images will often be criminal in itself, however, this is all the more the case, and all the more serious, where the images being sent to the athlete, or being posted online, are of the athlete themselves.

The current law makes it a criminal offence to post or share images without consent for the purpose of causing distress. The law is likely to tighten in the near future to remove the requirement that the purpose of the message was to cause distress. In the future it will be a criminal offence to post or share intimate images without consent.

## Harassment

Harassment is a course of conduct which is likely to cause distress. Posts or messages which might not, on their own, be criminal can be criminal harassment if taken together. Athletes will often have obsessed fans (or critics) if they have received two or more messages which are causing them distress then this may well be harassment.

Examples of harassment could be:

- Repeated, targeted and directed negative comments
- Messages which suggest knowledge of the player's private life and/or whereabouts
- Repeated false claims about the player seeking to damage their reputation or distress them

## Blackmail

Blackmail is a very serious criminal offence, punishable with a maximum of 14 years imprisonment. In this online age it is increasing, both through sophisticated online scammers but also with naïve yet vindictive members of the public (often young people who have had a sexual relationship with an athlete).

Any person who threatens to do an athlete harm – by releasing an image, information or anything else which would cause harm – unless the athlete pays money or does something else (like sending images, recommence a relationship or similar) is committing a serious criminal offence. We would expect the police to take a matter like this seriously indeed and they would likely investigate and prosecute.

### (2) Breaches of civil law

If a player is abused online and either the police are unwilling or unable to investigate/prosecute or the messages/posts don't quite cross the line to be a criminal offence then the player can always consider civil action.

It is possible to bring a civil claim against the perpetrator when a criminal offence has been committed. This means that a player could:

- a. Seek a Court Order against Facebook (which owns Instagram) or Twitter to require them to disclose any identifying details which they have about the

perpetrator. This will usually include an email address and IP address information. It may be necessary to return to court to get another Court Order against the ISP that owns the IP address that the perpetrator was using.

- b. Sue the perpetrator once they are identified seeking compensation and also an injunction to prevent the conduct from continuing.

The player is not limited to sue over criminal conduct alone. Typical breaches of the law on social media can include:

- a. Misuse of private information – private photos or videos of the players shared online, screenshots of private conversations, messages and WhatsApps.
- b. Libel – false and damaging allegations published on social media.
- c. Breach of copyright – we own the copyright in the photographs and videos were take. Victims of intimate image abuse can often rely on copyright to have images/videos taken down.

### (3) Evidence

It is unfortunate that we must ask a victim of crime to collate evidence but this really does give us the best chance of catching the perpetrator. Perpetrators will often change usernames or close down accounts after sending abuse.

If legal or police action is going to be taken then we would ideally obtain:

- a. Screenshots (and a link if applicable) to the abuse sent.
- b. Screenshots of any other information about the account, including a screenshot of the main profile, and also screenshots of other comments and posts by the account.
- c. The account on a block list. If an account is blocked by the victim on Twitter or Instagram then it will likely appear on the victim's block list even if the perpetrator changes their username. This can be very useful.