



ADVICE ON SOCIAL MEDIA USE

Date of Issue: 22/01/2019

Version: 1

The BSSF has issued advice to people using Facebook and other social media platforms to discuss issues concerning BSSF-based activities.

The BSSF Council is made aware on a regular basis of conversations held on public internet forums which sometimes include disparaging comments on one-sided accounts of private disputes, criticism of handling or training methods, insinuation against integrity, and so on.

The BSSF is unable to directly intervene in the majority of such cases and has issued the following guidance which is intended to provide advice to:

- people who have been the subject of such allegations and criticism,
- those who have been involved in such discussions, and
- give direction on when the BSSF can and cannot intervene.

TO THOSE CONVERSING ON SOCIAL MEDIA

This is addressed to those who think that careless, uninhibited and ill-considered comment and criticism, heckling and undermining aimed at judges, dogs, competitors and Council members on Facebook and other forums is acceptable and that its impact will not offend, hurt or deeply distress, alongside damaging people's reputations.

Freedom of expression and opinion is, of course, a right of all - but that should be in the context of normal and civil behaviour. In other words if you have something worthwhile to say, then it should be said in a spirit of constructive criticism and not in an offensive manner.

Members should take great care in joining in such conversations since it is not acceptable for members to criticise fellow members in a disparaging way. Members should keep a distance from contentious issues and maintain an independent and private view. This is a matter of perception, public confidence and general respect for those involved in harness sports at any level.

Members should be aware that younger models also have access to social media and should conduct themselves in such a way as to be excellent role models to those members.

TO THOSE READING SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT

Anyone who finds him or herself targeted, or the subject of such conversations, is advised to ignore such material and not to read, respond or engage in the conversation. The law is intended to offer protection from the more extreme material.

Try to put the matter into perspective; everyone's reality is subjective and most of the material is a matter of opinion, on occasions an expression of anger, and is often not based on verified fact. Rude, spiteful and ill-informed comments say more about those writing them than about those who they seek to criticise.



In extreme cases of direct threat or harassment, then the police should be contacted.

The Crown Prosecution Service recently issued guidelines on prosecuting cases involving communications sent by social media and these can be found at:

www.cps.gov.uk/legal/a_to_c/communications_sent_via_social_media

These guidelines take the approach that there must be something more than 'the expression of unpopular opinion about serious or trivial matters, banter or humour even if distasteful to some or painful to those subjected to it' before intervention is possible.

The BSSF has to apply a similar approach and policy and is therefore unable to intervene in the majority of cases, however blatant bullying of members or Council members will not be tolerated.

It remains our advice that it is better not to read, engage or respond to this sort of material. Sometimes it is better to allow those who choose to air views on these channels the freedom to do so, even if they do not do so in an adult and mature fashion. Those who wish to read such postings should treat such content, particularly if critical, with caution and not make any judgment or assume the truth or foundation on the basis of what is being written. Social media content should generally be treated as gossip and not a validated and reliable source of information.

Ultimately if you feel you have to join in, be informed and be polite; if you have to read the content, do not assume what is said is true; and if you are the subject of gossip or rumour then treat it for what it is. And remember that the most effective and practical way to deal with offending material is not to join in or respond.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

A few general guidelines that all social media users should follow are included below:

- **You are responsible for what you post since it is a public medium.**
- **Maintain privacy:** Do not post confidential information. Do not discuss a situation involving named or pictured individuals without their permission.
- **Does it pass the publicity test:** If the content of your message would not be acceptable for face to face conversation, over the phone or in any other medium, then it is not acceptable for a social networking site.
- **Think before you post:** If you feel angry or passionate about a subject, it is wise to delay posting until you are calm and clear headed. There is no such thing as a 'private' social media site, even if you delete a post.
- **Be aware of liability:** You are responsible for what you post on your own site and on the sites of others. Individual bloggers could be held liable for commentary deemed to be libellous, obscene or which infringes copyright.



WHAT THE BSSF CAN AND CANNOT DO

The BSSF's jurisdiction lies primarily with the enforcement of its Regulations and issues arising out of these and incidents at organised races. It does not have any remit or authority to censor material on the internet, or to censure those involved, and is therefore unable to intervene directly in the majority of cases.

However, there are ways to deal with the extreme versions of offending material online, including complaints for defamation or harassment or sending malicious correspondence. These are criminal or civil offences and forum moderators are usually (or should be) quick to respond and remove content that has no place being published.

Extreme cases of threat or bullying should be reported to the legal authorities and to the BSSF for consideration and advice. Members who do not follow these guidelines and whose behaviour risks bringing the Federation into disrepute, or whose behaviour falls into the category of bullying will be sanctioned against, and these sanctions may include temporary or permanent bans from the Federation's social media, refusal of entry to races and refusal, suspension or revoking of membership.