

Social Media with children and young people

INTRODUCTION

Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. Colossians 4:6

What is Social Media?

Social media is the umbrella term used to describe websites and applications that allow users to share content (that is words, images and web links) with others and/or to participate in social networking. The best-known platforms are Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat and YouTube, but the term also covers online forums and blogs as well as less well-known applications such as Pinterest and Flickr.

Why Guidelines?

- Social media is immediate, interactive, conversational and open-ended. This sets it apart from other forms of communication and demands a new way of thinking. As well as the many opportunities, users should also be aware of (though not put off by) the associated risks.
- Using the Internet (and other forms of technology) is an important part of the lives of the children and young people. For many children and young people, using the Internet is a regular part of their lives and has a significant impact on their social development. All possible steps must be taken to protect young people from significant harm or risk whilst using the Internet or any other form of technology.
- Importance of establishing and updating procedures to ensure workers are protected whilst they work with children and young people.

What are the Opportunities?

- Immediacy of communication- we can respond quickly to questions, correct misunderstandings, give our perspective about a breaking story in the news media. Responding quickly doesn't mean doing so without due consideration.
- Platforms for communicating and sharing the Gospel.
- Promoting events/good news stories

What are the risks?

- Immediacy of communication- information can be posted in the 'heat' of the moment and can be negative.
- Safeguarding- social media can be used to bully, harass, intimidate or groom children, young people and adults at risk.
- Blurred boundaries between personal and professional- Social media has become such an instinctive part of society that communication that is personal and professional can be mixed up.

Guidelines for all

- Confidentiality- Breaking confidentiality is as wrong as it would be in any other context. Arguably, it is worse as via social media a broken confidence could spread rapidly and be impossible to retract. Advice about when it is ok to break confidentiality in exceptional circumstances will be mentioned later on in the guidelines

- Personal information- Don't overshare personal information. Never publish detailed personal information such as your address or telephone number, unless in a private message to someone you know and trust.
- Think about what you are writing/sharing- Due to the swift, conversational style of social media, writing comments we may later regret is a common pitfall. It is here that the words of Colossians 4.6 serve us well. Our words must always be full of grace so that even in difficult situations we will know how to answer well. You are completely responsible for the things you post and so could fall foul of the laws relating to libel and defamation. Specific examples of legally prohibited social media conduct include: Posting commentary, content or images that are defamatory, pornographic, proprietary, harassing, libellous, or any material that could be seen to create a hostile environment
- Privacy settings- Double check your privacy settings on social media platforms. Be aware that Facebook is particularly prone (especially during updates) for resetting or creating new options for privacy. There are privacy policies and settings on each platform, including explanations of the different levels of privacy. When you post, bear in mind what effect your levels of privacy will have on who will – or could – see your post.
- Disclosure- if on social media you see some information which shows that a person or people are at risk of harm or are suffering harm, please let the church office know immediately. Even if you are given the information in confidence or asked to not share it, you should if harm is involved.

Guidelines for staff/youth workers

- Appoint at least two people to monitor and manage your church's social media accounts including the youth ones. One of these people should be a Safeguarding lead. Have contingencies in place to cover if either of the people are not available
- Make sure your online connections and friendships do not give easy access to children and adults at risk in your church. For example, we strongly recommend that, wherever possible, links between young people and church workers are only made on a church or youth group organisational page and not a personal page.
- You should not add children or young people on your personal social networking page who are part of the children's and youth ministry at your church or group and who are under the age of 18. You can set up a Facebook group for your project or group and invite them to be members (that is, if they are over the required minimum age limit – which is 13 for Facebook). Only use an agreed social networking account for contact with children and young people with whom you are working. This should normally be an account set up specifically for this purpose on behalf of a group rather than an individual (use project accounts, never personal accounts). Do not use their personal social networking or instant messaging accounts for contact with children and young people. Seek to ensure that your personal profiles on any social networking sites are set to the highest form of security to avoid young people accessing personal information or seeing any pictures of a personal nature.
- Personal contact by social media with an individual young person should only be used to arrange an appointment and only if there is already an agreed mentoring relationship in place. Contacting late in the evening has the potential to be viewed as inappropriate. Therefore no contacts after 9pm should take place. Discourage text conversation or phone conversation where it is not about communicating information. When you have received a communication from a young person that is not giving out information you must make a record of the conversation and report it to your group leader. As much as possible do not give children or young people your personal number.
- If a child has made a disclosure do not respond to it using social media. Inform the Safeguarding lead person as soon as possible. The Safeguarding lead should make

attempts to contact the young person via other methods of communication and where possible, arrange to meet face to face if necessary. Ensuring that this is in line with other safeguarding procedures, not alone etc

- Email communication - Email should only be used to communicate specific information (times and dates of events, for example). It should not be used as a relationship building tool.
- All workers are responsible for reading any church policies produced regarding safeguarding and communication matters and are expected to adhere to the guidelines in the Church's current policies.
- Parental awareness and consent- Parental consent for using electronic forms of communication is essential and should be included on annual consent forms or by letter with a return slip agreeing to the use of this form of communication. It should be outlined what means you will be using for communication and what information you will be communicating. It is important to explain this policy and practice to parents and carers and seek to ensure they are aware and are happy in the use of electronic communication and what type of electronic communication is being used
- Initial training session to be held with workers with annual updates
- Use youth sessions to discuss the use of social media regularly. Encourage the young people to discuss what acceptable and unacceptable behaviour is.
- Draw up a social media code of conduct which the young people should sign up to which reflects these guidelines.
- Social media Policy to be reviewed annually because of the fast pace of change.