

Text from Faith Based Social Media Guidance Document

Social Media Usage Policy

In all their contacts and communications with the members of their organisation/group, leaders must be seen to be open and transparent. This is the case whether communications are by traditional means or by electronic means.

Leaders must not communicate with children or young people via leader's personal social networking profiles, email accounts, or chat rooms.

For an Organisation Using/ Publishing A Social Networking Site the following principles should be applied:

1. The page/profile must be password-protected, and the password must be held by at least three leaders of the organisation.
2. The site should be monitored by a designated supervisor. This person should have access to the login details of the site. This supervisor will be appointed by the Designated Person/Safeguarding Panel in Charge of Child Protection.
3. Any inappropriate posts by children/young people or leaders should be removed by the designated supervisor. Reasons should then be explained to the person who posted the content. Where possible sites should be monitored before content is put up.

4. The site should be kept 'Private' i.e. only permitted members or 'friends' can see what is posted on the site.
5. The use of personal addresses and telephone numbers etc., should be avoided as, while sites are 'private', there is the potential for items to be copied and shared.
6. Content of any postings should be consistent with the aims of the organisation. In cases of doubt leaders should seek advice from church leaders or ministers.

For Leaders Using a Social Networking Site:

1. Leaders should not 'friend' or 'follow' children or young people on social media. (Children or young people may 'follow' leaders on social media so leaders should make sure any content they post is appropriate.)
2. Messages left to or from children or young people on social network sites should be written on an open page (e.g. A facebook 'Wall') and not in a private message or by using 'chat' [one on-one].
3. Leaders should not network with members of their organisation/group via closed [one-onone] chats e.g. facebook messenger, WhatsApp, etc,. This should be done only through 'Group Chat.'
4. Any events or activities run by the organisation that are organised or publicised on the site should be a closed event so as non-members cannot access the event without suitable permission by the site administrators.

5. Any emails sent to children or young people via the site must be sent to at least one other leader. (This can be done by 'bcc' if necessary.)
6. Leaders should avoid communicating with children or young people in their organisation/group via email late at night.
7. In signing off a post or email leaders should not do so in a way that could be misconstrued or misinterpreted by the recipient, e.g. "Luv X"; "xoxoxo". Simply sign your name.
8. Parents/guardians should be asked to give their approval for leaders to communicate with their children/young people via social networking sites, or by any other means of internet communications (e.g. email).
9. Parental permission is required before pictures or videos of children or young people are posted online.
10. Any disclosures of abuses reported through a social networking site must be dealt with according to your reporting procedures.

Use of Mobile Phones

Those whose work with children and young people need to be aware of the opportunities for abuse through the misuse of mobile phones and text messaging. While good use of such media can be beneficial we must be vigilant and alert to the possibilities of misuse and consequent harm that can result to young people. Leaders must also take care to protect themselves.

1. Leaders involved in youth and children's work should only have children's and young people's mobile numbers if the nature of their involvement requires them to phone or text them. (Such leaders might include those running an organisation for older teenagers, or an employed youth worker or a volunteer involved in co-ordinating youth work.)
2. Parental permission should be sought if the leader in this role will be contacting children or young people via mobile phone.
3. A method of accountability should be arranged e.g. copies of texts could also be sent to the minister or to parents.
4. If a leader had a child/young person's phone number it should only be used for the purposes it has been given, i.e., the leader should not share this information.
5. It is recommended that an employed youth worker had a separate phone for work purposes rather than using their personal phone for contacting children and young people.

Texting – Communication not Conversation!

1. Texts should be used for the purposes of reminding children or young people about events which are forthcoming.
2. Texts can also be used as a means to encourage children or young people if it is appropriate it, e.g., 'Hope exam goes ok.'
3. If it turns into a conversation, communications should be ended. A leader can suggest discussing the subject further at the next event or, if they are concerned about the child/young person, arrange to meet up to talk further (within the usual child protection parameters).

Camera Phones

Camera phones should be used safely and responsibly.

Pictures can be very powerful and stir up strong emotions. Camera phone users should respect the private lives of others and not take or distribute pictures of other people if it could invade their privacy.

Leaders and children/young people should not send pictures that are obscene, indecent, or menacing and should be sensitive about other people's gender identity, sexual identity, racial heritage, religion, or personal background. Both leaders and children/young people should be made aware that it is a criminal offence to take, make, permit to be taken, distribute, show, or possess an indecent or sexually explicit image of a child under 18. For further guidance please see attached 'Sexting and the Law' leaflet.

When commissioning professional photographers or inviting the press to an activity the leader in charge should ensure they are clear about expectations of them in relation to child protection. Professional photographers/film/video operators wishing to record an activity should seek accreditation from leaders by producing their professional identification for the details to be recorded. The leader should then:

- Provide a clear brief about what is considered appropriate in terms of content and behaviour
- Issue the photographer with identification which should be worn at all times.
- Keep a record of accreditations.
- Inform leaders, children/young people, and parents, that a photographer will be in attendance is at the activity and check that they consent to both the taking and publication of films or photographs.
- Not allow unsupervised access to children/young people or one-to-one photo sessions.
- Not approve/allow photo sessions outside the activity or at a child/young person's home.
- Anyone concerned about any photography taking place should discuss his or her concerns with the leader in charge or a member of the parish or central events panel.

Camera phones can be used to make children/young people safer. Older children, for example, using a taxi can send a picture of the car's registration to a friend before they begin the trip, or can simply use the phone to show parents where they are.

- Children/young people can only be photographed when permission has been provided in writing from their parent/guardian.
- The scope of the use of photographs must also be stated as part of the parental permission.
- Children/young people should not be named individually in photographs unless necessary, for example, if the child/young person concerned was winning a prize worthy of publication.
- When posting photographs on social media settings should be such that children/young people cannot be individually tagged.
- All photographs must be stored in a secure place either electronically in a password protected file or physically in a locked cabinet.
- If any electronic device/memory which contains photographs is disposed of or passed on, then the device must be wiped of all photographs in such a way that they cannot be recovered on that device.

Use of Mobile phones during activities

Groups should, with parents and children/young people, develop a policy on the use of mobile phones during youth activities. This policy should be communicated to all parents and youth members. This policy could include:

- Confirmation that when on activities a named leader is the primary point of communication and is to be contacted if there is an emergency or change to previously agreed arrangements.
- That the usage of mobiles phones including text messaging or playing games cannot be allowed to be a distraction from a safe awareness of the environment or be allowed to interfere with full participation in the activity.
- That when on camps or overnight activities, there is a stated preferred time period when parents may make contact, if they wish. Parents should be advised that contact outside of this time may not be possible due to activities.
- Consider that use of phones while away can worsen rather than alleviate homesickness. In this context it can be good to encourage children/young people to consider that 'no news is good news.'

Use of computers/tables/web-enabled games consoles/smart TVs

If such devices are used as part of activities within the organisation, guidelines should be produced to ensure that they are used for the correct purpose, and include, for example, what websites are suitable for the age of children/young people that the leaders are worth with.

Other information and sources for parents and carers on E-Safety

The following websites provide information for leaders, parents, and carers about e-safety to help them protect their children from harm:

- Safeguarding Board NI www.safeguardingni.org/esafety
- NSPCC / O2 Helpline www.o2.co.uk/help/nspcc/child-protection
- Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) www.ceop.police.uk
- Childnet www.childnet.com
- The UK Safer Internet Centre www.saferinternet.org.uk