CHILDREN & YOUTH

DIGITAL MEDIA GUIDELINES

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Introduction

These guidelines are intended to set out guidance as to the minimum standards which should be met to ensure good practice and appropriate safeguarding when using digital media. Digital media is an ever-evolving and changing area and it is important to be aware of this and to always seek advice from your diocesan Safeguarding Team if in doubt, if something arises which is not covered by these guidelines or if clarification is required. This is a living document and will be updated annually.

It is important to ensure young people are aware that if something is shared on social media that raises a concern you may have to share this in line with the Church safeguarding policy.

Rationale

- As those working with children and young people within the Church we recognise that using technology, including the internet and social media, is an important part of the lives of the children we work with and is seen as a vital tool for communication and social development.

- In order to ensure appropriate safeguarding of all children and young people when communicating or working with them we recognise that we must take all possible steps to protect them from significant harm or risk whilst using social media, the internet or other technology.

- We also recognise the importance of ensuring our workers and volunteers have clear guidelines to follow to ensure they are protected when working with children and young people.

- These guidelines apply to the use of all forms of social media and messaging platforms, including Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, Whatsapp, X (formerly Twitter), Google+, Wikipedia, Whisper, Snapchat, Vine, Tumblr, Threads and all other social networking platforms, internet postings and blogs. It applies to use of social media for work purposes as well as personal use that may affect our work in any way.

- In summary, these guidelines are in place to minimise the risks to both children and young people as well as our workers and volunteers through the use of social media and other technology. All workers and volunteers are responsible for reading and following safeguarding policies and these guidelines.

- These guidelines do not replace a need for you to conduct a risk assessment for your specific church group as with other activities with young people.

Principles for Communication

If you do not feel confident using social media then don't use this as a forum to communicate. Children under 13 are not generally permitted to access social media accounts (this may vary depending on the platform) and there may be other children or young people who do not have access to all forms of social media so it is important to use a variety of methods for communicating with young people.Some general principles around all use of social media are below:-

Avoid personal accounts
Consider setting up a separate social media or messenger account from any personal social media/messenger accounts and ensure there are limits on its use. Make it clear to the young people that they should only use these accounts and if any young people try to contact you through your personal accounts you should deny these requests. Where you will be using social media, texting or messaging sites to communicate with young people seek written parental consent for this.

Platforms
Also consider the best social media platform to use which will enable secure group communication and which only enables people to join with the consent of the administrator.Do not use platforms where the evidence of messaging threads disappear (for example SnapChat) or where it is very difficult to control external input (for example gaming platforms)

Avoid individual communication
Always ensure you only use social media to communicate with the whole group, do not communicate individually. If young people do message you directly via any social media outside of the group chat keep screen shots and ask them not to message you directly again. Further specific guidance related to messaging and email is in the guidance below.

Communication 'out of hours'
When using email/the internet/social media for communication with young people (within the guidelines above), it is advised that it should take place between the hours of 9am-5pm. If a project takes place in the evening (after 5pm) and it is necessary to send an email/use the Internet, you should seek advice from your line manager but there should be no email communication after 9pm.

If a young person in crisis contacts you 'out of hours', think about how you respond:-
- If they appear in emotional distress or are threatening to harm themselves then you should phone 999 before then contacting the PSO and initiating safeguarding reporting procedures. You may also need to contact the parents and even the police if the risk of harm is imminent.
- If they appear to need to have to talk through a situation, consider arranging a time to meet with them in the following days to work through it. (This meeting should take place in line with your church safeguarding policy and procedures). Keep a record of any discussion that has taken place and send it to the PSO within 24 hours

Ground rules
Consider agreeing with the young people ground rules for communicating as a group on social media including:-
- always being respectful,
- not using inappropriate language,
- not bullying or criticising other members,
- not sharing information from the group externally,
- no posting of inappropriate photographs
- no posting of photographs of individuals without consent (Church safeguarding policy on the use of images should be followed and consideration should be given to discussing the use of images with the child themselves if appropriate).

Avoid interacting more with one young person than another, eg, if you wish happy birthday to one person, you need to do it for all users.

Humour - without the cues of non-verbal communication, humour can be easily misconstrued. Be alert to adolescent sensitivities.

Be a good example. Remind young people that there's no such thing as 'private' online. Tell them what kind of photos and information are okay to post and to never share personal information like name, school, age or address.

Language
Workers and volunteers should take great care over the language used to reduce the risk of misinterpretation. When sending emails, you should not use informal language such as shorthand or 'text language' as this can often be misunderstood and lead to further complications.

It's potentially easier to form inappropriate relationships using social media. Online banter and private messaging can lead to a level of intimacy that you'd ordinarily guard against. Be alert to the potential for misinterpretation. Do not use emoji's or slang terms such as LOL as these create a perception of friendship rather than professional. Keep your boundaries in place.

Video conferencing and live streaming
Use of video conferencing (e.g. Zoom, Teams and any other webcam or visual communication via the Internet) with young people should be very carefully managed. Workers should refrain from using such methods on a one-to-one basis as they cannot be recorded. Video conferencing could be used for group conference calls and is considered appropriate if a project or group uses a webcam/Skype in a group environment for project purposes and has clear aims and objectives for its use. Always seek to inform a line manager or group leader when this is taking place, ensure at least two workers are on the call and keep a written record of it.

Livestreaming and live chat via social media should not be used with young people.

Specific Social Media Platforms

As set out above when using Social Media sites such as Facebook, Instagram or Twitter, it is important to distinguish between a personal account and a professional one. It is recommended that you set the account privacy to its highest possible settings, and that a new account is set up using work email for the groups.

Facebook
It is recommended that parishes do not use Facebook as a primary means of communication with children and young people. There will be some young people with access, but not all, and therefore exclusively using a platform that is not accessible to all will create problems within the group. The minimum age for an account is 13, and parental consent is required. It is recommended the youth worker seeks written parental consent for any use of social media.

The best advice is that it is not appropriate to use a personal Facebook account and profile for work with young people, so you should create a professional account to manage your communications with young people. To create a professional or 'work' account and profile, enter your work email in the sign up box, adding 'Work' or another suitable term after your last name to distinguish your professional profile from your personal (i.e. Joan Smith Work)

Important things to think about when using Facebook:
As with all forms of social media it's important to put more thought into your boundaries when communicating with children, young people and vulnerable adults. The law and diocesan policies around safeguarding apply in your communications with children, young people and vulnerable adults.

Consent

As with all forms of social media it's important to put more thought into your boundaries when communicating with children, young people and vulnerable adults. The law and diocesan policies around safeguarding apply in your communications with children, young people and vulnerable adults.

Get parents' or guardians' permission before you contact young people via social media or email, and consent for use of photographs. You need to be very specific when collecting consent as to where the photographs will be used. E.g. written publications, social media, passed onto Diocese etc. Also consider where and how long you store the photos/ videos and state it e.g. 3 years.

Any communications made via posts should avoid tagging people or using full names. Generally, posts should be announcing events, wishing people luck with exams etc. If communicating via a closed (private) Group, then posts asking questions can also be appropriate. If asking for Prayer requests, ensure you set boundaries around this.

Use of official pages

An official church Page should take every effort not to comment on, like or share any posts by someone who is under 18.

Avoid personal pages

You should not add children or young people on your personal social networking page who are part of the children's and youth ministry/project 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 (if they are over the required minimum age limit).

Public communications
Keep all your communications public and only send messages to whole groups, rather than to individuals. Behave as you would in a public setting - always maintain a second leader 'in the room', and make sure your line manager is able to see what is posted or emailed.

Retain information
If a young person uses social media to disclose sensitive or difficult information to you, save these messages in case they are needed later, for example in sharing with the police or social workers, then contact your Diocesan Safeguarding Team.

Instagram
Instagram is a platform for sharing photographs and images, so it is important to consider carefully what is shared. We would recommend no sharing of photos of the young people on this platform. Think of it as a place to inform of upcoming events, or to share appropriate inspirational quotes/Bible verses, that always encourage and are positive, inclusive and kind.

As with Facebook, if you use this platform, always have at least two appropriate adults as Admin for the account. It is possible to create a private page, where the admin has to approve who can see the posts, otherwise the account will be open for anyone to see what is posted.

Other social networking sites
Whilst Facebook and Instagram are the most well known social media sites, there are many others that young people may connect with each other on. It is vital that you think very carefully before creating an official work presence on any of them. Sites such as Snapchat have a feature that allows messages to disappear making it impossible to adhere to the highest safeguarding protocols. For that reason we recommend you don't use these sites with your groups.

·YouTube and TikTok are the most popular platforms for young people, but we would recommend you don't use these as a means of communicating with your group. YouTube is used by many churches as a platform for uploading videos of services, and for livestreaming. As with photographs and any other public sharing, parental consent would need to be obtained if young people feature in any videos. We would recommend, however, that you don't upload or stream content including young people to any platform that is accessible to the public.

Key points to take away in relation to online platforms
Before using an online platform, take time to think:
- if you really need to use an online platform for the activity
- if the platform is appropriate for use with children
- what steps you need to put in place to help mitigate any risk
- how to respond to incidents if they occur.

Email and **Messaging**

This guidance recognises that E-mail shares many characteristics with messaging by mobile phone and on social media platforms. As such, the same considerations should be given and safeguards made. What follows considers practice with children and young people in-particular. Not all of what follows may be possible in relation to communication with vulnerable adults, but similar relevant considerations should be given.

Considerations and Safeguards Applicable to E-mail and Messaging
As with other forms of communication, care should be taken to ensure that no adult or person in responsibility be in communication with a child or young person directly. This should be avoided where at all possible. Ideally, e-mail or other communication via messaging should be with the parents or guardians of the young person, or another responsible adult.

Where this is not possible (in the case of young adults, with a level of independence) the below steps should be taken:-

Never act alone
The adult/leader/responsible person should make another adult/leader/responsible person aware of what they plan to do (ideally, a line manager, or someone who has overall responsibility in the context).

Consent
Permission should be sought from the young person's parent or guardian to enter into e-mail or messaging communication prior to this happening.

Purpose and boundaries
The adult/leader/responsible person should set out the purpose and parameters of the communication with the parent/guardian and young person.

Include a colleague
When the steps above have been completed and communication with a young person is initiated a second adult should be copied in or included in the group with the young person (not a family member of the adult/leader/responsible person).

If communication is initiated by a young person to one adult/leader/responsible person, it should be forwarded to another adult/leader/responsible person, with the steps above followed before a reply is made.

If, at any stage, a young person does not continue to include the second adult/leader/responsible person, any communication they are not copied into should be forwarded to them, the adult/leader/responsible person should make sure the second person is included in their replies and the agreement that they would be included.

Group messaging
Where e-mail or messaging (WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger etc.) groups are used good practice would be to have two adults/leaders/responsible people managing the group, and a third (or an additional person, who is not involved in the work of the group, and, ideally in a more senior/responsible role) included in the group as a monitor, avoiding situations where a closed group could be more easily used to groom young people by two adults/leaders/responsible people who are friends, particularly close or unlikely to challenge one another's behaviour. Each of the adults/leaders/responsible people (including the monitor) should be made administrators of the group. It is also good practice to keep a record of which e-mail or messaging groups are in existence, who is responsible for them, and who is monitoring them.

In all of the above scenarios, messaging groups (on a platform such as WhatsApp) is preferable to e-mail where it is easier for individuals to delete certain people from the conversation. Text messaging should be avoided because of the difficulty of consistently including other adults/leaders/responsible people. In messaging groups with the option for 'Disappearing messages' this function should be disabled by the administrators.

Mobile devices
Ideally, any communication about, and certainly with, children and young people should come from a device owned by and used solely for the church/cathedral/organisations purposes, this is especially important where the messaging platform makes a telephone number visible. Using a personal mobile phone number for these purposes should be avoided unless absolutely necessary. All such communication should also come from an account used only for the adult/leader/responsible person's role e.g. a separate e-mail account if your church/organisation cannot provide you with an official email, and a social media profile/account used professionally or in role. In all cases, children and young people should not be able to access personal information they do not need to know or have access to.

Content of messages
As with all written communication, even with the safeguards above, the adult/leader/responsible person should be careful to be aware of how the written word can be read differently by different people, being attentive to nuance and humour, avoiding expressions that do (or could be read to) convey favour or affection. All messages and content must be age appropriate and in line with the general principles relating to ground rules and use of language set out above.

Digital youth work and gaming

It is vital that you take great care when engaging with young people whilst gaming. All games have a PEGI rating, which will tell you how old someone needs to be before they should be playing. It would be impossible to list all the games as this is a fast moving industry, but the following are helpful guidelines to work through before engaging in gaming with young people.

- Get written parental consent for the gaming group
- Set agreed times for playing ie: 4-6pm on a Friday and do not engage with the game or young people outside of that.
- Only play with the agreed group. Avoid games where external players can join e.g. Roblox
- Have at least 2 safely recruited adults in the group when playing
- Avoid video calling during games if possible. If it is essential to the game, think about the appropriate location for players ie: not in bedrooms
- Avoid personal messaging within the game, if possible. If it is a vital aspect of the game, keep a record of the chat, and try to only message the whole group.
- We recognise it will be difficult to have separate technology for gaming, so recommend the accounts of the leaders to be available for viewing by other safely recruited adults regularly.

If in doubt, contact the Diocesan Safeguarding Team or Children and Youth Team for advice details of which can be found on the Diocesan Website newcastle.anglican.org.

Useful Links
- The Church of England Safeguarding e-Manual
- NSPCC Social Media & Online Safet

Appendix One

In creating this document, a group of young people from NCEA Duke's Secondary School were asked what they would like us, as adults in the church, to know about their relationship with the digital world. Below are their comments, with thanks to Sally Milner for organising.

"YP tend to use Snapchat to message friends and Messenger to message family. No one uses Whatsapp."

"The difference between Youtube and streaming sites comes down to whether you can interact with one – that's why Youtube is social media but Netflix isn't."

"You can't make a page on Snapchat, so it's not as useful as things like Facebook and Instagram, though kids are more likely on other things."

"Snapchat is most popular, then things like Tiktok and Instagram."

"It's good for churches and youth groups to have social media so people can see what's going on inside those spaces before they go."

"There should be more than one person in charge of a Facebook page, to keep it safe and to make sure it keeps getting content put out."

Appendix One