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Internet, email, texting Communication Guidelines

WORKERS

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Areas covered in this document

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1   Rationale

As a children or youth Worker in the Methodist Church we recognise that using the internet (and other forms of technology) is an important part of the lives of the children and young people we work with.

👆   We understand that 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.

👆   In accordance with The Methodist Church Safe guarding policy, we recognise that we must take all possible steps to protect young people from significant harm or risk when using the internet or any other form of technology.

👆   We also recognise the importance of establishing and updating procedures to ensure Workers are protected whilst they work with children and young people.

👆   All Workers are responsible for reading any polices produced regarding safeguarding and communication matters and are expected to adhere to the guidelines in the current policies.

👆   At the end of this document, you will find a notes section which relates to specific parts of this policy.

2   Reasons for contacting a young person via the internet or email:

👆   It is not appropriate to have private non-work related contact with children and young people that we work with in the format of electronic communication.

👆   We recognise that there will be times when it is necessary and important to use electronic communication: However, we recognise the need for an appropriate response and always encourage face to face contact as opposed to a contact or reply via online methods of communication.

👆   Workers should only use electronic communication for reasons relating to work with children and young people, not for general socialising (see guidelines below).

👆   Workers should make their line manager or youth group leader aware when they are using electronic communication, this must be set up as part of a group communication and not individual.

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3   Parental awareness and consent

Parental consent for using electronic forms of communication is essential and should be included on your annual consent forms or by letter with a return slip agreeing to the use of this form of communication. The consent form must outline what means you will be using for communication and what 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 that we use electronic communication and what type of electronic communication we are using eg: email.

4   Specific definitions

'Internet' communication specifically refers to the use of:

👆 Social networking sites such as

• Bebo,

• Facebook,

• Twitter

And other web sites of a similar nature.

'Email' communication specifically refers to the use of:

👆 Emails including written text and/or pictures sent from personal or work accounts.

5   Email communication

👆 Email should only be used to communicate specific information. (eg: Times and dates of events). It should not be used as a relationship building tool.

👆 We recommend having a 'shared' staff email account where all staff can access any emails, regardless of whether it is private or public. This would allow communication amongst staff and young people to remain safe

👆 Only grooup emails should be used and not individual

👆 Workers should encourage appropriate 'face to face' contact where possible. Conversation (repeated sending of emails between two individuals) via email is discouraged.

👆 Workers should make their line manager or team leader aware when they are using email to contact young people.

👆 Email History should be kept and dated.

6   Email accountability

As specified above, email should only be used to convey information and not used as a relationship tool. However, if a young person discloses information or anything of a concerning matter arises via email, the following procedure must be followed:

1. Read and follow the Methodist Church Safeguarding procedures relating to disclosures.

2. Do not respond to the email. Make attempts to contact the young person via other methods of communication and where possible, arrange to meet face to face if necessary.

7   Language

All language should be appropriate and where possible 'standard responses' should be used. (eg: if you have sent an email out containing event details and receive a reply asking for further details, create a standard response with additional details so that all young people receive the same information).

👆 Workers and volunteers should take great care over the language used to reduce misinterpretation

👆 When sending emails, Workers should not use informal language such as short hand and 'text language' as this can often be misunderstood and lead to further complications.

8   Chat facilities / Messenger and live chat

Use of live chat facilities between workers and children and young people is not permitted. Youth workers should refrain from engaging in conversation via these mediums. Live chat services and chat facilities cannot be kept on record and are therefore an unsuitable form of communication between workers, children and young people.

9   Skype and other visual methods

Use of skype and any other web camera or visual communication via the internet is not permitted. Workers should refrain from using such methods on a one to one basis as they can not be recorded.

👆 It can be used for conference call and is considered appropriate if a project or group uses a web camera/Skype in a group environment for project purposes, and has clear aims and objectives for its use. Always seek to inform a line manger or group leader when this is taking place and keep a record of it.

10   Hours of communication

When using email/internet 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, Workers should seek advice from their line manager but there should be no email communication after 9pm.

11   Adding friends on facebook and similar sites

You should not add children or young people to your personal social networking page if they are involved with your Children and Youth Ministry Project and 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 ie: 13 for Facebook)

☞ Workers should only use an agreed social networking account for contact with children and young people with whom they are working. This should normally be an account set up specifically for this purpose on behalf of a group rather than an individual (ie: use project accounts, never personal accounts). You can set up a group via your personal facebook account but ensure that your personal settings are secure and limited viewing. It is possible also to set the Facebook group privacy settings soo they can't see the profiles of others who have joined. (look under Account, Privacy settings on Facebook)

☞ Workers should not use their personal social networking or instant messaging accounts for contact with children and young people.

☞ Workers should seek to ensure that their personal profiles on any social networking sites should be set to the highest form of security to avoid young people accessing personal information or seeing any pictures of a personal nature.

12   Security when using Facebook

How to create a secure profile when setting up a group:

1. Select friends list from your profile
2. For each friend you add, there is an 'add to list' option. Add the young people to the 'limited profile' group
3. Once every young person is in the group 'limited profile,' select 'Account' then 'privacy settings' from the top of your Facebook page.
4. Select 'customise settings' within the privacy settings page
5. The privacy settings are then broken into profile, basic info, photo's etc,
6. On each item that needs to be kept private click on the drop down box and choose 'customise' then in the 'hide this from' box, type 'limited profile.'

Do this for every part of your profile to be kept private.

You can also change the Privacy settings to 'Only Me.' You can find this under 'Account' then 'privacy settings.' Process is now complete.

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Internet Cafés at Church

These should adhere to the Methodist Church Guidelines on Safeguarding and best practice: www.methodist.org.uk Church Life/Safeguarding

☝ Filtering software should be installed on all computers used at the Church GetNetWise www.getnetwise.org has lists of filtering and monitoring software

☝ Display Safety Guidelines in a prominent position visible to children and young people detailing advice on using the net and other forms of communication. Also include details of Childline, CEOPS and anti bullying alliance

Mobile Phones

The rationale for texting and calling is the same as social networking and email contact

Risk: Accusation of an inappropriate message or receipt of one
Solution: Be very careful in what language you use. It is not encouraged for Workers to give out their personal mobile number to young people. We recognise that this may be needed at times

Risk: Texting late in the evening – potential to be inappropriate
Solution: No texting after 9pm

Risk: Young Person's perception of relationship
Solution: Discourage text conversation or phone conversation where it is not about communicating information.

Risk: Texting/calling whilst the young person in school/college
Solution:Call between 12-1pm or 4-9pm

Risk: Data protection of young person numbers on workers personal mobiles
Solution: Have a lock on your phone for data protection and do not allow access
Preferred action: Use a software texting package rather than a personal phone for texting.

☝ When you have received a phone call/text or made a phone call/text to a young person that is not giving out information, you must make a record of the conversation and report it to your line manager or group leader

☝ As much as possible do not give children or young people your personal number, if you have a works phone use that. Or set up an online texting service that only allows outward communication to a group and is managed online. But in all cases gain parental consent and limit your texts to the above guidelines.

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Where consultation with your line manager is advised in this document, it maybe more appropriate to inform another colleague as well as your line Manager. It is good practice to have a communication policy that all are aware of and adhere to.

☞ With regards to young people who have left the group or are now over the age of 18yrs, please use discression with regards to this policy and seek advice where neccessary.

☞ For useful resourses and support material to use with Parents, volunteers and children and young people visit http://www.ceop.police.uk/ or www.thinkuknow.co.uk

☞ Training material for workers, parents, children and young people to use alongside this policy will be available from Autumn 2011. Other policies include: Parents Guidelines, Guidelines for 5-11 yrs and Guidelines for 11-18 yrs. Available to download at www.childrenandyouth.org.uk

☞ Sign up to our Amaze best practice partnership where you can access a raft of free downloadable guidelines to support your ministry. Email admin@amaze.org.uk

This Policy works in conjunction with the Methodist Church Social Media Guidelines downloadable from: www.methodist.org.uk Technology and the Church and the Methodist Safeguarding Policy downloadable from www.methodist.org.uk Church Life

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