



## **Social media policy**

### **Rationale**

- We recognise that using social media is an important part of the lives of children and young people.
- We understand that for many young people, social media is a regular part of their lives and has a significant impact on their social development.
- We recognise that we must take all possible steps to protect young people from significant harm or risk whilst we work with children and young people.
- We also recognise the importance of establishing and updating procedures to ensure workers are protected whilst they work with children and young people.

### **Contacting a young person via social media or email**

- It is not appropriate to have private non-work related contact in the form of online communication (including email, text and direct messaging) with the children and young people with whom we work.
- Workers should only use online communication for reasons relating to work with children and young people, not for general socialising.
- Workers should make their line manager or group leader aware when they are using online communication. This must be set up as part of a group communication and not individual.

### **Parental awareness and consent**

- Parental consent for using online communication is essential and should be included in consent forms or by letter with a return slip agreeing to this form of communication. You should 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 happy that we use online communication and what type of communication we are using.

### **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.
- Only group emails should be used.
- Workers should encourage appropriate 'face to face' contact where possible. Conversation via email is discouraged.

- Workers should make their line manager or team leader aware when they are using email to contact young people.
- Email histories should be kept and dated.

#### Language

- All language used when communicating with children and young people should be clear and appropriate.
- Workers and volunteers should take great care over the language used to reduce the risk of misinterpretation.
- When sending emails, workers should not use informal language such as shorthand or 'text language' as this can often be misunderstood and lead to further complications.

#### Text messaging

- Text or WhatsApp messaging should only be used to communicate with young people as part of a group message with a parent or guardian included.
- Note that the age limit for WhatsApp is 16.
- Using text or WhatsApp requires sharing your phone number. For this reason, use of text or WhatsApp should generally be avoided. If possible, workers should use a separate work phone for any such messages.

#### Accepting followers on Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, Snapchat and similar platforms, and adding friends on Facebook and similar platforms

- You should not accept friend requests or follower requests on your personal social networking accounts from children or young people who are part of the children's and youth ministry and who are under the age of 18. You can set up a public group or account for your project or group and invite them to be members (remembering the age limit, currently 13 for most platforms).
- 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.
- Workers should not use their personal social networking 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.

#### Direct messaging via social media

- Use of direct messaging between workers and individual children or young people via social media is not permitted. Workers should refrain from engaging in conversation via these mediums.

#### Video Conferencing methods (e.g. Zoom, Facetime etc)

- Use of Zoom and any other webcam or visual communication between workers and individual children or young people is not permitted. Workers should refrain from using such methods on a one-to-one basis as they cannot always be recorded.
- Video conferencing may be used for conference calls and is considered appropriate if a group or project uses Zoom 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 and keep a record of it.
- We require more than one adult to be present when meeting with children or young people on Zoom.

#### Content

- Any content posted to social media that represents the church or any group or project run by the church should be appropriate.
- Workers should not post images of children or young people online unless permission has been given by them and their parents or carers.
- It is not appropriate to share specific information regarding conversations with, behaviour of or your personal opinions of children, young people and their families or carers.

Policy agreed: July 2023