



## Children and youth social media policy for churches

**Safeguarding contact name:** .....

**Church Secretary name:** .....

**Leader of group name:** .....

### Social media usage policy

Social media, when used properly, is exciting and opens up a lot of opportunities, but at times it can seem strange and even intimidating for people who are not familiar with it. Facebook, Twitter, texting, instant messaging, online gaming and personal emails are accessible by all. By following some simple guidelines you can avoid potential pitfalls, and these mediums can be safely used as a tool and a means of communication. Social media is great for promoting a group or event or communicating to parents, children and young people, as well as being a fun way to unwind and stay in touch with friends; it is essential to keep these two worlds separate.

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

Leaders must not communicate with children or young people (0-18 years) via leader's personal social networking profiles, email accounts or chat rooms. Messages must be in group format with more than one leader in the group. Young adults between 18-20 years of age should be communicated via group chat or group email.

### Social networking sites

**For an organisation/group** using or setting up a social networking site/medium that is for the purpose of running, maintaining communicating about the organisation/group the following principles should apply;

- 1) The page profile, if possible, must be password protected (this may not always be possible) and the password held by at least three leaders of the organisation or group. E.g. if you set up an Instagram or Facebook group.
- 2) The site should be monitored.

- 3) Any inappropriate posts by children or young people or leaders should be removed by the admin/s of the site. Reasons should then be explained to the person who posted the content. All those who use the site should be made aware what the purpose of the site is and that any inappropriate images, content that is not in line with the values of the group/organisation is not acceptable.
- 4) The site/ group should be kept closed i.e. only permitted/authorised members can see what is posted on the site.
- 5) Contents of any postings should be consistent with the aims of the organisation. In cases of doubt leaders should seek advice from the Group leader and the Group leader can seek advice if needed from Minister, Senior Steward.

### **Leaders, using social network sites for communication;**

- 1) Leaders should not friend or follow children or young people on social media. (The definition of children and young people in this context is 1-18 years of age. Young Adults between 18-20 years of age who are in the group or organisation should also be communicated with via groups, or group chat that has a minimum of two group leaders.
- 2) Messages left to or from children or young people on social networking sites should be written on an open page e.g. A Facebook wall and not in Private message or by using chat (one on one).
- 3) Communications with children and young people should be via group Chat with a minimum of three leaders on the group.
- 4) Any emails sent to children or young people should have a second leader copied into it.
- 5) Any events or activities run by the group or organisation that are organised or publicised on social media sites for group members should be set up as closed groups and membership managed by the administrators.
- 6) Leaders should avoid communicating with children or young people in their organisation/group after 9pm.
- 7) In signing off emails, messages, leaders should simply sign your name and the name of the group/organisation.
- 8) Parents/Guardians should be asked to give their permission for leaders to communicate with children and young people under 16 years of age via social networking sites or by any other means of internet communication e.g. email. This can be included on the annual consent forms. Parents or guardians should be the main port of contact and communication and copied into any communications to their children.
- 9) Parents or Guardians should be invited to be members of any group chat or social media groups (closed where possible). The parents or guardians should be informed of what the purpose of the group is and reminded to ensure that their privacy settings are suitable and that they should not accept any friend requests from children or young people.
- 10) Parental permission via annual consent forms is required for photographs and video footage of children and young people and the consent forms should state what the usage of the images will be for e.g.; for the promotion of the organisation via social media or publications. Leaders should endeavour not to state any unnecessary personal details or information relating to the child or young person when posting images or photos online e.g. full names, addresses, schools attending. If a child or young person has received an award then it is appropriate to use their full name.
- 11) Any disclosures of abuse reported through a social networking site must be dealt with in accordance with The Methodist Church Safeguarding procedures and Policy. In any doubt contact the Safeguarding Officer at Downsview Methodist Church.

### **Use of mobile phones**

- 1) Leaders involved in children and youth ministry should only have children's and young people's mobile numbers if the nature of their involvement requires to phone or text them (This might include those running groups for older teenagers or young adults or volunteer young

leaders involved in co-ordinating children or youth ministry) As much as possible group chats should be set up with two to three other leaders are included in communication. One on one text should be avoided and where possible parents should be included in the text.

- 2) Parental permission should be sort if the leader in this role will be contacting children or young people via mobile phone.
- 3) If a leader has a young persons or young adults phone number it should only be used for the purposes it has been given. E.g. times, dates, details of group meetings, events, planning.

### **Text communication not conversation**

- 1) Texts should be used for the purposes of reminding children and young people about meetings and events.
- 2) Texts can also be used as a means to encourage children or young people if it is appropriate e.g. Hope your exams go ok. If it turns into conversation, communication should be ended. A leader can suggest discussing the subject further at the next session. Be mindful of child protection usual parameters.

### **Camera phones**

Pictures can be very powerful, camera phone users should ask permission to take a photo or video and explain what the purpose of the photo or video is for.

- Leaders and children and young people should not send pictures that are obscene, indecent or menacing.
- 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.
- When posting photographs or video on social media settings should be set up so that individual children and young people cannot be tagged.
- Images should be stored safely in an electronic file on devices that have security passwords.
- If any electronic device/memory that contains video or images is disposed of the images and video should be wiped from the memory in such a way that it cannot be recovered on that device.

### **Use of mobile phones on activities**

Children and Young people, parents and guardians should be informed about safe usage of mobile phones and devices and the policy for the usage during the event or session;

- 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 mobile phones or devices including text messaging, games or music cannot be allowed to be a distraction from a safe awareness of the environment.
- That mobile phones or device usage should not interfere with the full participation of activities.
- That when on camps or overnight activities that there is a stated preferred time period when parents may contact, if they wish. This is to minimise and alleviate homesickness and to avoid the disturbance of other children and young people after lights out.

### **Use of computers/tablets/web enabled games consoles/Smart TVs**

If devices are used as part of activities within the organisation or group. They should be used within the following guidelines;

- All games, videos, films should be age appropriate for the group.
- Internet searching should be monitored and age appropriate.

- Children and young people should be supervised during the activity.
- Parental settings where possible should be used on all devices.
- Permission should be asked before videoing or recording other members of the group.
- Nothing should be posted without the leaders knowledge or agreement.
- The group should be informed of the parameters and guidelines for the activity.

## Safeguarding

Always conduct yourself on the internet as you would face-to-face and be aware of what you say and how you say it. If you wouldn't say or do something in the "real" world, then don't do it online. Never provide personal details about young people or volunteers and always ensure you have parental permission to use any photos of young people. Only ever use the first names of young people on any photo or video caption and only share appropriate photos, the sort that you would be happy putting on a public notice board. Remember that, potentially, anyone can view content on the internet.

If you sign yourself up to social networking platforms you need to be aware that content is speedily updated and security settings can change. Whatever site you choose to join, make sure you regularly check your privacy and security settings and have a browse of their privacy policy. Most content can be tagged and posted on your account and comments will be made that you cannot always control. It is a network rather than a broadcasting channel so people will share opinions (good and bad).

Only set up pages for events, activities or groups for which you are responsible. Once a site has been set up it needs to be checked regularly to ensure that information changes when appropriate and that members are interested and come back.

Please note that posts on social media are widely accessible and can easily be passed on; always be sure that any information or comments made are appropriate and in keeping with the ethos and values of the Methodist Church. Don't use your personal social networking account to communicate directly, on a one-to-one basis with children or young people. Be aware of the age limits on social media sites and purpose of usage.

## Methodist Church safeguarding and GDPR and other links

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-ministers-and-office-holders/safeguarding/>

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/children-and-youth/the-well-for-workers/well-resources/social-media-guidelines/>

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-ministers-and-office-holders/guidance-for-churches/data-protection/>

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/children-and-youth/the-well-for-workers/well-resources/organising-events/>

## Other Information and sources on E-Safety

The following websites provide information for leaders, parents, guardians and carers about e-safety;

- Childnet [www.childnet.com](http://www.childnet.com)
- Anti-Bullying Alliance [www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk](http://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk)
- NSPCC/02 Helpline [www.02.co.uk/help/nspcc/child-protection](http://www.02.co.uk/help/nspcc/child-protection)
- CEOP Think you know [www.thinkuknow.co.uk](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk)
- UK safer internet Centre [www.saferinternet.org.uk](http://www.saferinternet.org.uk)