

DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS WITH UNDER 18's POLICY

Rationale

'New' method of communication: wide scope, instant, informal, with many benefits but also inherent dangers. Awareness needed of the potential for misuse, whether intentional or accidental, and to use responsibly.

Definition

Refers to the use of mobile/smartphones, computers, tablets, etc. and to texts, e-mails, social media including social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Bebo, etc. photo messaging and so on.

Who do these Guidelines apply to?

All users of the above forms of communication who have any agreed position of responsibility and involvement with children and young people on behalf of St Luke's Church.

The Guidelines

1. Contact with children and young people via text, e-mail, social media sites, etc.

- 1.1. No private, non-role related contact with children and young people.
- 1.2. Use only for role related information giving and general reminders and preferably to a group rather than an individual.
- 1.3. Should make line manager/leader/relevant superior aware when using and keep a record of use.
- 1.4. Any contact, other than general enquiry such as date and time of next meeting, initiated by a young person should be kept, logged and line manager/leader/relevant superior/safeguarding officer made aware. If this contains disclosure or anything of concern follow usual safeguarding procedures. Ideally give only a minimal response via this media.
- 1.5. Where possible contact should be open to monitoring and in the case of e-mails, texts, etc., another leader/relevant adult should be copied in.
- 1.6. Parental consent for use of such means of communication should be given via signed registration form and if not given such means should not be used. Parents should be told why and how this method of communication will be used.
- 1.7. Children/young people should not be put under pressure to reveal their mobile number, e-mail address, etc.
- 1.8. Extended conversations via these methods should be discouraged.
- 1.9. Texts, e-mail, Facebook messages, Twitter, etc., history should be kept in accordance with St. Luke's retention of records policy.
- 1.10. Only workers recruited through St. Luke's Church safe recruitment procedure, who are authorised to do so, should use any electronic means to contact children or young people on behalf of the church.
- 1.11. These means of communication should not be used with children of primary school age.
- 1.12. Any personal information from a child or young person should not be communicated by workers via text, e-mail, IMS, social networking site, etc.

2. Use of language

- 2.1. Language should be appropriate and where possible responses should be brief, meaningful and capable of being received by the whole group.
- 2.2. Care is needed to avoid misinterpretation.
- 2.3. Text or informal language can easily lead to misinterpretation, e.g. is 'lol' laugh out loud or lots of love?! and so should be avoided.

3. Hours of communication

- 3.1. Not before 8.00am or after 9.00pm. There may be an exception in a case where the Youth Worker or appointed deputy considers immediate follow up to be necessary following a group meeting which has a finishing time at or later than 9pm. Logging requirements would apply.
- 3.2. Not during times children/young people may be in lessons e.g. possibly between 9.00am and 4.00pm on weekdays during term time.

4. Social Networking Sites

- 4.1. Children or young people under 18 should not be added as 'friends' on your personal page.
- 4.2. Use site developed for the youth group and invite people to be members if they are over the minimum age for the use of the site e.g. for Facebook this is 13.
- 4.3. Minimum ages should always be observed.
- 4.4. Be careful of privacy settings e.g. ensure your own privacy settings are secure and set privacy settings so members of your group can't see the profiles of others who have joined.
- 4.5. Do not use personal social networking for contact with children or young people.
- 4.6. All adults involved in the children's and youth work should also be invited to join in order to allow self-policing. Those involved should be encouraged to speak out about anything they think inappropriate.

5. Skype, FaceTime, Viber, Google Hangouts, etc.

- 5.1. Not to be used as cannot be recorded and can involve other more complex difficulties.
- 5.2. The exception may be in the case of conference calls in connection with specific projects and used in the group environment. However there must be clear aims and objectives and the line manager should be aware that this is taking place and record this.

6. Chat facilities

- 6.1. These facilities (e.g. IMS) should be avoided wherever possible. If used, any text file should be saved and log kept.
- 6.2. Only use in group settings where other safely recruited adults are part of the group. Keep record/evidence.

7. Use of church owned computers by children and young people

- 7.1. Use should be in line with St Luke's Church Safeguarding Policy.
- 7.2. Appropriate filtering software should be installed.
- 7.3. Safety guidelines for use of the Internet should be taught and displayed.

8. Mobile Phone/Text

- 8.1. Should be used only for information giving to the group.
- 8.2. For any non-information, call or text, a record should be made and be submitted to the line manager.
- 8.3. The Youth Worker will have a work mobile phone so all communications with children and young people may be made using this.
- 8.4. Two mobile phones are available from the church office, which must be used for activities away from the premises. Children/young people should be provided with a card detailing the mobile phone numbers. These phones should be used in order to avoid leaders/helpers needing to store children/young people's numbers on personal mobiles or to give their personal number to the children/young people and to allow records of communication to be retained.

9. Photographs/Videos

- 9.1. Should only be used with child/young person's agreement and signed parental permission as per registration forms.
- 9.2. Group photos rather than those of individuals should be used.
- 9.3. Captions should not include any personal details, including names.
- 9.4. Workers should not take/retain images of children or young people on their mobile phones.
- 9.5. Photographs of children and young people should only be taken using the church camera and should only be downloaded onto the church computer. (The youth worker may also use his work mobile phone for this purpose).

10. Time Limited Posts

- 10.1. Media that embraces time-limited posts should not be used e.g. Snapchat as it is not possible to check messaging retrospectively.

11. Use by Children and Young People

- 11.1. Workers need to be aware of inappropriate fixations, access to inappropriate sites or inappropriate use of these means of communication, by children or young people in their care.

12. Cyber Bullying

- 12.1. Should not be tolerated and should be challenged and dealt with as with any other form of bullying.
- 12.2. Instances should be reported to the Youth Worker or his appointed deputy who will refer to the Safeguarding Officer.

13. New Technology

- 13.1. These guidelines will be reviewed regularly to reflect any new digital communications technology and to consider the benefits and risks from an e-safety point of view.
- 13.2. Anyone using technology not specifically mentioned in these guidelines will be expected to apply this guidance appropriately and seek advice if required from the Safeguarding officer on any issues that may arise.

Footnote

Where appropriate this document should be read in conjunction with St. Luke's Safeguarding Policy, other relevant policies and the Diocese of Sheffield Social Media Guidelines.

Glossary of Terms

- **Cyber Bullying** is the use of electronic communication to bully, threaten, intimidate or otherwise harm someone. NB: there may be legal ramifications when technology is used in this way.
- **FaceTime**: the name for Apple's video-calling technology. It allows both video and audio-only calls between compatible devices.
- **Google Hangouts** is a unified communications service that allows members to initiate and participate in text, voice or video chats, either one-on-one or in a group.
- **IMS** enables person-to-person and person-to-content communications in a variety of modes including voice, text, pictures and video, or any combination of these.
- **Smartphone**: a handheld device that integrates mobile phone capabilities with the more common features of a handheld computer or PDA.
- **Skype** is a service provider that offers free calling between subscribers and low-cost calling to people who don't use the service. In addition to standard telephone calls, Skype enables file transfers, texting, video chat and videoconferencing.
- **Viber**: an instant messaging app for smartphones. In addition to instant messaging, users can exchange images, video and audio media messages.
- **Snapchat** is a mobile app and service for sharing photos, videos, and messages with other people. **It can be used** to send quick text messages that disappear once the recipient reads them.