

Online Safety Policy

1. Introduction

1.1. The majority of young people are using the internet, mobile phones and social networking sites to communicate with each other on a daily basis. This brings important new opportunities for our youth work, but also potential risks and challenges. As a result, we want all youth workers to be clear about how we expect all to conduct their online communication with young people.

Social networking and online communications also creates new issues in safeguarding and protecting young people. We will always prioritise the need to protect young people.

1.2. Definitions. Social networks are websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to communicate with others. The number and type of social media websites and apps are constantly changing and developing, but include Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat and many others. More general online communication includes email, online video (eg. Skype) and messaging.

2. Scope

This document describes our approach to online safety (with a specific focus on social networking) in line with the Diocesan of London Child protection policy as well as guidance from the Harrow Safeguarding Children's Board (HSCB). This document is intended as guidance for all workers (both paid and voluntary).

1. Principles for personal use of social networking sites

2. As youth workers we are role models (both in person and online) for the young people we work with. How we behave, speak and treat others online is just as important as how we act face to face.
3. Whilst online communication may be a valuable addition to our work, it does not replace the time we spend with young people in person.
4. Our "digital lives" - how we present and conduct ourselves online - should not be a misrepresentation or exaggeration of who we are in reality. We will always seek to be honest and truthful about ourselves online, and avoid anonymous communications.
5. Social networks are now commonly accessed on mobile devices. This is a useful tool however it has also led to a hyper-connected generation. Hyper-connection is the culture of always being connected, this can be seen visually by people constantly looking at their mobile device (focusing on "what is new", instead of "what is now"). In

a group work setting we want to challenge this culture encouraging both leaders and young people to put down their mobile devices so that together we can focus on what God is doing “here and now” whilst pursuing authentic and genuine community. Remember, “the most important lessons are caught, not taught”.

1. Principles for interaction with young people online

2. Members of the youth team **are not** required to add or accept friend requests from young people.
3. However if you do wish to add young people as online friends, the following conditions must be kept:
 - The youth worker must notify the youth pastor before using their account in this way. The youth pastor may then arrange a short meeting to discuss the content of this document in person and to assist with privacy settings (if needed).
 - Youth workers are encouraged to have strict privacy settings, other adult “friends” should be prevented from seeing or being able to contact young people.
 - Communication online or through social media may only take place with explicit parental or carer consent. The youth pastor will have a list of names of those who have consent.
 - Youth workers must not use social media to communicate with a young person who is breaking any regulations laid down by the social media provider: for example, the minimum age for an account on Facebook is 13.
 - Contact with young people using online communication or social media should be kept within the hours of 9am and 9pm.
 - Private picture messages should not be sent in any circumstance.
 - Young people may find it easier to communicate online and therefore be inclined to share more personal or sensitive information about themselves. General advice and support should be offered but no more- counselling must be carried out by those qualified to do so.
 - Whenever possible, copy another youth worker into the conversation.

Twitter

Direct messaging should not happen to personal accounts. Any significant messages sent to a member of the children’s or youth team by individuals under 18 should be recorded and reported.

Youtube

Parental consent should be obtained for all Youtube videos that are posted. Identities should be kept anonymous.

Instagram

Workers who have an Instagram account should not post pictures of young people on their own accounts.

Instagram photos may only be uploaded on the official HopeChurch Harrow

View account. Team members are encouraged not to follow young people.

Care should be taken when taking photos and permission should be sought from every young person before a photo is uploaded.

Snapchat

We strongly advise those involved in the children's and youth ministry not to have active snapchat accounts, given current concerns over the usage of this platform. Workers should not, under any circumstance, be communicating with any person under the age of 18 through this platform.

Email

Significant email conversations should be recorded and viewable. Again team members should not be emailing those under 18 and should only be emailing young people with specific prior agreement from the relevant worker and parent/guardian.

The exception to this is when the Children's Worker communicates with children through email by prior consent of the parent/guardian.

Text (including What's App)

Group messages are encouraged.

Text messages with young people should be kept and be viewable by the local safeguarding administrator.

Team members, as a general rule, should not be texting young people unless they have a specific mentoring responsibility. All communication should be relevant to the mentoring situation.

Significant conversations should be shared with the relevant worker.

1. Content of communication

2. Use clear language, avoiding abbreviations like 'lol' (which could mean 'lots of love' as well as 'laugh out loud') which might be misinterpreted.
3. Youth workers must not publish, post, or release information that is considered confidential by the church, a young person or anyone else. Sharing gossip or rumours is unacceptable at any time.

3. Youth workers should only post or comment in ways that should privacy settings fail, would be appropriate for a young person to witness.
4. Images of young people must not be posted online without prior consent, and then only posted in closed group or private accounts.

1. Safeguarding

2. Any safeguarding issues that arise during online communication with a young person online should be dealt with by following the church safeguarding procedure.
3. Pass on or show any texts or email conversations that raise concerns to the Youth Pastor, or Safeguarding Officer.
4. Once a disclosure has been made, or a concern has arisen, youth workers should not use social media to follow up or further investigate the matter.
5. Youth workers should keep a record of any significant conversations with young people. This should be kept in a password protected document or in a locked file. Do not remove any private conversations with young people from social networking sites.

7.0 Online Dangers

Youth workers should have a basic awareness of online dangers in order to promote positive behaviours and to guide discussion with young people and parents. Some of these issues include: sexting, sexual exploitation, cyberbullying, radicalisation, pornography and grooming. If you are concerned about a young person in one of these areas or a young person discloses something, react calmly and sensitively and follow the safeguarding procedures.

8.0 Further help

1. HopeChurch Harrow View will provide safeguarding training for staff and volunteers that incorporates appropriate use of information and communication technology as well as regular Teen Focus events for youth workers and parents covering topics such as sexting, pornography and online dangers.
2. The youth pastor and safeguarding officer will regularly be available to answer any questions.
3. The church Safeguarding Policy should be read and followed in conjunction with this document. If in any doubt, following the Safeguarding Policy.

Books:

Bex Lewis, *Raising Children in a Digital Age*.

Jason Royce & Sarah Percival, *A Parent's Guide to talking about sex with your teenager*, available from www.youthscape.co.uk/store

Web:

<https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/your-feelings/self-harm/>

<https://www.rethink.org/resources/s>

<https://www.selfharm.co.uk>

http://www.youngminds.org.uk/for_children_young_people/whats_worrying_you/self-harm

Local & National Support:**Alumina**

Online course & forum / video catch-up

<http://alumina.selfharm.co.uk>

Course and workbooks also available in CCRYouth resources, can be used as a group or adapted for one-to-one work

Childline

Child-line: 0800 1111

The Wish Centre

Girls Support group / one-to-one counselling

<http://thewishcentre.org.uk/wish-referral-form-harrow-v2/>