



**BROADMEAD**  
Baptist Church

## Social Media Policy

### **Communication Guidelines for Workers and Volunteers with those Under 18 years old**

The Church recognises 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 Church's Safeguarding Policy, we recognise that we must take all possible steps to protect young people from significant harm or risk whilst 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 church policies produced regarding safeguarding and communication matters and are expected to adhere to the guidelines in the Church's current policies.

### **Reasons for contacting a young person via the Internet or email:**

It is not appropriate to have private non-work/group related contact in the form of electronic communication with the children and young people with whom we work.

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.

Only use electronic communication for reasons relating to work with children and young people, not for general socialising. Your line manager or youth group leader should be aware when you are using electronic communication. This must be set up as part of a group communication and not by an individual.

### **Parental awareness and consent**

Parental consent for using electronic forms of communication is essential and should be included on annual consent forms or by letter with a return slip agreeing to the use of this form of communication. It should be outlined what means you will be using for communication and what information 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 in the use of electronic communication and what type of electronic communication is being used (e.g. email).

## **Specific definitions**

'Internet' communication specifically refers to the use of social networking sites such as Bebo, Facebook, Twitter and other websites 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.

## **Email communication**

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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 use a 'shared' email account where all church/group leaders can access any emails, regardless of whether it is private or public. This would allow communication amongst leaders and young people to remain safe.

Only group emails should be used.

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 histories should be kept and dated.

## **Email and 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, 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. Ensuring that this is in line with other safeguarding procedures, not alone etc.

## **Language**

All language should be appropriate and where possible 'standard responses' should be used (e.g. 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).

Take great care over the language used to reduce the risk of misinterpretation.

When sending emails, do not use informal language such as shorthand or 'text language' as this can often be misunderstood and lead to further complications.

## **Hours of communication**

When using email/the 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 or use the Internet, seek advice from your line manager/group leader but there should be no email communication after 9pm.

'Adding friends' on Facebook and similar sites

You should not add children or young people on your personal social networking page who are part of the children's and youth ministry at your church or group and who are under the age of 18.

You can set up a Facebook group for your project or group and invite them to be members (that is, if they are over the required minimum age limit – which is 13 for Facebook).

Only use an agreed social networking account for contact with children and young people with whom you are working. This should normally be an account set up specifically for this purpose on behalf of a group rather than an individual (use project accounts, never personal accounts).

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

Seek to ensure that your personal profiles on any social networking sites are set to the highest form of security to avoid young people accessing personal information or seeing any pictures of a personal nature.

### **Mobile Phones**

The rationale for texting and calling is the same as social networking and email contact. Be very careful in what language you use. It is not encouraged for workers to give out their personal mobile number to young people. However it is recognised that this may be needed at times.

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Texting late in the evening has the potential to be viewed as inappropriate. Therefore no texting after 9pm should take place.

Discourage text conversation or phone conversation where it is not about communicating information. 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.

Group code of conduct.

- Be respectful of other people's privacy.
- Never give away personal information.
- If you wouldn't say it, don't send it.
- Be polite.
- Maintain a history, so anything you send/say can be traced.

Encourage the children and young people to discuss what acceptable and unacceptable behaviour is. Put this code of conduct on the wall as a visual reminder.

Most children and young people use mobile phones and the Internet appropriately; however when technology is abused there may be legal consequences

What to do if a child tells you that are being cyberbullied

- DON'T PANIC! Your initial reaction is vital. Listen, learn, involve and resolve.
- Assure them that they have done the right thing by telling you.
- Decide a plan of action with the young person.
- Go through any messages that they have received and kept.

- Ask them not to open any further online or text messages from these addresses and phone numbers, but to allow you to open them instead.
- Get them to change their mobile phone number.
- Get them to change their online profile.
- Involve other agencies.
- Support the young person.

What do I do if I discover that a child is cyberbullying?

- Remain calm.
- Ask them what's been happening and find out what's behind their behaviour.
- Don't label the young person a 'bully'.
- When you've established the catalyst or reasons behind the cyberbullying behaviour, explain why this behaviour is wrong.
- Explain the consequences of bullying.
- Agree a way forward.

The church appoints the following to administer and monitor their Social Media Policy

Name:

Signed:

Date:

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