

CONNEXIONAL SAFEGUARDING TEAM

Online Communication Guidelines for Leaders working with Young People

- All communication must come from a monitored online work account, with appropriate privacy settings.
- Communication must be:
 - Transparent - visible to at least two leaders and able to be shared with parents/carers
 - Accountable - documented and shared with at least two adults
 - Purposeful - for a specific purpose that is in the best interest of the young person
- All leaders engaging in online communication with young people must have been safer recruited in accordance with Practice Guidance on carrying out Disclosure & Barring (DBS) checks as part of Safer Recruitment ([2018](#)).
- Two leaders must be present if there are under 18's on a video call.
- Staff ratios should always be adhered to online.
- Only known young people will be able to join online groups and all under 18's must have a consent form completed by their parents/carers. In addition, those 12 years and over should also sign a consent form.
- If a young person wishes to communicate privately with a leader, tell them that another adult will be listening to but not participating in the conversation. If you believe a young person is at risk and they refuse to have another adult present, tell them you will have to write down what they say and that you may have to share the content of the conversation with somebody who can help. **Never promise confidentiality and always consult with your Church/Circuit Safeguarding Officer who may contact your District Safeguarding Officer.**
- Links to access video calls should never be shared publicly and wherever possible a password should be set to access the call. Check with the provider of the software to see what security measures they have in place and whether this is a suitable platform for you to use.
- The software used must not share email or other data with participants.
- Only use platforms that are appropriate and secure. Stick to age restrictions.
- Do not use Snapchat as a means of communication.
- Keep records of contacts. Use a log to note the date, time, participants and platform used as well as a brief summary of the content of the session. Text conversations should be kept as screenshots¹.
- If you are concerned about the well-being of a young person share logs/screen shots and other information with the Church/Circuit Safeguarding Officer.

¹ A conversation is more than 'this is the time there is an online chat tonight', 'ok thanks. See you then.' 'great, see you later, stay safe'

- Be aware that not all households have internet access; some may have strict rules around use of screens or pay as you go streaming accounts.
- Involve young people in setting boundaries and ensure they are clear about the boundaries before and during online engagement. These should include a ban on recording online conversations and taking images of individuals. As you normally would in your weekly group, be mindful of the content of any material used, i.e. is it age appropriate, in line with Methodist theology etc.
- If any young person contravenes the boundaries, these boundaries should be revisited. If this continues, you should have conversations with their parents/carers on how you can work together to create boundaries for this young person so they can continue to engage online with the group. As a very last resort, in consultation with their parents/carers you may want to agree that they have some time out from group sessions.
- If you see anything posted on-line that concerns you, contact your Church/Circuit Safeguarding Officer. Inappropriate posts on social media can be part of a larger spectrum of issues (family abuse, peer-to-peer abuse, mental health concerns etc.) and other organisations may be aware of these.
- Use language that cannot be misinterpreted, avoid the use of abbreviations e.g. LOL and do not add kisses at the end of message even if young people do.
- When using group conversations, be aware it is easy for the quieter members to be overlooked. Think about how you will try to engage everyone.
- Although you are working from home, you are still working and normal rules apply e.g. appropriate dress.
- Be aware that you are on camera and that the space behind you is visible. Have a look around and make sure there is nothing around that you would not want anyone else to see.
- If you have to make video calls from a bedroom, make sure the bed/intimate items are out of camera view. Be aware of the environment where young people are situated. If it is a private space, e.g. bedroom communicate with the parents/carers and suggest the door is left open during the session. This is an indication from the parents/carers that they are aware the young person is online with the group.
- Set boundaries on times you will 'meet' young people e.g. online interaction can mirror your normal youth group meeting times, but as online interaction can be more tiring consider reducing the time.
- Stay in touch with parents/carers and share the progress of sessions as well as letting them know when the virtual group will gather.

Safeguarding Concerns

If a young person says something that concerns you, arrange to speak with them outside of the group so you can obtain further information and decide if any further action needs to be taken. **You should always consult with your Church/Circuit Safeguarding Officer in the first instance or alternatively your District Safeguarding Officer.** If you are unable to contact any of the above, get in touch with the Safeguarding Casework Supervisor who covers your district (contact details at the end of this document).

Safeguarding concerns and disclosures of abuse reported through a social networking site must be dealt with in accordance with The Methodist Church Safeguarding Policy, Procedures and [Guidance](#). If the situation is urgent, contact the police and/or your local social care agency.

Church Safeguarding Officer:

Name: _____

Tel: _____

Circuit Safeguarding Officer:

Name: _____

Tel: _____

District Safeguarding Officer:

Name: _____

Tel: _____

Social Care Agency:

Name: _____

Tel: _____

SAFEGUARDING CASEWORK SUPERVISORS

Karen Allen - Tel: 07969 292581 (North East)

Melanie Argles - Tel: 07792 345966 (South West)

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