

## Young people & Social Media Guidelines



### Guidance for volunteers & paid staff

For the purpose of these guidelines all volunteers and paid staff shall be classed as workers

As a worker part of your role may involve working and communicating with our young people via social media, this document is a set of guidelines on how to safely do this. These guidelines are for those who have responsibility for working with young people and children within their role.

We recognise that using the internet, social media (and other forms of technology) is an important part of the lives of the children and young people we work with and has a significant impact on their social development. In accordance with The Methodist 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 policies produced regarding safeguarding and communication matters and are expected to adhere to the guidelines in the current policies. They must also sign to say they have seen policies such as safeguarding and relevant risk assessments.

It is not appropriate to have non-volunteer related contact in the form of electronic communication with children and young people. However we recognise that some workers will have prior relationships with some of the young people e.g. parent, family friend etc. For this reason we will request that all workers make us aware of any of these prior relationships, which we will record and store in the form of a declaration form.

We also acknowledge times of transition, for young people who turn 18 and become volunteers. They may end up leading groups with their friends in them. In terms of friendships these transition rules are for young people aged 16-18 years (no under 16s). Again, if prior relationships e.g. family and friends are made known, we can be made aware of this and inform the parents/guardians of the young person in the form of the letter. It will then be the parents/guardians responsibility to monitor their child on social media.

There will be times when it is necessary and important to use electronic communication, however there is a need for an appropriate response and it is always encouraged that face-to-face contact as opposed to a contact reply via online/electronic methods is preferable. Workers should only use

electronic communication for reasons relating to work with children and young people, not for general socialising.

### Communication for team purposes

As much communication with Young People is done through Social Media, we understand that to work with young people we also need to communicate with them this way. But this needs to be done in a way that is safe and open for the protection of both the young person and the worker. It is important that you know the acceptable methods of communication which you may use and also when it is appropriate for you to contact a young person. A consent form goes out to the parents/guardians for the young people and permission is asked for us to be able to contact the young people via Facebook, text message and email. You will be made aware of any young people whose parents have not given us their consent.

If any guidelines are broken, we have the right to ask a person to stop volunteering.

### *Specific communication methods*

#### Facebook, Instagram and Twitter

Minimum sign-up age – Facebook: 13 years old, Instagram: 13 years old, Twitter: 13 years old

Workers are not to instigate a connection with anyone under the age of 18 on social media. But if a young person instigates it, then volunteers are asked to keep any communication open and within allowed communication hours (which are mentioned further on in this document). If individual messages are required, this should be done in a group conversation with a second leader in the group.

Workers should be mindful of the content that they themselves post on social media. Workers should not be sharing opinions that could bring the church into disrepute or those that could alienate young people, such as strong views on gender/sexuality.

#### Text Messaging

Texting is a common way of communicating with young people. Try to keep any communication with under 18's as public as possible. Don't delete any personal messages without showing them to your line manager, group leader and creating a record of the contact (a written record or screen capture). This is for your benefit and safety as well as the young peoples. If possible create a group with another appropriate adult for the messages.

### Whatsapp

Minimum sign-up age – 16 years old (within the EU), 13 years old (outside the EU)

No private one-to-one messages are permitted via Whatsapp with under 18's. It is acceptable for group messages as long as there are at least 2 DBS checked adults in the group chat. This includes Google+ and other similar software.

### Email

There are church email accounts that are the preferred way for sending any email communication to young people. If you do not have access to one of these accounts, please forward the email and any instructions to someone who does.

### Skype, Facetime, Viba and other video messaging mediums

The use of Skype, Facetime and any other webcam or visual communication via the Internet is not permitted. It could be used for a conference call and is considered appropriate if a group uses a webcam/Skype in a group environment for project purposes and has clear aims and objectives. Always seek to inform your team leader when this is taking place and make a record of it.

### Messenger/Live Chat

The use of live chat facilities between adults and under 18's is not permitted. However if a young person starts chatting with you this way, arrange an appropriate time to talk face-to-face. If something is disclosed to you via this method save the messages and follow the below procedure for disclosure.

### Snapchat

We do not approve the use of Snapchat (or similar services) for anyone working with under 18's, as a form of communication with young people. If you are found to be communicating with under 18's on Snapchat (or similar), there will be grounds for a review of your role.

### Meetme and other similar location based apps e.g. Tinder

We do not approve the use of location based apps for anyone working with under 18's. If you are found to be communicating with under 18's this way, there will be grounds for a review of your role, as this could be construed as grooming.

### Hours of Communication

When using social media/email/text for communication with Young People it is advised that it should take place between the hours of 9am – 7pm. If a project takes place in the evening (after 5pm) and it is necessary to send an email/text/Facebook – workers should seek advice from their line manager, but there should be no communication after 9pm. The exceptions to this would be a youth outing/trip away where it may be necessary to contact a young person after 9pm, but this would be for a specific event and permission would be obtained from the parents. It would also include a specific risk assessment and contact would be limited to named leaders.

### Disclosure

If a Young Person discloses something to you over Social Media sites/email/text, it needs to be copied and saved with the time and date of the message. Straight away you need to let Robin Selmes (Minister), Kirstie Bottiglieri (safeguarding officer) or Helen Young (youth pastor) know what has been disclosed to you. They will then follow the church Safeguarding procedures for dealing with the matters raised. If possible, encourage the young person to meet with you face to face and not to carry on the conversation via Social Media. We are aware that this is not always possible and if the young person will only talk through social media/email/text then please keep all the messages and let one of the above people know this conversation is taking place.

### Photos

There are times when there will be the opportunity to take photos during events or for an activity. We already ask for parental permission for photos – but you are asked not to post photos of young people on your personal social media accounts or to store photos on your personal phones. You will be informed of which young people have photo restrictions. In addition to parental consent, young people aged 13 years + can give their own photo consent and their wishes must be respected.

### Whistle-blowing

If you see another member of the church not adhering to the social media policy, or if you have any questions, concerns or require clarification – please report this to Helen Young, Robin Selmes or Kirstie Bottiglieri

### Finally

Clear boundaries around interacting with under 18's online not only helps keep young people safe, it helps keep you safe, too.

If you are unsure how to proceed in light of this document, please talk to Helen Young, Kirstie Bottiglieri or Robin Selmes.

Once you have read this document please sign the below agreement saying that you have understood this policy and agree to adhere to the rules. This needs to be handed back to your team leader.

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Third Avenue Social Media Policy agreement

I....., have read and understood this document and I agree to uphold the rules in my voluntary position here at Third Avenue Church & Community. Should these rules not be upheld, my position may be at risk.

I also agree to notify my line manager if I am aware that others are not adhering to this policy.

Signed.....

Name.....

Date..... Review date.....