

## **Communications Policy for Children and Youth Ministry: use of Social Media and ICT**

April 2020, updated October 2020

In the current situation, where the Covid-19 pandemic makes face-to-face contact with children and young people impossible, the creative use of social media will be a vital means of keeping in touch and offering support.

### **1 Introduction**

As an organisation, we recognise that using the internet (and other forms of information technology) is an important part of the lives of the children and young people with whom we work. 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 St Paul's Safeguarding Policy, we recognise that we must take all possible steps to protect children and young people from significant harm or risk whilst using the Internet or any other form of technology. All leaders are responsible for reading policies regarding safeguarding and communications and are expected to model safe practice and to equip volunteers to adhere to the current guidelines.

### **2 Reasons for contacting a young person via the internet or email**

2.1 St Paul's employees and volunteers should only use electronic communication with children and young people for reasons directly related to St Paul's activities, not for general socialising.

2.2 We recognise that there will be times when it is necessary and important to use electronic communication. However, we encourage face-to-face contact for communication wherever possible, rather than via online methods of communication.

2.3 St Paul's employees should inform their line manager when they are using electronic communication. A spreadsheet will be set up on the Google Docs in which outline details of such communications should be logged. Volunteers should inform the St Paul's employee with whom they are working. This must be set up as part of a group, not individual, communication.

2.4 Email should only be used to communicate specific, factual information (times and dates of events, for example). It should not be used as a relationship-building tool.

### **3 Parental awareness and consent**

3.1 Parental consent for using electronic forms of communication and electronic storage of under-18s' data must be obtained for all St Paul's activities. (European law currently forbids the collection and storage of data relating to under-13s without parental consent.) All relevant letters and consent forms sent to parents should include a return slip with space for a signature to indicate parental agreement. The proposed means of communication and an outline of the content should be explained. In current circumstances we will accept electronic confirmation.

2. This policy and practice should be carefully explained to parents and carers.

### **4 Specific definitions**

4.1 'Internet' communication specifically refers to the use of social networking sites. This should normally only be for publicising events and not for instant messaging.

4.2 'Email' communication specifically refers to the use of emails, including written text and/or pictures sent from personal or work accounts.

## **Email and accountability**

4.3 As specified above, email should only be used to convey information and not as a relationship-building tool. If, via email, a young person discloses information that gives cause for concern, the following procedure must be followed:

- Read and follow the St Paul's Safeguarding Procedures relating to disclosures.
- 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.

## **5 Language**

5.1 All language should be appropriate. In response to an individual young person requesting additional details about *eg* a group event, St Paul's employees and volunteers should create a standard response, ensuring that all receive the same information.

5.2 Employees and volunteers should not use informal language such as shorthand or 'text language' as this can easily lead to misunderstandings.

## **6 'Adding friends' on Facebook and similar sites**

6.1 Employees and volunteers should not use their personal social networking or instant messaging accounts for contact with children and young people under the age of 18, nor add them to their personal social networking page. This applies to all children and young people connected in any way with St Paul's activities.

6.2 Employees are encouraged to ensure that their personal profiles on any social networking sites are set to the highest level of security to avoid young people accessing personal information or seeing any pictures of a personal nature.

## **7 Chat facilities**

### **7.1 Messenger and live chat**

7.1.1 Under normal circumstances, the use of live chat facilities between employees/volunteers and individual children or young people is not recommended, as these facilities lack transparency and cannot be kept on record.

7.1.2 Contact between employees and individual young people is currently permitted but should not be made via personal Instagram accounts. St Paul's Facebook and Instagram accounts should be used for this purpose.

It is acknowledged, however, that WhatsApp is often used to replace 'normal' text messages.

7.1.3 If a young person uses Facebook, Instagram or another live chat facility to ask a question of an employee, the employee should use the appropriate St Paul's account to reply. This allows for a record to be kept of any conversation that takes place.

### **2. Skype and other visual methods**

7.2.1 Use of Skype and any other webcam or visual communication via the Internet on a one-to-one basis is not normally permitted. In the current situation, one-to-one video calls may be used to maintain contact with individuals, particularly mentees. Where possible, video calls of any type made by St Paul's employees should be done via a St Paul's computer (in the office) and not via personal phones or laptops. In the current situation, however, employees and volunteers may use their own devices. Parental consent must be sought and, ideally, a parent should be present in the home when a call is made. Good practice also suggests that the adult making the call should have an additional colleague in the room, **but it is recognised that this may not be possible**. Care should be taken to ensure that the context from which the call is made is appropriate.

7.2.2 Visual communication may be used for conference calls and is considered appropriate if used in a group environment for project purposes and has clear aims and objectives for its use. If using platforms such as “Zoom” or “HouseParty”, the visual room must be set up as private or locked. A line manager or group leader should be informed when such calls are taking place so that a record of the activity may be kept.

## **8 General E-Safety Considerations**

8.1 E- Safety considerations need to evolve as technology is constantly changing. Children and young people often appear to be more technologically savvy than adults, but it is worth remembering that, although children may be digitally competent at an early age, they don't have the maturity to deal with the dangers that being online can expose them to.

8.2 Age restrictions must be kept in mind at all times. Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, Instagram, Musical.ly and Skype all require users to be 13 years old. WhatsApp users must be 16 years old. Although under-13s may view YouTube videos, they may not create their own YouTube account.

## **9 Cyberbullying - Keep Children Safe Using ICT**

9.1 Cyberbullying – or bullying via digital technologies like mobile phones and computers – is a different threat from typical playground bullying. It can be harder to spot and more difficult to stop than ‘traditional’ bullying.

9.2 Cyberbullying is different from other forms of bullying because:

- it can occur at any time and in any place – the victim can even receive bullying messages or materials at home
- the audience to the bullying can be large and reached very quickly and easily if messages are passed around or posted online
- it can be unintentional – people may not think about the consequences of sending messages or images

9.3 The most common ways of cyberbullying are through:

- chat rooms, blogs and forums – although many of these are moderated, there is still an element of risk
- text messaging – abusive and threatening texts can be sent to mobile phones
- abusive or prank phone calls – these can be made to a child's mobile phone
- email – new addresses can be set up in minutes and used to send offensive messages and images
- social networking and personal websites (like Facebook or MySpace) – offensive or humiliating messages and images can be posted on these sites
- identity theft – in many cyber environments fake profiles can be set up pretending to be someone else with the aim of bullying others
- instant message services – quicker than email, these allow users to have 'real time' conversations, and offensive messages or content can be sent in this way
- webcams – usually used to view each other when chatting online: children can also be sent abusive images or encouraged to act in an inappropriate way while being filmed
- video hosting sites (like YouTube) – children may find themselves the subject of films being shown (eg something that is wrongly called 'happy slapping') or may be accidentally exposed to pornographic images

- gaming sites, consoles and virtual worlds (eg Habbo Hotel) – chatting is possible within many games, and name-calling, abusive remarks and picking on particular players can occur

## **10 Protecting children from Cyberbullying**

As with other types of bullying it is important to listen to children and to react with sympathy, affirming them for reporting the bullying. It is also important for them to learn to respect and look after their friends online and to think before they post or text.

To help keep children safe you can:

- encourage them to talk to an adult about anything that's upsetting them
- watch out for signs of distress after they have used the internet or their mobile phone
- try to understand the ways in which they are using their digital technologies
- ask them to think about how their actions affect other users
- suggest that they only use moderated chat rooms
- encourage them to show you any abusive or offensive emails or messages they've received and keep a record of them
- help them to report any abuse to their internet service provider, the website manager/moderator, the mobile phone company or the police
- tell them never to respond to any abusive messages or calls – this is frequently what the abuser wants
- discuss keeping their passwords safe and avoiding giving their name, email address or mobile phone number to people outside their immediate circle of friends and family
- help them to change email address or telephone number if the abuse continues
- help them to turn on in-built internet safety features and install computer software to ensure that they only receive emails from people they have chosen and to block unwanted images
- tell them about places where they can go for help and support like Beatbullying (CyberMentors), ChildLine and Childnet International.

## **11 Sexting**

11.1 Children and young people should be made aware of the potentially serious consequences of 'sexting'. By taking (and possibly distributing) photos of a sexually explicit nature, young people can find themselves caught up in something totally outside their control. Apart from the acute embarrassment and detrimental impact it may have on the person whose image has been made public, there is a more serious side to consider.

11.2 As far as the law is concerned, the person who has taken the photo may be deemed to be distributing indecent images; the person to whom it is initially sent may be guilty of possession. If the image is shared more widely with friends, these young people also become culpable. All are likely to be in breach of website terms and conditions by posting the image on a social networking site.

11.3 The image may also be used by complete strangers to bully and intimidate children and young people: sexual predators browse internet profiles and, in some instances, are able to distribute the images they find. They can also use the images to blackmail children and young people and even pose as the young person in the picture in order to trap another victim. Children and young people should be made aware of the potentially serious consequences of 'sexting'.

11.4 The best thing any adult can do is to educate young people about these dangers, perhaps by raising it as a topic for discussion. The basic rule is: "If you don't want the image to be seen by other people, don't take the picture in the first place!"

11.5 If a St Paul's employee or volunteer is made aware that such an image has been posted on a social networking site, they should contact those who run the site and request that it be removed.

For further advice on sexting go to: <http://www.ceop.police.uk>