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## **INTERNET, EMAIL AND TEXTING POLICY FOR COPPLESTONE METHODIST CHURCH**

### **Rationale**

As a children or youth Worker at Copplestone Methodist Church we recognise 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 Methodist Church and Copplestone Methodist Church Safeguarding policy, we recognise that we must take all possible steps to protect young people from significant harm or risk when 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.

*At the end of this document, you will find a notes section which relates to specific parts of this policy.*

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

- It is not appropriate to have private non-work related contact with children and young people that we work with at Copplestone Methodist Church in the format of electronic communication.
- 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.
- Workers should only use electronic communication for reasons relating to work with children and young people, not for general socialising (see guidelines below).
- Workers should make their line manager or youth group leader aware when they are using electronic communication, this must be set up as part of a group communication and not individual (ie Copplestone Youth Facebook group).
- Unnecessary contact could include sharing personal issues or anything that might burden a young person. Excessive contact will also be inappropriate.

### **Parental awareness and consent**

Parental consent for using electronic forms of communication is essential and is included on our consent forms or by letter with a return slip agreeing to the use of this form of communication. The consent form outlines what means we will be using for communication and what we will be communicating.

- This policy will be made available to parents via Copplestone Methodist Church website and we will seek to ensure they are aware and are happy that we use electronic communication and what type of electronic communication we are using eg: email.
- A copy of the 'Methodist Church Safe use of the internet' guidelines can be found on the Copplestone Methodist Church website ([www.copplestonechurch.org.uk](http://www.copplestonechurch.org.uk)).
- This policy and the 'Safe use of the internet' guidelines will be noted on our consent forms so parents are aware of how we use electronic communication.

### **Email communication**

- Email should only be used to communicate specific information. (eg: Times and dates of events). It should not be used as a relationship building tool.

- All youth and children's workers should copy in their line manager to any email that is sent to a young person or child, regardless of whether it is private or public. This would allow communication amongst staff and young people to remain safe
- Workers should encourage appropriate 'face to face' contact where possible. Conversation (repeated sending of emails between two individuals) via email is discouraged.
- Email History 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, the following procedure must be followed:

- Read and follow The Methodist Church 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 if necessary with another member of the Church.

### **Language**

All language should be appropriate and where possible 'standard responses' should be used. (eg: 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).

- Workers and volunteers should take great care over the language used to reduce misinterpretation.
- When sending emails, Workers should not use informal language such as short hand and 'text language' as this can often be misunderstood and lead to further complications.

### **Chat facilities/Messenger and live chat**

Use of live chat facilities between workers and children and young people is **not permitted**. Youth workers should refrain from engaging in conversation via these mediums. Live chat services and chat facilities cannot be kept on record and are therefore an unsuitable form of communication between workers, children and young people.

### **Skype and other visual methods**

Use of skype and any other web camera or visual communication via the internet is not permitted. Workers should refrain from using such methods on a one to one basis as they cannot be recorded.

- It can be used for conference call and is considered appropriate if a project or group uses a web camera/Skype in a group environment for project purposes, and has clear aims and objectives for its use. Always seek to inform a line manger or group leader when this is taking place and keep a record of it.

### **Hours of communication**

When using email/internet for communication with young people (within the guidelines above), no email communication should take place after 10pm

### **Adding friends on facebook and similar sites**

You should not add children or young people to your personal social networking page if they are involved with Coplestone Methodist Church Children and Youth Ministry and are under the age of 18. Coplestone Methodist Church has a Facebook group page for youth workers and young people to communicate and invite them to be members. (If they are over the required minimum age limit ie: 13 for Facebook)

- Workers should only use an agreed social networking account for contact with children and young people with whom they are working.
- Workers should not use their personal social networking or instant messaging accounts for contact with children and young people.

- Workers should seek to ensure that their personal profiles on any social networking sites should be 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.

- 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, however if this is necessary limit your texts to the below mobile phone guidelines.

### **Notes relating to this document**

#### ***Specific Definitions***

*'Internet' communication specifically refers to the use of: Social networking sites such as Bebo, Facebook, Twitter and other web sites 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.*

*Where consultation with your line manager is advised in this document, it may be more appropriate to inform another colleague as well as your line Manager, such as the Church Safeguarding Officer.*

- *With regards to young people who have left the group or are now over the age of 18yrs, please use discretion with regards to this policy and seek advice where necessary.*
- *For useful resources and support material to use with Parents, volunteers and children and young people visit <http://www.ceop.police.uk/> or [www.thinkuknow.co.uk](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk)*

#### ***Mobile phones advice on risks and solutions***

- *Risk: Accusation of an inappropriate message or receipt of one*
- *Solution: Be very careful in what language you use. It is not encouraged for Workers to give out their personal mobile number to young people. We recognise that this may be needed at times*
- *Risk: Texting late in the evening – potential to be inappropriate and parents not aware of this.*
- *Solution: No texting after 10pm*
- *Risk: Young Person's perception of relationship*
- *Solution: Discourage text conversation or phone conversation where it is not about communicating information.*
- *Risk: Texting/calling whilst the young person in school/college*
- *Solution: Call between 12.30-1pm or 4-10pm*
- *Risk: Data protection of young person numbers on workers personal mobiles*
- *Solution: Have a lock on your phone for data protection and do not allow access Preferred action: Use a software texting package rather than a personal phone for texting.*

This Policy works in conjunction with the Methodist Church Social Media Guidelines downloadable from: [www.methodist.org.uk](http://www.methodist.org.uk) and Copplestone Methodist Church Safeguarding Policy downloadable from [www.copplestonechurch.org.uk](http://www.copplestonechurch.org.uk).

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