

Appropriate Communication Guidance

The following good practice guidelines are to be followed for email and text communication, and use of websites.

Emails

Emails can provide an excellent opportunity to quickly disseminate information to a group of people. However, there are some risks and staff should be aware of good practice, which includes:

- Language should be appropriate and professional;
- Emails should come from the same person, e.g. secretary or office manager;
- Emails should be about legitimate organisational information and avoid over-familiarity;
- Ideally emails should be sent to groups rather than individual children. If communication needs to be sent to an individual child, another adult such as their parent should be copied into the message;
- For group emails, consideration should be made as to if it is appropriate to allow others access to all the recipient's email addresses by using the 'to' field or if the 'blind carbon copy' (bcc) function should be used;
- People should be given the option to opt out of receiving further emails;
- For under-16's, parental consent must be gained before collecting email addresses and parents should also be copied into the email. Parents should be able to include their own email address instead of that of their child;
- For young people aged 16-18, permission should be gained to email them and parents should be made aware that the club will be emailing their child and the reasons for this;
- If an organisation receives any emails of concern from a young person, the child protection policy should be followed;
- Email addresses should not be passed on or used for other purposes without permission.

Text messaging

The use of text messaging increases the vulnerability of both the young person and the organisation. However, it is one of the most direct forms of communication with young people, and may sometimes be unavoidable.

Good practice for reducing the risks includes:

- The content should relate solely to organisational business and should reflect the professional relationship between adult and child;
- Text messages should be sent at appropriate times of the day (i.e. not overnight) and avoid language that is overly familiar or could be misinterpreted;
- Persons with access to the young peoples' personal contact details should be kept to a practical minimum;
- Persons should not allow anyone to use their phone to text a young person and they should not pass on young people's mobile phones numbers to other people;
- Consent must be obtained from young people prior to sending them text messages. For under 16s, parental consent must also be obtained and parents should be given the option of also being sent the text message;

- For young people aged 16-18, permission should be obtained before sending them text messages and their parents should be made aware;
- Staff and volunteers should be aware of our guidelines on how to sensitively deal with concerns if they receive messages from a young person that could be considered inappropriate or concerning;
- Young people should be given the opportunity to request not to receive further messages.

Websites and social networking

The internet provides an excellent opportunity to reach a wide audience at little cost. Staff should be mindful in how they present themselves online and the risks the internet can pose to young people if not used appropriately.

Good practice guidelines include:

- The website/profile should present a professional image, ensuring all language and content is appropriate;
- Organisational representatives will plan how they will manage their website/social networking profile. There should be more than one person with 'moderator' responsibilities so content can be edited/removed quickly if necessary;
- The website/profile should be regularly monitored and links reviewed regularly to ensure they are appropriate and working;
- Procedures and contact details for reporting any problems/concerns should be easy to locate;
- Contact details for the Child Protection lead is available and links established to help organisations such as Childline;
- If organisations decide to publish profiles of under 18s, their - and their parents' - permission should be sought first;
- Permission to publish photos/videos of young people should be gained from them and their parents, and the organisation should follow the photography guidelines in the Child Protection Policy;
- Organisational members will avoid publishing excessive personal information of under 18s i.e. never include email address, home address, school attended, etc.;
- If there is a minimum age on the social networking site, organisation members will not target young people under this age to use it;
- Parents should be encouraged to view the website/profile as well as young people;
- If the organisation becomes aware of problems such as cyber bullying or a young person placing themselves at risk with the information they share on the internet, they will follow the set procedures for concerns or contact a help organisation for advice;
- Organisational members should think carefully about their personal online profiles and should not be linking them to young people's pages. Any bullying and/or abuse online will be dealt with in the same manner as offline bullying and/or abuse.

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