

**Woodside Church**  
**Social Media Policy**  
**3rd Draft**

**Rationale**

- The Safeguarding Team recognise that using the Internet (and other forms of technology) is an important part of the lives of the children and the 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 and education
- In accordance with Woodside 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 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 policies produced regarding safeguarding and communication matters and are expected to adhere to guidelines in the current policies.

**Specific Definitions**

- 'Internet' communications specifically refers to the use of social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, WhatsApp, Instagram and other websites 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

**Reasons for contacting a young person via the Internet or email**

- 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
- It is not appropriate to have private non-work related contact in the form of electronic communication with the children and young people with whom we work
- Workers should only use electronic communication for reasons relating to work with children and young people, not for general socialising
- 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.

**Parental awareness and consent**

- Parental consent for using electronic forms of communication is essential and should be included on your annual consent forms or by letter with a return slip agreeing to this form of communication. This will include outlining what means of communication will be being used and what will be communicating
- It is important to explain this policy and practice to parents and careers and seek to ensure they are aware and are happy that we use electronic communication and what type of electronic communication we are using (e.g. email)

**E-mail communication**

- Email should only be used to communicate specific information (times and dates of events, for example). It should not be used as a relationship building tool
- All leaders of children and youth groups within Woodside Church will only email out from the agreed '@[woodsidechurch.com](mailto:woodsidechurch.com)' email address and would follow the guidelines shared in the chart below.
- Workers should encourage appropriate face-to-face contact where possible. Conversation (repeated sending of emails between two individuals) via emails is discouraged.
- Workers should 'CC' to make their line manager or team leader aware when they are using email to contact people
- Email histories 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:

- 1) Read and follow the Woodside Church Safeguarding Procedures relating to disclosures
- 2) Do not respond to the email. Make attempts to contact the young person personally (with another over 18 leader from the church).
- 3) If the email is considered 'inappropriate' then the leader should not contact the young person, but instead immediately contact their line manager (and must not delete the email).

### Language

- All language should be appropriate and where possible 'standard responses' should be used (e.g. if you have sent an email out containing event details and receive a reply asking for further details so that all young people receive the same information).
- Workers and volunteers should take great care over the language used to reduce the risk of misinterpretation.
- When sending emails, workers should not use informal language such as shorthand or 'text language' (ROFL, LOL etc) as this can often be misunderstood and lead to further complications.

### Hours of Communication

- When using email / the Internet for communication with young people (within the guidelines above), it is advised that it should take place between hours of 9am-5pm.
- If a project takes place in the evening (after 5pm) and it is necessary to send an email/use the Internet there should be no email communication after 9pm.

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

- Workers should not add children or young people on their personal social networking page who are part of the children's and youth ministry/project at your church or group and who are under the age of 18. They can set up a Facebook group for your project or group and invite them to be members (that is, if they are over the required minimum age limit - which is 13 for Facebook). This means that within the Woodside Church, if a club is run with children younger than this age - then there will be no Facebook group created.
- Workers should only use an agreed social networking account for contact with children and young people with whom they are working. This will be ONLY be an account set up specifically for the purpose of the group rather than an individual. In these instances, with these groups, the Facebook privacy settings would be established ensuring that the profiles of others who join the group cannot be seen.
- 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.
- In 'Yoof', 'Lighthouse' and 'Powerhouse' where an 18 year old is recruited or expresses an interest into leadership, they will NOT be able to officially lead until they are 19, which will give them a year for them to develop and acquire key skills and responsibilities, one of which will be that any U18 friends on their current social media will need to be removed. For this year (aged 18), they will be known as **Trainee Leaders** and will have a number of safeguarding risk assessments put into place, including, still having an up-to-date DBS prior to Trainee Leadership and also that they will not be permitted to be in a situation where they are on their own with an U18.
- U18 leaders can be 'Friends' with other U18s, however it is the leader of the specific group to which the U18 leader serves who must discuss with them 'appropriate' use. If an U18 leader is found to be posting things on social media that can compromise the reputation of themselves, the church or the group for which they serve - then that leader may be asked to step down from

leadership until a point where they feel they understand the reasons why and will no longer post similar content.

### **Chat Facilities**

- Use of live chat facilities between workers 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 webcam 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.
- As part of the FP Impact interviews, it may be that an under 18 is interviewed via Skype - in this situation there will always be two people in the room conducting the interviews and a member of the Safeguarding Team will be informed.

### **Cyberbullying and the law**

- Most children and young people use mobile phones and the Internet appropriately. However, when technology is abused there may be legal consequences.

### **Mobile Phones**

- The rationale for texting and calling is the same as the social networking and email contact

Risks	Solutions
Accusation of inappropriate message or receipt of one	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.
Texting late in the evening - potential to be viewed as inappropriate	No texting after 9pm
Young Person's perception of relationship	Discourage text conversation or phone conversation what it is not about communicating information
Texting/calling whilst YP is school/college	Make calls between 12noon-1pm and 4-9pm
Data protection of YP numbers on workers personal mobiles	Have a lock on the phone and do not allow access.

- As much as possible do not give children or young people your personal number, if you have a works phone use that. In all cases gain parental consent and limit your texts to the above guidelines.

### **Photography in our Children's and Youth Groups**

- There is no personal photography allowed by any leader in any of our groups with any U18.
- There may be occasions where photos are wanted for items such as the church website of advertising material, in these cases, written permission **MUST** be gathered from the U18's parents, with all photos to be taken from a designated church camera.
- In the event that photos are taken professionally, there must be assurances from the professional photographer that any images are given to the church and are not kept.

## Overview

Group	Email U18	Texting U18	Facebook U18	Live Chat U18	WhatsApp U18	Skype / Facetime U18
Children's work on Sunday (Explore, Excite, Engage)	All communication is through the parents and not through the children					
Lighthouse (including U18 leaders)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Group Email to all others</li> <li>- Line manager included on email</li> <li>- From establish church email - not personal</li> <li>- Where possible includes parents</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Not a group, but a page for parents to inform</li> </ul>			
Powerhouse (including U18 leaders)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Group Email to all others</li> <li>- Line manager included on email</li> <li>- From establish church email - not personal</li> <li>- Where possible includes parents</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Not a group, but a page for parents to inform</li> </ul>			

Yoof	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Group Email to all others</li> <li>- Line manager included on email</li> <li>- From establish church email - not personal</li> <li>- Where possible includes parents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Information only</li> <li>- Not encouraged to give personal number out</li> <li>- No texting after 9pm</li> <li>- Between hours of 12pm-1pm and 4pm-9pm</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Facebook group allowed</li> <li>- Not through personal Facebook</li> <li>- All young people associated with the group should NOT be added as friends</li> <li>- Personal settings of all are secure</li> </ul>			
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**\*This Policy is based upon the Methodist Church 'Social Media Guidance for Workers' document**