

Social Media Policy

Affirming the benefits of social media and electronic communication (Facebook, Twitter, websites, e-mail, texting, etc.) for ministry with children, youth, and families, we encourage the following guidelines for church employees and volunteers for the purpose of safeguarding God's children in the digital world.

Facebook and Other Social Networking Sites

Groups

- If one creates any kind of separate Facebook page for the children of the church, e.g. EYC or Tweeners, parents should be members as well and have access to the content.
- All privacy settings should be set so that only members can have access to information about members.
- Just as there are always two adults in a room with children, there should always be two adults as administrators.
- All content on the Facebook pages of adults working with children must be appropriate for children to see.
- Personal pages as well as church group pages must be monitored for inappropriate content.
- Photos that go on the group page must be approved by the administrators, with an awareness that photos not be used to exclude, bully, etc.
- Tags should not be applied to photos of group members.
- Behavioral covenants should be created to govern what content is appropriate and inappropriate for an online youth group.
- Inappropriate content needs to be removed and addressed by adult youth leaders and parents.
- Inappropriate material that raises suspicion that a child has been or will be abused/neglected/exploited should be immediately reported to the clergy.
- Any staff, volunteers, or youth who are no longer part of the church group should be removed immediately.

Relationships

- Adults who minister to children and youth are encouraged strongly to set very stringent privacy settings on any social networking profile.
- Adults should not submit "friend" requests to children or youth, but may accept friend requests.
- Adults should discern the level of contact they want to maintain with children or youth prior to accepting these requests.
- Youth requesting to "friend" an adult can be invited to join a closed group rather than be accepted as a friend on an adult's personal profile account.
- Friendships outside of such a closed group need to be maintained in keeping with all of the guidelines suggested here.

Publishing/Posting Content Online, Including Photos

- Photos that are published on church sponsored sites should not include name or contact information for children or youth.
- If parents do not want photos taken of their children at church events to be used in church publicity, the church will not use them.
- All images of children and youth should be modest and age-appropriate.
- All online content posted by church employees or volunteers should be appropriate for children to see, both on official church sites and personal sites (personal FB page, blogs, video blogs, etc.).

Phones, Email, and Texting (includes Twitter)

- Youth leaders should not text a child or call him/her on a cell phone unless there is an emergency or need to communicate briefly about logistics.
- Email can be an appropriate and effective means of communicating basic factual information about events.
- Parents/guardians need to be included in the distribution lists.
- Email is not an appropriate means of communication for matters that are pastorally or legally sensitive, emotionally charged or require extensive conversation.
- Texting during church events should be discouraged strongly.
- Cell phones can be collected at the beginning of events and returned to their owners at the conclusion of events.
- Tone must be considered carefully in electronic communication. Humor and sarcasm can be misinterpreted easily in an email or text message.

Applying the Theory to Any Situation

- The basic premise of these guidelines is that we need to extend our safe church practices into the digital world.
- Adults should not get into isolated one-on-one relationships with children and youth through Facebook, emailing, texting, etc.
- Staff members and volunteers must engage in appropriate interactions online.
- Adults must be aware of potential dangers and the need to think through various new scenarios as our ministries now inevitably involve online interaction.

If there are questions, ideas for safety, etc. please discuss them with fellow staff members.