



# Covid-19 Safeguarding guidance on social media and online activities for young people

## Introduction

Social Media is fast becoming an essential part of the everyday ministry of the Church during Covid-19. The Diocese of Coventry embraces this, acknowledging the value of social media as an important missional and pastoral tool. However, we recognise that with increased social media use comes risk, and in this document we will explore how that risk can be managed and how we can safeguard people on social media.

This temporary guidance is a working document during Covid-19 alongside the National Safeguarding Team 'Advice for using video conferencing for youth work' and may change depending on the government guidance and National Safeguarding Team advice.

All online activities the parish organises with young people such as online youth groups must be properly risk assessed. Please see Safer Environments and Activities guidance.

The PCC must approve the use of all online activities with young people. They should see the risk assessments and ensure these risks have been identified and are being managed appropriately.

The Church of England cannot endorse one particular platform. Please consider GDPR and privacy settings on the platform you use.

## Key principles

There are key principles to consider to safeguard both the volunteers and the young people, think about online youth work in the same way you would approach youth work in person.

### 1. Professional boundaries:

- Please be mindful of how you ensure there are clear boundaries between your 'personal presence' on social media and when you are using it for youth work. It might be helpful to be aware that Zoom and Microsoft Teams can be used to set up group calls and do not require each participant to have an account.
- Do not accept young people as 'friends' on any personal accounts. Consider your own privacy settings on personal accounts
- Ensure at least two volunteers have access to accounts/messaging groups to prevent 'closed accounts/conversations'
- Each volunteer must take responsibility to ensure that no one else in their household has access to the online platforms that you are using to engage young people, do not share passwords and always log out.
- Be mindful of what you write and talk about on social media, you need to continue the same professional boundaries and conduct as you would if you were with young people face to face. 'Think before you post or say it online'
- Consider your physical presentation and what you would wear if you were with young people in person.

- Create clear boundaries of your time and capacity, have set times you will meet or talk and ensure these are within sensible hours e.g. between 9am-10pm depending on the age of the young people.
- Set a curfew for all online platforms to be clear with young people when any posts/messages will be viewed.

## **2. Consent**

- Parental consent and the young person's consent must be gained before communicating with a young person online. Where possible this should be written consent (e.g. a parent using an email address already known to the parish), if this is not possible to gain verbal consent via video media so you can confirm it is the parent.
- Be clear with parents and with young people that they are consenting not only to being part of a video call, but to this data being gathered. Please be aware that each of these platforms has their own privacy policy/notice. You should read these yourself and make parents/carers or young people aware of them – in particular, ensure that you review what cookies are active and change these settings to necessary cookies only.
- Parents must be informed that all contact with a young person will be recorded appropriately and monitored by the identified person i.e. Youth Leader including anyone else who has been identified to have oversight of this contact.

## **3. Accountability & Recording**

- Volunteers must have been safely recruited and have a current enhanced DBS check.
- At a minimum they must have completed the online Basic and Foundation Safeguarding Training
- Ensure you have a clear structure of accountability for the volunteers e.g. who is taking overall responsibility for the youth work online, how will contact be monitored, process for reporting safeguarding concerns.
- Consider how you will keep an overall record of online youth work i.e. keeping a log of any activities, which young people and volunteers were involved and recording any concerns from the session.
- The recommendation is that you do not video/sound record group calls
- Records should be secured safely to ensure they remain confidential and data protection is adhered too in line with your usual safeguarding protocols.

## **4. Physical environment**

- A risk assessment for youth work online should be completed for all online activities, please refer to 'Safer Environments and Activities' guidance
- Each volunteer needs to take responsibility for ensuring there is no one else present in their physical room when speaking to other young people online.
- Have a minimum of TWO youth volunteers in the 'virtual room' when meeting as a youth group or with an individual young person. This is for the volunteer and young person's safety. If there is a reason a young person needs to be seen on a one to one this must be discussed with the parish safeguarding officer to determine if this is appropriate – this should only be in exceptional circumstances and a clear record of why this has been agreed.
- Think about what young people can view on your screen if you are at home, consider what you are happy for young people to see and what needs to remain private
- Transfer your Code of Conduct to what this would look like when participating in online groups or interactions. Think about appropriate behaviour, speech, physical presentation confidentiality and safeguarding, ensure everyone involved is signed up to this.

- Be mindful of online banter this can lead to a level of intimacy or upset that you would ordinarily guard against. Also avoid interacting with one young person more than another. For example if you wish happy birthday to one person, you need to do it for all users.

## 5. Reporting online safeguarding concerns

- Never tell a young person that you will keep a secret, a young person should be informed that if they disclose a safeguarding concern on any of the online platforms being used for youth work i.e. virtual youth groups, individual sessions or written messages that the youth worker has a duty to report these.
- There needs to be a clear agreed process of reporting safeguarding concerns within the parish
- There needs to be an agreed plan of how any social media accounts will be managed to have oversight of what young people have posted online.
- Screenshot any messages of concern in case they are needed later, for example in sharing with the police. These should be stored safely and shared with the Parish Safeguarding Officer.
- If you believe somebody is in immediate danger you must ring 999 to contact the emergency services. A record of all incidents and actions taken should be kept.
- The usual safeguarding policy and guidance for reporting a safeguarding concern must be followed.

## Online safety issues

There are online safety concerns to be aware of when working with young people especially given the current 'lock down' which is leading to us all using social media platforms in our everyday lives.

**Grooming**– This is when someone builds a relationship, emotional connection, trust with a child in order to manipulate, exploit or abuse them. Online platforms offer an opportunity for someone to contact and target children, they can often find out information and to identify those children that are particularly vulnerable by looking at the things they post.

The NSPCC has useful guidance for young people, professionals and parents  
<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/grooming/>

If you are concerned about a young person please contact Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command (CEOP) - <https://www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre>

**Inappropriate content** – This is when a young person is viewing information/images there are not age appropriate, this could include accessing pornography online.

**Sexting** – This is when a young person is sending and receiving of sexually explicit photos, messages and video clips, by text, email or posting them on social networking sites.

**Digital self-harm** – for example a young person might create a fake account and send abusive messages to themselves, waiting for their peers to come to their defence or children might deliberately provoke and offend online in the hope that they receive the negative attention and response that they believe that they deserve.

**Cyber bullying** – This is bullying that happens through online social media, messaging and gaming platforms

## Useful websites and resources

The National Safeguarding Team has issued advice for using video conferencing for youth work during Covid 19  
<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/Video%20Calling.pdf>

ThinkuKnow <https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/support-tools/home-activity-worksheets/> - 15-minute activities for parents and carers to do with their children using CEOP's Thinkuknow educational resources.

Internet Matters: <https://www.internetmatters.org/issues/>

NSPCC: <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/>

UK Safer Internet Centre: <https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/>

Kidscape: <https://www.kidscape.org.uk/>