



Youth Communications and Social Media Policy

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to direct staff and volunteers in their practice with regards to communicating with young people through social media, email and mobile phone. Young people communicate in these ways and it is essential for our ministry that we engage with them effectively and safely. Social media are continually changing and this policy will be reviewed and updated as appropriate, but the principles embodied in this document will continue to be applied. This policy is designed to provide a framework to protect children, young people, staff and volunteers. It also serves to help children and young people understand appropriate use of social media and modern technology.

Scope

'Young people' are defined as those in school years 7 to 13, or equivalent. Where a young person reaches the age of 18 before leaving our youth work provision it is still good practice to adhere to this policy. Children in year 6 and below should not normally be communicated with using social media or mobile phones.

Consent Forms

Parents and guardians will be given the option to consent to the following:

- Photos to be taken at youth events and then used in official River Church publications, Facebook group, the church website and displays.
- The method of communication they are happy for leaders to use to contact their young person/s

See River Church Youth Registration Form. (Age 11-18)

Note for all forms of communication

Communication should not usually take place with young people after 8.00pm or on staff members' days off. Note this does not mean staff and volunteers have to be available to young people at all other times. Young people should also note that, whilst staff and volunteers will exercise appropriate discretion in dealing with the substance of communication, they cannot promise confidentiality.

Emails

When using a River Church email address, users must:

- Ensure they do not harm River Church's reputation.

- Not use the system for the creation, retention or distribution of offensive messages or images.
- Not send emails that might reasonably be considered to be bullying, harassing, abusive, malicious, discriminatory or contain illegal or offensive material or foul language.
- Retain, distribute, download or upload material which might reasonably be considered indecent, obscene, pornographic or illegal.
- Not send chain letters or joke emails.

Guidelines for use:

- Once permission is given, leaders and volunteers can hold email addresses for young people in their care.
- Emails should be short and should usually be a one-off communication to arrange a meeting or remind young people to attend an event.
- Emails should be kept on file, so that they can be traced if necessary.
- Conversations should not be had over email. Staff and volunteers should arrange to meet one-to-one with a young person if the young person would like to talk.
- If an email raises any safeguarding concerns, the line manager and/or Safeguarding Officer should be informed.
- When a volunteer leaves the youth work team, young people's email addresses should be removed from their personal address book.

Phone calls, Texting / WhatsApp or similar

- Once permission is given, leaders and volunteers can hold mobile phone numbers of the young people in their care.
- Text communication should be short and should usually be a one-off communication to arrange a meeting or remind young people to attend an event or to ask a question.
- Leaders and volunteers should use an appropriate tone; friendly, but not over-familiar or personal. While communications should be warm and friendly, they should not suggest or offer a special relationship.
- Long conversations should not be had over texts. Staff and volunteers should arrange to meet with a young person if the young person would like to talk. Meetings should take place in a public place or with other people present.
- Leaders and volunteers can have phone calls with young people, but these should be short.
- If a disclosure is made that raises a safeguarding concern, verbatim notes should be made as soon as possible. This information should be reported to the line manager and/or Safeguarding Officer and the records kept on file.
- When a leader or volunteer leaves the youth work team, young people's numbers should be removed from private phones and any other digital or written records.
- All messages should be kept as a record of the conversation.

Facebook and Instagram or similar

Leaders and volunteers cannot be friends on Facebook/Instagram with an under 18 where their contact has been established through their role as a leader or volunteer. Once a young person has left our youth work provision at 18 it is then the volunteer or staff member's choice whether to be Facebook friends with them. Private messaging is prohibited.

- Each group can have a Facebook/Instagram group following the age limits of the site.
- The group must be closed.
- The group must be monitored by a leader/volunteer who has admin rights.
- Young people, leaders and volunteers can become a member of this group by invitation only.
- Only the administrator can add a post on the site, invited members can comment on the post.
- Events can be posted on the page.
- Once permission is given, photos of events and young people can be posted on the page.
- Privacy settings on photographs should be set to ensure that only members of the group can see them.

Twitter

- Young people can follow leaders and volunteers on Twitter. Leaders should be aware as they tweet that they are a role model to young people.
- Direct private messages should not be sent or responded to as these are hidden forms of communication.
- Leaders and volunteers must not follow young people on Twitter.

Snapchat or similar apps

- Leaders and volunteers should not connect with young people on Snapchat.
- Leaders and volunteers should not befriend/follow/message/or post photos of young people on these apps.

YouTube or similar

- Staff and volunteers should not subscribe to any young person's YouTube channel.

Zoom or similar

- Meetings can only instigated by a leader.
- Sessions to be recorded and the young people should be told this.

- Meetings should be held at appropriate times for the age of the young people.