

Social Media Policy

Working with young people often requires a balancing act between being part of the world in which they live, to reach them, and yet maintaining a leadership role. To understand young people, it is important to live in their culture and at the same time be a role model to them. No place is this balancing act more difficult to get right than around technology, namely the Internet and, in particular, social networking sites.

Safeguarding is as important in the virtual world as in the 'real' world, and therefore, the same rules should apply.

Be aware that different platforms have different restrictions in relation to age so ensure you take account of age restrictions within the terms and conditions of use of your chosen platform. Some commonly used Social Media sites are –

- Facebook (minimum age 13) – lets users create their own profiles, share status updates, pictures, videos and chat with other users, and also has a messenger app.
- Instagram (minimum age 13) – allows users to alter photos, upload them to Instagram and share them to other social networking sites. Photos can be sent directly to specific users. A video feature is also available.
- Snapchat (minimum age 13) – a photo-sharing app where users can send photos or videos to their friends. These will display on screen for up to ten seconds before being deleted, although it is possible to take screenshots of messages and download other apps designed to capture and save Snapchat content.
- X (formerly known as Twitter) (minimum age 13) – a social network that lets users send and read 'tweets', messages limited to 280 characters.
- Tumblr (minimum age 16) – a social networking site where users can post blogs and follow other people's blogs. Some of the content on this site contains inappropriate images.
- WhatsApp (minimum age 16) – free-of-charge, real-time messaging. Users can share images and videos, take part in 'group chats' and share locations. As it is based on knowing the user's phone number, you can only message users if you already know their telephone number.
- YouTube (minimum age 13) – allows users to watch, create and comment on videos.
- ASKfm (minimum age 13) – users can ask other users questions, with the option of anonymity. ASKfm's reputation as a platform for cyberbullying has been highlighted in the media. How to use social media responsibly.

Avoid the use of Skype/Facetime – these are social media platforms and as such share contact details with all users. You may inadvertently connect young people with other people as an unintended consequence.

Any leader wishing to set up a closed group or account for their organisation on any social media platform should first seek permission from Kirk Session.

Everything posted on the Internet – comments, opinions, and photos – can potentially be seen and copied by anyone else using the Internet. Social Networking sites have privacy settings for this reason and these limit what any other person, whom you have not accepted as a friend, can view.

Leaders should think carefully before adding a child or young person in the organisation in which they are leaders, as a friend or follower on a social networking site. If a leader does choose to accept a child or young person as a friend or follower, it is important always to remember that the child or young person has access to all opinions, information and photos which are posted on the leader's profile, either by the leader or by their other friends. Leaders are recommended to evaluate photos of themselves that are posted on these sites and consider deleting or 'untagging' any photos in which they are depicted in what could possibly be construed as compromising situations.

Leaders should not post photographs of young people from the organisation in which they are leaders, on a social networking site or anywhere on the Internet, unless they have written parental consent.

Comments made on the Internet should be considered the same as if they were made in a public place. If a child discloses something to a leader via a social networking site, a chatroom or any other public domain publishing method, then the disclosure must be dealt with by following the normal referral process. If a leader is concerned about something that a young person communicates to him or her via the Internet, he or she should encourage the child to talk to a suitable adult about it or arrange to meet with the child (within the usual child protection parameters).

Leaders should limit the direct Internet communication they have with individual children and young people in the organisation of which they are leaders. While communication via the internet can be highly effective, all such communication with children and young people should, as far as possible, be within an open forum, in order to protect both young people and leaders.