

# St Boniface Social Media Policy

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## Scope

This policy applies to all staff and volunteers of St Boniface who have contact with anyone under the age of 18. A child or young person is anyone under the age of 18.

## Background

These guidelines relate to communication between youth workers and young people using internet, email, mobile phone and social networks apps and sites. Many young people use these methods of communication all the time. St Boniface recognises the impact and importance of social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, in the lives of the young people we are working with. St Boniface understands 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. St Boniface also acknowledges that in areas of significant deprivation, only 40% of households have internet access. Social media excludes young people from the most disadvantaged backgrounds and we will ensure that this is not our sole form of communication.

When used effectively and safely, social media, emails and mobile phones can be extremely effective tools to help connect, build relationship, organise events and inspire youth.

These guidelines are designed to clarify the necessary boundaries and create accountability to safeguard both the youth worker and the young people.

## Overview

The aim is to promote 'visible' communication. These guidelines explain how to keep consistent boundaries and follow safeguarding practice that is consistent with the physical world. Safeguarding policies promote one to one conversations with young people in full sight of others.

St Boniface therefore acknowledges the dangers and potential risks that these sites can pose to both young people and youth workers, as they have the potential to be abused as ways of interacting with young people. In accordance with St Boniface's Safeguarding Policy, we are committed to taking all possible steps to protect young people from significant harm or risk when using the internet or any other form of technology. We also recognise the importance of establishing and continually updating procedures to ensure workers are protected whilst they work with children and young people.

When using these methods of communication as part of their ongoing work with young people, staff and volunteers (referred to as 'worker' for the remainder of the policy unless otherwise stated) must abide by the following guidelines to safeguard themselves as workers and the young people involved.

### General Principles

- One-to-one communication between a worker and a young person should predominantly happen face to face, and in the full sight of others.
- Parental consent for the use of electronic forms of communication (emails, social media and mobile phone) is essential and is included on our consent forms. Until a parent has agreed to you communicating directly with a young person using such means, this should not happen.
- All social networking sites have the potential to allow workers to communicate with young people on a one-to-one basis. We strongly advise that any one-to-one communication using a social networking site is kept in the public eye to safeguard both young people and workers. Therefore private messages through these sites should only be used if a record can be kept of the messages and referred back to. Private message threads should never be deleted. Workers should normally only send group messages to young people, and also include another worker.
- Employed workers and volunteers will engage young people on platforms that they are legally allowed to use according to the platform's age restrictions.
- Live chat services and chat facilities cannot be kept on record and therefore the use of live chat facilities between workers and children or young people is not permitted. Youth workers should refrain from engaging in conversation via these mediums.
- If a young person contacts a worker through a private message the worker should respond where possible, in the public domain. If this is not appropriate due to the nature of the message, then a worker should arrange a public one-to-one meeting, or seek further advice from the Safeguarding Officer, depending on the level of information a young person has disclosed using a social networking site.
- In the case of group messages (one message sent to multiple young people in the same conversation), it is advisable that another adult is also copied into this message. Alternatively, the usual principles of ensuring a log is kept should apply.
- Text speak, words or emoticons (smileys) should be avoided as these can be misinterpreted by the young person or their parents.
- Where possible 'standard responses' should be used. (eg. if you have sent an email containing event details and receive a reply asking for further details, you could create a standard response with the additional details so that all young people receive the same information).
- Contact with Young People should only happen between 9am-8pm. Young people should not be contacted, in any form, after 9pm, except in an emergency. This is in order to maintain a safe boundary between work and personal life. It is also advised not to contact Young People during school hours.
- Private and confidential information about yourself or about young people (eg. personal contact details) should not be shared on social networking sites that are being used for work.
- If you upload pictures of young people to the internet via social media you must (1) have written permission of parents via the consent form and verbal consent of the young people (2) keep your privacy settings to the photo/album limited to sharing in the group page (3) do not tag young people, allow the young people to tag themselves.
- Employed workers should **NOT** have children or young people with whom they have a working relationship with added as 'friends' to their personal social networking page (with the exception of those young people who you have a relationship with prior to the work context e.g. family friends). This is also highlighted as good and recommended practice for volunteers. Workers should seek to ensure that their personal profiles on any social networking sites are set to the highest form of

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security to avoid young people accessing personal information or seeing any pictures of a personal nature.

- Social media, emails and messaging should not be used as a specific relationship building tool. Workers should encourage appropriate 'face to face' contact wherever possible. Repeated communication between individuals via text or email is discouraged.
- A record of all employed worker's current passwords (for email, social media, mobile phone), should be held by the line manager.

### Over 18 year olds

With regards to contacting young people over the age of 18, whilst Safeguarding Procedures no longer apply, we would expect you to follow the principles of this policy.

### Consent Form

St Boniface's consent form requests the following from young peoples' parents/guardians:

"St Boniface uses social media, emails and mobile phone communication to communicate with young people about our current and future events. **Please indicate if you do not wish for staff and volunteers from St Boniface to communicate with your child/ward in these ways.**  \_