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Use Of Social Networking and Child Protection

Outline

As a trust working with young people we acknowledge the impact and involvement that social networking sites such as Facebook, Myspace and Bebo have on the lives of young people and their role in the ways which young people interact with each other and there is great potential for these tools to be used by youth workers to deepen relationships with young people, to encourage them in their faith and to create an extended discipleship role outside of a face to face event.

At the same time we acknowledge the dangers and potential risks that these sites can pose to both young people and youth workers and have the potential to be abused as ways of interacting with young people. Therefore as a trust any youth worker using social networking as part of their ongoing work with young people must abide by the following guidelines to safeguard both workers and young people involved.

Guidelines For Using Social Networking With Young People

Use of Messages & Communication With Individuals

All social networking sites have the potential to allow workers to communicate with young people on a one to one basis however we would 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.

On Facebook this communication can be done using the wall function and it is recommended that this is used for communicating with young people individually on Facebook and for replying to private messages which young people may have sent to workers.

In the case of group messages (messages sent to multiple young people perhaps for an event) it is advisable that another adult is also copied into this message alternatively make sure these messages are logged and not removed.

In all communication with young people using social networking sites it is advisable to not use abbreviations (for example: lol) as these can often be misinterpreted by parents.

The use of instant chat on Facebook, Myspace and Bebo is inadvisable as it provides no log of conversations and could potentially leave a worker open to allegations.

If a public wall post is not appropriate for responding to a young person then a worker should arrange a public one to one meeting, phone the young person or seek further advice from the Child Protection advocate depending on the level of information a young person has disclosed using a social networking site.

Use of Social Networking for YWR Purposes

Youth Work Resource recognises the important role that social networking websites play in the ways in which young people communicate and the effectiveness of these groups within youth ministry, however Youth Work Resource also recognises the potential safeguarding issues social networking brings therefore Youth Work Resource recommends that it is good practice for its staff to:

- Use a separate, designated Facebook account for the purposes of the youth trust. This account may be examined by any of the trustees and should be used for YWR purposes only and not as a workers personal account.
- Any communication using this Facebook account should be kept public or kept logged. Messages should be saved and kept (both incoming and outgoing) and instant chat must not be used at any time to communicate with young people.
- All contact with young people using Facebook should be kept appropriate and not use abbreviations/language that could be misunderstood by a parent or guardian (e.g. LOL and smilies).
- It is recommended that staff do not use this account after 10pm in order to maintain a safe boundary between work and personal life.