

# Safeguarding Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults in

The Parish of St Matthew, Triangle and All Saints, Ipswich

## Social Networking Sites – Good Practice Guidelines

### Good Practice Guidelines for Youth Leaders and Young People when Using Social Networking Sites

Social Networking Sites are a fun and popular method of communication and can be used to build and maintain supportive and encouraging relationships between young people, youth leaders and volunteers. These guidelines are intended to raise awareness of potential risks as we seek to safeguard the integrity of both our young people and the adults who come into contact with them in our church community.

Internet use is changing rapidly and its access and capabilities are constantly evolving. These guidelines will be reviewed annually and in the light of significant changes and developments.

- 1) Some organisations recommend that youth leaders have separate personal and work profiles. Integrity in youth leaders and volunteers is essential and they should have nothing that they wish to hide on their profiles. However, we ask all those who connect with young people via a SNS (Social Networking Site – e.g. Facebook, Twitter) to ensure that items posted on their SNS pages are appropriate at all times.
- 2) We encourage youth leaders and all volunteers to carefully consider the appropriateness of the material they post on Social Networking sites, including their choice of language and photographs/films. Postings can include personal wall posts, friend and 3<sup>rd</sup> party wall posts, photographs and videos linked to your page. This should become an instinctive mindset.
- 3) We respectfully ask all youth leaders and volunteers that if they are uncomfortable in any way about what is posted on their social pages, then they should either set up a separate persona for this purpose or choose not to connect with our young people in this way.
- 4) Youth leaders and volunteers should familiarise themselves with the privacy settings on the Social Networking Site and may wish to censor what a young person can and cannot access. It is possible to veto all posts as well as to control what individual friends can and cannot see. However, if ever in doubt, the wise approach would be not to post.
- 5) Privacy controls are frequently updated, especially by Facebook. We recommend that all adults and parents make it a priority to stay up to date with the current measures. (If you would like support with this please contact a member of clergy or the Safeguarding Officer who will be able to put you in touch with someone who can help.)
- 6) Avoid connecting with young people (under the age of 13 years old) on Facebook. They have lied to get an account.
- 7) Avoid one to one electronic contact with children or young people, even on messaging sites and apps. Contact with children, young people and vulnerable adults is always preferable via a separate closed page set up for your group or copied in to all members and parents/other adults. Save all messages involving young people. Often messages can be retrieved or recovered from Facebook and similar sites up to 90 days even after the post has been deleted.
- 8) Communication via email should always have the parents copied in as well as the child/young person.
- 9) It is essential that messages between youth leaders, helpers and young people should be kept on your computer, as it may become necessary to print a copy of a comment or conversation. If you store messages that are between others that do not involve you then you fall within the data protection law. Information kept on your computer is your own business and not that of the church.

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- 10) The use of the private “chat”/instant messaging function with young people is discouraged. Should you receive contact in this way from a young person, save a copy of it (‘print screen’ and paste into a document) and respond by copying in another adult e.g. the parent or another youth group leader. If you have concerns about the content (maybe this is the reason that they have contacted you in this way) then please contact the safeguarding officer to discuss and agree the response.
- 11) As with regular child protection policy, volunteers and youth leaders must never promise to keep secrets for young people and there may be occasions when a young person says something you find worrying or causes concern. Youth Leaders and all volunteers have a duty to refer all concerns that a child has been harmed, or is at risk of harm. The Diocesan procedures for referral should be followed. If you believe the child is at risk of immediate harm contact the police on 999.
- 12) Pasting of photos should be in line with the church’s policy and preferable avoided except in a closed group.
- 13) Volunteers and youth leaders should try to be aware of placing themselves in vulnerable situations. The best way to do this is to follow the principle of a well lit room. Do this by copying other adults into your correspondence and by sharing any concerns immediately with a member of clergy or the safeguarding officer.
- 14) We respectfully ask that all those involved in youth and children’s work attend an annual ‘E-Safety Forum.’

As a church we would like to reiterate the benefits of Social Networking as a means of contacting and engaging with our young people and we pledge our constant support to our youth, to their parents and to the adults involved in this vital work.