

Social and Online Contact Policy

Adapted from a template provided by:

Safe Ministry

Professional Standards Unit Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney

Social Contact Policy

We want to encourage healthy, appropriate, relationships with the children and young people we lead. Depending on the age of the children this can at times involve contacting them outside of the main program and can include calling, talking online and meeting in person. While some conversations are private it is important that relationships are transparent; parents and church leaders should be aware of the relationships that exist between leaders and the children and youth even if they are not aware of every conversation.

Below is a list of recommendations for social contact beyond the structures of the regular program.

Faithfulness In Service

5.32 *When meeting a child privately you should:*

- *have parental or guardian consent, where practicable;*
- *ensure where appropriate that a parent, guardian or suitable adult is present;*
- *inform another member of the clergy, an adult church worker or another adult of the time, location and duration of the meeting;*
- *not invite or have children to your home or visit children in their home when no other adult is present; and*
- *make a record of the time, location, duration and circumstances of any meeting where it is impracticable to follow these guidelines.*



Gender

- Leaders should limit their contact with students of the opposite gender.
- During a program leaders should focus their attention on young people of the same gender.
- Contact outside of the program should be by someone of the same gender.
- It is appropriate to send generic invitations or reminders to young people of the opposite gender.

Primary Students



- Any phone contact should be for ministry purposes only. It should be with parents and then, if appropriate, with the child e.g. if the child answers the phone the leader should speak to the parent first and explain why they are calling then speak to the child if appropriate. You should never contact a primary student on their mobile phone. SMS can be sent to the parents or guardians mobile for logistical purposes e.g. event reminder.
- Online contact must be limited to logistical purposes (e.g. information on the church website)
 - It is inappropriate to talk with primary students on a social networking site, **online chat platform** or email.
 - Email can be sent to the parents or guardians for logistical purposes. More significant conversations should be held in person.
- It is never appropriate to meet primary children socially unless it is in the context of socializing with the child's family.

Years 7–9 Students

- Any phone contact should be for ministry purposes only. It should be with parents and then, if appropriate, with the young person e.g. if the young person answers the phone the leader should speak to the parent first and explain why they are calling. You should never call a Year 7-9 student on their mobile phone.
- SMS should be limited to logistical purposes (e.g. don't forget event this week).
- Email should be limited to logistical purposes and basic encouragement. All email should be sent to the young person with a BCC or CC to a senior leader (e.g. Senior Minister) for accountability, safe keeping and future reference. If at all possible more significant conversations should be held in person.
- It is never appropriate to physically meet Year 7-9 students socially without written or verbal permission from the parents and discussing it with your ministry supervisor first.

Online interactions

- Caution must be used when communicating with young people online. You must maintain transparency and be accountable for what you say. You must also take care with the message you intend to communicate through both the words and images you use as it may be perceived differently by those who view it.
- In compliance with the *Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act 2024 (Commonwealth)*, age-restricted social media platforms must take reasonable steps to prevent Australians under 16 years old from having accounts (the minimum age obligation). As a consequence of these requirements:
 - Ministry Team and designated activity Leaders must ensure that no age-restricted social media platforms in use by St Jude's allow people under the age of 16 to follow accounts or join groups (e.g., the St Jude's Youth instagram account, the St Jude's Connect facebook group)

- youth communication has quickly evolved into alternate forms, such as the use of chat rooms on various messaging platforms and other online facilities (which are constantly evolving) if not prohibited under the legislation.
- any group chats legally used by St Jude's must be based on the discussion groups established in the Youth Ministry, and always have the leaders and more than 1 teenager involved.
- the Church account must not add or follow any follower's account; replies to any comments on posts or direct message must be kept to a minimum, and for the purposes of encouragement and sharing information. The Church account may follow the accounts of other ministries for the sake of sharing good Christian content (e.g., posts from KYCK).
- Youth should always be directed to a group account rather than a leader's individual account. Where an **individual's account** is used this should occur in consultation with a senior leader (e.g. Youth Minister/Rector). Strict guidelines should be developed when using this type of communication facility. These would include but are not limited to:
 - Youth should initiate friendships, following or adding to their account, not leaders.
 - Ensure any text posted online is beyond reproach and cannot be misconstrued.
 - Ensure all photos and videos posted or tagged are beyond reproach and cannot be misconstrued.
 - There should be no private contact or conversations with any student in Years 7-9.
 - No leader should use a social media platform for leader to youth interactions that allows anonymity
 - No leader should use a platform for leader to youth interactions that deletes posts, images or comments
 - No leader should use video calling for leader to youth interactions.

Years 10–12 Students

- Phone contact is permissible for ministry purposes however long conversations are to be avoided.
- SMS is permissible and should be for logistical purposes and encouragement (e.g. praying for you today).
- Email should be limited to logistical purposes and basic encouragement. All email should be sent to the young person with a BCC or CC to a senior leader (e.g. Senior Minister) for accountability, safe keeping and future reference. If at all possible more significant conversations should be held in person.
- Leaders can meet with same gender students or in mixed groups casually in public places (e.g. coffee at McDonalds). Parents and the supervisor of the ministry should be aware of the meeting and its purpose.

Photographs

We often want to take photos as part of life together however the use and storage of these images must be carefully considered.

- An appointed leader should take photos of youth/children's ministry activities. Photos should be saved to a secure location as soon as practical and kept secure i.e. burnt to DVD or stored on an external hard drive and clearly labelled. The photos should then be deleted from the leader's camera or phone and any online storage e.g. the cloud.
- Leaders should not be taking photos of children or youth during ministry activities for any reason other than official ministry purposes which have been clearly discussed with the ministry leader.
- When taking photos:
 - Do not photograph any child/youth without parental consent.
 - Do not photograph any child/young person who has asked not to be photographed.
 - Focus on small groups rather than individuals.
 - All children/young people must be appropriately dressed when photographed.
 - Embarrassing or possibly degrading photos must be deleted immediately.
 - Children/young people should only take photos of ministry leaders as part of a group.
- When using photos of children or young people in print or online:
 - Seek written permission annually from parents/guardians (e.g. Registration form) before posting photos of children/youth on the church website or social media.
 - Avoid identifying the person/s in the photograph in physical publications.
 - Do not tag youth in pictures online. Youth will often tag themselves.
 - Ministry leaders need to monitor the Church's social media to ensure photos and comments are appropriate.

Video Phoning (mobile Phone/internet)

Church workers should not enter into conversations of this nature with children/young people.

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