

Policy for Social Media use at Emmanuel Church Northwood

Purpose of Guidelines

This policy provides parameters in order to guide church staff, team members, employees, volunteers, and church leaders when social media tools are used on behalf of **Emmanuel Church Northwood (ECN)**.

It also provides specific communication guidelines for employees, leaders and volunteers working with those under 18 years old or with vulnerable adults.

This policy forms part of ECN's safeguarding strategy and should be read alongside and in conjunction with our Safeguarding policy.

Context

The Church recognises that using the Internet (and other forms of technology) is an important part of all our lives; including those of children, young people and vulnerable adults. 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.

In accordance with The Church's Safeguarding Policy, and our duty of care under the law, we must protect children, young people and vulnerable adults from significant harm or risk whilst using the Internet or any other form of technology. Moreover, we must ensure that all employees/volunteers are protected whilst they work with children and young people. It is the responsibility of all employees and volunteers at ECN to read all church policies relating to safeguarding and communication matters and ensure they adhere to the guidelines in them.

There are many good reasons for using electronic communication. However, ECN encourages all employees/leaders to use the tips below, as a starting point before choosing to use online methods of communication.

The responsibilities of ALL employees and volunteers:

- Employees/volunteers who work or support within **ECN** must sign to confirm they have read and understood our Church Safeguarding Policy and Strategy as well as this Social Media Use policy, at their induction.
- Every employee and volunteer must attend a safeguarding training session within the first six months of starting work at ECN, but ideally as soon as possible.
- Copyright and Data Protection legislation, including GDPR must be respected at all times.
- Team members, volunteers and employees will be held responsible for the content they publish online, including personal content of their own social media pages. Posting inappropriate content in your private life might result in negative impact or disciplinary action at ECN.



- Seek to ensure that your personal profiles on any social networking sites are set to the highest form of security to avoid people gaining access to your personal information or seeing any pictures of a personal nature.
- If any posted material concerning **ECN** seems to be illegal or unhelpful in any way, team members must contact church leadership and the appropriate authorities immediately.
- All language used electronically must be appropriate. When sending emails, do not use informal language such as shorthand or 'text language' as this can often be misunderstood and lead to further complications.
- In the event of a crisis, contact church leadership prior to responding to any posting or comments relating to the crisis.

The responsibilities of employees and volunteers in ADDITION to the above as specifically relating to working with 11-18 years olds:

- ECN** discourages staff members and volunteers from accepting invitations to "friend" youth group members within personal networking sites.
- Electronic communication with 11-18's should be facilitated primarily through Churchsuite and be for the purpose of communicating event details and arrangements, rather than forming and developing a relationship.
- When communicating with young people electronically, it should take place between the hours of 4pm-10pm, avoiding times when they are at school and depending on the age of the young person.
- When using your personal mobile to communicate with 11-18 year olds, you must be willing to share all communications with your line manager or the PSO upon request.

The responsibilities of employees and volunteers in ADDITION to the above as specifically relating to Youth Leaders:

- Electronic communication with 11-18's should be facilitated primarily through 'groups.'
- When communicating with young people on behalf of ECN, through social media (eg Instagram, Whatsapp) ensure there are always two DBS adults in any group created.
- Keep online contact appropriate and generic. Communications can include: event details, invitations and RSVPs, Bible verses, encouragements, prayers, birthday and other achievement based wishes. Communications should avoid sharing or requesting private and personal information.

- When communicating with young people using video conferencing (eg Zoom, Whatsapp Video messaging, Facetime, Google Hangouts, etc) ensure there are always two DBS adults present in any Zoom session.
- When using video conferencing all adults and young people are to be suitably dressed with an appropriate background visible on screen. Where possible try and avoid Zooming from your bedroom and discourage the young people from doing so.
- If a young person discloses information or anything of a concerning matter via electronic communication of any type, the leader contacted should not respond electronically, but follow the reporting procedure as detailed in the safeguarding policy.

The responsibilities of employees and volunteers in ADDITION to the above as specifically relating to Mentors:

- 1 on 1 mentoring between an adult and a young person under 18 can only commence when the 3 way agreement between Mentor, Mentee and their parent/s has been agreed and signed.
- In the first instance mentoring should take place in person and in a public place. When this is not possible, for eg mentor or mentee is shielding or needing to isolate, communication should then take the form of a voice-only phone call.
- All electronic messages should use appropriate language and contain a depth of communication appropriate for a mentor/mentee relationship.
- All Mentors using their personal mobile to communicate with 11-18 year olds, do so with the specific understanding that all communications with their mentee must be shared with the youth leader or the PSO upon request.

Version of Policy	Date of production/review	Date ratified by PCC
1.0	Dec 2018	Feb 2019
2.0	Dec 2020	Feb 2021
2.1	Feb 2021	Feb 2021
3.0	Dec 2022	Feb 2023
4.0		

Advice relating to the application of ECN's Social Media Policy

Where Do These Guidelines Apply?

This policy applies to all online and mobile platforms for sharing content and information, whether hosted by **ECN** or hosted by others. "Social media" refers to social networking services, short-message services; such as text and What's app, message boards, wikis, podcasts, image/video sharing sites and other methods for sharing real time information among users. Due to the ever-changing speed of social media, this policy applies to all new social media platforms, whether or not they are mentioned. All social media platforms are relevant and included.

Parent Partnership Guidelines

Parental consent for using electronic forms of communication with children, young people and vulnerable adults is essential and should be included on annual consent forms or by letter with a return slip. Parents then sign agreeing to the use of this form of communication and ECN has a record of their consent.

Leaders should outline to parents what means we will be using for communication and what information we will be communicating.

Parents have the right to refuse consent for their children to be contacted electronically by leaders form ECN.

Social Media Tips

- Be selective. Use Churchsuite for online communication when at all possible. If it is not possible to use Churchsuite when communicating with a group of people, always use the BCC function to prevent sharing email addresses across the group.
- Think and be smart! Use the right medium for the message. For example, a Facebook post is not ideal to communicate sensitive or private information. A blog, community post, or social media post is often visible to the entire public and can/will be shared by others in various ways that cannot be controlled at any level. Remember that this may reflect on ECN as well as you.
- Use grace! Never use electronic communication when angry or respond in kind if you have received a negative message.
- Ask us! In areas where this policy does not provide a direct answer for how members of our community should answer social media questions, please check with **ECN's** leadership team before speaking as a representative of the church.
- Groups are good. When communicating via social media on behalf of ECN, ensure members of the group consent to their details being shared with all other members of the group. Keep group members current and relevant.

Group code of conduct for children and young people's group

- Be respectful of other people's privacy.
- Never give away personal information.
- If you wouldn't say it, don't send it.
- Be polite.
- Maintain a history, so anything you send/say can be traced.

Encourage the children and young people to discuss what acceptable and unacceptable behaviour is. Put this code of conduct on the wall as a visual reminder. Most children and young people use mobile phones and the Internet appropriately; however when technology is abused there may be legal consequences.

What to do if a child tells you that are being cyberbullied

- DON'T PANIC! Your initial reaction is vital. Listen, learn, involve and resolve.
- Assure them that they have done the right thing by telling you **and offer the young person support.**
- Decide a plan of action with the young person, involving parents and other agencies where appropriate. The plan of action may include:**
 - Not opening any further online or text messages from the relevant addresses and phone numbers, but to allow others to read them instead.**
 - Going through any messages that they have received and kept.**
 - Changing their mobile phone number.**
 - Changing their online profile.**

What do I do if I discover that a child is cyberbullying?

- Remain calm.
- Ask them what's going on for them at the moment to try and ascertain what may lie behind their behaviour.**
- Don't label the young person a 'bully'.
- If you are able to establish the catalyst or reasons behind the cyberbullying behaviour, explain why this behaviour is wrong.
- Explain the consequences of bullying.
- Agree a way forward with the young person.
- Contact parents, teacher and other agencies where appropriate.**