



Staff and Volunteer Youth Communication Policy Example

Note: this example policy includes language for both churches and schools and should be tailored accordingly. At a minimum, the sections in red need to be updated. It's the responsibility of the Organization to edit this document as necessary. Protect Young Eyes, LLC accepts no liability in connection with the use and distribution of this template.

General

The purpose of this policy is to direct staff and volunteers in their practice with regards to communicating with young people through social media, email and mobile phone. Young people communicate in these ways and it is essential for our ministry that we engage with them effectively and safely. Social media are continually changing and this policy will be reviewed and updated annually, but the principles embodied in this document will continue to be applied. This policy is designed to provide a framework to protect children, young people, staff and volunteers. It also serves to help children and young people understand appropriate use of social media and modern technology. It should be read alongside the **[Insert Organization's] Abuse Prevention Policy**, which can be found on the **church/school** website.

Scope

'Young people' are defined as those in school years 6-12th, or equivalent. Where a young person reaches the age of 18 before leaving our youth work provision it is still good practice to adhere to this policy. Children in year 5 and below should not be communicated with using social media or mobile phones in any way.

Consequences for Non-Compliance

[to be completed by the organization, but could include] Violation of the guidelines below may result in temporary or permanent suspension of volunteer worker's role or termination of employment at the discretion of the organization.

Consent Forms

Parents and guardians will be given the option to consent to the following in the **church/school media release/consent form**:

- Photos to be taken at youth events and then used in official **[Insert Organization's]** publications, our Facebook group and Instagram account, the **church/school** website and displays.
- Young people to have email contact with staff and volunteers in accordance with this policy.
- Young people to make and receive calls and texts to and from staff and volunteers in accordance with this policy.
- Young people to connect to their group's Facebook page and Instagram account in accordance with this policy.

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Note for all Forms of Communication

1. Communication should not take place with young people between the hours of 9:00pm and 7:00am or on staff members' days off, unless in an emergency. Note this does not mean staff and volunteers have to be available to young people at all other times. Young people should also note that, while staff and volunteers will exercise appropriate discretion in dealing with the substance of communication, they cannot promise confidentiality. An effective way to speak about sensitive matters with youth is to give options. For example, "if we get to a point where I think it would be important for your parents to know this, I'll give you some options. You can tell them. I can tell them. Or, we can do it together. Does that sound ok?"

Emails

1. Once permission is given via the annual **media release/consent form**, staff and volunteers (small group leaders, mentors, coaches and children's group leaders) can hold email addresses for young people in their care.
2. Emails should be short and should usually be a one-off communication to arrange a meeting or remind young people to attend an event.
3. Conversations should not be had over email. Staff and volunteers should arrange to meet one-to-one with a young person if the young person would like to talk.
4. If an email raises any child protection concerns, the staff or volunteer must raise the issue with their Director, according to the **[Insert Organization's] Abuse Prevention Policy**.
5. When a volunteer leaves the youth work team, young people's email addresses should be removed from their personal address book.
6. Staff should only email using their work account and not personal email accounts.

Phone Calls, Texting

1. Once permission is given via the **media release/consent form**, staff and volunteers (small group leaders, mentors, coaches and group leaders) can hold mobile phone numbers of the young people in their care.
2. Text communication should be short and should usually be a one-off communication to arrange a meeting or remind young people to attend an event. When possible, leaders should use a group text that includes another leader.
3. Staff and volunteers should use an appropriate tone; friendly, but not over-familiar or personal. While communications should be warm and friendly, they should not suggest or offer a special relationship.
4. Staff and volunteers should only give personal contact details that are within the public domain of **[Insert Organization]**, including their mobile phone number. All staff working with young people should only use their work phone (if applicable). Volunteers should only text from private phones as an exception.
5. Conversations should not be had over texts. Staff and volunteers should arrange to meet one-to-one with a young person if the young person would like to talk, in accordance with the **[Insert Organization's] Abuse Prevention Policy**.
6. Staff and volunteers can have phone calls with young people, but these should be short.

7. If a disclosure is made that raises a safeguarding concern, verbatim notes should be made as soon as possible. The staff or volunteer must raise the issue with their Director, according to the **[Insert Organization's] Abuse Prevention Policy**.
8. When a member of staff or volunteer leaves the youth work team, young people's numbers should be removed from private phones and any other digital or written record, and work phones should be returned to **[Insert Organization]** for secure storage.

Social Media

This policy does not list every social media site, but the principle for all of them is that staff and volunteers should not befriend, follow or be followed by young people. All those using social media sites should set their privacy settings accordingly and check them periodically.

Counseling of children through social media is not permitted. When children form their own social media groups, **adults should not join these groups**.

Facebook

Schools and secular youth work policies state that an adult cannot be friends with a minor on Facebook. This is also **[Insert Organization's]** policy. Private messaging is not permitted. If a young person messages a staff member or volunteer's personal account, they should not respond.

1. Volunteers and staff cannot be friends on Facebook with a minor where their contact has been established through their role as a staff member or volunteer.
 - a. Once a young person reaches age 18, it is then the volunteer or staff member's choice whether to be Facebook friends with them.
2. Each **ministry group/class can have a Facebook group**. They should follow this policy on the group page.
 - a. The group must be closed.
 - b. The group must be monitored by at least two staff/volunteers who have admin rights.
 - c. Young people, staff and volunteers can become a member of this group, provided they are 13 or over.
 - d. Communication can occur openly through comments and posts on the page.
 - e. Events can be posted on the page.
 - f. **Church/school** personnel are forbidden to post or distribute personal identifiable information of any child under the age of eighteen. Personal identifiable information includes but is not limited to: full name, home address, email address, telephone number or any information that would allow someone to identify or contact a child or that would jeopardize their safety or well-being in any way.
 - g. As an exception to this policy, a child whose parent or other legally responsible adult has signed a **media release/consent form** may be identified by name in photographs or videos posted to an official social media account unless the child or his/her parent has requested otherwise.

- h. Privacy settings on photographs should be set to ensure that only members of the group see them.
3. If a child directly contacts Church or School personnel engaged in ministry through a personal social media account, **the ministry or school account should be used to reply**. In unusual cases where a personal account is used to respond, such as an emergency situation which requires urgent communication, Church and School personnel should **maintain copies of all such messages and must promptly provide copies of the communication to a Supervisor**.

Instagram (Pinterest should be treated similarly)

1. Volunteers and staff cannot follow a minor on Instagram where their contact has been established through their role as a staff member or volunteer.
 - a. Once a young person reaches age 18, it is then the volunteer or staff member's choice whether to follow them on Instagram.
2. Staff and volunteers should make their personal accounts private so that young people cannot follow them.
3. Staff, volunteers and young people can all follow the official **[Insert Organization's]** Instagram account, provided they are 13 or over. Young people should not be followed by the **[Insert Organization's]** Instagram account.
 - a. The account should be a private account
 - b. It should be monitored by at least two staff/volunteers who have admin rights.
 - c. The administrators can post pictures and comments but only on our own posts.
 - d. Notice of events can be posted on the account.
 - e. Administrators should not initiate conversation by private message but if a young person sends a private message a very short reply can be sent.
 - f. Pictures of young people and events can be posted by the administrator provided parents have given permission on the consent form

Snapchat, WhatsApp and all Anonymous Apps

1. Staff and volunteers should not connect with young people on Snapchat, WhatsApp or any "anonymous" app, including, but not limited to YikYak, Whisper, Kik.
2. As a general rule, use of Snapchat, WhatsApp, and all anonymous apps is forbidden to use as communication tools for parishes, schools and ministries due to the lack of accountability and ability to retain records of communications on these apps. This policy also prohibits the use of any such apps for communications between any Church or School personnel and any child connected to any ministry or school related activity.

YouTube or similar

1. Staff and volunteers should not subscribe to any young person's YouTube channel or comment on their uploads.



I have read and will adhere to the guidelines outlined above.

Printed Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

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MEDIA RELEASE/CONSENT FORM [typically completed every 12 months]

For good and valuable consideration, I hereby grant to _____ (“Organization”) the irrevocable and unrestricted right to make, use and/or publish any and all photographs, videos, and other images of me/my minor child(ren) as listed below, or images in which child(ren) may be included, now existing or hereafter made, in any case, with or without identifying child(ren) for editorial, advertising, news, or any other purpose and in any manner and medium; to alter the same without restriction; and to copyright the same. On behalf of myself and/or my child, I specifically waive all rights to privacy and confidentiality with respect to name, likeness, voice, photographs, images, video recordings, audio recordings and identifying information.

I also understand that the church/school maintains strict guidelines regarding the types of electronic communication are permitted between minors and staff/volunteers. These communications are intended to be public in nature whenever possible. With this consent, staff and volunteers may maintain student e-mails and phone numbers for the purposes of short, event-oriented communications. Parents/guardians have the right to review these communications if requested.

As a parent of legal guardian of the below named child/children, I agree that the organization may retain my child/children’s email address and/or phone number for the purposes of short, event-oriented communications or other quick responses. These communications may occur via text or e-mail. I also agree that I have read or have waived my right to read the Staff and Volunteer Youth Communication Policy located at: **[insert URL]**

Please check this box if you agree.

I hereby release and agree to fully and unconditionally protect, indemnify, and defend Organization and their respective officers, agents, and employees, (collectively, “Indemnitees”) and hold each Indemnitee harmless from and against any and all costs, expenses, attorney’s fees, claims damages, demands, suits, judgments, losses, or liability for injuries to property, injuries to persons (including child(ren)) and from any other costs, expenses, attorney fees, claims, suits judgments, losses, or liabilities of any and every nature whatsoever arising in any manner, directly or indirectly, out of, in connection with, in the course of, or incidental to the use or publication of any photographs, videos, or other images of child(ren), REGARDLESS OF CAUSE OR OF THE JOINT, COMPARATIVE, OR CONCURRENT NEGLIGENCE OF THE INDEMNITEES.

Print names all students in the same family to which this release applies

Date

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Printed name of Parent/Guardian

Parent /Guardian Telephone

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