Safe Church Training Agreement
TOWARDS SAFER CHURCHES

SAMPLE Electronic Communication Guidelines

Rationale

The use of the telephone, email, social networking sites (eg Facebook) and SMS are a part of everyday life for many young people and children. In some ministry situations such as general *communication* and *general pastoral care and support* may take place through electronic forums.

However, electronic communication may be used by those seeking to harm children and young persons. Electronic communication may be used to test or step over relational boundaries. We need to be mindful of the positional power dynamic that exists between those in leadership and the children and young people under their care. The following guidelines for the safe use of electronic communication may be used as part of exercising Safe Church practices.

1. GENERAL ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES

a. Safe ministry is about ministering in teams therefore, interaction with children/young people in electronic forms should be carried out in a team context. The use group emails, SMS from the team is good practice , indeed for all forms of electronic communication. Any personal emails sent from a church worker to a child or young person should also be sent to the team leader (cc'd).

b. Where possible and practical, and especially for communication to children under the age of 16 years, teams should inform parents or even seek parental permission before communicating with any electronic communication tool.

c. Church workers (leaders) must not knowingly transmit, retrieve or store any communication that is discriminatory or harassing; derogatory to any individual or group; obscene, sexually explicit or pornographic; defamatory or threatening; in violation of any licence governing the use of software; for any purpose that is illegal or contrary to your c onduct code.

d. Church workers (leaders) must not send any electronic communication that attempts to hide the identity of the sender or represent the sender as someone else.

2. TELEPHONE COMMUNICATION

a. When telephoning a child/young person, call on the home phone if possible.

b. Whenever possible ensure that the parents/guardians are aware of the phone call, e.g. phone the parents and ask if it is ok to speak with their child.

c. Mobile phone use should be kept to a minimum and never be used for long calls, especially for pastoral care:

d. If a child/young person initiates a mobile phone call requiring a long conversation, transfer the call to the home phone line.

3. EMAIL COMMUNICATION

a. All emails to children/young people should have a church email address carbon copied into them. Note: As carbon copying the church address into youth emails will clog up that mail box, the staff may wish to create a purpose address for leaders to cc into their email.

b. Emails should generally be restricted to purpose only emails e.g. "meet at this place" or general conversations e.g. "how was the excursion today?" Pastoral care/ deeper conversations regarding more personal issues should be face to face.

c. As far as possible save all emails to and from children/young people.

4. SMS COMMUNICATION

a. SMS communication should generally be restricted to purpose only communication e.g. "meet at this place, at this time".

b. If a longer SMS conversation begins, phone the child/young person, preferably on the home phone.

5. SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES (e.g. Facebook, Myspace etc)

a. Internal mail should be restricted to purpose only messages.

b. Writing on 'walls' should be kept to a minimum and only of a broad nature e.g. "hey, hope you're having a good week, cya Sunday" or other light conversations.

c. Do not give out any details of children/young people on 'walls' e.g. name of school, email address, home address, phone numbers, etc.

6. INTERNET CHAT ROOMS /PROGRAMS (e.g. MSN, ICQ etc)

a. Church workers should not enter into a closed conversation with a child/young person. If a child/young person invites you in to a conversation you should bring in a third party.

b. Church workers should use discernment and wisdom when having a multi-person conversation. Your conversation should be above reproach.

7. VIDEO PHONING (mobile phone/internet)

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

8. PHOTOGRAPHY

a. Any photos of youth/children's ministry activities should be taken by someone appointed by the Minister or ministry coordinator and with parental consent.

b. Do not photograph any child/young person who has asked not to be photographed.

c. Photography should focus on the activity or small groups rather than individuals.

d. Do not identify in writing the person/s in the photograph.

e. All children/young people must be appropriately dressed when photographed.

f. Only post photos of children/young people on the internet with parental permission as part of whole church communications and advertising.

g. If you do find a photo of a youth/children's activity posted on the internet by a young person, gently ask them if they have permission from everyone in the photo to post it. If they don't then advise them to either seek permission or remove it from the internet.

h. Do not allow children/young people to take a mobile phone photos of church workers.

i. Do not take photos of children/young people with your mobile phone.

Disclaimer
This is not legal advice but rather good practice advice for holistic Safe Church ministry produced by the NCCA-SCTA Unit 2010.

If you are concerned about legal issued you are advised to seek your own legal opinion.

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