**2020 <Your church name> Youth Ministry Guidelines**

**for the Communication between**

**Leaders and XX Youth Ministry members**

**Definitions:**

* ***“XX”*** *refers to XX Baptist Church.*
* ***“XX Youth Ministry”*** *refers to all youth ministry events, including those run under the ministry titles “Youth connect group”, “Zoom hang out”, “State Youth Games” (edit as appropriate)*
* ***“XX Youth Ministry member”*** *refers to all attendee participants of any youth ministry event who is between the ages of 12 and 18 years old, and/ or attends grades 6 – 12 at either primary or secondary school.*
* ***“Leader”*** refers to all people who have been appointed as Youth Leaders by the Youth Pastor or Senior Pastor of XX, who have signed the XX Leaders Code of Conduct and completed a current Youth Leader Application Form.
* ***“closed conversations”*** *refers to any online social communication where it is only between one (1) leader and one (1) XX Youth Ministry member.*
* ***“revealingly dressed”*** *refers to clothing that is low cut or shows too much skin on the area around the chest, stomach or upper legs including but not limited to bathers, bikinis, shorts or singlets.*
* ***“purpose only statements”*** *refers to facts or details that cannot be misunderstood by a reasonable person including but not limited to the date, time, description of the activity and location of events.*

This policy is for use by all appointed leaders and volunteers of the XX youth ministry. Only appointed leaders of this ministry, as well as senior leadership, may contact any person under 18 year old. See the separate document (eg- Church electronic communication policy) for further information regarding general correspondence within the church.

**Guidelines:**

These Guidelines have been written to preserve the safety and well-being of both the leaders and all XX Youth Ministry members. In the event that a leader does not follow these guidelines in how they communicate with all XX Youth Ministry members, they may be stood down from their leadership position by the Youth Pastor or Senior Pastor of XX, either temporarily, while the leader in question undertakes further training, or permanently, where it is deemed necessary.

A Professional Relationship **WILL** be violated if a leader engages in any online behaviour that:

* Suggests that he or she has an intimate relationship (i.e. Boyfriend/girlfriend) or a sexual relationship with an XX Youth Ministry member.
* Uses sexual innuendo or explicit or obscene language and/ or shares such material with an XX Youth Ministry member.
* Requires that they spend unsupervised face-to-face time alone that is not in accordance with the guidelines outlined below.
* Takes or captures photographs or digital recordings of a teenager, when they or their parents or guardians have asked that the teenager not to be photographed or recorded, and/or the photographs or digital recordings are of teenagers who are inappropriately dressed.
* Sends any form of electronic communication that attempts to hide the identity of the sender or misrepresents the identity of the sender to be someone else.
* Ridicules, harasses or bullies a teenager or contravenes the terms of XX Leaders Code of Conduct.

Additionally, for the protection of the leadership team, XX Youth Ministry recommends that leaders communicate in such a way as to:

1. **Maintain Transparency** – i.e. that the communication between leaders and XX Youth Ministry members both verbal or in writing be done as if it is done publicly with full access by parents or guardians, other leaders and society generally.
2. **Ensure Safety** – i.e. that the communication prioritises the safety of all parties, including emotional, mental and physical safety and wellbeing of both leaders and the XX Youth Ministry members at all times.
3. **With Integrity** – that the leader in question is communicating and responding openly at all times, with honesty and authenticity.
4. **Act Lawfully with Regard to the Care of People** – i.e. if the conversation (in any written format, or on any app or platform) includes sensitive material, the leader should contact the Youth Pastor or Senior Pastor of XX to discuss the substance of the conversation; and, if the conversation includes allegations of abuse or disclosures, or the leader suspects abuse or risk of harm, the leader must act promptly, keeping the child’s safety and wellbeing in mind, and make a report to the police and relevant governing bodies in accordance with the child safe policies of XX and the governing laws of our land.
5. **Be Open about the Expectations of Confidentiality** – it is the leader’s responsibility to ensure that any XX Youth Ministry member is advised that the leader cannot keep any safety concerns confidential in accordance with the laws of the land and the leader must also inform the XX Youth Ministry member each time it is necessary to add another adult or leader to their conversations before they do so for the sake of transparency.

**Phone Contact including Phone Calls and Texts (SMS)**

* The leader can text directly to the any youth whose parents or guardians have consented to direct contact in the annual Enrolment Form. At the end of the conversation, the leader will save and/or screenshot the conversation and email the copy to themselves for the sake of keeping a record of it.
* If the parents or guardians have indicated on the annual Enrolment Form that they want contact through them rather than direct to the child, leaders should either call or text the parent or guardian to ask to speak to their child on the parent/s or guardian/s’ number each time, until such time as the parent/s or guardian/s consent in writing to direct contact to the XX Youth Ministry member in the future.
* If a leader wants to phone the XX Youth Ministry member directly and have a conversation (and the parent or guardian has consented to this form of direct contact), the leader should first send a text direct to the parent or guardian to let them know that they’ve organised to call their child on a set day and at a set time. Then they can go ahead and speak to the XX Youth Ministry member directly on that day and time so as to meet the transparency requirement.
* Leaders should restrict SMS conversations wherever possible to purpose only statements (i.e. Meet at \_\_\_) to eliminate misunderstandings and save and/ or screenshot all SMS text messages to and from the XX Youth Ministry member wherever possible and email the copy to themselves for the sake of keeping a record of it.

**Online Contact**

Leaders should:

* not enter into ‘closed conversations’ with a teenager in chat rooms / social networking sites, including in apps like “House Party” or similar platform where they can ‘lock the door’ to the chat etc
* Save and/or screenshot all e-mails / letters / online direct messages (DMs) to and from young people wherever possible
* CC the youth pastor, team leader or another team member when sending e-mails directly to one (1) single XX Youth Ministry member at a time
* Restrict online written conversations to purpose only statements (i.e. Meet at \_\_\_) to eliminate misunderstandings wherever possible
* If undertaking a pastoral care role where confidentiality is important:
  + make sure that another adult / leader is aware that the session is taking place; and
  + keep a written record of the event, including date, time, place and a brief factual summary of what was said;

**Face-to-Face Contact**

* The leader should invite more than one (1) XX Youth Ministry member to any informal meetings or events, as well as a second adult or leader, wherever possible.
* The leader should protect their own reputation by ensuring that any informal meeting or event (i.e. meeting an XX Youth Ministry member outside of events organised by the XX Youth Ministry team) with one (1) XX Youth Ministry member in person takes place publicly and with transparency (e.g. in a public place like a café) and with the parent/s or guardian/s’ prior knowledge and written consent.
* If the informal meeting or event is in private, it must take place in a room with the door open and with another adult that is not related biologically or by marriage to the leader in the same building at all times.

**Contact via Apps**

* A leader should not be initiating friend requests with XX Youth Ministry Members to their private Facebook account or similar platform if they are under 18 years of age. Should an XX Youth Ministry Member (under 18 years of age) initiate a friend request with a leader, the leader is under no obligation to accept the request.
* If the leader does accept a Facebook friend request, they do so with the expectation that they will do their utmost to ensure that all of their future posts and shared content on their personal page will be considered by a reasonable person to be appropriate and ‘family friendly’ without explicit language or sexual innuendo or content.
* If communicating with an XX Youth Ministry member under 18 years of age via Facebook or similar platform, it is strongly advised that leaders post or share to the XX Youth Ministry member’s public wall in all circumstances to meet the transparency requirement rather than privately.
* If communicating directly with an XX Youth Ministry member via Facebook Messenger or similar platform, it is strongly advised that leaders include a second leader in the conversation, especially whenever it cannot be limited to purpose only statements.
* If communicating directly with an XX Youth Ministry member via Instagram or similar platform, always post directly to a teenager’s photo and refrain from direct messages on this social media platform, unless they are purpose only statements.
* It is strongly advised that leaders should only use Snapchat or similar platform to directly communicate purpose only statements to any XX Youth Ministry members under the age of 18 years old.
* In the event that a conversation occurs via direct messages between a leader and an XX Youth Ministry member on any of these or similar social media platforms that is not limited to purpose only statements, the leader should as soon as reasonably possible add another leader to the conversation. If that is not possible, the leader should save and/ or screenshot the entire conversation and email it to themselves for the sake of keeping a record of it. If the leader is concerned about any of the content shared in the conversation, the leader should also forward the saved screenshots of the conversation to either the Youth Pastor or the Senior Pastor at XX.

**Contact via Video Conferencing**

* Please limit the use of Zoom Video Conferencing, FaceTime, Skype or similar platform to communicating with two (2) or more XX Youth Ministry Members at a time and the leader should do their best to ensure wherever possible that at least one (1) other leader can be present for the conversation. The leader should also obtain the permission of each XX Youth Ministry member’s parent or guardian in writing via text or email response and do their best to ensure that the conversation takes place in a room where the doors remain open at all times at both ends of the conversation (i.e. the kitchen or lounge room is preferable).
* If an XX Youth Ministry Member requests that the conversation be limited to themselves and the leader, the leader should refrain from using Zoom Video Conferencing or similar platform and follow the directions above for calling the XX Youth Ministry member directly on the phone.

**Contact via Online Gaming**

* The leader should invite more than one (1) XX Youth Ministry member, as well as a second adult or leader, wherever possible, if they are playing an online game or similar platform including but not limited to Minecraft or Call of Duty; and/or if they are playing an online game that allows the participants to converse verbally in real time.
* The leader should ensure that the maturity rating for any online game is considered appropriate for the age of any XX Youth Ministry member they have invited to participate and that they have informed all parent or guardians or guardians of the online game ahead of time as well as the date and time of the informal online gaming event and obtained their permission in writing via text or email to their child’s participation.

**Contact via Livestreaming Services**

* If conducting any livestream communication, leaders should use Facebook Livestream or similar platform only, so long as the livestream is directly posted to their public wall for the sake of transparency.

**Contact using Emojis/ Bitmojis/ other Emoticons**

* Please refrain from using emojis or bitmojis or other emoticons whenever possible.
* If the leader does use emojis, bitmojis or other emoticons, please avoid using any that might be considered by a reasonable person to have multiple and/ or suggestive meanings.
* Some examples of ones to avoid (and this is by no means an exhaustive list) include:

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Eggplant |  | Rooster |  | Peach |  |
| Love Heart (any) |  | Peace Sign |  | OK Hand |  |
| Donut |  | Banana |  | Tongue |  |
| Honeypot |  | Baguette |  | Dancing Lady |  |
| Sweat Droplets |  | Hot Dog |  | Fireworks |  |
| Smiling Devil |  | Taco |  | Pointer Finger |  |