

St Ebbe's Headington, Oxford

Youth Communications Policy

(Email, Mobile Phone, Social Media, Written)

Introduction

'Email' is electronic mail sent from one user to another.

'Mobile phone' communications are phone calls and text messages sent from one user to another. For the purposes of this policy, WhatsApp messaging is treated alongside text messaging, due to the similarity of their purpose and medium.

'Social media' are websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking. Social media activities include:

- Maintaining a profile page on a networking site such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or LinkedIn
- Writing or commenting on a blog, whether it is your own or the blog of another person
- Taking part in discussions on web forums or message boards.

Social media are important components in how the church relates to the community and indeed how the community relates to the church. For young people it is now a matter of course to use social media, and most adults, including older adults, do so also. The widespread availability of social media means it is important to understand how to use it responsibly. This requires extra care when dealing with young people.

'Written' communications are letters or post cards.

Purpose of this policy

This policy seeks to direct staff and volunteers in their use of social media, email, mobile phones and letters when communicating with young people. The aims of doing this are:

- to provide a framework which protects young people, staff and volunteers
- to encourage communication by staff and volunteers that provides a healthy and helpful model to young people
- to empower staff and volunteers to communicate with young people in the many appropriate ways.

Social media are continually changing and this policy will be reviewed and updated regularly, but the principles embodied in this document will continue to be applied.

Scope

'Young people' are defined as those in school years 7 to 13 (or equivalent). This is the group for Heads Up, and so 'Heads Up members' are those involved in the Heads Up work from school years 7-13. 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.

Consent Forms

On the annual Registration and Consent Form for Heads Up, parents and guardians will be given the option to consent to the following:

- Photos to be taken at youth group events for internal Heads Up use. Anything that might be suitable for public use (e.g. church publicity) will be discussed with the parents/guardian first.
- *Heads Up members only*: to have email contact with staff and volunteers in accordance with this policy.
- *Heads Up members only*: to make and receive calls, texts and WhatsApp messages to and from staff and volunteers in accordance with this policy.
- *Heads Up members only*: to connect to a Heads Up Facebook group (one is not currently in place), and to relate to staff and volunteers through social media, in accordance with this policy.

Note on all forms of communication

Communication should not usually take place with young people after 9.30pm. This does not mean staff and volunteers have to be available to young people at all other times. Staff and volunteers will exercise appropriate discretion in dealing with the substance of communication from young people, though they cannot promise confidentiality.

Note on privacy in social media

The lines between public and private can become blurred in all use of social media, so staff and volunteers should assume that everything they write on any such media is permanent and can be viewed by anyone at any time. They should also assume that everything can be traced back to them personally as well as to their colleagues or the church.

Use of social media for purely personal reasons (ie not involving young people) does not need church approval but even here you should be aware that you are at all times in a position of trust, and that you may be perceived as an ambassador for the church. You are advised to exercise wisdom in all online activity to ensure you maintain integrity and gospel witness. This will apply to the online content you post, or are associated with, and will also shape how you select your privacy settings.

Guidelines on specific forms of communication

Emails

1. Once permission is given by a parent or guardian, staff and volunteers can hold email addresses for Heads Up members in their care, and can communicate with Heads Up members via email.
2. Emails should be short and should usually be a one-off communication to arrange a meeting or remind Heads Up members to attend an event. Extended conversations should not be had over email. Staff and volunteers should arrange to meet one-to-one with a Heads Up member if the Heads Up member would like to talk.
3. The content should be appropriate, such that you would be happy for a third party to view it. The tone should be warm and friendly, but not over-familiar or suggesting a special relationship.
4. Emails should be kept on file, so that they can be traced if necessary for a term in accordance with the Oxford Diocesan guidance on record-keeping in parishes.
5. If a disclosure is made that raises a safeguarding concern, this information should be reported to the line manager and/or Safeguarding Officer in accordance with the Oxford Diocesan Good Practice Guide for Church Workers with Children and Young People.
6. When a member of staff or volunteer leaves the Heads Up team, Heads Up members' email addresses should be removed from their personal address book.
7. Staff should only email using their work account and not personal email accounts.

Mobile Phones: Phone calls, Texting, and WhatsApp

1. Once permission is given by a parent or guardian, staff and volunteers can hold mobile phone numbers for Heads Up members, and can communicate with Heads Up members via phone call, text message or WhatsApp message. Staff and volunteers may participate in WhatsApp group messages with Heads Up members where all the participants are staff, volunteers, Heads Up members or Heads Up parents.
2. Phone calls, text messages and WhatsApp messages should be short and should usually be a one-off communication to arrange a meeting or remind young people to attend an event. Extended conversations should not be had; staff and volunteers should arrange to meet one-to-one with a Heads Up member if the Heads Up member would like to talk.
3. The content of calls and messages should be appropriate, such that you would be happy for a third party to view it. The tone should be warm and friendly, but not over-familiar or suggesting a special relationship.
4. If a disclosure is made that raises a safeguarding concern, this information should be reported to the line manager and/or Safeguarding Officer in accordance with the Oxford Diocesan Good Practice Guide for Church Workers with Children and Young People.
5. When a member of staff or volunteer leaves the Heads Up team, Heads Up members' numbers should be removed from phones and any other personal digital or written record.

Social Media: Facebook

1. Volunteers and staff cannot be friends on Facebook with a Heads Up member where their contact has been established through their role as a staff member or volunteer. Private messaging is also therefore not permitted. Once a young person has left our youth work provision at 18 it is then the volunteer or staff member's choice whether to be Facebook friends with them.

2. Heads Up can have a Facebook group, according to the following policy:

- a. The group must be a 'secret group'.
- b. The group must be managed by at least two staff/volunteers who are 'administrators'. Other volunteers may be made 'moderators'.
- c. Young people, staff and volunteers can become members of this group when added or invited by a member.
- d. Communication can occur openly through posts and comments on the page.
- e. Events can be posted on the page, and polls can be created on the page.
- f. Once parental permission is given for photography, photos of events and young people can be posted on the page.
- g. Privacy settings in a 'secret group' will ensure that only members of the group see posts, comments, photographs and events posted in the group.

Social Media: Twitter

1. Young people can follow staff and volunteers on Twitter. Leaders should be aware as they tweet that they are a role model to young people.

2. Direct private messages should not be sent or responded to as these are hidden forms of communication.

3. Staff and volunteers must not follow young people on Twitter.

Social Media: Snapchat, Instagram or similar apps

Staff and volunteers should not communicate with young people on Snapchat, Instagram etc.

Social Media: YouTube or similar

Staff and volunteers should not subscribe to any young person's video channel.

Written Communications

1. Staff and volunteers can send young people postcards (ie written communications not in envelopes) to, for example, invite them to events, etc.

2. Staff and volunteers can not send young people letters (ie written communications in envelopes).

3. Once a young person has left our youth work provision at 18 the volunteer or staff member may send either postcards or letters.