



# **Coplestone Methodist Church**

Coplestone  
Crediton  
Devon  
EX17 5NH



The **Methodist Church** 

## **E-SAFETY POLICY FOR COPPLESTONE METHODIST CHURCH** **Social Media Usage, Internet, Text, Email, Virtual Meetings**

### **Rationale**

At Coplestone Methodist Church we recognise that using the internet (and other forms of technology) is an important part of the lives of the children and young people we work with. We understand that 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 Methodist Church and Coplestone Methodist Church Safeguarding policy, we recognise that we must take all possible steps to protect young people from significant harm or risk when using the internet or any other form of technology. We also recognise the importance of establishing and updating procedures to ensure Workers are protected whilst they work with children and young people.

All Workers are responsible for reading any policies produced regarding safeguarding and communication matters and are expected to adhere to the guidelines in the current policies.

### **Reasons for contacting a young person via the internet or email:**

It is not appropriate to have private non-work-related contact with children and young people that we work with at Coplestone Methodist Church in the format of electronic communication. We recognise that there will be times when it is necessary and important to use electronic communication. However, we recognise the need for an appropriate response and always encourage face to face contact as opposed to a contact or reply via online methods of communication. Workers should only use electronic communication for reasons relating to work with children and young people, not for general socialising.

Workers should make their line manager or youth group leader aware when they are using electronic communication, this must be set up as part of a group communication and not individual (ie Coplestone Children and Families Facebook group). Unnecessary contact could include sharing personal issues or anything that might burden a young person. Excessive contact will also be inappropriate.

### **Social Media Usage**

Social media, when used properly, is exciting and opens up a lot of opportunities, but at times it can seem strange and even intimidating for people who are not familiar with it. Facebook, Twitter, texting, instant messaging, online gaming and personal emails are accessible by all. By following some simple guidelines you can avoid potential pitfalls, and these mediums can be safely used as a tool and a means of communication. Social media is great for promoting a group or event or communicating to parents, children and young people, as well as being a fun way to unwind and stay in touch with friends; it is essential to keep these two worlds separate.

In all contact and communications with members of organisations/group leaders must be seen to be open and transparent. This is the case whether communications are by traditional means or electronic means.

Leaders must not communicate with children or young people (0-18 years) via leader's personal social networking profiles, email accounts or chat rooms. Messages must be in group format with more than one leader in the group. Young adults between 18-20 years of age should be communicated via group chat or group email.

### **Social networking sites**

For an organisation/group using or setting up a social networking site/medium that is for the purpose of running, maintaining communicating about the organisation/group the following principles should apply;



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- The page profile, if possible, must be password protected (this may not always be possible) and the password held by at least three leaders of the organisation or group. E.g. if you set up an Instagram or Facebook group.
- The site should be monitored. Children and youth social media policy for churches
- Any inappropriate posts by children or young people or leaders should be removed by the admin/s of the site. Reasons should then be explained to the person who posted the content. All those who use the site should be made aware what the purpose of the site is and that any inappropriate images, content that is not in line with the values of the group/organisation is not acceptable.
- The site/ group should be kept closed i.e. only permitted/authorised members can see what is posted on the site.
- Contents of any postings should be consistent with the aims of the organisation. In cases of doubt leaders should seek advice from the Group leader and the Group leader can seek advice if needed from Minister, Senior Steward.

## Leaders, using social network sites for communication

- Leaders should not friend or follow children or young people on social media. (The definition of children and young people in this context is 1-18 years of age. Young Adults between 18-20 years of age who are in the group or organisation should also be communicated with via groups, or group chat that has a minimum of two group leaders.
- Messages left to or from children or young people on social networking sites should be written on an open page e.g. A Facebook wall and not in Private message or by using chat (one on one).
- Communications with children and young people should be via group Chat with a minimum of three leaders on the group.
- Any emails sent to children or young people should have a second leader copied into it.
- Any events or activities run by the group or organisation that are organised or publicised on social media sites for group members should be set up as closed groups and membership managed by the administrators.
- Leaders should avoid communicating with children or young people in their organisation/group after 9pm.
- In signing off emails, messages, leaders should simply sign your name and the name of the group/organisation.
- Parents/Guardians should be asked to give their permission for leaders to communicate with children and young people under 16 years of age via social networking sites or by any other means of internet communication e.g. email. This can be included on the annual consent forms. Parents or guardians should be the main port of contact and communication and copied into any communications to their children.
- Parents or Guardians should be invited to be members of any group chat or social media groups (closed where possible). The parents or guardians should be informed of what the purpose of the group is and reminded to ensure that their privacy settings are suitable and that they should not accept any friend requests from children or young people.
- Parental permission via annual consent forms is required for photographs and video footage of children and young people and the consent forms should state what the usage of the images will be for e.g.; for the promotion of the organisation via social media or publications. Leaders should endeavour not to state any unnecessary personal details or information relating to the child or young person when posting images or photos online e.g. full names, addresses, schools attending. If a child or young person has received an award then it is appropriate to use their full name.
- Any disclosures of abuse reported through a social networking site must be dealt with in accordance with The Methodist Church Safeguarding procedures and Policy.



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## Use of mobile phones

- Leaders involved in children and youth ministry should only have children's and young people's mobile numbers if the nature of their involvement requires to phone or text them (This might include those running groups for older teenagers or young adults or volunteer young leaders involved in co-ordinating children or youth ministry) As much as possible group chats should be set up with two to three other leaders included in communication. One on one text should be avoided and where possible parents should be included in the text.
- Parental permission should be sought if the leader in this role will be contacting children or young people via mobile phone.
- If a leader has a young persons or young adults phone number it should only be used for the purposes it has been given. E.g. times, dates, details of group meetings, events, planning.

## Language

All language should be appropriate and where possible 'standard responses' should be used. (eg: if you have sent an email out containing event details and receive a reply asking for further details, create a standard response with additional details so that all young people receive the same information).

- Workers and volunteers should take great care over the language used to reduce misinterpretation.
- When sending emails, Workers should not use informal language such as short hand and 'text language' as this can often be misunderstood and lead to further complications.

## Chat facilities/Messenger and live chat

Use of live chat facilities between workers and children and young people is not permitted. Youth workers should refrain from engaging in conversation via these mediums. Live chat services and chat facilities cannot be kept on record and are therefore an unsuitable form of communication between workers, children and young people.

## Skype and other visual methods

Use of skype and any other web camera or visual communication via the internet is not permitted. Workers should refrain from using such methods on a one-to-one basis as they cannot be recorded. It can be used for conference call and is considered appropriate if a project or group uses a web camera/Skype in a group environment for project purposes, and has clear aims and objectives for its use. Always seek to inform a line manager or group leader when this is taking place and keep a record of it.

## Hours of communication

When using email/internet for communication with young people (within the guidelines above), no email communication should take place after 10pm

## Adding friends on facebook and similar sites

You should not add children or young people to your personal social networking page if they are involved with Copplestone Methodist Church Children and Youth Ministry and are under the age of 18. Copplestone Methodist Church has a Facebook group page for youth workers and young people to communicate and invite them to be members. (If they are over the required minimum age limit ie: 13 for Facebook)

- Workers should only use an agreed social networking account for contact with children and young people with whom they are working.
- Workers should not use their personal social networking or instant messaging accounts for contact with children and young people.
- Workers should seek to ensure that their personal profiles on any social networking sites should be set to the highest form of security to avoid young people accessing personal information or seeing any pictures of a personal nature.



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### **Email communication**

- Email should only be used to communicate specific information. (eg: Times and dates of events). It should not be used as a relationship building tool.
- All youth and children's workers should copy in their line manager to any email that is sent to a young person or child, regardless of whether it is private or public. This would allow communication amongst staff and young people to remain safe
- Workers should encourage appropriate 'face to face' contact where possible. Conversation (repeated sending of emails between two individuals) via email is discouraged.
- Email History should be kept and dated.

### **Email and accountability**

As specified above, email should only be used to convey information and not used as a relationship tool. However, if a young person discloses information or anything of a concerning matter arises via email, the following procedure must be followed:

- Read and follow The Methodist Church Safeguarding procedures relating to disclosures.
- Do not respond to the email. Make attempts to contact the young person via other methods of communication and where possible, arrange to meet face to face if necessary with another member of the Church.

### **Text communication not conversation**

- Texts should be used for the purposes of reminding children and young people about meetings and events.
- Texts can also be used as a means to encourage children or young people if it is appropriate e.g. Hope your exams go ok. If it turns into conversation, communication should be ended. A leader can suggest discussing the subject further at the next session. Be mindful of child protection usual parameters.

### **Camera phones**

Pictures can be very powerful, camera phone users should ask permission to take a photo or video and explain what the purpose of the photo or video is for.

- Leaders and children and young people should not send pictures that are obscene, indecent or menacing.
- It is a criminal offence to take, make, permit to be taken, distribute, show or possess an indecent or sexually explicit image of a child under 18.
- When posting photographs or video on social media settings should be set up so that individual children and young people cannot be tagged.
- Images should be stored safely in an electronic file on devices that have security passwords.
- If any electronic device/memory that contains video or images is disposed of the images and video should be wiped from the memory in such a way that it cannot be recovered on that device.

### **Use of mobile phones on activities**

Children and Young people, parents and guardians should be informed about safe usage of mobile phones and devices and the policy for the usage during the event or session;

- Confirmation that when on activities a named leader is the primary point of communication and is to be contacted if there is an emergency or change to previously agreed arrangements.
- That the usage of mobile phones or devices including text messaging, games or music cannot be allowed to be a distraction from a safe awareness of the environment.
- That mobile phones or device usage should not interfere with the full participation of activities.
- That when on camps or overnight activities that there is a stated preferred time period when parents may contact, if they wish. This is to minimise and alleviate homesickness and to avoid the disturbance of other children and young people after lights out.



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### **Use of computers/tablets/web enabled games consoles/Smart TVs**

If devices are used as part of activities within the organisation or group. They should be used within the following guidelines;

- All games, videos, films should be age appropriate for the group.
- Internet searching should be monitored and age appropriate.
- Children and young people should be supervised during the activity.
- Parental settings where possible should be used on all devices.
- Permission should be asked before videoing or recording other members of the group.
- Nothing should be posted without the leaders knowledge or agreement.
- The group should be informed of the parameters and guidelines for the activity.

### **Parental awareness and consent**

Parental consent for using electronic forms of communication is essential and is included on our consent forms or by letter with a return slip agreeing to the use of this form of communication. The consent form outlines what means we will be using for communication and what we will be communicating.

### **Safeguarding**

Always conduct yourself on the internet as you would face-to-face and be aware of what you say and how you say it. If you wouldn't say or do something in the "real" world, then don't do it online. Never provide personal details about young people or volunteers and always ensure you have parental permission to use any photos of young people. Only ever use the first names of young people on any photo or video caption and only share appropriate photos, the sort that you would be happy putting on a public notice board. Remember that, potentially, anyone can view content on the internet.

If you sign yourself up to social networking platforms you need to be aware that content is speedily updated and security settings can change. Whatever site you choose to join, make sure you regularly check your privacy and security settings and have a browse of their privacy policy. Most content can be tagged and posted on your account and comments will be made that you cannot always control. It is a network rather than a broadcasting channel so people will share opinions (good and bad).

Only set up pages for events, activities or groups for which you are responsible. Once a site has been set up it needs to be checked regularly to ensure that information changes when appropriate and that members are interested and come back.

Please note that posts on social media are widely accessible and can easily be passed on; always be sure that any information or comments made are appropriate and in keeping with the ethos and values of the Methodist Church. Don't use your personal social networking account to communicate directly, on a one-to-one basis with children or young people. Be aware of the age limits on social media sites and purpose of usage.

### **Specific Zoom overview**

Many of the principles for safeguarding and good practice that underpin face to face meeting remain the same in virtual spaces. For instance:

- Ensure there are at least two leaders, who have been recruited using the Safer Recruitment processes (references and DBS checks) in each virtual meeting (and make sure the leaders 'arrive' before the group does) or alternatively ensure parents are within ear distance of the zoom meeting.
- You will need parental consent to include their child in any virtual meeting space and, for those under 16, the parents/carers will need to be the Zoom account holders and the link for the meeting should be sent to them. We also recommend that parents/guardians are asked to supervise\* the Zoom call – the processes outlined here, if correctly followed, will include this.



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- If a young person says something that causes concern and seems like it could lead to a safeguarding disclosure, then tell them you would like to talk to them about that more later – away from the wider group. Encourage them to stay online after the main meeting and ask them to tell you more. Again, you need to make sure there are two leaders present for the conversation – perhaps one asking questions and the other taking comprehensive notes. Follow safeguarding procedure as you would at any other time and contact your District Safeguarding Officer and, if appropriate and safe, the parents and carers as soon as you can.
- Consider inclusivity and accessibility – how can you make sure all your group is able to fully participate? For instance, you may want to consider: Does everyone have access to a device that will enable them to take part? Do any of your young people have additional needs that might prevent them from taking part fully? Does the time of the meeting align with the rhythms of the families you work with?
- Do not record the meeting. Most video conferencing software allows for the session host to record the goings on, but this would require separate permission for data capture and there are additional issues around storage, GDPR etc.
- In the settings for your Zoom meeting you should disable the one-to-one anonymous chat function so that participants cannot send private messages that are not seen by the wider group. You may also want to consider disabling screen share and only allowing this if needed for a particular activity.
- As part of your ground rules for the whole group their participation in the Zoom chat should take place from a public part of the house, not their bedroom.

Step by step guidance from the Methodist Church for virtual meetings can be found at - <https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/children-youth-family-ministry/the-well-learning-hub-equipping-and-supporting-workers/resources-and-help-for-lockdown-and-beyond/creating-safe-and-engaging-virtual-spaces-with-children-and-young-people/virtual-meeting-groups-a-step-by-step-guide/>

Zoom collects information about its users and has its own privacy terms and conditions to which members must adhere. Please review Zoom's privacy terms and conditions carefully before registering, and ask parents/carers to do so also.

*\* By supervision we mean: The parent/carer holds the responsibility to log in to the Zoom meeting and agrees to not share the log in details. The parent/guardian is also responsible for logging out of the Zoom call at the end of a session and checking that privacy settings haven't been changed and their passwords are not saved. The parent/carer is to manage the Zoom account and to ensure that they are at home while the child or young person is attending the session. Where possible the child/young person should be in a communal space or in a room with the doors left open when accessing the session via their laptop, computer or other device.*

Zoom's advice around under 16s using the platform is: "Children under 16 cannot create a Zoom account. A parent or guardian may, however, permit the child to use that parent or guardian's account with their supervision."

**IMPORTANT:** Due to the increase in 'Zoombombing' it is vitally important that you only share the meeting invite link with the parents/young people in your group - and you must stress to them the importance of not sharing the link beyond the group. Read more here.

### **Specific Definitions**

*'Internet' communication specifically refers to the use of: Social networking sites such as Bebo, Facebook, Twitter and other web sites of a similar nature.*

*'Email' communication specifically refers to the use of: Emails including written text and/or pictures sent from personal or work accounts.*

*Where consultation with your line manager is advised in this document, it may be more appropriate to inform another colleague as well as your line Manager, such as the Church Safeguarding Officer.*



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*With regards to young people who have left the group or are now over the age of 18yrs, please use discretion with regards to this policy and seek advice where necessary.*

This Policy is read in conjunction with the Methodist Church Social Media Guidelines downloadable from: [www.methodist.org.uk](http://www.methodist.org.uk) and Coplestone Methodist Church Safeguarding Policy downloadable from [www.coplestonechurch.org.uk](http://www.coplestonechurch.org.uk).

This policy was agreed at Church Council on: 10<sup>th</sup> October 2023

Signed (Chair of Church Council): *Paul Smith*

(Superintendent Minister and Chair of Church Council)

Review Date: *October 2024*

## Methodist Church safeguarding and GDPR and other links

- <https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-ministers-and-office-holders/safeguarding/>
- <https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/children-and-youth/the-well-for-workers/wellresources/social-media-guidelines/>
- <https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-ministers-and-office-holders/guidance-for-churches/data-protection/>
- <https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/children-and-youth/the-well-for-workers/wellresources/organising-events/>

## Other Information and sources on E-Safety

The following websites provide information for leaders, parents, guardians and carers about e-safety:

- Childnet - [www.childnet.com](http://www.childnet.com)
- Anti-Bullying Alliance - [www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk](http://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk)
- NSPCC/02 Helpline - [www.02.co.uk/help/nspcc/child-protection](http://www.02.co.uk/help/nspcc/child-protection)
- CEOP Think you know - [www.thinkuknow.co.uk](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk)
- UK safer internet Centre - [www.saferinternet.org.uk](http://www.saferinternet.org.uk)
- Step by step guidance from the Methodist Church for virtual meetings - <https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/children-youth-family-ministry/the-well-learning-hub-equipping-and-supporting-workers/resources-and-help-for-lockdown-and-beyond/creating-safe-and-engaging-virtual-spaces-with-children-and-young-people/virtual-meeting-groups-a-step-by-step-guide/>

## Mobile phones advice on risks and solutions

Risk: Accusation of an inappropriate message or receipt of one

Solution: Be very careful in what language you use. It is not encouraged for Workers to give out their personal mobile number to young people. We recognise that this may be needed at times

Risk: Texting late in the evening – potential to be inappropriate and parents not aware of this.

Solution: No texting after 10pm

Risk: Young Person's perception of relationship

Solution: Discourage text conversation or phone conversation where it is not about communicating information.

Risk: Texting/calling whilst the young person in school/college

Solution: Call between 12.30-1pm or 4-10pm



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Risk: Data protection of young person numbers on workers personal mobiles

Solution: Have a lock on your phone for data protection and do not allow access Preferred action: Use a software texting package rather than a personal phone for texting.