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Technology



TAKINGCARE

www.presbyterianireland.org/takingcare

8. TECHNOLOGY

In an increasingly complex world the opportunities for child abuse are growing. Those who care for children need to be aware of the opportunities for abuse through the misuse of the internet, text messaging, video and other media. While good use of such media can be beneficial we must be vigilant and alert to the possibilities of misuse and the consequent harm to young people that can result.

::8.1 USING COMPUTERS

If there is a computer being used within the programme of your organisation, it is important that guidelines are drawn up in order to ensure that it is used for its correct purpose and that it is looked after properly. The leaders could agree on a contract which would be given to and possibly signed by all children, parents and leaders.

Leaders need to be agreed upon the primary purpose of using computers as part of their programme. For example, is it primarily used for the purposes of research in a homework club or recreational games as part of the youth club? Leaders need to agree which websites are suitable and which websites are unsuitable for the age group of children that they are working with. Computers need to be secure with up to date virus checkers and appropriate parental controls. When young people are using computers on church premises they should be well supervised (see Section 12 for a sample computer contract for use within a church organisation).

::8.2 CHILDREN AND THE INTERNET

Whilst the development of the internet has revolutionised communication systems throughout the world and appropriately used is an excellent resource, care in its application needs to be exercised so that the safety of a child is not compromised.



Children need to be aware of online safety in the same way they are taught road safety.

As well as the prevalence of online grooming, children can often be the victims of cyber bullying. Bullying through the use of social media can be more intense and more difficult to escape than bullying children experience within the playground or school.

The Taking Care Office has worked in partnership with CEOP (Child Exploitation Online Protection) to educate parents, leaders and children about the safety issues regarding the internet. Several youth leaders have been trained to deliver their 'Thinkuknow' education programme to children and young people in youth groups. To organise training for the young people or parents in your congregation please contact the Taking Care Office. Contact details of CEOP and other organisations working in this area can be found in Section 12.

::8.3 CHURCH WEBSITES

When designing or developing a church or youth website or an internet page please remember the following:

- :: Parental permission must be obtained before using any pictures of a child/group of children on a website.
- :: Avoid using photographs of individual children which can be easily copied on to other websites, it is preferable to use a group photograph.
- :: Names, addresses, phone numbers and email addresses should not be given.
- :: Leaders should be aware that by advertising dates and times of events online, there is the possibility that other people, who would not have otherwise heard of an event, may target the event and turn up without warning.
- :: It should be made very clear to young people that the website should not be used to make arrangements to meet up with each other casually, eg going out for coffee. They need to be reminded that they don't know who is reading their conversation.
- :: A 'closed' page or password protected site can help to limit who can view the site.

::8.4 COMMUNICATION WITH YOUNG PEOPLE VIA THE INTERNET

Working with young people often requires a balancing act between being part of the world in which they live, in order to reach them, and yet maintaining a leadership role. In order to understand young people, it is important to live in their culture and at the same time be a role model to them. No place is this balancing act more difficult to get right than in the area of technology, namely the internet and, in particular, social networking sites, blogs, micro-blogs and other public domain publishing methods.

If used well, methods of communication via the internet can be effective tools in youth ministry. For example, social networking sites have a group facility which allows online groups to meet in a virtual space where all information and comments are seen by everyone in that group but no-one else.

It is worth noting that everything posted on the internet – comments, opinions and photos – can potentially be seen and copied by anyone else using the internet. Social networking sites have privacy settings for this reason and these limit what any other person, whom you have not accepted as a friend, can view.

Leaders should think carefully before adding a child or young person in the organisation in which they are leaders, as a friend or follower on a social networking site. If a leader does choose to accept a child or young person as a friend or follower, it is important always to remember that the child or young person has access to all comments, opinions, information and photos which are posted on the leader's profile, either by the leader or by their other friends. Leaders are recommended to evaluate photos of themselves that are posted on these sites and consider deleting or 'untagging' any photos in which they are depicted in what could possibly be construed as compromising situations, thus preventing the photograph or other material being used inappropriately.

Leaders should not post photographs of young people from the organisation in which they are leaders, on a social networking site or anywhere on the internet, unless they have written parental consent.

Comments made on the internet should be considered the same as if they were made in a public place. If a child discloses something to a leader via a social networking site, a chat room or any other public domain publishing method, then the disclosure must be dealt with by following the normal reporting process (see Section 3). If a leader is concerned about something that a young person communicates to him or her via the internet, he or she should encourage the child to talk to a suitable adult about it or arrange to meet with the child (within the usual child protection parameters).

It would be wise for leaders not to get involved in lengthy or intense engagements online, setting boundaries is encouraged. While communication via the internet can be highly effective, all such communication with children and young people should, as far as possible, be within an open forum, in order to protect both young people and leaders.

::8.5 COMMUNICATION WITH YOUNG PEOPLE VIA MOBILE PHONES

Those who work with children need to be aware of the opportunities for abuse through the misuse of mobile phone and text messaging. While good use of such media can be beneficial we must be vigilant and alert to the possibilities of misuse and consequent harm that can result to young people. Leaders must also take care to protect themselves and Kirk Sessions should take an active role to ensure that good practice is followed.

Leaders involved in youth and children's work should only have children's mobile numbers if the nature of their involvement requires them to phone or text children. Such leaders might include those running an organisation for older teenagers, or an employed youth worker or a volunteer involved in co-ordinating youth work within the congregation. Kirk Session should be informed which leaders need to contact children for their specific roles.

- ∴ Parental permission should be sought if the leader in this role will be contacting children via mobile phone.
- ∴ A method of accountability should be arranged eg copies of texts could also be sent to the minister or to parents.
- ∴ If a leader has a child's phone number it should only be used for the purposes it has been given ie the leader should not share this information with other church members.
- ∴ It is recommended that an employed youth worker has a separate phone for work purposes rather than using their personal phone for contacting young people.



Texting - communication not conversation!

- ∴ Texts should be used for the purposes of reminding young people about events which are forthcoming.
- ∴ Texts can also be used as a means to encourage young people if it is appropriate eg 'hope exam goes ok'.
- ∴ If it turns into a conversation, communications should be ended. A leader can suggest discussing the subject further at the next event or, if they are concerned about the young person arrange to meet up to talk further (within the usual child protection parameters).

∴8.6 DVD MINISTRY

Many congregations now film services for home ministry purposes. Children can be recorded in a group setting, for example, a wide view taken at the children's talk but they should not be identified. The congregation should be given prior notice at least two weeks in advance, either from the pulpit or printed on the announcement sheet and the DVD should not be used for any reason other than its primary purpose.
