

Free Church Youth Camps

Social Media Guidance

General Guidance for Leaders Use

Introduction

The use of various Social Media websites and applications have become an essential part of everyday life for many young people and churches. Social Media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, What's App and Snapchat are widely available and accessible to young people through their mobile electronic devices including smartphones and tablets. As such, Social Media has substantially changed the way organisations, communities, and individuals communicate with each other. Whilst it can be both an essential and valuable communication tool for those providing services for people in the Church, it also presents significant challenges if the user is to avoid what can be quite significant pit-falls in practice. As the purpose and use of these applications are continually evolving and expanding, often without adequate checks or controls, various difficulties and challenges can arise.

How does being a FCYC leader affect how I use Social Media?

The use of Social Media is open to different interpretations and perceptions of what is appropriate and what is not. It can involve the transmission of words, sounds, moving and still images, all of which have the potential to be harmful in a safeguarding sense, hence the importance about making joint decisions and seeking advice of your Team Leader or Camps Administrator.

For FCYC, most of the challenges surrounding Social Media revolve around maintaining responsible boundaries between the volunteer leaders who engage in the mission work of FCYC and the young people we come into contact with before, during and after camp. By volunteering to be a leader with FCYC you are committing to being a Christian witness and teacher to the young people attending your camp. Your role involves (amongst other things):

- The safety, security and welfare of the young people at your camp
- Sharing the Gospel message with them
- Teaching young people about Christ
- Advising them on spiritual matters
- Instructing and guiding them in their Christian walk.

This may take place in the context of formal Bible talks; dorm discussions; testimonies; Bible study groups or just one to one sessions. As such, you are in a position of trust with these young people because these roles are regarded as 'Regulated Work with Children'. Becoming a member of the PVG Scheme is one part of ensuring those who engage in this work are suitable for it. As a Christian organisation it is important that in addition to having our volunteers join the PVG Scheme, we also provide safe and suitable environments and boundaries to ensure all our volunteers comply with the legislative requirements. However most of all, we must apply Biblical wisdom to our conduct and the manner in which we interact with young people. It is important to bear in mind that some of the challenges our volunteers may face relates to how the conduct of leaders towards campers might be perceived by others as potentially harmful or inappropriate.

The perceptions of an individual or an organisation are governed by beliefs, values, attitudes, life and professional experience etc. Consequently what may look or sound OK to one person may be

misunderstood or misconstrued by another and might well be considered harmful and inappropriate. This is especially true when it comes to communication and interaction on Social Media. The following guidance is written from a safeguarding perspective and seeks to identify good practice with a view to preventing harm or abuse to children and minimising the likelihood of it happening. It identifies a number of underpinning principles (things that are important or right to do) and these have been used to generate a set of questions that workers and volunteers should ask themselves.

So what CAN and CAN'T I do??

It is impossible to produce a complete list of “dos and don'ts” to cover every situation and circumstances that arise out of using Social Media. Whilst there are express boundaries and clear warnings relating to some conduct, there will be situations that will require common sense and the application of general safeguarding principles. Below we have provided 3 areas of guidance produced in order to help you:

- 1. Principles of Good Practice** – This will provide a framework for you to use and apply to every scenario, along with common sense.
- 2. Safeguarding Checklist Questions** – This will provide you with a list of specific Safeguarding considerations you should look at carefully when using Social Media.
- 3. Specific Boundaries** – This will provide clear direction on issues and areas which you must follow.

1. Principles of Good Practice

It is helpful to consider our Christian witness when volunteering with FCYC and apply Principles of our faith and walk with Christ as good practice to follow:

- Integrity – As Christians we are called to live Christ-like holy lives. We should not distinguish between following Christ privately and publicly.¹ Therefore whatever words, images and videos we share with others online, whether privately or publically, should be consistent with our faith and Biblical teaching.²
- Transparency - We should be transparent with all our Social Media accounts and profiles remembering that as Christians, we have just as much responsibility for our actions to the world over the internet as we do for our actions in person.
- Privacy - We should be aware of our privacy settings and what information is available to our friends and family, but also to the general public who may search for your profile (including campers, parents, and other leaders). This is not to be mistaken as contradicting the previous points. Instead, it is an important aspect of controlling what information about you, and especially your work with children, is accessible and available to the general public.
- Sensitivity and Confidentiality - Social media does not change our fundamental understanding about confidentiality across the whole life of the Church. When telling a story about a situation which involves someone else, always ask yourself Is this my story to tell? – would it cause distress, inconvenience, upset or embarrassment to others if they found out you had shared in this way? If in any doubt, do not share it online.

¹ “Whoever says he abides in Christ ought to walk in the same way in which he walked” – 1 John 2:4-6

² Read Ephesians 5:1-21 which is particularly applicable in this context.

2. Checklist before using Social Media

The checklist below is designed to be point of reference before any type of social media is used in relation to FCYC or to review its ongoing use. This checklist should be considered as a generic safeguard for using mobile phones, Facebook and other social networking sites, mobile phone text messaging, the taking of digital photographs or recording videos etc. It should be a tool for leaders to help ensure they are keeping themselves (as volunteers) and those they are working with (children and vulnerable adults) safe.

Questions

1. WHAT information do you want to capture, store, transmit, communicate or use?
2. WHY did you choose this particular type of media?
3. WHAT is the purpose of using this social media?
4. WHAT privacy settings and controls have you set for the media? (Specifically - Is the information you are about to share personal/confidential? Can the person be identified (by words or images)? If yes – get permission).
5. WHO is the target audience? (a defined group of people or everyone?)
6. WHO can see the information posted – anyone or have safeguards or tools been used to set limits e.g. closed Facebook group rather than public Facebook page?
7. WHO is identified (images/words/sounds) in the communication?
8. WHOSE consent is required? (Parental consent applies to anyone under the age of 18)
9. HOW will you get their consent? (FCYC will be reviewing consent forms for campers next year to address this issue)
10. HOW may others interpret the information? Can the information you want to share be easily misunderstood or misinterpreted. If in doubt check with your Team Leader or Camps Administrator and get a second opinion. Re-read before sending/ posting.

3. Specific Boundaries

FCYC uses Social Media in various forms as an effective tool to advertise the work and activities of your camp. In order to do this, specific consent is obtained via booking forms for each camper and also various restrictions are placed on photography at camp.³ Furthermore, careful consideration is given to what information is publicly posted and provided along with photographs. Likewise, when using Social Media in the context of your camp, there are specific rules and responsibilities which must be followed in order to protect both yourself as a leader and the campers.

Whilst following the above Principles of Good Practice and Checklist would be ordinarily be sufficient, unfortunately further restrictions now specifically have to be put in place. Sadly, some of these restrictions, which may appear excessive, have actually arisen as a result of previous abuses perpetrated by volunteers in other organisations. As such, it is important that we recognise the need

³ This guidance is readily available and your Team Leader will explain who is designated photographer at your camp.

to safeguard ourselves from potential pitfalls. Therefore specific boundaries have been created in respect of certain types and areas of Social Media that could cause difficulties for leaders:

- **Communication at Camp** – There should be no electronic communication between leaders and campers at camp. Whilst an emergency contact number of one leader may be provided if there are any day trips, it should only be used for that purpose. The Team Leader will take responsibility for providing an emergency contact number so team members will not require to provide any camper with their own personal number
- **Facebook Groups** – If you decide to use Facebook to keep in touch, the best option is to create a closed Facebook group for your camp and co-ordinate with your Team Leader and the Camps Administrator on how to maintain and moderate this for leaders and campers after camp. The privacy controls should be set up so that only campers and leaders have access to any videos and photographs. There should also be an option in place for allowing/inviting parents who may wish to join the group to see their child's activities.
- **Friend Requests** - You should not accept friend requests from any camper under the age of 18, unless you have checked with their parent or guardian. You should not send any friend request to any camper under the age of 18, unless you have checked with their parent or guardian
- Continued communication with campers under 18 after the conclusion of camp should only be done with the consent of parents.
- **Private Messaging** – there is the possibility that a camper may send personal private messages to you without being accepted as a 'friend' and as such, you cannot prevent this from happening. Whilst some campers may be contacting you for spiritual guidance or advice, others may be contacting you to confide in you as a result of what they heard at camp or in response to another situation. It is not possible to produce a definitive list to cover every eventuality therefore it is vital you remember your responsibility as a leader continues after camp and as such you should advise and seek guidance from your Team Leader or the Camps Administrator. Applying the Principles of Good Practice is essential here as transparency is especially important in this area and so all private messaging conversations should be stored and not deleted.
- **Personal Information** - You should not have the personal mobile number, email address or any social media username of a camper. Whilst contact numbers may be required in the event of an emergency for any planned day trips at camp; this should be done under the instruction of the Team Leader only and any numbers stored should be deleted at the end of camp.
- **Snapchat/Photo sharing Apps** - You should not add, or accept invites to join, any photo sharing applications with campers. FCYC have a policy in place which covers the taking of photographs during camp and that should be followed by leaders and campers, on the advice of your Team Leader. Applications such as Snapchat are open to abuse by users and specifically do not store records of what has (or has not) been shared. This could cause difficulties should any allegation be made regarding the use or abuse of this application.
- **Consent** - get permission from all involved (or their guardians/representatives) if their words or images are to be transmitted and made public or shared with a selected group of people

There may be certain exceptions to the advice contained in this guidance. If you have unanswered questions (or if in doubt) seek advice from your Team Leader and/or the Camps Administrator

Most importantly keep written record of any decisions made by you and your Team Leader/FCYC Camps Administrator about your use of social media where there may be room for misunderstandings or misinterpretation. Keep an audit trail of all communications (if any) you have with campers, e.g. don't delete records of phone and email communication.

General Guidance for Campers Use

Social Media and mobile phone use by campers

It is now highly likely that all campers, from the youngest to the oldest, will have a mobile phone or other electronic tablet/device with them at camp and that device will be linked to various Social Media platforms. To monitor the use of these devices would be an impossible task for any leadership team. Therefore the Team Leader, in consultation with their team members and the Camps Administrator, will have the responsibility of deciding what restrictions (if any) are in place for the campers and leaders at their camp. This will be dependent on the age group and type of camp (i.e. boys/girls/mixed) where limitations will be required to differing degrees.

1. Mobile Phones

Access and use of mobile phones will require to be carefully regulated throughout the period of camp. Whilst some camp locations are fortunate enough to suffer from lack of signal and Wi-Fi connections, there will nonetheless be campers who would use their devices for playing games or using other applications. A central part of the whole camp experience is interaction between the young people themselves and also with the leaders. There would be some young people, if given the choice, who would opt solely for communication by messaging apps instead of talking – even if you were in the same room! Therefore, it is especially important that campers are encouraged to fully immerse themselves in the different activities and conversations at camp without the use of their mobile phones. Leaders should lead by example in this area also! Whether campers are taking part in organised activities; eating at meal times; listening to talks/discussions; or after lights out – the use of mobile phones should not feature and instead should be discouraged. Below are some points for you to consider in managing the use of mobile phones at camp:

- **Security** – Some mobile phones, especially the latest smartphones, are worth hundreds of pounds. Whilst it is expressly stated that campers take personal belongings to camp at their own risk, the camp should provide a secure means of storing phones when not in use.
- **Time restrictions** – Phones will of course be required by campers in order that they can text or phone home to speak with family or friends. It will not be appropriate to allow this to happen at any point of the day, as such an agreed time in the afternoon or early evening should be set aside for campers to use their mobiles to contact home. A clear policy should be put in place at the start of camp and on the first day campers should inform their parents what those restrictions are so that everyone understands. Parents accept when signing the consent forms that mobile phone use is something which the Team Leader has discretion over during the period at camp.
- **Leaders use** – The leaders are reminded to set an example when it comes to interacting with campers. Efforts should be made by leaders to speak to all the young people at your camp and not to isolate themselves by using their mobile phones.
- **Bible Apps** – Careful consideration should be taken if mobile phones are permitted to be used as Bibles during morning devotions, Bible talks, dorm discussion, or at church. The availability of mobile phones at these times could be open to abuse by campers who may use them to distract themselves or disrupt others. On the other hand, we would not wish to discourage campers reading their Bible on their phones completely therefore the practicalities will require to be worked out by the Team Leader. Examples of current practice include: Having the Bible reading together at the start of talk and then asking everyone to switch off their phones and put them away; or (where available) using projector screen to display the readings; or asking campers to share hard copy Bibles.

2. Social Media including photo/video sharing

The use of social media at camp may be restricted if no 3G or Wi-fi network is available however this cannot be assumed. Campers should be aware that the general restrictions that apply to mobile phone use above also applies to Social Media use whether on mobile phones or other electronic tablets/devices.

- **Taking photos/videos** – Whilst on-site, the camp environment should be considered a safe and private area which means both campers and leaders can expect a level of privacy. Leaders will have specific permission from their Team Leader to photograph and film certain activities however campers are not permitted to take photos/videos of leaders and other campers without their consent. If phones are given to campers for specific use in activities i.e Day trips in public, then the restrictions can be relaxed for those purposes
- **Posting photos/videos online** - There have been instances of photos/videos being taken of campers and leaders (who were unaware) and that media then posted online without any consent. As above, when on-site, the privacy of campers and leaders must be respected. The Team Leader will decide if any activities on-site can be photographed or filmed by leaders and then arrange the appropriate means by which that can be shared with the campers.
- **Cyberbullying** – Some applications such as ‘What’s App’ provide the opportunity to create groups and it has been known for some young people in dorms to create group chats but exclude one or two members from that dorm. The purpose of this can be to talk about that person, gossip or bully that individual. As above, careful consideration should be taken and leaders should be vigilant if it appears any devices are being used by campers for malicious purposes.

Conclusion:

As has been alluded to throughout this guidance, leaders play a significant role in setting an example on how they interact with each other through using (and not using!) electronic devices and Social Media. The interactions between leaders with each other and also their interaction with campers directly will be a means by which your Christian witness is observed by all. Please be aware of how your use of mobile phones, photography, video recording and all aspects of social media use can be observed by campers and other leaders and the possible impact that can have on them. Finally in relation to the use of any type of social media: **if in doubt, don’t use it.**