



Social Media Guidance



Free Church of Scotland is a Registered Charity in Scotland (SC012925)

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General Guidance for Leaders' Use

Introduction

The use of various social media websites and applications has become an essential part of everyday life for many young people and churches. Social media platforms are widely available and accessible to young people through their mobile electronic devices. As such, social media has substantially changed the way organisations, communities, and individuals communicate with each other. Whilst these can be valuable, and at times essential, communication tools for those providing services for people in the Church, they also present significant challenges in terms of maintaining good practice. As the purpose and use of these applications are continually evolving and expanding, often without adequate checks or controls, various difficulties can arise. All references to “young people” and “campers” apply to young people under the age of 18, and all references to “leaders” apply to any member of the camp leadership team, including cooks, drivers etc.

How does being a Free Church Youth Camps 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 – so it is important to make joint decisions and to seek the advice of your team leader and/or the Camps Coordinator (who is also the Safeguarding Coordinator) where necessary. It is vital that all members of the leadership team have attended the required Safeguarding training, and are familiar with the Free Church Safeguarding Policy.

For Free Church Youth Camps (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 with whom they come into contact 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 camp, and to following the Free Church policies and procedures.

Your role involves (amongst other things):

- Ensuring the safety, security and welfare of the young people at camp
- Sharing the Gospel message with young people and teaching them about Jesus
- Advising the young people at camp on spiritual matters
- Instructing and guiding the young people in their Christian walk whilst at camp; leading by example

Further details on the roles of each member of the leadership team can be found in the FCYC Leaders' Handbook.

This may take place in the context of formal Bible talks; dorm discussions; testimonies; Bible study groups or informal conversations at camp. Volunteering at camp, in any role, is regarded for the purposes of safeguarding as ‘Regulated Work with Children.’ Becoming a member of the Protecting Vulnerable Groups Scotland (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 of our volunteers comply with the legislative requirements, including the Free Church Safeguarding Policy and

procedures. Most importantly, 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 relate to how the conduct of leaders towards campers might be perceived by others as potentially harmful or inappropriate. 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, as well as to help protect volunteers from any perceived issues.

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 circumstance 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.

1. Principles of Good Practice

It is helpful to consider our Christian witness when volunteering with FCYC, and to apply principles of our faith and walk with Christ:

- **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 publicly, 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 and do I have permission to tell it? Would it cause distress, inconvenience, upset or embarrassment to others if they found out I have shared in this way? If in any doubt, do not share it online.

2. Specific Boundaries

FCYC uses social media in various forms as an effective tool to advertise the work and activities of camps. In order to do this, specific consent is obtained via parental consent forms for each camper and

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.

also various restrictions are placed on photography at camp³. Furthermore, careful consideration is given to what information is publicly posted and provided along with photographs. Likewise, when contributing to FCYC social media on behalf 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.

Along with the Principles of Good Practice given above, there are some areas in which specific boundaries have been created in order to safeguard ourselves from potential pitfalls.

- **Communication prior to Camp** – This will mostly be carried out by the Camps Coordinator. Parent/Guardian contact details (email address and phone number) are provided to team leaders prior to camp, and team leaders can contact parents/guardians if necessary. There should be no direct contact with campers prior to camp.
- **Communication at Camp** – There should be no electronic communication between leaders and campers at camp. Each camp is given an FCYC mobile phone, and this number can be given to campers as required, for example on a day trips, so that team members are not expected to provide any camper with their own personal number.
- **Photographs** – Photographs should only be taken of young people who have had parental permission and who, for young people 12 years and over, have also given their own permission. Photographs should be taken by the leader appointed as photographer, and should be sent to the Camps Coordinator during and/or after camp then deleted from the photographer's device. These photographs will be shared by the Camps Coordinator via the FCYC social media pages.
- **Continued Communication** – Communication with campers under the age of 18 after the conclusion of camp is strongly discouraged. If communication after camp does take place, it is only allowed with the consent of parents, and all messages should be kept (not deleted). This includes accepting friend requests from any camper under the age of 18.
- **Private Messaging** – There is the possibility that a camper may send personal private messages to you without being accepted as a 'friend', which you cannot prevent 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. Ideally, the local church is the best place to provide ongoing spiritual guidance and advice for young people, so leaders should signpost local contacts who can support these young people. If a young person is reporting a safeguarding issue to you, this should be reported to the Camps Coordinator in accordance with the Free Church Safeguarding Policy. Transparency is especially important in this area so any 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 FCYC provides each camp with a phone to be used on day trips etc, there may still be times when contact numbers are shared. This should only be done under the instruction of the team leader, and any numbers stored should be deleted at the end of camp.
- **Snapchat/Photo Sharing Apps** – You should not add campers or accept invitations from campers to connect via any photo sharing applications. In particular, no leaders and campers should connect on Snapchat. 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. As above, for photo-

³ The camp photographer (appointed by the team leader), along with the other leaders, should ensure that they are familiar with both the guidance in the FCYC Leaders' Handbook and online, on the Safeguarding page of the Free Church website.

sharing apps which store all correspondence, this may be permissible with parental permission, although it is not recommended.

- **Consent** – The Camps Coordinator is responsible for obtaining parental consent for the sharing of photos/videos of young people, but team leaders are responsible for obtaining the additional required permission from young people aged 12 and over. Consent must be obtained before sharing words as well as images.

There may be certain exceptions to the advice contained in this guidance. If you have unanswered questions or if you are in any doubt whatsoever, seek advice from the team leader and/or the Camps Coordinator. Most importantly, keep written records of any decisions made by you and your team leader/Camps Coordinator 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. Again, if you're in any doubt at all, don't do it.

General Guidance for Campers' Use

Social Media and Mobile Phone Use by Campers

It is likely that most campers will have a mobile phone or other electronic device with them at camp, and that the device will be linked to various social media platforms. The team leader, in consultation with their team members and the Camps Coordinator, will have the responsibility of deciding what restrictions (if any) on the use of electronic devices are in place for the campers and leaders at their camp. This will be dependent on the age group and type of camp, where limitations will be required to differing degrees.

1. Mobile Phones

A central part of the whole camp experience is the interaction between the young people themselves, and between the young people and the leaders. Access to and use of mobile phones should be regulated to ensure 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! While 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 be limited to allow them to participate fully in camp. Below are some points for you to consider in managing the use of mobile phones at camp:

- **Security** – Many mobile phones are very valuable. Whilst it is expressly stated that campers take personal belongings to camp at their own risk, any camps where mobile phones are stored when not in use (generally kids' camps) must have a safe and secure way of storing these.
- **Time restrictions** – Phones will, of course, be required by campers at various times. If campers do not have open access to their phones, the agreed time set aside for campers to contact home should be shared with parents before camp via the camper information pack. If this is not possible, the campers should inform their parents on the first day of camp of the agreed time for mobile phone use. Parents are aware from the camper information pack that mobile phone use is something over which the team leader has discretion during 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 camp and not to isolate themselves by using their mobile phones.
- **Bible Apps** – Careful consideration should be taken if Bible apps or note-taking apps on mobile phones are permitted to be used during morning devotions, Bible talks, dorm discussions, or at church. Some camps allow mobile phones to be used for the Bible reading at the start of the talk and then ask everyone to switch off their phones and put them away; others display the readings on a projector screen or ask campers to use hard copy Bibles. Campers could also be asked to put their phones on aeroplane mode if they plan to use their phones for taking notes during the talks. Each camp and each group of campers will be different, and what works well at one camp may not work so well at another camp.

2. Social Media (including photo/video sharing)

The use of social media at camp may be restricted if no 4G or Wi-fi network is available, however, in the case that signal is available, campers should be aware that the general restrictions which apply to mobile phone use above also apply to social media use, whether on mobile phones or other electronic 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 or film certain activities. Campers are not permitted to take photos/videos of leaders and other campers without their consent.
- **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 this can be shared with the campers.
- **Cyberbullying** – Some applications provide the opportunity to create groups of contacts, and it has been known for some young people in dorms to create group chats but exclude one or two members of the dorm from the group chat. The purpose of this can be to talk about that person, gossip or bully that individual. As above, careful consideration should be given and leaders should be vigilant if it appears any devices are being used by campers for malicious purposes.

Conclusion

Leaders play a significant role in setting an example on how they use (and don't use!) 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 their 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 this can have on them.

Please also be aware of how the campers are using mobile phones and social media, and do not be afraid to enforce the agreed arrangements for the camp. Be vigilant, and discuss any concerns you may have about campers' use of electronic devices with your team leader as soon as possible.

Finally, in relation to the use of any type of social media: **if in doubt, don't use it.**