ST.PAUL'S

YOUTH & CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

E-SAFETY POLICY

Updated March 2025

Revised and approved by the PCC March 2025

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OUR COMMITMENT TO E-SAFETY

St Paul's Parochial Church Council is committed to taking all necessary steps to ensure that everyone involved in Youth and Children's ministry is E-safety aware and competent. E-Safety is the collective term for safeguarding involving the use of mobile phones, computers (including laptops, netbooks, tablets) and other electronic devices including games consoles, to communicate and access the internet, emails, text messages, instant messaging, social networking sites and other social media. Today safeguarding embraces interaction online as well as traditional offline communications. We should be teaching young people how to stay safe online as well as offline and all leaders involved in youth and children's ministry need to be informed in order to help young people navigate the online environment using new digital technologies and social media safely. The term 'leaders' is used to include employed church workers and all those who volunteer in this ministry.

KEY PRINCIPLES

- We recognise that using the Internet (and other forms of technology) is an important part of the lives of children and young people and an important means by which leaders can engage children and young people in church activities.
- We understand that for many children and young people, using the Internet and social media platforms is a regular part of their lives and has a significant impact on their social development.
- We recognise that we must take all possible steps to safeguard young people from harm or risk of harm whilst using the Internet, any other form of electronic communication or technology.
- We recognise the importance of establishing and updating procedures and keeping leaders in youth and children's ministry informed so that they can protect themselves and the children and young people they are working with.
- All youth and children's leaders are responsible for reading and adhering to safeguarding policies and for complying with any communication from those responsible for youth and children's ministry.
- All electronic communication used within youth and children's ministry will comply with the terms and conditions of the particular platform being used.

REASONS FOR CONTACTING A YOUNG PERSON VIA EMAIL OR SOCIAL MEDIA

Leaders must only use electronic communication for reasons relating to work with children and young people, not for personal socialising (see guidelines below).

- We recognise that there will be times when it is necessary and important to use electronic communication and to provide an appropriate response.
- Volunteer leaders should seek agreement of the youth or children and families worker to use electronic communication with their group and this must always be set up as part of a group communication and not individual contact.

PARENTAL AWARENESS AND CONSENT

Parental consent for using electronic forms of communication is essential and will be included on the St Paul's generic consent forms or by letter relating to a specific activity, with a return slip. Consent will explicitly cover the particular means we will be using for communication and what we will be communicating.

- This policy will be available to parents and careers and we will seek to ensure they are aware of all the various forms of electronic communication we use in youth and children's ministry.
- The ChurchSuite SMS function is available to provide individual text messages, such as to remind young people about forthcoming arrangements and in this case, the function allows for the same text message to be sent simultaneously to the parent.

SPECIFIC DEFINITIONS

- 'Internet' communication specifically refers to the use of social networking sites such as Facebook, Facebook messenger, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, Signal, Snapchat and other websites 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.

LANGUAGE

- All language should be appropriate and where possible 'standard responses' should be used (e.g. 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).
- Leaders should take great care over the language used to reduce the risk of misinterpretation.
- When sending emails, leaders should not use informal language such as shorthand or 'text language' as this can often be misunderstood.

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- When using email/text/the Internet for communication with young people (within the guidelines above), it should take place between the hours of 9am-7pm.
- If a project takes place in the evening (after 5pm) and it is necessary to send an email/use the Internet, volunteer leaders should seek advice from the Youth or Children's Worker but there should be no email communication after 9pm.

INTERNET, EMAIL AND TEXT COMMUNICATION

EMAIL

Vulnerable people can find it easier to communicate via email rather than talking face-to-face. They may therefore share more personal or sensitive information about themselves or someone else than if talking one-to-one. General advice and support may be offered by email but no more – mentoring must be carried out by those qualified to do so.

Email should only be used to communicate specific information (times and dates of events, for example), and ALL leaders should only be using their church email account for communication.

- ✓ We recommend having a 'shared' email account where all volunteers can access any emails, regardless of whether it is private or public. This would allow communication amongst leaders and young people to remain safe.
- ✓ When emailing a child or young person volunteer leaders must always copy in the Children's/Youth Worker.
- ✓ Leaders should encourage appropriate 'face to face' contact where possible.
- ✓ Leaders should make their line manager, team leader or co-leader aware when they are using email to contact young people.
- ✓ Email histories should be kept and dated.

- ☒ Conversation (a chain of emails between two individuals) is discouraged.
- ☒ It should not be used as a relationship building tool.
- ☒ Do not uses kisses or emoticons which could be misinterpreted.

TEXTING AND/OR WHATSAPP

This is probably the most used method of communication amongst children and young people. This form of communication is, however, difficult to monitor; leaders using this method of communication must be

accountable for what is said.

- ✓ Use appropriate language.
- ✓ Only text during the guideline hours.
- ✓ Should only be used to communicate specific information (times and dates of events, for example).
- ✓ Work mobile phones must be used by staff members. Volunteer leaders may use ChurchSuite SMS facility to text young people and parents simultaneously,
- ✓ All sent and received messages must be kept.
- ✓ Itemised bills can be used to check communication if necessary.
- ✓ One or two smiley faces may be used, especially where a young person has initiated this practice.

- ☒ Do not uses kisses or emoticons which could be misinterpreted.

Be aware of leaving your personal phone around children and young people. Make sure that you have a passcode on your personal phone.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media sites and forms of communication such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Signal, Snapchat and Facebook Messenger, are constantly evolving and being added to. **Youth and children's leaders should always consider accountability and whether the form of electronic communication they use can be traced.** If someone is in doubt about the suitability of a form of communication, he/she should always ask those leading the team.

- ✓ Use the 'Stpauls Youthteam' Facebook account in order to communicate with young people through Facebook in agreement with the Youth Worker. Please make it clear who it is that the young person is interacting with when using this account.
- ✓ Make sure your communication is clear and unambiguous.
- ✓ Use to send information only.
- ✓ Keep Facebook contact visible – i.e. posting on a young person's wall is visible and therefore, easily accountable.
- ✓ Make sure your own privacy settings are in place.
- ✓ Only communicate with those in your pastoral remit – keep social media contact to the group you volunteer in.
- ✓ Always share any social media communication you are having with children or young people with the Children's or Youth

  Worker.
- ✓ Make sure that you comply with the terms and conditions of the platform you are using. The minimum age for Facebook is 13 with parental consent and for WhatsApp, it is 16. Leaders must comply with these conditions, regardless of whether the parent has allowed the child to have an account in contravention of the

platform's terms and conditions. Signal offers a similar platform to WhatsApp and may be used by young people 13 and over with parental consent.

- ☒ **Do not add any children or young people as friends on personal social media accounts.**
- ☒ Do not enter into conversation through social media.
- ☒ Snapchat should not be used, as no record of communication can be traced.
- ☒ Do not post photographs of children/young people whose parents have stated that they don't want images of their child being used.

FACEBOOK MESSENGER AND ANY/ALL ONLINE CHAT FACILITIES

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.

- ☒ Do not engage in conversations via these mediums.

- ☒ Use of live chat facilities between volunteers and children or young people is not permitted.

VIDEO CONFERENCING

Video calls are not a common way of gathering but when they do happen they do present different safeguarding challenges from those already in place for when we're together. The following safeguards must be followed.

- All virtual meetings will be risk assessed in the same way that risk assessments must always be completed for face to face activities.

- We will only use a video conferencing platform such as Zoom: https://zoom.us/ or Microsoft Teams. Users only need to have an email address for account setup.

- We will not use Skype or Facetime or other social media tools which share contact details with all users, with the result that you may inadvertently connect young people up with other people as an unintended consequence.

- We will only uses video conferencing for group activities and not 1:1 chats with young people.

- Parental consent must be obtained for all children under the age of 13. Parental consent is not required for young people over the age of 13 who may consent for themselves, but we will always keep the parent(s) fully informed about the event and seek their consent.

- Parents and young people can give consent simply by responding to an email in which we explain what we are doing, the date and time of the video conference session, which youth leaders are participating and a brief

description of the activities. We must keep their responses as evidence of consent in a separate folder.

- We will always use the parents/carers email address for the meeting invitation and this ensures that parents or carers are aware that it is happening and can set up the young people to access the session appropriately with any oversight if they wish.

- Meeting ID and passcode will only be given to participants and not shared publicly. The waiting room feature will always be used and the meeting locked when participants have arrived. Chat and screensharing will be open to all participants at the leaders' discretion and subject to the rules which they establish for the group.

- At least 2 safely recruited youth leaders must be present and both leaders must be live before young people arrive.

- Wherever possible, we will use the same time slot as your normal group meeting. If new youth members want to join the group, the standard group consent form must be completed and details entered on ChurchSuite.

- Parents and young people participating in video conferencing meetings will be asked to comply with 'rules of etiquette' as follows:-
  o Being polite and kind to others
  o Being fully clothed
  o Not taking a screenshot or other photographs of the participants during the session

- Parents must be present throughout video conferencing groups involving children under the age of 11.

- DO NOT RECORD. Most video conferencing software allows for the session to be recorded – this is an option for the host of the meeting only. However, to record or capture images would require explicit permission for data capture and this would fall within the remit of our Safe Use of Images Policy.

DANGERS TO YOUNG PEOPLE

SEXTING

'Sexting' is the act of sending sexually explicit messages or photographs, primarily between mobile phones. It is a rising concern amongst young people, and all adult volunteers should remain vigilant. Once made public the 'sexts' are very difficult to remove. Apart from causing acute embarrassment and distress, a recent change in the law now makes it a criminal offence to take, possess or share explicit photos of somebody who is under 18 – even if they are of oneself. Young people need to understand that they could be charged with child pornography and be put on the

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sex offenders register for sending explicit photos of themselves or anyone on their phone.

- ✓ Report it immediately.
- ✓ Be prepared to talk about sexting in the wide conversation about relationships.
- ✓ Make it clear that it is a criminal offence.
- ✓ Explain it is still illegal to hold or take indecent images of anyone under the age of 18, even if the pictures are not shared

  ("sexted").
- ✓ Encourage children and young people to 'Think before they post' in all forms of social media.

- ☒ Never promise confidentiality.

ONLINE GROOMING

Someone making contact with a child with the motive of preparing them for sexual abuse either online or offline.

Someone who grooms a child is breaking the law.

- ✓ Be vigilant.
  - ○ A young person is hiding their emails or texts.
  - ○ A young person is being contacted by unknown adults or receiving gifts from people they don't know.
- ✓ Report it immediately.

- ☒ Never promise confidentiality.

CYBER BULLYING

Cyber bullying is no different from ordinary bullying except that the child in question uses digital technologies to bully another. If an adult bullies a child however, it is defined as cyber-stalking and is taken even more seriously. Cyber bullying may involve the use of visual images, texts, phone calls and hits on social networking profiles.

- ✓ Be vigilant.
- ✓ Report it immediately.

- ☒ Never promise confidentiality.

CONCERNS

Communication and behaviour online should be no different from offline and/or in person. If you feel uncomfortable about any communication or behaviour, whether it be online or offline, contact the Children's or Youth worker as soon as possible. Matters for concern may include:

- What has been said by a young person suggests they are in danger or at risk (NB – you need to take immediate action – see

  "What to do" below).
- The content of messages/e-mails suggests some form of abuse (NB – you need to report your concerns as

  soon as possible, within 24 hours at the latest).
- You are concerned by the mental well-being of a young person (act quickly).
- The content of what a young person has said online or by text seems inappropriate.
- Inappropriate images of youth or leaders have been shared.
- A young person has become too dependent on you through frequent and extended online, text or face-to-face contact.
- A young person is hiding their emails or texts (could be an indication of online grooming).
- A young person is being contacted by unknown adults or receiving gifts from people they don't know (could be an indication of online grooming).

WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE CONCERNED

If you become concerned about the content of conversations on social network sites, you should take the following actions:

- DO NOT CLOSE DOWN THE CONVERSATION. This will potentially lose any evidence.
- If you believe a young person to be in immediate danger or at risk, call 999. If you are not sure, seek online

  advice on the CEOP website http://www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre.
- Inform the youth and/or children's workers immediately who will always involve the parish safeguarding officer.
- Ensure you preserve any 'paper trails'. If necessary copy and paste any conversations and have these

  witnessed, signed and dated.
- Save any instant messages or texts that might relate to a cause for concern to a password encrypted file.
- Seek help and advice – seek help and advice from CEOP (Child Exploitation and Online

  Protection Centre) http://www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre

THE ROLE OF THE ST PAUL'S CHILDREN'S AND YOUTH TEAM IN SUPPORTING VOLUNTEER LEADERS

We undertake to:

- Help you to apply this policy in your relationships with the youth and children – through training and ongoing catch-ups.
- Ask you regularly which young people and/or children you have contact with online and offline.

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- Challenge you, if we feel that something on your social media is inappropriate or doesn't reflect the Christ-like modelling we are striving for.
- Support you in and through any incidents.
- Incorporate this policy into the ethos of the Youth and Children's work at St Paul's.

Signed: ///////

ASS. VILAR
~~Incumbent~~, St Paul's Church Letchworth

Date: 12/06/2025

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