



ashwood
church

Social Media Policy

Last review date: May 2025

Next review date: May 2027

Version Control

Date	Version	Name	Description
	1.00		Initial Version
27/09/2018	1.10	Zoe Bell	Updated for General Data Protection Regulation 2018 (GDPR)
May 2020	1.20	Zoe Bell	General Review
Dec 2020	1.30	Zoe Bell	Review following Covid Restrictions
Feb 2023	1.40	Zoe Bell	General Review
May 2025	1.50	Gaye Locke	General Review

Ashwood Church Social Media Policy

(Please also refer to Mobile Phone Policy and Safeguarding Policy)

As a church, we are more and more aware how technology is playing a big part in the everyday things that we are involved in. This obviously plays an important role in the way we communicate with people and it is important what we are able to use social media to communicate with those we are working with. We acknowledge the use of these technologies as a legitimate means of communicating with children and young people but also set out here expectations of the church in relation to their use.

What is Social Networking?

Social networking websites function like an online community of internet users. Depending on the website in question, many of these online community members share common interests in hobbies, religion, or politics. Once you are granted access to a social networking website you can begin to socialise. This socialisation may include reading the profile pages of other members and possibly even contacting them.

The friends that you can make are just one of the many benefits to social networking online. Another one of those benefits includes diversity because the internet gives individuals from all around the world access to social networking sites

Examples of social networking sites include Facebook, X, WhatsApp, Snapchat and Instagram.

Young people and the people we work with can be at risk from online predators through these media, and also can be subject to bullying or peer pressure from their peers via social media. It is important you understand the social media used by young people so you are aware of the dangers young people face and can respond to this appropriately.

Appropriate use of Social Media for Ashwood Staff and Volunteers:

Good practice suggests that staff and volunteers should not make friend requests or follow children, young people or vulnerable service users on social media.

If they 'friend request' you, we suggest you refuse this if they are under 16. However, you are of course entitled to have your own social media sites that are public and open to be followed. We ask you to please consider your privacy settings, and think carefully before accepting friend requests from young people and service users. You may wish to consider the following questions:

- Am I comfortable with this person seeing my social media site?
- Would the parent/carer consider it appropriate?
- Do I know the family of the child/young person?
- Is it necessary to the development of an appropriate relationship with this person?
- Are they likely to misinterpret communication?

- What are the benefits to them?
- Am I being fair and demonstrating equality? (i.e. it would not be appropriate to respond to requests from some members of a group but not others)
- Are they of the appropriate age to be accessing this social media (e.g. young people under 13 should not be using Facebook so to accept their request would be condoning this)

If you are unsure about whether accepting a request is appropriate, please ask your line manager or the group leader.

Also bear in mind that some media are public and anyone can see your page without you giving permission.

Please also follow these guidelines when using your personal social media:

- Always use a public group to communicate where possible (e.g. The Ashwood Church Youth Instagram page)
- The material you put on social media should reflect your beliefs and values and not undermine those of the church.
- You should not post any content on your profiles which would be professionally inappropriate for young people to know or see, or you should use the privacy settings of a site to ensure this content is not accessible to young people
- You should lead by example, and ensure you are engaging with social media safely and appropriately.
- No photos of young people are to be posted on personal social media pages.
- No invitations to become a 'friend' should be sent to young people through your personal page – if you are happy to be friends with young people over the age of 16 and it is appropriate you should wait for their request
- Avoid any private chats or messages from young people - make sure your conversations are kept public, and can be seen by other appropriate adults.
- Always manage your privacy settings to avoid people from trying to log in to your social media pages.
- Avoid Relay Chat (IRC) from your personal page e.g. Facebook Messenger, SnapChat.
- Ensure that this mode of social media is not going to result in sharing someone's personal details with others, without their permission (e.g. On Whatsapp, everyone in the group can see each other's telephone number)

Using Social Media to communicate with Young People about church events

There is a growing need to communicate with young people and vulnerable people through social media. This is the primary communicate method between young people and to stay relevant and connected we need to engage with them in ways that are culturally accessible. To this end we have developed procedure to ensure this can be done safely, without using staff or volunteers private accounts. Please refer to the procedures for the relevant social media before you use it.

WHATSAPP

When using Whatsapp, please note that you are using someone's personal phone number. If you have access to this number only via your work for Ashwood Church (e.g. from ChurchSuite), please ensure you have their written permission to add them to any Whatsapp group. Ashwood Church could be contravening GDPR law if this is not adhered to. For young people under 16 to be added to a Whatsapp group, we must have written permission via the Ashwood Church online child/youth consent form.

We do have an Elevate youth whatsapp group.

The group has 4 primary functions;

1. To communicate key information to Elevate Youth young people.
2. To enable Elevate Youth young people to stay in touch with one another, and with a leader(s) from Ashwood Church.
3. To enable Elevate Youth young people to support each other spiritually & emotionally.
4. To enable Elevate Youth young people to access support from a trusted adult(s) from Ashwood Church should they be particularly vulnerable or struggling.

1. Useful Information:

- WhatsApp features: <https://www.whatsapp.com/features/>
- How to use WhatsApp: <https://www.digitaltrends.com/mobile/how-to-use-whatsapp/>

2. Guidelines for Digital Group work:

There are a number of digital solutions for conducting group work, WhatsApp being one of them. Communicating with groups and holding virtual gatherings via online platforms presents challenges that should be considered before giving access to your virtual environment to those who you may not know.

Good practice tips:

The Elevate WhatsApp group will be operated by the children and youth leader using only the designated children and youth work phone/WhatsApp number. The Safeguarding Officer will also be added to the group to monitor the conversations, the phone will only be used for group chat and never any personal messages or phone calls.

The children and youth leader may also set up WhatsApp groups using the Kids and youth phone to communicate with individual young people for information. E.g. about their participation in volunteering opportunities. In this case a parent or carer will also be included in the group.

Code of conduct that all group members must follow-

THE DO'S

- ✓ ALL YOUTH MUST HAVE A CONSENT BY CONSENT FORM FROM THEIR PARENTS BEFORE BEING ADDED TO A MESSAGING GROUP. IF THERE IS NO CONSENT THIS MEANS NO CONTACT.
- ✓ ALWAYS MESSAGE LEADERS IN THE GROUP CHAT.
- ✓ ALWAYS SEND LIGHT AND INFORMATIVE MESSAGES OR ANY QUESTIONS YOU HAVE.
- ✓ PARTICIPATE IN DISCUSSIONS.

THE DONT'S

- ✗ NO ONE-TO-ONE OR PRIVATE MESSAGES WITH LEADERS / ADULTS.
 - ✗ LEADERS WILL NOT CONTACT OR RESPOND AFTER 9PM
 - ✗ NO SWEARING OR UNPLEASANT COMMENTS IN ANY GROUP CHAT. RESPECT OTHERS WITHIN THE GROUP.
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- The Leader(s) should be the administrator of the group and should retain control of who is added to the group. No one else should add anyone to the group.
 - Ensure that parental permission is sought before adding a young person to the group via email.
 - Personal mobile phones should not be used by staff members or volunteers.
 - The group administrator should mute/block participants in the event they are displaying/sharing anything unsuitable or illegal.
 - The Leader(s) are not to respond to messages outside of 9am – 9pm.
 - If a young person messages a leader or volunteer privately, they should be directed back towards the group chat, or to a separate group chat where two staff/leader(s) are present. A screenshot/recording/documentation of any one-to-one conversations should be taken and sent to the Hub Leader for our records.

3. Guidelines for digital one-to-one work:

It's important to remember that communicating with young people one-to-one online, whether via messaging or video, is the equivalent of meeting a young person in a room on your own with no one around. Therefore, it should be avoided whenever possible.

Good Practice Tips:

- If a young person messages a staff member or volunteer privately, they should be directed back towards the group chat, or to a separate group chat where two staff/volunteers are present. A screenshot/recording/documentation of any one-to-one conversations should be taken and sent to the leader for our records.
- If a one-to-one conversation is the only option, or is essential for the wellbeing of a particular young person it is permitted, but the full conversation should be documented and sent to the safeguarding officer and the young person should be made aware of this.
- Always adhere to the Ashwood Church safeguarding policies