

STANDARD 1

CREATING AND MAINTAINING SAFE ENVIRONMENTS GUIDANCE FOR INDICATOR 1.9

1.9C Guidance on Use of Texting and Email

Texting and email are very quick and effective methods of communication for those involved in Church activities. However, there are certain risks associated with their safe and appropriate use, which must be managed.

The risks of text and email messaging for children and young people are:

- Inappropriate access to, use of, or sharing of personal details (names, numbers, email addresses);
- Unwanted contact with children/young people by adults with bad intent, text bullying by peers etc.;
- Being sent offensive or otherwise inappropriate materials;
- Grooming for sexual abuse;
- Direct contact and actual abuse.

The risks for adults include:

- Misinterpretation of their communication with young people;
- Potential investigation (internal or by statutory agencies);
- Potential disciplinary action.

Using bulk (or bundled) text and email messaging

A way to minimise the risks above is to use bulk text messages. This is where the same text or email message is sent to several young people involved with a particular activity or group. The advantage of this approach is that it presents fewer opportunities for misuse and abuse than personal, one-to-one texting or emailing arrangements between staff or volunteers and children/young people. Therefore, one-to-one texting or emailing should be strongly discouraged and should only occur in exceptional circumstances. The same applies to emailing young people.

The following guidance is provided to minimise risk to all:

1. Consent must be obtained prior to sending young people text or email messages. For all young people, specific consent must be obtained from their parents/guardians. Parents/guardians of younger children should be offered the option to be copied on texts and emails that their child will be sent. Written consent must be obtained from the parents/guardians and young people themselves;
2. The young people's mobile phone numbers or email addresses should be stored in either a locked and secured cabinet, or on an electronic system that is password protected, with access only available to the staff member or volunteer identified to the young people and parents/guardians as a group leader. The numbers or details should not be shared with anyone else, and should only be used for the purposes of the text and email messaging system regarding the Church activity;

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3. All text and email messages must be sent via a bundle to a group of young people, i.e. the same standard text message is sent to every member of the group. The text and email messaging system should never be used to send text or email messages on an individual basis (i.e. to just one person);
4. All text and email messages sent must make it clear to the young people receiving them who has sent the message;
5. Young people should not be given the opportunity to text or email back to the system. It should only be used as a one-way communication channel;
6. The text and email messages that are sent must never contain any offensive, abusive or inappropriate language;
7. When this guidance is being provided in relation to Church-related activities, all of the text or email messages sent must be directly related to Church activities. The text or email messaging system and mobile phone numbers must never be used for any other reason or in any other way;
8. All of the text and email messages sent should include a sentence at the bottom that provides young people with the opportunity to unsubscribe from receiving further text and email messages.