

## Social Contact Policy

We want to encourage healthy, appropriate, relationships with the children and young people we lead. This can at times involve contacting them outside of the main program and can include calling, talking online and meeting in person. While some conversations are private it is important that relationships are transparent; parents and church leaders should be aware of the relationships that exist between leaders and students even if they are not aware of every conversation.

Below is a list of recommendations for social contact beyond the structures of the regular program.

### Faithfulness In Service

5.32 *When meeting a child privately, you should:*

- *have parental or guardian consent, where practicable;*
- *ensure where appropriate that a parent, guardian or suitable adult is present;*
- *inform another member of the clergy, an adult church worker or another adult of the time, location and duration of the meeting;*
- *not invite or have children to your home or visit children in their home when no other adult is present; and*
- *make a record of the time, location, duration and circumstances of any meeting where it is impracticable to follow these guidelines.*

### Gender

- Leaders should limit their contact with students of the opposite gender.
- During a program leaders should focus their attention on young people of the same gender.
- Contact outside of the program should be by someone of the same gender.
- It is appropriate to send generic invitations or reminders to young people of the opposite gender.

### Primary Students

- Any phone contact should be with parents and then if appropriate with the child. If the child answers the phone the leader should speak to the parent first and explain why they are calling. You should never call a primary student on their mobile phone. SMS should be limited to logistical purposes (e.g. don't forget event this week)
- Online contact must be limited to logistical purposes. (e.g. information on the church website) It is inappropriate to talk with primary students on a social networking site.
- Email should be limited to logistical purposes. All email should be sent to the young person with a BCC or CC to a storage email address (for example a GMail account) for

future reference if it becomes necessary. The email account should only be accessible by the appropriate leadership. More significant conversations should be held in person.

- It is never appropriate to meet primary children socially without written or verbal permission from the parents.

## Years 7–9 Students

- Any phone contact should be with parents and then if appropriate with the young person. If the young person answers the phone the leader should speak to the parent first and explain why they are calling. You should never call a Year 7-9 student on their mobile phone. SMS should be limited to logistical purposes (e.g.. don't forget event this week)
- Online contact can include group discussions that are public and can be read by others. You should never have a group discussion where the group of students are all the opposite gender (A male leader should not have an online chat with four of the Year 8 girls). The history of the conversation must be kept and recorded.
- Caution must be used when participating with young people on social networking sites. You must maintain transparency and be accountable for what you say. You must also take care with the message you intend to communicate through both the words and images you use as it may be perceived differently by those who view it. Leaders should refrain from private social media contact with young people. If you do use this type of site strict guidelines should be developed. These would include but are not limited to:
  - Ensure your privacy settings prevent personal contacts from seeing or interacting with youth contacts connected to your ministry.
  - Ensure any text is beyond reproach and cannot be misconstrued.
  - Ensure all photos are beyond reproach and cannot be misconstrued.
  - There should be no private contact or conversations with any student in years 7-9.
- Youthworks online community ([www.fevr.net](http://www.fevr.net)) allows you to connect with youth through online blogs and comments. It has been designed specifically for ministry and has actively developed safe ministry protocols.
- Where other social media sites are used leaders should use the church or Youth Group's social media page and not their own private page when relating to young people.
- Email should be limited to logistical purposes and basic encouragement. All email should be sent to the young person with a BCC or CC to a storage email address (for example a GMail account) for future reference if it becomes necessary. The email account should only be accessible by the appropriate leadership. If at all possible more significant conversations should be held in person. Email as a medium should be avoided where sensitive pastoral issues are involved.
- It is never appropriate to meet Years 7-9 socially without written or verbal permission from the parents and discussing it with your ministry supervisor first. Touch football with the boys at the park or a cafe with the girls should be confirmed with the parents first.

## Years 10–12 Students

- Phone contact is permissible. It is preferable to call a home phone which allows some transparency to the relationship.
- SMS is permissible and can include logistics and encouragement (e.g.. praying for you today)
- Online contact can include group discussions that are public and can be read by others. It can also include private conversations but these must be recorded for future reference.
- Caution must be used when participating with young people on social networking sites. You must maintain transparency and be accountable for what you say. You must also take care with the message you intend to communicate through both the words and images you use as it may be perceived differently by those who view it. Leaders should refrain from private social media contact with young people. If you do use this type of site strict guidelines should be developed. These would include but are not limited to:
  - Ensure your privacy settings prevent personal contacts from seeing or interacting with youth contacts connected to your ministry.
  - Ensure any text is beyond reproach and cannot be misconstrued.
  - Ensure all photos are beyond reproach and cannot be misconstrued.
  - Ensure that any private postings are kept as a record.
- Youthworks online community ([www.fevr.net](http://www.fevr.net)) allows you to connect with youth through online blogs and comments. It has been designed specifically for ministry and has actively developed safe ministry protocols. Where other social media sites are used, leaders should use the church or Youth Group's social media page and not their own private page when relating to young people.
- Email can include logistics and private conversations. All email should be sent to the young person with a BCC or CC to a storage email address (for example a GMail account) for future reference if it becomes necessary. However, email as a medium should be avoided where sensitive pastoral issues are involved.
- The email account should only be accessible by the appropriate leadership. If at all possible more significant conversations should be held in person.
- Leaders can meet with same gender students or in mixed groups casually in public places (e.g. coffee at McDonalds). Parents and the supervisor of the ministry should be aware of the meeting and why.

## Photographs

Children, youth and leaders will often want to take photos as part of their life together however the use and storage of these images must be carefully considered.

- An appointed leader should take photos of youth/children's ministry activities. Photos should be saved to an appropriately private location as soon as practical and kept secure, e.g. password protected file on the church computer then deleted from the camera or phone.

- Individual leaders should not be taking photos of children or youth during ministry activities with their own device. Any exception to this policy should be discussed with the ministry leader.
- Do not photograph any child/young person who has asked not to be photographed or where parental consent has not been given.
- Photos should focus on small groups rather than individuals:
  - do not identify in writing the person/s in the photograph.
  - all children/young people must be appropriately dressed when photographed.
  - never post photos of children/young people on the internet without parental permission eg seek permission to post ministry related photos of children/youth on the church website or church social media page
  - you need to ask permission from the primary subjects of the photo before posting the photo online.
- Ministry leaders need to monitor social media pages associated with the ministry to ensure photos and comments are appropriate
- Children/young people should only take photos of ministry leaders as part of a group
- Video Phoning (mobile Phone/internet)
- church workers should not enter into conversations of this nature with children/young people.