Social Media Guidelines for Youth Ministry

Social networking sites, texting, e-mailing and other forms of electronic communication are a reality in the lives of most of our students. They offer an opportunity to develop and deepen relationships in new ways and are therefore a vital part of youth ministry work. But their improper use can produce serious consequences.

The following recommended practices and guidelines apply commonly accepted principles of healthy boundaries for digital networking and communication. Be mindful that our calling is to meet students where they are; model healthy boundaries; and love and care for students safely.

1. Employee and volunteer youth workers who want to communicate with minors using text messaging, e-mail, social networking websites or other forms of electronic media must agree to follow the guidelines set forth by the Chapel Hill Youth Ministry.

2. Ministry youth workers may not transmit any content that is illicit, unsavory, abusive, pornographic, discriminatory, harassing, or disrespectful when communicating with each other or with minors involved in ministry activities.

3. Except in an emergency, youth workers may not transmit any personal information pertaining to a minor without the youth ministry participant and his or her parents or guardians signing consent forms. This applies to group texting, group e-mail, or any other public method of electronic communication. Personal information may include such things as a minor’s name, phone number, e-mail address, or photograph.

4. Use prudent judgment in the time you contact students through social media. The “home phone rule” is a basic rule of thumb to use – normally do not text, chat, or email back-and-forth with students at a time you would not normally call their home phone line, i.e. before 8:00 AM or after 9:00 PM.

5. Implement privacy settings and personal boundaries
   a. Creating separate private and professional profiles on networking sites
   b. Applying privacy settings that are consistent with all students, across all platforms.
   c. Reviewing accessible content and photos frequently.
   d. If a student texts you after hours and it’s not an emergency – wait until morning to reply

6. Youth workers who become aware of possible child abuse through electronic media must immediately notify their supervisor. The ministry will consult with its attorney and report abuse as required by law.

7. If you choose to utilize any social networking site to communicate with students associated with Chapel Hill youth group, invite other Chapel Hill youth workers to view and respond to the content. Parents of students should be aware of and how:
   a. All information, images, or videos shared electronically through public ministry communications channels aren’t considered confidential.
   b. When possible, communication should be sent to entire groups, on their wall or in public areas - not in private messages – this includes images
   c. When ongoing pastoral communication are private (ie: Emails, FB Messages, Texting, etc) – Who they are with and their frequency should be disclosed to the parent or a supervisor
   d. Consistency with all students on all platforms is of the utmost importance
8. Covenants should be created to govern digital groups, addressing:
   a. appropriate & inappropriate language and behavior
   b. who may join and/or view group activity and when they should leave the group
   c. content that can be posted/published on the site or page
   d. who, how and when photos may be tagged (i.e.: did guardians give you permission to post pictures of their student)
   e. mandatory reporting laws will be followed
   f. consequences for breaking the covenant

9. Any inappropriate material posted in your online groups should be deleted and addressed or reported if necessary.

10. Video Chatting with student is strongly discouraged – if you must, be aware of what you’re wearing and of your surroundings.

11. Your emails and texts should communicate facts not feelings. When the content of a received email or text raises concerns or questions share it with a member of the staff, Pastoral team, or supervisor.
   a. Phone conversations and face-to-face meetings are the preferred mode of communication, when responding to emotionally driven communication or pastoral emergencies

12. There are further considerations when using photos and videos of minors for ministry purposes.
   a. Respect the dignity of every person depicted in an image
   b. Include a media release statement on a signed consent form
   c. It is strongly discouraged to attach student names with their image (i.e.: captions, tagging on Facebook)

13. Youth workers driving on ministry business are to avoid cell phone use—even hands-free—when transporting children, while driving in heavy traffic, during hazardous weather conditions, or when it violates local law.

14. Youth workers are never to send or read text messages while driving.