



## Eastwood Community Baptist Church Social Contact for Ministry with Children & Young People Policy (2020)

Fruitful Christian ministry with children and young people involves healthy, appropriate relationships. This can at times involve contacting them outside of ministry programs and can include meeting in person, posting letters through the mail, talking on the telephone, and online forms of communication. While some conversations are private it is important that ministry relationships are transparent, and that parents and church leaders are appropriately informed and have given permission for this contact.

The use of the telephone, email, SMS, and social networking sites like Facebook are a part of everyday life for many young people and children. The rate of technological advancement increases each year and in twelve months' time there will no doubt be new ways of connecting with others. With this comes challenges in the way we communicate and it is important to be aware of appropriate and positive ways of using these means of communication to ensure that we communicate in a safe manner.

In most ministry situations, electronic communication is a useful tool for general communication, building community and basic pastoral care and support. However, electronic communication may be used by those seeking to harm children, young people and vulnerable people. Electronic communication may be used to test or step over relational boundaries. We need to be mindful of the positional power dynamic that exists between those in leadership and the children, young people and vulnerable people under their care.

### **General Guidance:**

Church employees or volunteer leaders should never be alone in private with any child or young person they lead. This protects the child or young person from risk of harm, and it also protects the leader against the risk of false allegations.

When meeting with a child or young person, a ministry leader or volunteer should:

- Have parental or guardian consent, where practicable;
- Meet in a public place (eg café)
- Not invite or have children alone in your home, or visit children alone in their home when no other adult is present; and
- Make a record of the time, location, duration and circumstances of any face to face meetings with any child or young person

**Time alone in cars:**

Church employees or volunteer leaders should not be in a car alone with a child or young person, unless they are family members, or in exceptional circumstances when the following protective steps have been taken:

- The leader receives express permission from parents or guardian, and
- The leader is of the same gender as the young person or child, and
- The time spent alone in the car is minimized, and
- This is not a regular pattern of behavior.

Leaders need to exercise extreme caution in being alone in the car with a child or young person, as by doing so they allow the possibility of false assumptions or allegations to be made.

**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 and reminders to young people of the opposite gender

**Electronic Communication:**

- a) Where possible and practical, parents will be informed of any possible electronic communication with children/young people. (This could be achieved through an annual Permission/Registration Form)
- b) Church employees and volunteer leaders must not send, or post any electronic communication that is:
  - i. is discriminatory or harassing
  - ii. Derogatory
  - iii. Obscene, sexually explicit or pornographic
  - iv. Defamatory or threatening
- c) Church employees and volunteer leaders must not send any electronic communication that attempts to hide the identity of the sender or represent the sender as someone else

**Recommendations for Contact with 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. 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.

**Recommendations for Contact with Years 7-8 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 Year 7 or 8 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 of the opposite gender (eg a male leader should not have an online chat with four of the year 8 girls). The history of the chat should be kept and recorded if possible.
- 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 consider limiting social media contact with young people in years 7 & 8, however if social media contact is made with young people in years 7 & 8 the following guidelines are recommended:
  - Consider privacy settings which 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.
  - Private contact or conversations with young people in years 7 & 8 should be limited to logistical purposes and basic encouragement.
- Email should be limited to logistical purposes and basic encouragement. More significant conversations should be held in person.
- It is never appropriate to meet young people in Years 7 & 8 socially without written or verbal permission from the parents and discussing it with your ministry supervisor first.
- Private video calls (skype/facetime) are not appropriate for young people in years 7 & 8.

### **Recommendations for Contact with Years 9-12 Students**

- Phone contact is permissible.
- SMS is permissible and can include logistics and encouragement (eg praying for you this week)
- Online contact can include group discussions that are public and can be read by others. The history of the chat should be kept and recorded if possible.
- 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. If social media contact is made with young people in years 9 – 12 the following guidelines are recommended:
  - Consider privacy settings which 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.
  - Private conversations are permissible and should be kept for future reference if possible
- Email can include logistics and private conversations. If possible, more significant conversations should be held in person.
- It is permissible for leaders to meet with same gender students or in mixed groups in public places (café or McDonalds). Parents and the ministry supervisor should be informed of this meeting occurring.
- Private video calls (skype/facetime) are not appropriate, however group video calls may be appropriate in some circumstances (eg small group bible study context).

