

**SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY**

A guide for staff on using social media to promote the work of New Life Church and in a personal capacity

This policy will be reviewed on an ongoing basis, at least once a year. New Life Church will amend this policy, following consultation, where appropriate.

Date of last review: April 2024

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Introduction

**What is social media?**

Social media is the term given to web-based tools and applications which enable users to create and share content (words, images and video content), and network with each other through the sharing of information, opinions, knowledge and common interests. Examples of social media include Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), LinkedIn and Instagram.

**Why do we use social media?**

Social media is essential to the success of communicating New Life Church's work. It is important for some staff to participate in social media to engage with our audience, participate in relevant conversations and raise the profile of New Life Church's work.

**Why do we need a social media policy?**

The difference between a personal and professional opinion can be blurred on social media, particularly if you're discussing issues relating to New Life Church's work. While we encourage the use of social media, we have certain standards, outlined in this policy, which we require everyone to observe. Publication and commentary on social media carries similar obligations to any other kind of publication or commentary in the public domain.

This policy is intended for all staff members of all levels, volunteers, Trustees and Eldersand applies to content posted on both aNew Life Churchdevice and a personal device*.* Before engaging in work-related social media activity, staff must read this policy.

**Setting out the social media policy**

This policy sets out guidelines on how social media should be used to support the delivery and promotion of New Life Church, and the use of social media by staff in both a professional and personal capacity. It sets out what you need to be aware of when interacting in these spaces and is designed to help staff support and expand our official social media channels, while protecting the charity and its reputation and preventing any legal issues.

**Internet access and monitoring usage**

There are currently no access restrictions to any of our social media sites in the New Life Church office. You are permitted to make reasonable and appropriate use of personal social media activity during your lunch breaks. But usage should not be excessive and interfere with your duties.

**Point of contact for social media**

Our social media team is responsible for the day-to-day publishing, monitoring and management of our social media channels. If you have specific questions about any aspect of these channels, speak to the team.No other staff member can post content on New Life Church's official channels without the permission of the team.

**Which social media channels do we use?**

New Life Church uses the following social media channels:

Youtube for live streaming our services and posting other relevant content.

Instagram for publishing events and content relevant to the aims of New Life Church, particularly for the younger demographics that use Instagram.

Facebook for communicating with our church regular attenders and members via our private New Life Family page, which only allows access via a short application to join to protect data. We also use an outward facing Facebook page for general information about the church and to publish and advertise events.

WhatsApp is used to communicate by many groups within the church.

Guidelines

**Using New Life Church's social media channels — appropriate conduct**

1. The Social Media team is responsible for setting up and managing New Life Church's social media channels. Only those authorised to do so by the social media team will have access to these accounts.

2. The Social Media team responds to comments within office hours and other reasonable daytime hours (8am-8pm) as needed.

3. Be an ambassador for our brand. Staff should ensure they reflect New Life Church values in what they post and use our tone of voice. Our brand guidelines set out our tone of voice that all staff should refer to when posting content on New Life Church's social media channels.

4. Make sure that all social media content has a purpose and a benefit for New Life Church, and accurately reflects New Life Church's agreed position.

5. Bring value to our audience(s). Answer their questions, help and engage with them.

6. Take care with the presentation of content. Make sure that there are no typos, misspellings or grammatical errors. Also check the quality of images.

7. Always pause and think before posting. That said, reply to comments in a timely manner, when a response is appropriate.

8. If staff outside of the social media team wish to contribute content for social media, whether non-paid for or paid for advertising, they should speak to the social media team about this.

9. Staff shouldn't post content about supporters or service users without their express permission. If staff are sharing information about supporters, service users or third party organisations, this content should be clearly labelled so our audiences know it has not come directly from New Life Church. If using interviews, videos or photos that clearly identify a child or young person, staff must ensure they have the consent of a parent or guardian before using them on social media.

10. Always check facts. Staff should not automatically assume that material is accurate and should take reasonable steps where necessary to seek verification, for example, by checking data/statistics and being wary of photo manipulation.

11. Be honest. Say what you know to be true or have a good source for. If you've made a mistake, don't be afraid to admit it.

12. Staff should refrain from offering personal opinions via New Life Church's social media accounts, either directly by commenting or indirectly by 'liking', 'sharing' or 'retweeting'. If you are in doubt about New Life Church's position on a particular issue, please speak to the social media team.

13. It is vital that New Life Church does not encourage others to risk their personal safety or that of others, to gather materials. For example, a video of a stunt.

14. Staff should not encourage people to break the law to supply material for social media, such as using unauthorised video footage. All relevant rights for usage must be obtained before publishing material.

15. Staff should not set up other Facebook groups or pages, X (formerly Twitter) accounts or any other social media channels on behalf of New Life Church. This could confuse messaging and brand awareness. By having official social media accounts in place, the social media team can ensure consistency of the brand and focus on building a strong following.

16. New Life Church is not a political organisation and does not hold a view on party politics or have any affiliation with or links to political parties. We have every right to express views on policy, including the policies of parties, but we can't tell people how to vote.

17. If a complaint is made on New Life Church's social media channels, staff should seek advice from the social media team, staff team, or where relevant the Trustees before responding.

18. Sometimes issues can arise on social media which can escalate into a crisis situation because they are sensitive or risk serious damage to the charity's reputation. Examples might include: safeguarding accusations, allegations of corruption or abuse, or other serious incidents. The nature of social media means that complaints are visible and can escalate quickly. Not acting can be detrimental to the charity.

The social media team regularly monitors our social media spaces for mentions of New Life Church so we can catch any issues or problems early. If there is an issue that could develop or has already developed into a crisis situation, the social media team will do the following:

1. Do not respond immediately.
2. Take screenshots or save the content in some fashion.
3. Alert the Trustees with all of the relevant information.
4. Await the counsel of the Trustees to respond.
5. In some instances the Social Media Channels may be taken down or temporarily deactivated in order to manage the crisis.

If any staff outside of the social media team become aware of any comments online that they think have the potential to escalate into a crisis, whether on New Life Church's social media channels or elsewhere, they should speak to the social media team, the Elders, Trustees, or other staff members immediately.

**Use of personal social media accounts — appropriate conduct**

This policy does not intend to inhibit personal use of social media but instead flags up those areas in which conflicts might arise. New Life Church staff are expected to behave appropriately, and in ways that are consistent with New Life Church's values and policies, both online and in real life.

1. Be aware that any information you make public could affect how people perceive New Life Church. You must make it clear when you are speaking for yourself and not on behalf of New Life Church. If you are using your personal social media accounts to promote and talk about New Life Church's work, you must use a disclaimer such as: "The views expressed on this site are my own and don't necessarily represent New Life Church's positions, policies or opinions."

2. Staff who have a personal blog or website which indicates in any way that they work at New Life Church should discuss any potential conflicts of interest with their line manager and the social media team. Similarly, staff who want to start blogging and wish to say that they work for New Life Church should discuss any potential conflicts of interest with their line manager and the social media team.

3. Those in senior leadership roles, or specialist roles where they are well known in their field of expertise, must take particular care as personal views published may be misunderstood as expressing New Life Church's view.

4. Use common sense and good judgement. Be aware of your association with New Life Church and ensure your profile and related content is consistent with how you wish to present yourself to others e.g the general public, colleagues, partners and funders.

5. If a staff member is contacted by the press about their social media posts that relate to New Life Church, they should talk to the social media team immediately and under no circumstances respond directly.

6. New Life Church is not a political organisation and does not hold a view on party politics or have any affiliation with or links to political parties. When representing New Life Church, staff are expected to hold New Life Church's position of neutrality. Staff who are politically active in their spare time need to be clear in separating their personal political identity from New Life Church, and understand and avoid potential conflicts of interest.

7. Never use New Life Church's logos or trademarks unless approved to do so. Permission to use logos should be requested from the social media team.

8. Always protect yourself and the charity. Be careful with your privacy online and be cautious when sharing personal information. What you publish is widely accessible and will be around for a long time, so do consider the content carefully. When you are using social media sites at work, it is important that you do so safely. You can find more information on your responsibilities when using our computer systems in our Internet Use Policy.

9. Think about your reputation as well as the charity's. Express your opinions and deal with differences of opinion respectfully. Don't insult people or treat them badly. Passionate discussions and debates are fine, but you should always be respectful of others and their opinions. Be polite and the first to correct your own mistakes.

10. We encourage staff to share tweets and posts that we have issued. When online in a personal capacity, you might also see opportunities to comment on or support New Life Church and the work we do. Where appropriate and using the guidelines within this policy, we encourage staff to do this as it provides a human voice and raises our profile. However, if the content is controversial or misrepresented, please highlight this to the social media team who will respond as appropriate.

**Using social media to Engage and Communicate with Young People in the Church**

This policy incorporates the Baptist Union Guidelines set out in Appendix 1

Further guidelines

**Libel**

Libel is when a false written statement that is damaging to a person's reputation is published online or in print. Whether staff are posting content on social media as part of their job or in a personal capacity, they should not bring New Life Church into disrepute by making defamatory comments about individuals or other organisations or groups.

**Copyright law**

It is critical that all staff abide by the laws governing copyright, under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988. Never use or adapt someone else's images or written content without permission. Failing to acknowledge the source/author/resource citation, where permission has been given to reproduce content, is also considered a breach of copyright.

**Confidentiality**

Any communications that staff make in a personal capacity must not breach confidentiality. For example, information meant for internal use only or information that New Life Church is not ready to disclose yet. For example, a news story that is embargoed for a particular date. Please refer to our Data protection policy and other policies (which can be found on our website newlifewoking.com) for further information.

**Discrimination and harassment**

Staff should not post content that could be considered discriminatory against, or bullying or harassment of, any individual, on either an official New Life Church social media channel or a personal account. For example:

* making offensive or derogatory comments relating to sex, gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, age, religion or belief
* using social media to bully another individual
* posting images that are discriminatory or offensive or links to such content

**Lobbying Act**

Charities are legally allowed to campaign to bring about a change in policy or law to further their organisational purpose. In most cases, spending on charity campaigns that are in accordance with charity law will not be regulated under electoral law. However, the Lobbying Act, which was passed in January 2014, states that during national elections (known as regulated periods) spending on campaigning activities may be regulated.

Charities which spend more than £20,000 in England or £10,000 in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, during the regulated period, need to register with the Electoral Commission. To abide by the Lobbying Act, campaigning activities on social media must not be seen as intending to influence people's voting choice. During these periods, all campaigning activity will be reviewed by the Trustees.

**Use of social media in the recruitment process**

Any advertising of vacancies on social media should be done through the social media team.

There should be no systematic or routine checking of a candidate's online social media activities during the recruitment process, as conducting these searches might lead to a presumption that an applicant's protected characteristics, such as religious beliefs or sexual orientation, played a part in a recruitment decision. This is in line with New Life Church's Equal Opportunities Policy.

**Protection and intervention**

The responsibility for measures of protection and intervention lies first with the social networking site itself. Different social networking sites offer different models of interventions in different areas. For more information, refer to the guidance available on the social networking site itself. For example, Facebook. However, if a staff member considers that a person/people is/are at risk of harm, they should report this to the Safeguarding lead immediately.

**Under 18s and vulnerable people**

Young and vulnerable people face risks when using social networking sites. They may be at risk of being bullied, publishing sensitive and personal information on their profiles, or from becoming targets for online grooming.

Where known, when communicating with young people under 18-years-old via social media, staff should ensure the online relationship with New Life Church follows the same rules as the offline 'real-life' relationship. Staff should ensure that young people have been made aware of the risks of communicating and sharing information online, and given guidance on security/privacy settings as necessary. Staff should also ensure that the site itself is suitable for the young person and New Life Church content and other content is appropriate for them. Please refer to our Safeguarding Policy.

**Responsibilities and breach of policy**

Everyone is responsible for their own compliance with this policy. Participation in social media on behalf of New Life Church is not a right but an opportunity, so it must be treated seriously and with respect. For staff, breaches of policy may incur disciplinary action, depending on the severity of the issue. Please refer to our policies for further information on disciplinary procedures. Staff who are unsure about whether something they propose to do on social media might breach this policy, should seek advice from the social media team.

**Public Interest Disclosure**

Under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, if a staff member releases information through New Life Church's social media channels that is considered to be in the interest of the public, New Life Church's [*policy name i.e. Whistleblowing Policy*] must be initiated before any further action is taken.

**The New Life Church, Woking CIO**

**APPENDIX 1**

**A group of people using gadgets

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Using Social Media to Engage and Communicate with Young People in the Church

# Safeguarding Guidelines for Youth Leaders and Volunteers

# July 2020

# Safeguarding guidelines - Using social media to engage and communicate with young people within the church

Social media has become a key aspect of communicating, not just with young people but to the church community as a whole. There are some specific points that we suggest you consider when you are thinking about how you engage with young people in your church.

Our advice to churches has always been that great care must be taken if you plan to use social media to communicate with young people both inside and outside the church. This is because it is very hard to regulate the information that is shared, and to monitor the interactions between adults and young people through this medium.

We recognise that some youth leaders are confident in the use of social media and alert to the risk associated with its use. However, we feel it may be beneficial to set out some checks and balances that youth leaders can put in place. This does not replace a need for you to conduct a risk assessment for your specific church group as with other activities with young people.

## Set up and procedural guidelines

1. As youth leaders if you do not feel confident in using social media then do not use it to communicate with young people.

1. Remember that children under the age of 13\* are not allowed social media accounts and there may be other children in the church whose parents do not let them have access to it. On this basis it is important to have a variety of methods of communicating with young people.
2. Parents still need to know what activities their children are involved with and parental consent should always be sought before taking children and young people to off site activities (this is in addition to the consent forms in place for the everyday church activities). You cannot rely on young people to communicate what is happening to their parents. This remains the responsibility of the youth leader.
3. When using social media consider using a platform (i.e. WhatsApp or Facebook) that allows for secure, group communication and where people can only join with the consent of the administrator\*.
4. When using social media consider setting up a separate account from any personal social media accounts and ensuring that there are limitations on its use. Make it clear that this is your youth leader/worker account, and the only one they are to access. If any young people try to add or contact you through your personal accounts, deny the requests.
5. Consent should be sought from parents for direct communication with young people to take place, whether this is via social media or using text message, WhatsApp or email.
6. Where there is a paid youth worker, they should be the first point of contact for young people and it is wise for them to have a separate mobile phone for work use – this can then be used for all communication with young people.
7. Where all youth leaders are voluntary then consideration could be given to the purchase of a youth work mobile that can be held at the church and used to communicate with young people, either via social media or direct messaging.
8. When considering which social media platforms to use it is best to use one where there is a record of what has been posted to any group or where there is evidence of messaging threads. An example of a platform that **does not** have this capability is Snapchat.

## Involving young people in the process of engaging with social media

1. Consider agreeing with young people a list of ground rules for communicating via social media – this could include:

* Being respectful of others in the group, their opinions and experiences
* Not sharing group members’ contact details outside of the group without their consent
* Not using the group to bully or put down other members of it

1. Be clear with young people that if they share something on social media that makes you concerned then you will have to pass it on, in line with the church safeguarding policy.
2. Model healthy social media use:

* Only post messages before 8pm.
* Do not respond to messages after a specific time at night.
* Regularly review the information shared within the group to ensure that it is beneficial, uplifting and sits within the purpose of the group.
* Set ‘office hours’ when you as the youth worker will have the phone on you. e.g., 8am-8pm (unless at an event with the young people where you might need it for emergency communication).
* In terms of posts/pictures on your youth work pages, make sure they are in line with the church safeguarding policy and procedures, and are wholesome and suitable for all audiences under the age of 18.

1. Always ensure that you are using social media to communicate with the whole group. Do not use it to communicate with individual young people.
2. If young people direct message you through social media/WhatsApp outside of the group chat:

* Keep screenshots or documentation of the messages and any response.
* Ask that the young people do not message you that way again.
* Consider whether an immediate response is needed, particularly if it is late at night – even if there is a simple and quick response, consider leaving it until the next day within your ‘office hours’.
* Consider sharing the response with the whole group rather than getting into a one-on-one discussion with a young person
* Note: If your phone is off outside of ‘office hours’ then you will not see these messages until the next day when you are again at work. This is a good habit to get into and takes the pressure off maintaining boundaries around communication with young people.

1. If, despite your best efforts to maintain the boundaries around when you are available, a young person in crisis contacts you ‘out of hours’, think about how you respond.

* If they appear in emotional distress or are threatening to harm themselves then you should contact the DPS immediately and initiate safeguarding reporting procedures. You may also need to contact the parents and even the police if the risk of harm is imminent.
* If they appear to need to have talk through a situation, consider arranging a time to meet with them in the following days to work through it. (This meeting should take place in line with your church safeguarding policy and procedures)
* Keep a record of any discussion that has taken place and send it to the DPS within 24 hours.

## Social Media Platforms and minimum age criteria

You will note that the minimum age for most social media platforms is 13 years old but not all. It is important, even if young people under that minimum age are using these platforms for other communication that you do not engage with them through this medium.

With all of these social media platforms it is important to note that parental consent is required for a young person to register for an account. However, this does not override your need as a youth worker to seek this consent from parents as well.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Social Media Platform | Minimum Age |
| Facebook | 13 |
| Instagram | 13 |
| TikTok | 13 |
| Twitter | 13 |
| Pinterest | 13 |
| YouTube | 13 |
| Google Hangouts | 13 |
| \*WhatsApp | 16 |
| \*\*SnapChat | DO NOT USE |
| \*\*\*House Party | DO NOT USE |
|  |  |

**\*Please note that the minimum age to register for a WhatsApp account is 16 years old. As such we strongly advise that you do not use this platform to communicate with young people under this age, even if they say that they have an account.**

\*\* We strongly advise against the use of Snapchat and any other app where the messages are not stored. Snapchat is designed specifically so people can share their immediate thoughts and images and then they disappear. This leaves young people vulnerable to exploitation and grooming because perpetrators know that this is the case and will target young people using Snapchat for this reason. In addition, Youth workers leave themselves open to allegations with no way to evidence what has been said or posted as it is impossible to produce a record of these communications as part of an accountability process or if there were safeguarding concerns.

\*\*\* Houseparty is an app that is designed for groups of friends to gather together – it focusses on informality and is not a secure platform where you can manage precisely who attends the ‘party’. There are other video conferencing facilities which give a viable alternative and where people respond to a specific invitation which may be more appropriate to use.

## Video Conferencing

We recognise that video conferencing has become a valuable tool as we look at ways to meet together as church and as a youth group, particularly at a time when we are not able to meet physically. There are many difference platforms available for this such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Skype, Google Meeting, FaceTime, Facebook Rooms and Google Duo. As we have already stated it is important to ensure that in using this technology, we still apply our safeguarding policies and procedures:

* It is important to ensure that there are always at least 2 youth workers in the call and that they are online first.
* Just as you would do usually if you have concerns about someone then follow the reporting procedure within your church.
* **Do not be tempted to record your virtual youth group meeting**. If you are following your usual safeguarding policy and procedures, then you do not need an added record. Keeping a record of what is said and done in this way presents an added challenge of
  + where this is subsequently stored
  + parental and personal consent to the recording
  + the potential breach of an individual’s right to privacy

### Using Video Conferencing for Mentoring and Pastoral Support with Young People

We know that churches offer a great variety of work with young people, including mentoring and individual pastoral care. We understand the value of this work when is carried out by skilled and experienced youth workers. At the time of writing churches continue to face restrictions around face to face meetings with young people because of the Coronavirus outbreak. We are aware that churches may be considering continuing to provide mentoring and individual pastoral support using video conferencing platforms. Please consider the following advice should you wish to do so:

* If, as a church you did not offer individual mentoring and pastoral support meetings to young people before the Coronavirus outbreak then please do not start doing so now.
* The youth worker **and** Designated Person for Safeguarding should complete a risk assessment focussed on working one to one with young people online considering the following:
  + Do you have a youth worker that is skilled and experienced in engaging and supporting young people through mentoring and pastoral support programmes?
  + What are the benefits of providing pastoral support and mentoring online at this time – does this need to be a broad offer to all young people or are there specific young people who need this support and where there are no other agencies already providing it?
  + What risk factors do you need to consider in your decision to use video conferencing to conduct mentoring or pastoral support meetings online?
  + How will you mitigate these risk factors in arranging meetings and keeping a record of them?
* Seek written consent of both the young person and the parent or guardian before arranging the meeting – is this something that the young person wants and is the parent happy with it going ahead.
* Ensure that the meeting is booked in advance and that someone else is aware that it is taking place.
* Keep all mentoring and pastoral support meetings within the working day.
* Keep a written record of when meetings have taken place and an outline of the topics discussed… including any actions. Ensure that this record is stored securely. For computerised records this should be encrypted with a password or stored in a secure online location that can only be accessed by agreed personnel. If you are making handwritten records these should be stored securely in a locked cupboard. All records should be kept in line with the church record retention policy.
* Ensure that the young person is aware that you will be making notes of the discussion and that if you have any concerns that you will have to pass them on in line with the safeguarding policy
* Agree with the young person where they will be in the house when you have the meeting. We strongly advise that they are not in their bedroom, although we also recognise that for some young people there will not be another private space in their home. Consideration needs to be given to this in the risk assessment.
* Avoid conducting online meetings with young people from your own bedroom or personal space. If this is not possible use the technology to change the background either to a neutral image or so it is fuzzy.
* Remember that young people under the age of 16 cannot legally register for a Zoom account. However this does not preclude them from using Zoom if it is set up by an adult. On this basis it is likely that the account will be held by the parent or guardian. This is another reason why a parent or guardian to be aware of the meeting taking place.

Reviewed March 2022

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