

Internet/Digital/Online Safety

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“Never “friend” a child on any form of technology and social media without written permission from the guardian.” Because the mere term “friend” equates to equal footing, it is inappropriate even with parental permission. There will always be unequal footing in an adult/child relationship. It is the adult’s responsibility to recognize that.

INTERNET SAFETY

The internet and social media are evolving tools which offer great promise for developing and deepening ministries but also pose significant safety challenges.

Definitions

- **Church Sponsored Sites** — any group, page or list-serve that is created by a designated member of First Church, Simsbury, for the purpose of establishing, maintaining or growing ministries to and with youth and/or adults.
- **Inappropriate Content** — refers both to content that is improper or offensive, but also content that might be suited to the medium but not to the relationship.

In general, please understand these recommendations and guidelines are best practices in the child safety environment. We understand that a child may reach out to you in need, and because you know your intentions are genuine and pure, you see fit to connect to help this child. However, setting proper boundaries also protects the child. The next person that child wants to connect with may not be as genuine and pure of intent as you are. Helping that child to understand proper adult to child boundaries helps to protect the child from not become victimized by a predator.

General

1. Use of church-related digital and social media is intended to build up members in the Body of Christ. Individuals who use this media to disseminate negative material may lose their access privileges.
2. Inappropriate content is prohibited on church-related media, network, and resources. Guidelines for the definition of inappropriate content are provided at the bottom...
3. Any information sent digitally (e-mail, social networking, etc) is not confidential and may be reported or shared with others.
4. Only websites and social media authorized by Church Council/Board/Trustees are the responsibility of the church and represent the church. Content that appears on pages or sites that are not sponsored by the church are not the responsibility of the church.
5. Requests for church-related websites and social media must be submitted to Church Council and must be approved before said sites are created.
6. Staff must use only professional profiles on church networking sites to establish a line of privacy and separation. A professional profile is defined as one that is linked to a church-provided e-mail address. Personal e-mail addresses may not be used to establish professional profiles.
7. Authorized church officials must be included as additional administrators of all church-related accounts in order to allow oversight.
8. Staff and Authorized Volunteers must use all privacy settings available to shield minors from inappropriate content.

Digital Content

Digital communication allows reproduction and nearly instant communication of text, audio, image, and video materials to a wide-reaching audience.

1. Signed church Media Release Forms must be received from parents/guardians of all minors whose images are to be distributed or published (digitally, printed, or otherwise) for use on authorized media sites, worship, posters or in any form of publicity. The staff member or Authorized volunteer leader using the images is responsible for obtaining the parent/guardian's permission.
2. No full names or contact information of any minor shall appear on any church-related website or social media page. No contact information of any adult shall appear on any church-related website or social media page without the written consent from the named adult individual.
3. Copyrighted materials must not be published on church-sponsored sites, without written approval from the copyright holder.

Social Media, Electronic Mail, Messaging, and Texting

Social media networking can be defined as interactive platforms by which both individuals and communities create and share content. Examples include Facebook and Twitter.

1. Parents (or guardians as appropriate) must approve a minor's participation in any church-related social media. In cases of separated parents, approval must be from primary caregiver. Approval is indicated by a signed Social Media Approval Form which must be renewed on a yearly basis.
2. Adults are not permitted to friend, follow, or otherwise engage in direct but private electronic forums with minors. Group communication through products such as the Remind App are acceptable for church use and should include at least one other adult in the group. Youth social media groups tied to the church are permitted with at least two adults in the group, and with the understanding to all participants that NO direct messaging occur between adult and child.
3. Staff shall use their church-provided e-mail account for all correspondence related to their position. If staff is contacted by a youth through email, staff may only respond and MUST include the parent or guardian in the response.
4. Former youth members, authorized volunteers, staff and authorized church officials, due to departure from church, removal, or loss of eligibility will be removed from church-related youth group social media groups and automated distribution lists by Authorized administrators.
5. Any inappropriate material covered by "Mandatory Reporting" laws that is discovered on any church related social media or technology devices must be reported to pastor, documented for church records, and then deleted from the site. (If you have evidence to be used in a criminal investigation, DO NOT delete it without approval of authorities. Close down the site until cleared by authorities. You may have a "spoliation of evidence" issue that will hinder prosecution.)
6. Any inappropriate material that is not covered by "Mandatory Reporting" laws must be deleted from the site. Church staff, authorized volunteers and authorized church officials will decide whether material not covered by Mandatory Reporting laws is inappropriate.
7. Any content that details inappropriate behavior during a church-sponsored event or activity must be reported to and addressed by Youth Minister, or Authorized volunteer leader and minor's parents.

Inappropriate content

Content that is improper or offensive, but also content that may be suited to the medium but not to the relationship. Content meeting the definition of child pornography or is harmful to minors is considered inappropriate.

Child pornography, any photograph, film, audio, video, or other visual depiction involving a minor engaging in any sexually explicit conduct.

Harmful to minors, any picture, image, graphic image file, sound or other visual depiction or audio that:

1. Taken as a whole and with respect to minors, appeals to a prurient interest in nudity or sexual conduct.
2. Depicts, describes, or represents, in a patently offensive way with respect to what is suitable for minors, an actual or simulated sexual act or sexual contact.