



The Parish of St Augustine of Canterbury

Social Media Policy

Purpose

Communicating safely online and through social media with children and young people and with vulnerable adults.

Dated:	March 2024
Policy agreed by PCC:	19 March 2024
Next Review Date	March 2025

Introduction

This document draws significantly on material from the Parish Safeguarding Handbook and its procedures and guidelines for safeguarding children and vulnerable adults and responding to domestic abuse.

The document provides specific guidance designed to help in fulfilling the aims of the policy. Given the seriousness of the matters the policy is designed to address, it is important that the guidance is adhered to.

St Augustine strives to be a safe and secure environment for everyone, especially children and vulnerable adults. Electronic communication and online activities of all sorts have become an integral part of everyday life, particularly for children and young people. For many these are the preferred way of communicating, which are seen as an extension of physical face-to-face relationships.

Communicating online can be beneficial both for those involved in leading and organising church groups and activities and for those with whom they are communicating, so it is important that St Augustine engages with its community and worshippers through such platforms. However, all such communication between adults and children/young people, vulnerable adults must take place within clear and explicit boundaries and should follow the guidance in this document. Adults should ensure that all communications are transparent and open to scrutiny.

Who the policy is for

- Leaders of groups and activities that include children and vulnerable adults.
- Church members who need to communicate to others with whom they serve alongside through a wide range of groups and activities.
- PCC MEMBERS
- All elected members and those in leadership position

NOTE: Leaders of groups and activities will have access to the policy and will, in turn, be expected to make their team members aware of it.

Aims of the policy

The aims of this policy are:

- To ensure that communication with children and vulnerable adults who may be vulnerable, and especially with children and young people, is safe both online and through social media.
- To play a part, alongside other policies, in promoting a safe and nurturing environment, especially for children and vulnerable adults.





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Practical guidance

- Do not regard online communication as the default form of communication with young people and vulnerable adults. Always consider first whether face-to-face communication would be preferable.
- Make sure you adhere to minimum age restrictions that apply to the use of the following applications:
 - Facebook,
 - Instagram (now X),
 - Skype,
 - Snapchat or
 - Zoom
 - WhatsApp
 - X (Previously Twitter)
 - Tik Tok, etc
- Maintain good and open relationships with parents and carers regarding communication with them and their children.
- If young people want you to have their mobile phone numbers, e-mail addresses or similar, make sure that their parents know and have agreed in writing.
- Only give personal contact details to young people that are within the public domain of the church, including your mobile telephone number.
- If you are issued with, or have access to, a church-owned mobile device to help you fulfil your role, it should be used for this purpose only. The only permitted personal use is for making contact in the event of an emergency.
- Only communicate at reasonable times of the day and never at night and with the knowledge of a parent/guardian.
- As much as possible communicate with a group, not just an individual.
- Where possible another adult should be copied into all communication with young people or adults who may be vulnerable. This should be an overt copy rather than a blind copy.
- Only contact young people for reasons related to the work of the church and never simply to engage in conversation.
- Establish a dedicated group with at least two authorised adult users.
- Use the highest appropriate level of security setting and restrict membership to the intended group.
- Set personal profiles on any social networking sites to the highest form of security to avoid access to personal information.
- Do not use a personal account to communicate.
- Do not 'friend' or 'follow' children or young people on social media or allow them to befriend or follow you.
- Where young people are on a rota ensure that individual contact details are not shared.
- Communicate clearly, do not abbreviate or short-cut communications, never use inappropriate language, and avoid the use of emojis or other symbols.
- Use an appropriate tone - friendly, but not over-familiar or personal.
- Be aware that boundaries of relationships can become blurred on social media.
- Be warm and friendly, but do not suggest or offer a special relationship.
- Be careful how you sign off. Consider, for instance, how 'love' and 'XXX' might be perceived and misinterpreted by the young person, and never sign off in this way. Use the name you would expect them to call you in person.





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- Do not share any personal information with a young person, or request or respond to any personal information from the young person, other than that which might be appropriate as part of your role.
- Be circumspect in your communications with young people to avoid any possible misinterpretation of your motives or any behaviour which could be construed as grooming.
- Do not engage in any form of sexting (the sharing of sexual, naked or semi-naked images or videos of oneself or others, or the sending of sexually explicit messages); Section 67 of the Serious Crime Act 2015 inserts a new section into the Sexual Offences Act 2003 which now makes this a criminal act.
- If a young person misinterprets your communication and tries to engage you in conversation, you must end the conversation or stop replying. Suggest discussing the subject further at the next activity which should be in the presence of another adult and, if concerned about the young person's communication, discuss the matter with the Parish Safeguarding Officer (PSO).
- Make sure that communication would not cause embarrassment if it were seen by the young person's parents or church officials. Recognise that text messaging is rarely an appropriate response to a young person in a crisis situation or at risk of harm.
- When posting to Social Media always:
 - be aware of and comply with copyright laws;
 - be aware of and comply with terms of use;
 - ensure that all content posted is compliant with law;
 - does not encourage or condone unlawful activity;
 - is age appropriate and is consistent with Church of England values.

A handy quick reference guide of Dos and Don'ts for using social media whilst working with children and young people is available elsewhere in the Parish Safeguarding Handbook

Record keeping

- Store e-mail, texts and other messages for as long as possible. If a message contains anything which causes concern, print it out and/or retain on file/hard drive
- Have an agreed supervisor of any group accounts, who young people are aware of, and document this.

Important contacts

Parish Safeguarding Officer (PSO) Gill Gooding – Mobile: 07743 708379

Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser (DSA) – Phone: 020 7932 1224

