

First Presbyterian Church, Salina, KS

Communications and Social Media Policy for Youth Workers (both paid and volunteer)

Digital Communication holds a vital place in youth ministry. Through texting, email, social media and other similar platforms, youth workers can communicate with youth and minister with them in meaningful ways. In an effort to ensure the safety of both the youth worker and youth, and to clarify what is and is not appropriate when utilizing these ministry tools, the following guidelines have been put in place. Adherence to them is not only a responsibility as a representative of First Presbyterian Church, but as they are intended to promote a safe and loving youth atmosphere, is also faithful to the greater Church, as well.

General Guidelines:

- It will be our policy to never publish a minor's name on a public document/internet site without explicit permission of the parent/guardian.
- All communication sent digitally is NOT CONFIDENTIAL and must be available to be shared or reposted with others.
- Interactions in the virtual world need to be transparent, as a window in the door provides transparency in the physical world.
- In the virtual world, healthy boundaries and safe church practices must be adhered to as they are in the physical world.
- Use prudent judgment in the time you contact youth through social media. Laws regarding mandated reporting of suspected abuse/neglect/exploitation of children, youth, elders, and vulnerable adults apply in the virtual world as they do in the physical world.
- When possible, communication (including images) should be sent to entire groups or posted in public spaces on the internet—not in private messages.
- When responding to emotionally-driven communication or pastoral emergencies, phone conversations and face-to-face meetings are the preferred mode of communication.
- When using social networking tools, ALWAYS be intentional about what is communicated, to whom it is sent, when it is done, and what repercussions it might have.

Email/Texting:

- Email can be an appropriate and effective means of communicating basic factual information such as the time of an event, agenda for a meeting, text of a document, etc.
- Email and texting are not appropriate forms of communication for matters that are pastorally or legally sensitive, emotionally charged or require extensive conversation.
- At least one other adult should always be included (copied) in an email or text message to minors for matters that are pastorally or legally sensitive, emotionally charged or require extensive conversation.
- All users should note that humor and sarcasm can be easily misinterpreted in an email/text.
- If at all possible, do not text, chat, or email back-and-forth with youth at a time you would not normally call their parents, i.e., before 8:00 a.m. or after 9:00 p.m.
- If a youth emails or texts an adult youth worker "after hours," and it is not an emergency, wait until morning to reply.
- Adults will not Snapchat from a personal account or send any type of communication not directly related to FPC youth ministry.
- Adults will not send "selfies" to youth to whom they minister.

Online Social Media:

- Adults who minister to children and youth are strongly encouraged to set very stringent privacy settings on any social networking profile. Adults should also understand that everything posted online is public and may be viewed by minors.
- Adults should not submit “friend” or “follow” requests to minors or youth. Because there is a disparity of power between youth and adults, youth may not be in a position to decline such requests. Youth may take the initiative and request to be “friends,” but adults should carefully discern the level of contact they want to maintain with youth prior to responding to these requests.
- If an adult chooses to accept friend requests from minors or youth who are associated with the church, other adult leaders and parents should be able to gain full access to all aspects of that adult’s profile and correspondence.
- Adults who want to connect via social networks with youth to whom they minister are strongly encouraged to set up a closed (but not hidden) group that youth may join. Youth requesting to “friend” an adult can then be invited to join this group rather than be accepted as a “friend” on an adult’s personal profile account. The purpose of these two separate accounts/profiles is to create a line of privacy and maintain healthy boundaries with youth and real family, friends and colleagues.
- Any material on any site (whether affiliated with the church or not) that raises suspicion that a child has been or will be abused/neglected/exploited should be immediately reported to the clergy and/or local law enforcement.
- Video chatting with youth (through cell phone platforms or online with programs like Skype) is strongly discouraged unless it is a part of a larger program with multiple youth and adults. If you use video chatting, be aware of what you’re wearing and of your surroundings.

Groups on Social Networks:

- Groups should have at least two unrelated adult administrators.
- Social networking groups for youth should be open to parents of current members.
- Parents should note that the content of youth pages or groups that are not sponsored by the church are NOT within the purview of adult youth workers.

Behavioral Covenant for all Youth and Youth Workers:

- Materials posted on church-sponsored sites (and/or group pages) are NOT CONFIDENTIAL.
- Content deemed inappropriate will be removed from the site or group page.
- Appropriate and respectful language shall be used at all times. Language deemed inappropriate will be removed by the site administrator.
- Eligibility of membership to join a closed social networking group is limited to those who are a member of the particular youth group, and their parents and youth workers.
 - Persons will be removed from membership when they cease to be a part of the particular youth group, due to moving away, inactivity, leaving the church, or becoming too old for the group.
 - Persons shall also be removed for persisting in inappropriate postings or behavior.
- Individuals shall only tag themselves in photos related to any church activity or event.

Disclaimer:

First Presbyterian Church of Salina, Kansas, is not responsible for social media posts made by youth, parents or outside individuals.