



SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Purpose of Guidelines

Digital technologies present a huge range of opportunities for innovation. Even when we're not able to physically meet with people in groups or as individuals, the internet enables us to connect in a range of ways.

People who find it difficult to meet and talk in person can often feel much more comfortable communicating behind the 'safety' of a screen. Connecting through a smartphone, tablet or computer opens up huge potential for a different kind of outreach. Where we can invite people to view and even participate in activities without ever having to cross the threshold of a church or other physical meeting space.

Online work can take many forms, but these might typically include:

- Meeting as a group through an online video chat platform
- Connecting with individuals and groups through messaging software
- Broadcasting activities or video on social platforms

Each of these methods can provide a great opportunity for work which otherwise might not happen, or even for an enhanced experience of what is possible. But all come with risks, which we need to understand and plan for. This policy aims to give best practice advice and guidance needed for staff and volunteers at Hope Church to operate safely and appropriately online.

The risks?

It's important to remember that communicating with people one to one online, whether via messaging or video is the equivalent of meeting a person in a room on your own with no one around.

Communicating with groups and holding virtual gatherings via online platforms presents challenges that should be considered before giving access to your virtual environment to those who you may not know.

Some risks that should be kept in mind include:

- The opportunity for grooming / sexual exploitation
- Sharing of personal contact details
- Inappropriate conversations and posts in interactive forums
- Potential allegations against workers
- Use of apps with age restrictions (eg. 13 for Facebook)

General Good Practice Guidelines

All employees and volunteers at Hope Church should adhere to the guidance below:

- Anyone who is interested in representing Hope Church must first be briefed on this policy and attend basic safeguarding training, which will include information on appropriate use of social media and working online in our context.
- You should apply / translate all principles from the Church's safeguarding policy, when participating in online groups and interactions. You therefore need to be familiar with the content of the Church's safeguarding policy.
- You should operate using respectful modes of behaviour and speech, appropriate physical presentation such as clothing, venue and environment from which you communicate, and be aware of appropriate times for official online interaction - generally after 8am and before 9pm.
- You should always try to be gracious! Always use Biblical wisdom when utilising social media. For example, if someone has offended you, consider speaking with them privately on the matter (if over 18). Do not post offense responses publicly.
- You should be selective. There are a variety of digital platforms available. Use the right medium for the message. For example, don't use a Facebook post to communicate sensitive or private information.
- You should be smart! A blog, community post, or social media post is often visible to the entire public and can/will be shared by others in various ways that cannot be controlled at any level. Be extremely wise with all content posted.
- You are solely responsible for the content you publish online, including content from your own social media pages. It must be absolutely clear that all views/posts do not reflect Hope Church, but are reflective of your own opinions.
- When in doubt, be positive! Whether someone has posted something mean, rude or distasteful, take the high road at all times.
- Social media postings should never disclose sensitive or confidential information, unless consent to share said information is obtained from the individual it concerns. This includes but is not limited to personal and/or medical information.
- Ensure any live call has a designated organiser who has the ability to mute / block any participants in the event they are displaying / sharing anything unsuitable or illegal.

- Please refrain from posting photos of individuals or identifying those individuals on Hope Church's social media pages without their consent prior to posting. Written consent will be needed for those under 18, which can be submitted via email or text. Verbal consent must be given by adults in photos.
- Copyright and Fair Use Laws must be respected at all times. Feel free to point or link to another individual's site, not post or blog about it like it is your own content.
- If any posted material concerning Hope Church seems to be illegal (e.g. child or elder abuse, etc.) team members should contact the safeguarding officer and the appropriate authorities immediately.
- As Employees and volunteers at Hope Church, remember that your online presence and posts can have the potential to affect our ministry. For this reason, it is imperative that you conduct your online interactions in accordance with Hope Church's vision and values and with the Code of Conduct. If you have any questions in this area, enquire with the Hope Church Leadership Team for clarity.
- Ask us! In areas where this policy does not provide a direct answer for how members of our community should answer social media questions, please check with the Hope Church Leadership Team before speaking as a representative of the church.
- In the event of a crisis, contact the Church Leadership Team prior to responding to any posting or comments relating to the crisis.
- Staff Team members who misuse the Hope Church's social media resources in ways that violate the law or other church policies will be subject to an investigation in line with their employee code of conduct.

Current official platforms that Hope Church uses for online contact:

- Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube for public communication
- Zoom for video conferencing

Public Relations Guidelines

- Church communications may not be used for partisan political messages or paid advertising.
- Hope Church may designate one or two main employees to facilitate all external communication channels on behalf of the Church. Only authorized employees and departmental leads may coordinate communications with members of the media on behalf of Hope Church.

- Any external communication from the Hope Church office regarding serious/unexpected incidents must be approved by the Church Leadership Team.

Where Do These Guidelines Apply?

- This policy applies to all online and mobile platforms for sharing content and information, whether hosted by Hope Church or hosted by others. "Social media" refers to social networking services, short-message services, message boards, wikis, podcasts, image/video sharing sites and other methods for sharing real time information among users. Due to the ever-changing speed of social media, this policy applies to all new social media platforms, whether or not they are mentioned. All social media platforms are relevant and included.

Good Practice Guidelines for working with under 18s

As well as adhering to the above guidance, any employee or volunteer at Hope Church working with under 18s should additionally adhere to the guidance below:

- When communicating with youth via social media, team members must adhere to Hope Church's Safeguarding Policy.
- Additionally, employees and volunteers serving in the Children and Youth ministries must keep their professional image in mind at all times. Online conduct, comments, behaviour, etc. affects this image.
- Hope Church discourages youth workers from accepting invitations over Facebook to "friend" youth group members. Similarly they are discouraged from adding young people on their personal accounts to other platforms including (but not exhaustively) Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat.
- Whatsapp and Zoom are the designated forms of 'personal interaction' social media contact agreed by the Church. Contact with young people should only take place with appropriately vetted and checked workers present.
- Where a one to one video call is required, it is good practice where possible to have an additional colleague in the room with the worker and (dependent on the age of the young person) also better to ask if a parent can be in the home of the young person at the same time. Recordings of group calls should not be made unless permission is sought.
- If a one-to-one conversation is instigated by a young person to a youth worker, these conversations should be confidentially reported and to the line manager or youth worker (in the case youth volunteers) and date and time recorded securely. Follow ups to these conversations should ideally include more than one youth worker.

- Make sure all communications are clear and unambiguous. Texting and Whatsapp are best for information rather than conversation. For example, they are for reminders about what's going on at Youth or for organising a mentoring session.
- Don't text young people who are not in your direct pastoral remit - keep texting contact to the group you lead. Don't get into deep and meaningful chats by text.
- Don't use snapchat, as no record of communication can be traced.

Working Online with under 18s specifically during the lockdown period for Covid-19

We recognize the importance of safeguarding not only face to face but also with all online and virtual platforms. As an organisation we will practice within these guidelines:

- Parents/carers give consent for their child under 12 to take part of or be involved in any online platform. (Consent via email – Appendix 1)
- Concerning 12-18 year olds, each young person will need to have some form of written confirmation (via email – Appendix 1) that the parent / carer is happy for their young person to participate in regularly scheduled youth sessions online. Any sessions outside of regular youth times will need additional consent from parents. Parental consent should be securely stored and recorded.
- Records should be kept by anyone leading a session online, outlining the attendees of each session, broad content for each online gathering, and a record of which leaders and volunteers were participating in each session.
- For any online chat with under 18 via the Zoom platform, the waiting room function is to be used always.
- Zoom meetings with youth & children (under 18) are always led by one of the Hope Church youth leaders who all have current Hope Church DBS checks in place. These meetings may be led by just one adult and so will be recorded for the safety and security of everyone involved. These recordings will be kept securely for the time of the lockdown and will not be shared.
- Should a session on any online platform get hacked the leader or host of the session should shut it down immediately and communicate to each of the parents what happened and deal with any pastoral issues that arise from this after this communication.
- General codes of conduct and 'normal' working guidelines to be followed as though you were in a usual context.