

# Guidance on Use of Texting and Email



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Texting and email are very quick and effective methods of communication for those involved in Church activities. Usually this does not include Church personnel and volunteers contacting young people directly, as contact is usually made via their parents/carers. However, there are certain circumstances where contacting children and young people directly may be necessary (e.g. in an emergency or on a trip away); any members of Church personnel and volunteers using this method of communication with children and young people should ensure appropriate safeguards are in place, as there are certain risks associated with the safe and appropriate use of texting and email, which must be managed.

## The risks of text and email messaging for children and young people are:

- Inappropriate access to, use of, or sharing of personal details (names, numbers, email addresses).
- Unwanted contact with children and young people from adults, text bullying by peers, etc.
- Being sent offensive or otherwise inappropriate materials.
- Grooming for sexual abuse.
- Direct contact and actual abuse.

## The risks for adults include:

- Misinterpretation of their communication with children and young people.
- Potential investigation (internal or by statutory authorities).
- Potential disciplinary action.

## Using bulk (or bundled) text and email messaging

A way to minimise the risks above is to use bulk text messages. This is where the same text or email message is sent to several children and young people involved with a particular activity or group. The advantage of this approach is that it presents fewer opportunities for misuse and abuse than personal, one-to-one texting or emailing arrangements between Church personnel, volunteers and children and young people. Therefore, one-to-one texting or emailing should be strongly discouraged and should only occur in exceptional circumstances. The same applies to emailing young people.

## The following guidance is provided to minimise risk to all:

- Consent must be obtained from children and young people and their parents/carers prior to sending the children and young people text or email messages. Parents/carers should be copied in on texts and emails that their child will be sent.
- The children and young people's mobile phone numbers or email addresses should be stored safely and securely, with access only available to the specific, identified members of Church personnel or volunteers. The numbers or details should not be shared with anyone else, and should only be used for the purposes of the text and email messaging system regarding the Church activity.
- All text and email messages must be sent via a bundle to a group of children and young people, i.e. the same standard text message is sent to every member of the group. The text and email messaging system should never be used to send text or email messages on an individual basis (i.e. to just one person).

- All text and email messages sent must make it clear to the children and young people receiving them who has sent the message.
- Children and young people should not be given the opportunity to text or email back to the system. It should only be used as a one-way communication channel.
- The text and email messages that are sent must never contain any offensive, abusive or inappropriate language or language or images that could be misinterpreted.
- When this guidance is being provided in relation to Church-related activities, all of the text or email messages sent, must be directly related to Church activities. The text or email. messaging system and mobile phone numbers must never be used for any other reason or in any other way.
- All of the text and email messages sent should include a sentence at the bottom that provides young people with the opportunity to unsubscribe from receiving further text and email messages.

## Relevant Forms

### SO14

## USEFUL RESOURCES

- [SBNI Online Safety Hub](#)
- [Online Safety Trust Trap](#)