



1.3M GUIDANCE ON THE USE OF MOBILE PHONES AND DIGITAL DEVICES

Those who work with children need to be aware of the opportunities for abuse through the misuse of mobile phones or other devices and messaging. While good use of such media can be beneficial, we must be vigilant and alert to the possibilities of misuse and consequent harm that can result to children. Church personnel must also take care to protect themselves.

- Church personnel involved in youth and children's work should only have children's mobile numbers with parental knowledge and consent and if the nature of their involvement requires them to phone or message children. This practice should be avoided when working with children under 13 years. Such church personnel might include those running a group for older teenagers, or those involved in co-ordinating youth work.
- Written parental consent should be sought in advance if the member of church personnel will be contacting children via mobile phone *(1.3L Template 1)*.
- A method of accountability should be arranged, e.g. also sending to another church person.
- If a member of church personnel has a child's phone number, it should be used only for the purposes it has been given; i.e. church personnel should not share this information.
- Texts should be used for relaying relevant information and not for conversation.
- It is recommended that staff/clergy have a separate phone for work purposes rather than using their personal phone for contacting children.
- A group agreement should address the use of mobile phones during activities and trips, as well as identifying a named member of church personnel as the primary point of communication, including in relation to emergencies.
- Church personnel and children must not send pictures that are obscene, indecent or menacing and should be sensitive about other people's gender, colour, religion, sexual orientation or personal background.
- Church personnel and, where appropriate, children themselves should be made aware that it is a criminal offence to take, make, download, permit to be taken, distribute, show or possess an indecent or sexually explicit image of a child under 18 years of age.
- Where church personnel plan to use electronic devices, such as computers, tablets, games consoles, Smart TVs, etc. as part of their activities to engage the children, it is essential that several additional safety measures are undertaken. The electronic devices being used should have appropriate parental control software installed to ensure that the children do not gain access to inappropriate material. Church personnel should supervise the access to the electronic devices closely to ensure that they are not used inappropriately.