Safeguarding and social media

The internet, social media channels and text messaging are an increasing part of many peoples' work and daily lives, bringing new opportunities, positive working relationships and access to services and agencies. Many organisations have found new ways of working with their clients through social media channels, and many try to address the risk of digital exclusion and provide online access and support.

But some agencies have concerns about workers and volunteers using text messages and social media in their work with children and young people. Staff such as social workers during court proceedings have been threatened and harassed through social media. There is increasing awareness that vulnerabilities: abuse, neglect, mental ill-health; increase a risk of online grooming and exploitation.

In Newcastle the 2015 Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire, This is me, found that of year 8 and year 10 school children:

- 55% of girls and 59% of boys have used an Internet chat room

- 59% nearly two thirds of boys have seen violent or pornographic images

- 24% nearly one in five girls have been asked to send inappropriate images of themselves

The issues around safeguarding may not be new, but the speed, pervasiveness and permanence of the online world creates its own potential for harm.

Actions for your group

1. **Include e-safety social media within your safeguarding policy and procedures and risk assessments**

This will help to keep children and young people safe, help to protect staff and volunteers from putting themselves and their careers at risk, and help to protect the good reputation of your organisation from damage and harm.

2. **Discuss what good practice means for your group and its work**

Your organisation will need to consider the context of your work, the community that you work with, where your workers and volunteers are from, and the pace of change in the social media landscape.

3. **Consider writing down your group's views about acceptable use**

When is it okay or not okay to use your group's IT resources, the internet, social media, and text messaging? This may need to be written separately to your safeguarding procedures but there will be some overlap.

Discussion prompts:
Good practice in work with children and young people

Some organisations recommend keeping work and private lives separate, perhaps creating a separate professional online presence, and using the organisation's Facebook. Other organisations that are embedded within their local community need

to develop approaches that maintain safety and recognise their local connections.

In recognition that most abuse and exploitation takes place in secret, some organisations recommend that all dealings with young people are kept in public. Others recommend that young people are not identified but that staff and volunteers always copy a colleague into communication and keep a record/log.

You should clarify your organisation's position for volunteers, management committee members and workers.

Where workers and volunteers are working in the area in which they live and have grown up, the boundaries between personal and professional lives are as challenging online as in the real world.

Your organisation should draw up its own guidelines.

• One organisation has local workers whose family and friends may also be using the organisation's activities. In a personal capacity they recommend ideally no Facebook friends under 18, but where there are, such as family members, there must be parental knowledge and awareness. All communication with young people in a work capacity must be through the organisation's Facebook Wall

• Other organisations maintain a blanket ban on staff having any Facebook Friends who are under 18, and also a ban on any Facebook Friends who are clients

As a worker ask yourself "am I in a defensible position?" If something bad happens after your contact with a young person…am I in a defensible position?

Make notes, ensure there is a record, analyse the situation, make referrals.

This applies to social media and phone based work with children and young people as much as face to face work.

Discussion prompts:
Your organisation and support for staff and volunteers

Do your staff and volunteers work with clients who might also be neighbours, school mates, or family members? Recognise the specific issues, create guidelines that will address safety and make sure that your staff, volunteers and your organisation are protected.

The permanence of online postings means that your young volunteers and new workers will come with an online history. Many organisations encourage clients to become volunteers and staff, who will also have an online history.

• What chance does your organisation give to young volunteers to recover from foolish or embarrassing postings?

• How does your organisation help potential volunteers and young people clear their online presence and safeguard their future reputation?

• What does your organisation suggest about pre-existing Facebook friends who are also service users?

• What online 'ground rules' do you need to develop to keep your practice safe and your online reputation good?

• Does your organisation support staff and volunteers to avoid having work and their private lives clash in inappropriate ways because of social media use?

• Are there actions your group can take to ensure that the most vulnerable young people do not have their life chances further damaged by digital exclusion?

- Do you regularly include social media use within team meetings and with trustees?

Useful tips

- If you have a work social media profile that is separate to your home/private one, do not link from one to the other

- If your organisation considers a separate professional profile is an appropriate way of working, draw up guidelines for staff to create and monitor their profile

- Regularly check privacy settings, as providers' updates may change or re-set them

- Only reply to private messages from clients, especially children and young people, using your organisation's public platforms, such as the Wall on Facebook. Or meet them if it needs to be a more private conversation

- Copy other staff into your work communications including texts

- Ensure records are kept; do not leave your staff and volunteers open to allegations that cannot be disproved

- Do not use instant messaging which leaves no log and can leave workers open to allegations

- Information marked private may be forwarded easily, even by someone you trust; think about the potential newspaper headlines

- Deleted information can always be retrieved

Resources

Guidelines on-a-page
Northumberland Safeguarding Children Board has written **e-safety social media guidance** for people who work with children and young people. It includes: on-a-page guidelines for appropriate and inappropriate use; and on-a-page examples of best practice, safe practice and poor practice for: social networking; email; images (still and moving); mobile phones; live streaming media; and using the internet.
http://northumberlandlscb.proceduresonline.com/pdfs/esafety_social_media.pdf

Facebook
Flow chart guide to set Facebook privacy settings and location tagging.
www.communitycare.co.uk/2014/09/11/simple-guide-protecting-social-media-privacy-facebook/

Online Compass
A free tool that helps you self-review your organisation's policy and practice.
Register with www.onlinecompass.org.uk

Childnet
Written for young people, it includes a 'consider your online reputation' button.
www.childnet.com/young-people/secondary/hot-topics

CEOP
The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) for advice, help or to make a report. For children aged 5 plus, young people and parents.
www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre

iRights
A framework of five principles for enabling children and young people to access the internet, 'creatively, knowledgeably and fearlessly'.
www.irights.uk

Youth and the Internet
Report for government policy makers.
www.barnardos.org.uk/youth_and_the_internet_report.pdf

Keep yourself up to date
Newcastle CVS information sheets:

- Safeguarding adults

- Safeguarding children

- DBS checks (used to be CRB checks)

- Young people and the Care Act

- Preventing vulnerable people being drawn into terrorism

www.cvsnewcastle.org.uk/publications-and-resources/safeguarding

Newcastle CVS free newsletter:
www.gatesheadcvsnewcastle.org.uk

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