

Digital, Social Media and Online Communication with Children & Young People Policy 2021



Diocese of Cloyne

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Introduction: Rationale for Using Digital, Social Media and Online Communication with Children and Young People

Social media platforms increasingly dominate how people communicate, find information, and access news and entertainment. As our world moves into an increasingly digital and online environment, so have our ministries. This is particularly true for those ministering to youth groups as more young people utilise a wide variety of online, digital and social media platforms as their preferred methods of communication. Indeed, these mediums are essential tools in our efforts to communicate and share the Gospel with the next generation. There is great potential in the utilisation of these platforms to aid Parishes / Youth Ministry in deepening relationships with young people, encouraging them in their faith, and promoting opportunities and events for the Diocese of Cloyne.

However, social media involves challenges for both young people and those who minister to them. The Diocese of Cloyne acknowledges the dangers and potential risks these platforms can pose to both our young people and to our Parish / Youth Ministry personnel. Children and young people must be protected from all forms of online abuse, including such activities as online bullying, grooming and sexting. Thus, transparency, prudence and professionalism must guide our digital communication and online interactions with young people. In this way, we can improve ministry effectiveness while ensuring the privacy and safeguarding of everyone involved.

2.0 Guidelines for Parish / Diocesan Youth Ministry Using Social Media Platforms with Children and Young People (Under 18).

- Diocesan Safeguarding Policy applies in your online communications with children, young people and vulnerable adults, as it does in face-to-face settings.
- In Ireland under the Child Care Act 1991, the Children Act 2001 and the United Nations on the Rights of the Child, a child is defined as anyone under the age of 18.
- The digital age of consent in Ireland is 16 years.

2.1 Facebook / Messenger Age rating 16+ (Digital Age of Consent in Ireland is 16 years)

Facebook is a platform where you can post text, images and videos to your “wall”, as well as promote events. Messenger is the direct messaging (DM) function of Facebook. It has a separate app.

- Any Parish / Diocesan Youth Ministry Facebook account must be used for Parish / Diocesan Youth Ministry purposes only and not as a Parish / Diocesan Youth Ministry personnel personal account.
- All ministry with young people through Facebook must be in line with the Diocesan Code of Conduct for Volunteers and be appropriate:
 - The Facebook account must not be utilised between 10pm and 8am.
 - One to one communication with young people must be kept in the public eye to safeguard both the young person and the adult leader. Communications must be done through the ‘wall’ function and it is advised that this is utilised to reply to any private messages which young people may have sent to the page.
 - Messenger must not be used for individual or group chats.

- All messages must be saved in Messenger (both incoming and outgoing).
- If you are using emojis, they should reflect the information you are communicating. For example, music notes can be used if you are communicating about music /worship. Never use emojis which could be misinterpreted (hearts, lips etc). If in doubt, do not use. Acronyms should not be used as they may be misinterpreted or misconstrued by parents / guardians or young people e.g. LOL, YOLO.
- Parish / Diocesan Youth Ministry personnel are not permitted to direct message or accept/send friend requests to young people from their own personal Facebook account.
- Young people are free to like or follow Parishes / Diocesan Youth Ministry on Facebook however Parishes / Youth Ministry cannot 'follow' any young person back. The accounts the Parish / Diocesan Youth Ministry can 'follow' must be organisations or official Facebook accounts relevant to the youth ministry e.g. Holy Family Mission, Youth 2000.

2.2 Instagram Age rating 13+ (Digital Age of Consent in Ireland is 16 years)

Instagram is a free photo and video sharing app available on iPhone and Android. People can upload photos or videos to our service and share them with their followers or with a select group of friends. They can also view, comment and like posts shared by their friends on Instagram. It has a direct messaging (DM) function.

- Any Parish / Diocesan Youth Ministry Instagram account must be used for Parish / Diocesan Youth Ministry purposes only and not as a Parish / Diocesan Youth Ministry personnel personal account.
- All ministry with young people through Instagram must be in line with the Diocesan Code of Conduct for Volunteers and be appropriate:
 - Photos uploaded onto the Instagram must be in line with the ethos and guiding principles of the Diocese of Cloyne.
 - The account is not to be utilised to showcase the Parish / Diocesan Youth Ministry personnel's own interests.
 - All photos uploaded to Instagram should be stored as per Diocesan GDPR requirements.
 - The Instagram account is not to be utilised after between 10pm and 8am.
 - Young people are free to 'follow' any Parishes / Youth Ministry on Instagram however Parishes / Youth Ministry cannot 'follow' any young person back. The accounts the Diocese of Cloyne Youth Ministry can 'follow' must be organisations or official Instagram accounts relevant to the youth ministry e.g. Net Ministries, Holy Family Mission, Youth 2000.
 - Replying to comments on Instagram should be restricted.
 - Parish / Diocesan Youth Ministry personnel may reply to a comment on the relevant Instagram post only if it is a query about an event.
 - Replying to general comments is not allowed.
 - Any replies in the comments section must not use Emojis or Acronyms e.g. LOL, YOLO, heart emoji, as these may be misinterpreted by parents / guardians or other young people.

- Appropriate ‘hash tags’ are allowed e.g. those related to youth ministry, liturgical seasons, scripture, prayer, saints, inspiring quotes #Christmas #praytherosary #preparetheway.
- Parish / Diocesan Youth Ministry personnel are not permitted to direct message or accept/send follow requests to young people from their own personal Instagram account.
- When posting “Stories” on Instagram, it is recommended to highlight the story and bookmark it in the relevant section, so that all information that has been posted can be accessed at any time and not just for 24 hours.
- Instagram Groups:
 - Instagram Groups allows you to create a specific group of Instagram users, and to send direct messages (DMs), pictures and videos within the group chat.
 - When using Instagram group chats you should be aware that adding people to the group discloses their Instagram handle to the rest of the group, and the written joint consent of children/ young people and parents / guardians must be given for this.
 - If the youth group is made up of both over and under 18’s, a separate Instagram chat group should be set up for both age groups.
 - At least two Parish / Diocesan Youth Ministry designated adults (who have been Garda vetted) must be part of an Instagram group chat. Only vetted leaders can be part of a group with u18’s.
 - As a young person leaves the youth group, they should immediately be deleted from the group Instagram group list.
 - Young people should be given the option to unsubscribe / opt out of the Instagram group chat also. They can also choose to leave the group themselves.
 - Instagram also offers a Video Group Chat option, limited to 6 people. We recommend using Zoom as an online communications platform rather than this option. View zoom policy document available on: www.safeguardingchildrenclayne.ie
 - Breaches of the Online Code of conduct will result in the young person being removed from the group chat. Incidents should be recorded with as much detail as possible immediately after the meeting has ended and stored as per Diocesan GDPR requirements. parents / guardians are to be informed of the breach and consequences.

2.3 Use of Facebook / Instagram or YouTube “Live” by Parish / Diocese

Live-streaming is a beneficial way of reaching out to those in your ministry, but be sure you have a clear purpose for the video and be well-prepared in advance. Be aware that when you go live on any platform, there is no going back to edit this footage – whatever happens is happening in front of a live audience. Before using Facebook or Instagram / YouTube Live, clergy and other contributors, should be aware of the implications of doing so. These include the following:

- Written permission from a young person and their parent / guardian shall be obtained prior to any child or young person featuring in any Facebook / Instagram or YouTube video created on a Parish / Diocesan Youth Ministry account.

- Uploading a video to Facebook/Instagram/YouTube Live means that it is streamed on the internet. Depending on what settings you use, this may mean that anyone who subscribes to your Parish / Diocesan Youth Ministry account may view the video. However, it is not necessarily confined to the account's friends / followers / subscribers.
- Once a live-streamed video is uploaded, the Parish / Diocesan Youth Ministry loses control of that video. While it is possible to delete the video after broadcasting, if they are left on the Parish / Diocesan Youth ministry account, page or channel, they can be saved or shared by individuals who view them with their own friends, followers and / or subscribers.
- Live-streamed videos can be deleted from the social media platform, unless there is a purpose for making them available after the livestream has ended.
- It is possible to block specific users from commenting / spamming on Facebook or Instagram Live for the duration of the feed, and to turn off live chat during a YouTube live stream or block certain words. If you choose not to do this, be aware that comments are not always complementary.

Steps to take when using social media in this way:

- Check the Facebook/Instagram/YouTube privacy settings. The settings dictate who can view the video. These are generally either (i) everyone on Facebook/Instagram; or (ii) the "friends" of the social media account. If you want to direct a particular video to specified individuals, it is also possible to pick the "friends" who you want to see it.
- If you have not disabled live chat when using YouTube live stream, the account administrators must ensure the comments below any video posts are monitored.
- Set a time frame after which the video will be deleted / removed unless you choose to save them. Instagram live stories automatically delete after 24 hours unless you choose to save it to IGTV (Instagram TV) or download it to share to Facebook.

2.4 Twitter Age rating 16+ (Digital Age of Consent in Ireland is 16 years)

Twitter is a platform that allows users to write short posts. It also allows picture and video to be shared, and there is a direct messaging (DM) function.

- Any Parish / Diocesan Youth Ministry Twitter account must be used for Parish / Diocesan Youth Ministry purposes only and not as a Parish / Diocesan Youth Ministry personnel personal account.
- Tweets sent from this account must be in line with the ethos and guiding principles of the Diocese of Cloyne. It is not to be utilised to endorse or promote the Parish's / Diocesan Youth Ministry personnel's own interests.
- All 'tweets' must be saved in the Twitter feed and not deleted.
- All communication must be appropriate:
 - All communication with young people via Twitter must be done publicly and on the 'twitter feed'.
 - The ability for young people to 'direct message' the Parish / Diocesan Youth Ministry Twitter account must be disabled at all times.

- The Twitter account must not be utilised between 10pm and 8am.
- Young people are free to 'follow' Parish / Youth Ministry Twitter account however Parishes or Youth Ministry cannot 'follow' any young person back or comment, like or retweet any of their posts. The accounts the Parish / Youth Ministry can 'follow' must be organisations or official twitter accounts relevant to the youth ministry e.g. @Pope Francis, @Alpha.
- If you are using emojis, they should reflect the information you are communicating. For example, music notes can be used if you are communicating about music /worship. Never use emojis which could be misinterpreted (hearts, lips etc). If in doubt, do not use. Acronyms should not be used as they may be misinterpreted or misconstrued by parents / guardians or young people e.g. LOL, YOLO.
- Appropriate 'hash tags' are allowed e.g. those related to youth ministry, liturgical seasons, scripture, prayer, saints, inspiring quotes, specific Youth Ministry challenge hashtags #Christmas #praytherosary #AshWednesday
- Parish / Diocesan Youth Ministry personnel are not permitted to direct message or accept / send follow requests to young people from their own personal Twitter account.

2.5 Snapchat Age rating 16+ (Digital Age of Consent in Ireland is 16 years)

The use of Snapchat by any Diocesan Group/Parish/Youth Ministry Group is **prohibited**. Snapchat is a picture and video sharing app with an ephemeral nature. This means that the pictures/videos taken and shared are only viewable for up to 10 seconds before they disappear from the recipient's phone. Images and messages cannot be saved on the app. Due to its nature it is impossible to safeguard the use of Snapchat, hence the decision to implement a no use policy in relation to this social media app.

2.6 WhatsApp Age rating 16+ (Digital Age of Consent in Ireland is 16 years)

WhatsApp uses the internet to send messages, images, audio or video. Messages can be sent to individuals or groups.

- WhatsApp can be a great tool for sending group messages between / to young people however written permission from a young person and their parent / guardian shall be obtained first.
- When using WhatsApp group chats you should be aware that adding people to the group discloses their mobile number to the rest of the group, and the consent of children/ young people and parents / guardians must be given for this.
- If the youth group is made up of both over and under 18's, a separate WhatsApp chat group should be set up for both age groups.
- At least two Parish / Diocesan Youth Ministry designated adults (who have been Garda vetted) must be part of a WhatsApp group chat. Only vetted leaders can be part of a group with u18's.
- As a young person leaves the youth group, they should immediately be deleted from the group WhatsApp chat list.
- Young people should be given the option to unsubscribe / opt out of the WhatsApp group chat also.

- WhatsApp allows you to back up your chats, and this should be done through the designated Parish / Diocesan Youth Ministry email account.
- WhatsApp has a “Disappearing Messages” setting, which when turned on by either person in a one-to-one chat or by Group Administrators, this will make new messages disappear from the chat after seven days. Group Administrators should ensure this setting is disabled (turned off).

2.7 Youth Ministry Websites or Web pages

- Parish / Diocesan Youth ministry webpages or websites shall be related to or an extension of the parish / diocesan website. If a parish website is not available, the youth ministry website shall be registered in the name of the parish / diocese.
- Parish / Diocesan Youth Ministry webpages or websites may be utilised for catechesis, encouraging prayer and spiritual growth, ministry event promotions and coverage, sharing relevant resources.
- Parish / Diocesan Youth Ministry websites or webpages must be in line with the ethos and guiding principles of the Diocese of Cloyne.
- A minimum of two adults within the Parish / Diocesan Youth Ministry shall have full access to the website account.
- Parish / Diocesan Youth Ministry websites or webpages shall not contain personal photographs, personal information, or contact information about young people.
- Written permission from a young person and their Parent / Guardian shall be obtained prior to posting any photographs, videos, or other identifying information about young people on a Parish / Diocesan Youth Ministry webpage or website.

2.8 Online Video and Music Sharing Accounts: e.g. YouTube, Vimeo, Spotify, iTunes

- Parish / Diocesan Youth Ministry digital online video and music accounts may be utilised for catechesis, event promotions, sharing resources, encouraging prayer or evangelization. It is not to be utilised to endorse or promote the Parish / Diocesan Youth Ministry personnel’s own interests.
- Parish / Diocesan Youth Ministry digital video and music uploaded, shared or recommended must be in line with the ethos and guiding principles of the Diocese of Cloyne.
- A minimum of 2 designated adults in the Parish / Diocesan Youth Ministry shall have full access to / administrate the digital online video or music account.
- Parish / Diocesan Youth Ministry channels or accounts shall not contain personal photographs, personal information, or contact information about young people.
- Written permission from a parent / guardian and young person shall be obtained prior to posting any photographs, videos, or other identifying information about young people in a Parish / Diocesan Youth Ministry online video.
- If a video has a “comment” function enabled, administrators shall monitor comments closely and react quickly should any comment turn inappropriate. Comments may also be disabled.

- Replying to comments should be restricted. Parish / Diocesan Youth Ministry personnel may reply to a comment only if it is a query about an event. Replying to general comments is not allowed.
- Young people are free to 'follow' or subscribe to a Parish / Youth Ministry video channel / music account, however Parishes or Youth Ministry cannot 'follow' (or subscribe to) any young person.
- The accounts / channels the Parish / Youth Ministry can 'follow' or subscribe to must be organisations or official accounts relevant to Youth Ministry. e.g. Youth 2000 Ireland.
- Parish / Diocesan Youth Ministry personnel are not permitted to subscribe to young people from their own personal accounts or share their personal account information with them.

2.9 Email, Texts

- Parish / Diocesan Youth Ministry emails and texts may be utilised for catechesis, event promotions, sharing resources, encouraging prayer. They are not to be utilised to endorse or promote the Parish / Diocesan Youth Ministry personnel's own interests.
- Texting / emailing should only be used for communication, not conversation.
- Only an officially designated Diocesan / Parish Youth Ministry email account or mobile number should be used to send emails / texts. Parish / Diocesan Youth Ministry personnel should never use their own personal email account or provide a young person their personal contact details.
- Parish / Diocesan Youth Ministry texts and / or emails must be in line with the ethos and guiding principles of the Diocese of Cloyne.
- Direct communication with individual children and young people (for example, asking them to attend a choir practice or a Zoom Call) is to be done through their Parents / Guardians rather than directly to the children and young people.
- It is permissible to send messages (by text or email) to older adolescents who are still minors (16 and 17 year olds), under certain conditions:
 - the young people and their Parents / Guardians have given written consent
 - the messages come from Parish / Diocesan Youth Ministry accounts
 - copies of emails are sent to their Parents / Guardians
 - individual email addresses are to be put in the Blind Carbon Copy (BCC) section so people cannot access each other's email addresses
 - a second leader must always receive a Carbon Copy (CC) of the email
- Using bundled text and e-mail messaging, where the same message is sent to a group of young people, can minimise risks associated with this form of communication.
 - Written consent must be obtained from the young person and their parent / guardian prior to using this method of communication.
 - The contact details for a young people receiving such a message must not be visible to other recipients (use BCC function).

- The young people's contact details must be stored securely as per Diocesan GDPR requirements.
 - All texts or email messages must clearly identify who has sent the message.
 - All text and email messages sent must include an opportunity for the young people to "unsubscribe" from receiving further text and email messages.
 - The texts and emails sent from this service must never contain any offensive, abusive or inappropriate language.
- Texts or emails should never contain personal information about a child or young person.
 - The contact numbers and email addresses for the identified young people should only be used for information sharing about Parish / Diocesan Youth ministry.
 - Do not respond to emails / texts from young people other than those directly related to Youth Ministry matters. Do not use text or emails for personal conversation, sending pictures, jokes or other items of a personal nature.
 - In emergency circumstances where a call, text message or email has to be sent to a minor (for example, if a young person has become separated from the group) follow this up with a telephone call to their parent / guardian to make them aware of the content.

2.10 Online Communication Platforms e.g. Zoom

Follow guidance as outlined in policy document: Using an online Communication Platform with Children and Young People – Zoom, available on www.safeguardingchildrenclayne.ie

3.0 General Guidelines

- Take responsibility for what you write or post, and assume everything is public. On the internet, everything is visible, and everything is stored. Nothing you say will be forgotten or hidden.
- Be careful when commenting or liking posts when using the Parish / Diocesan Youth Ministry account, since anything you say can be seen as the official words of the Church / Parish or Diocese.
- Be transparent: identify yourself clearly and do not use pseudonyms. Young people must also use their own first name as their user name (e.g. not a gaming name).
- There must be at least two administrators for each social media app to allow for rapid response, monitoring and updating.
- Be aware of privacy settings: Use secure passwords and don't click on links you are unsure about. Where possible, the settings should be set up so that posts can be reviewed before being made public.
- Monitor Content / Comments: Postings to be monitored regularly by a named agreed administrator(s). If the administrators deem comments (or other content) that are posted to the Parish / Diocesan Youth Ministry social media accounts or pages to be unsuitable or offensive, they must take action that may include hiding, deleting or reporting comments, or blocking

users. Reasons for the removal of comments / content should be explained to the person who posted the content.

- Always comply with copyright laws and data protection requirements when posting anything on Diocesan social media accounts.
- It is requested that the "no tagging" option be set on all social media (including use of handles/profile names of young people).
- Be mindful of requesting young people to join group video chats or share video content from their home. Some may feel uncomfortable sharing their home environment. Other family members, personal information etc. may also be visible. Certain platforms (e.g. Zoom) enable users to use generic backgrounds when sharing video content. Encourage people to choose this option where possible and/or provide alternative means of connecting for young people who are uncomfortable with group video chats or sharing video content. Young people and adult leaders should only use this online platform from a public part of the house i.e. not a bedroom or bathroom, mindful that other people who are not part of the ministry should not be visible on camera.
- Appropriate dress code must be adhered to.
- Parish / Diocesan Youth Ministry apps should be updated, as required, to benefit from the latest security and privacy options.
- Participant's options should be limited to commenting only (if this feature is to be enabled) and not posting of pictures or videos.
- Young people must be made aware of who they can go to if they need to report any problems or concerns while using Parish / Diocesan Youth Ministry online platforms and social media.
- If there is a safeguarding concern, contact the Diocesan Designated Liaison Person: 086 6362480. Full list of contact available on the diocesan website: www.safeguardingchildrenclayne.ie
- These guidelines, policy and procedures will be reviewed regularly and updated in light of feedback and experience.

4.0 Online Code of Conduct for Young People

- **Be kind:** No judgmental attitudes or bullying. Negative, hurtful or derogatory comments will not be tolerated. The group should be a safe space for members to express themselves.
- **Respect others:** Respect the different opinions of everyone in the group and listen. Healthy debates are natural, but kindness is required. Keep discussions to discussion time. Follow the instructions of the leader(s).
- **Respect privacy:** No photo-taking, screenshots or screen recordings of meeting. Do not share group codes or passwords with people outside the group. Do not tag other people in photos or posts on social media without their permission.
- **Be honest:** Make a leader aware if you are feeling uncomfortable due to a person or topic being discussed. If you need a break do not be afraid to ask.
- **No self-promotions or spam:** Self-promotion, spam and irrelevant links aren't allowed.

- **Respect confidentiality and do not gossip:** if you are telling a story about someone, ask yourself, “Is this my story to tell?” Do not talk about other people without permission: this includes your family members. Always respect confidentiality: what is said in the group, stays in the group, unless there is a safeguarding concern.
- **Appropriate dress code and surroundings:** Only use the online platform from an appropriate location i.e. bedrooms and bathrooms are not appropriate. Make sure people around you cannot be seen on camera unless they are part of this group. Dress appropriately e.g. pyjamas are not appropriate.
- **Breach of the Code:** Anyone who breaks the rules or acts inappropriately while on the online platform will be removed from the meeting.

5.0 Template 1: Summary checklist:

Issue	Completed by and date	Approved by and date
Step 1- Initial Approval		
Which technology/platform will be used?		
Ask the opinion of parents and young people about using this platform		
Complete risk assessment for the activity. Instruction on how to complete the risk assessment as well as the template are available on the Diocesan Website http://www.safeguardingchildrencloyne.ie		
Group Leader to inform Director of Safeguarding about the activity. Diocesan Safeguarding Committee to review risk assessment and provide approval for the online activity.		
Step 2 - Planning		
Recruit Leaders for the activity in line with Diocesan recruitment procedures and supervision ratios.		
Leaders to familiarise themselves with the platform and the relevant diocesan policies.		
Leaders to complete code of conduct for working online with young people.		
At least one Leader to attend Safeguarding Training		
Parents/guardians and young people to complete consent forms		
Plan for session- including timings, alternative facilitation skills, resources etc		
Step 3 – Running the Ministry		
Follow guidelines for the platform as outlined in this policy.		
Step 4 - Evaluation		
Ministry leaders meet regularly review platform		
Complete an evaluation with young people		
Seek views of parents/guardians on ministry, effectiveness and safety		