Using Modern Technologies Safely with Children
Oakhall Church ICT Safety Policy

Definitions and aims
Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are electronic devices such as personal computers (PCs), mobile phones, Smartphones, Personal Digital Assistants, games consoles and digital cameras that allow communication via websites, email, Instant Messenger, voice and texts. As those working with children and young people we want to make the most of these technologies but ensure they are used appropriately and responsibly. This ICT safety policy will ensure children and young people are protected and the integrity of workers safeguarded.

Email
When using email to communicate with children and young people, workers should:
- Obtain parental agreement first.
- Use clear, unambiguous language to reduce the risk of misinterpretation. Workers should never use terms such as 'lol' to round things off.
- Ensure all messages can be viewed if necessary by the worker's supervisor and this policy is explained to children and young people. This can help deter bullying, insulting or abusive emails.
- Use their official Oakhall email address (available to group leaders).

Giving advice and confidentiality
It is entirely appropriate to offer general advice and support, but counselling should only be done by those qualified to give it. It is important to respect the rights and opinions of parents. Workers should encourage young people to discuss issues with their parents.

Chat & Messenger Services (e.g. Facebook, Skype)
Chat is a great way to engage with young people but workers should consider the following:
- Encourage children to use moderated chat rooms that will block inappropriate messages.
- Care needs to be taken with regard to language, content and frequency of communication. These conversations should be kept brief and there will be an agreed curfew (no communication between 10pm and 8.00am). Care will be taken to avoid communicating during school / work hours.
- To ensure accountability and safeguard integrity, workers should save significant conversation as a text file as well as keep a log of when and with whom they communicated. This should be explained to children and young people.

Transferring / sending files
Workers will ensure that only legal and non-offensive content is sent / transferred and a log kept of significant files. Anti-virus software and a firewall will be installed on computers being used.

Mobile Phones
These are the most used communication tools. It is important for workers to remember:
- Not every child or young person has the use of a mobile phone and, even if they do, parents may not want the worker to have the number. It is important therefore to have alternative means of communication.
- Where appropriate use group rather than individual texting.
- Workers should take care with the language they use, avoiding ambiguous abbreviations e.g. 'lol' (could mean 'laugh out loud' or 'lots of love') and always end with their name.
- Any texts / conversations that raise concerns should be saved and shown to the group leader.
- There will be an agreed curfew (no texting between 10.00pm and 8.00am) and care will be taken not to communicate during school / work hours.

- All leaders / volunteers should ensure that consent is obtained before taking photos and ensure that all images are stored in accordance with Data Protection Act principles. Images should be downloaded from the worker's phone to the organisation's computer and kept securely.

Internet use

Where internet access is provided, parents / carers, children and young people should sign a 'user' agreement which explains what is acceptable / unacceptable online activity.

Examples of what would be classified as unacceptable behaviour:
- Searching for and/or entering pornographic, racist or hate-motivated websites.
- Downloading, forwarding on and/or burning onto CD any music, images or movies from the internet where permission has not been granted by the copyright holders.
- Disclosing any personal information e.g. addresses (postal, email or messenger), telephone numbers, bank details. This includes personal information about others.
- Passing on gossip or unpleasant / nasty comment

Children and Young People

Every child/young person will be made aware of the ICT Safety Policy that Oakhall church and its workers follow. Not only parents/carers, but also children and young people have a right to
decide whether they want a worker to have their email address or mobile phone number and won't be pressurised into divulging information they would rather keep to themselves.

Parents and Carers

When a child or young person joins a group / activity, a rider will be included on the general consent form the parent/carer signs, i.e. that ICTs are operating and may be used to communicate with their child. Oakhall Church's ICT Safety Policy will be attached to this consent form. If the parent/carer requests their child is not communicated with via ICTs, this will be respected and an alternative found.

A high value will be placed on good relationships with young people's parents and parents will be kept informed about activities and events, times, changes of plans etc.

Websites and Photographs

Any website related to Oakhall Church's activities will be careful to ensure the safety of children and young people as follows:
- Children will not be identified by surname or other personal details such as e-mail, postal addresses, telephone etc.
- When using photographs of children and young people, we will endeavour to use group pictures. If a photograph of an individual child or young person is used, we will avoid personal details.
- We will obtain written consent from parents or carers before using photographs on a website or Facebook page.

Helping children develop e-safety skills

Children and young people can be vulnerable to unscrupulous individuals who wish to harm them. We will seek to involve parents/carers by offering help and advice on the use of the internet in the home and maintain on-going dialogue about emerging technologies their children may be using.

This policy can be found at: http://oakhallchurch.org.uk/?page_id=592

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