

Social Media Guidelines

All digital communications must comply with the same Safeguarding policies as all other EDOT entities. The following guidelines apply commonly accepted principles of healthy boundaries for social networking, communication, online forums and gaming.

1. Implement consistent privacy settings that respect personal boundaries with all participants across all platforms.

- a. Remember that privacy settings do not ensure confidentiality.
- b. Each church/school/organization should develop and publish agreed upon privacy settings that staff and volunteers will use, and make that information available to parishioners, teachers, students, parents, and employees.

2. Be Accountable

- a. Adults (parents) should be aware of how leaders utilize social media platforms.
- b. Communication should be with groups, in public areas rather than in private messages. This includes image sharing.
- c. **Youth Formation Leaders:** When electronic pastoral communications are of a potentially harmful nature, they should be saved and disclosed to supervising clergy and, as appropriate, to parents. (Examples: bullying; abuse; etc.)
- d. Ministry presence on social media platforms should have more than one administrator.

3. Social media is rarely appropriate for a sensitive matter that requires pastoral care and attention. In those instances, a face to face meeting or phone call is preferable, as it allows for an assessment of tone and demeanor that can be helpful in evaluating the situation and determining both the urgency and appropriateness of a response. When received communication raises concerns or questions it must be shared with a ministry leader.

4. Frequently review your accessible content and photos. Keep informed about new and emerging social media platforms.

5. Online Groups are required to follow the same Safeguarding policies as all other EDOT entities. Youth Ministers, note item 2.c. above. In group communication platforms, leaders should create covenants to govern group communication, addressing:

- a. appropriate & inappropriate language and behavior; profane or derogatory language is forbidden
- b. who may join and/or view group activity
- c. content that can be posted/published on the site or page
- d. how images will be taken and shared
- e. consequences for breaking the covenant: removal from group
- f. mandatory reporting rules

6. Any inappropriate material posted in online groups should be removed from the page, but should be saved the administrator and reported to the ministry leader to be addressed or reported as necessary.

7. When video chatting, a leader should be mindful of appropriate attire and surroundings, as they are visible to the viewer. One-on-One video chatting should follow the same Safeguarding guidelines as when meeting with people face to face. Video chatting should not occur behind closed doors.

8. If posting photos of children online or in any publication, obtain a photo release from parents. (This should be done annually for schools and programs). Do not provide personal or identifying information about the children or youth pictured.

The following **Photo Release** wording may be added to school and program registration:

"I understand that photos or videos of my child and others may be taken during Sunday school and other church/school events. I consent to the use of my child's photo or likeness in promotional materials such as church/school website and other social media outlets. I understand that my child's identifying information will not be provided unless I give permission at a later time."

9. Be aware that all communications sent digitally are not confidential and potentially may be shared or reposted to other platforms or people without an individual's permission or knowledge.

10. Use prudent judgment in the timing of your communications. For example, consider work hours, school hours, meal times, vacations and sleep schedules.

11. Reporting: Laws regarding mandated reporting of suspected child abuse or exploitation of children, youth, elders and vulnerable adults apply in the virtual world just as they do in the physical world. Report suspected abuse to the [Texas Department of Family and Protective Services](https://www.dhs.gov/tx): 800.252.5400.