

Quick Tips for Online Youth Work



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The COVID-19 pandemic is creating new challenges for the youth work sector. We are asked: how can we reach young people digitally? How can we do it safely? What activities can we arrange online when our youth centres are closed? Safeguarding the young people you work with and keeping yourself safe are still top priorities.

Provide a safe youth work community & support social connections

You are creating a safe community where young people can continue to engage with each other online in a safe way with your support. It gives them a sense of 'belonging', supports their mental health and wellbeing and contributes to positive self-esteem. Young people can be used to being around 150-1000+ young people a day – this is a big transition for them socially and for us as youth workers. Isolation may be great for some but for a lot of young people this can be very stressful and they need you to reassure them. There are days that will be good and others less so.

Best Practice

- **Work, personal and private are not the same** – decide what platform to use and create a youth work account in line with your organisation's social media/online platform policy and procedure. Sign up with your work details not your personal details. More than one person should be able to administer the accounts
- **Review and update your privacy settings on your personal social media accounts.** If young people contact you there – signpost them to your work account
- **Child Protection** – follow your organisation's policy and procedure and try to avoid lone- working (even online) so that safeguarding and accountability can be maintained – see template Child Protection Policy
- **Use the common sense approach** – if something doesn't feel right then don't do it and report any concerns to your Child Protection Officer
- **If young people disclose information or you have concerns** - follow your child protection policy and report concerns to your child protection officer
- **Maintain appropriate behaviour** - see template Code of Conduct
- **Create consistent times for staff undertaking youth work online and promote these times with clear safe guidelines with your young people**

Best Practice

Work, personal and private are not the same

While communication through social media networks is to be done only on a *work account* with the young people you work with and not on your *personal account*, it is a good reminder not to be drawn into *private* conversations. In many cases, written conversations on social platforms can be easily discovered via search engines and through fellow contacts. There's nothing stopping someone from screen grabbing your conversations and sending them on to a wider audience.

As a general rule of thumb, think of the BBC, your family and your boss. Don't say anything you wouldn't be comfortable seeing quoted on the BBC, being asked about by your family or having to justify to your boss.

Your Personal Privacy

As an extension of the above, it's important that you are aware of your personal privacy settings on the social networks that you use. Most networks offer various levels of privacy, so familiarise yourself with them and be aware about what you share online.

Child Protection

You should be familiar with your organisation's policy. As per the policy, your organisation works extensively with young people and it is your duty to protect them online.

- Do not engage with the young people you work with on any personal social media accounts. This is to protect you as much as the young people that might try to get in touch with you.
- If a young person that you work with professionally approaches you on your personal account online, decline any friendship or connection requests and, if appropriate, refer them to your official Youth Worker account. An example of wording could be:

"Thanks for getting in touch, but as this is my personal social media account it's not appropriate for us to connect. If you'd like get involved with (your organisation's name) and all our news, you can follow the official Twitter account or like the official Facebook page."

The common sense approach

These are your work social media accounts, but just like anything else, it's helpful to have a common sense approach:

- Arguments are quite often counter-intuitive online. Sometimes it's best just to avoid them completely.
- Respect the law and be courteous to other people. Don't say things that could get you into trouble further down the line.
- Use your best judgement. If you're about to publish something that makes you uncomfortable or you're not sure about, take some time and think over whether it's what you really want to say.
- Make sure you know the privacy settings on your social media accounts.
- Don't disclose personal information like phone numbers, addresses and other sensitive details to a public network.
- Once you have posted content to the web, any mistakes become a matter of public record. There's no point trying to cover it up so the quicker you stand corrected the better perceived it will be by the people who are reading what you have to say.

Appropriate behaviour

- Work social media use should be restricted to your agreed work time and this should be clear to the young people you work with.
- Obviously, bullying and harassment of staff members, volunteers or young people on social media will not be tolerated by your organisation or Youth Scotland.

What's definitely off limits

Treat communicating on social media just like real life. It's not appropriate to discuss you or your organisation's:

- confidential information
- financial information
- embargoed stories

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- anything that may bring your youth organisation into disrepute
 - personal information of staff members, volunteers or young people

You will be subject to your youth organisation's disciplinary proceedings. So steer clear.

Useful links

[European Guidelines for Digital Youth Work](#)

[Child Protection Policy \(Template\)](#)

[Code of Conduct \(Template\)](#)

[Zoom \(Video Tutorials\)](#)