



Guidelines For Online Communication

The Coronavirus Pandemic restrictions undoubtedly resulted in increased usage of online platforms to stay in touch. While there are amazing benefits to these platforms for educational, professional and personal use, some aspects need to be considered when communicating with these platforms.

This guide should be read in conjunction with your current organisations Social Media Policy and Communicating with Minors Guidelines.

Regardless of the platform being used before sharing content or forwarding on a message to a group or other contacts, STOP and ask yourself

- “Why am I sharing this?”
- “Does this content fit within the guidelines for which this group was created?”
- “How could this content be interpreted by others?”
- “Does this content reflect the ethos of our organisation?”

*For messages that have been forwarded on to you, before re-sharing STOP, check the source and ensure the content is accurate. Again ask the above questions.

General Advice

- The digital age of consent in Ireland is 16 years. For those under 16 years who wish to use any online service or platform which collects and/or processes their personal information, parental permission is required. Hence, WhatsApp’s minimum age increase from 13+ to 16+. For more information see Data Protection Act 2018 <https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/act/2018/7/eng/enacted/a0718.pdf> and <https://www.dataprotection.ie/>
- Be mindful of requesting people especially youth 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 enable users to use generic backgrounds when sharing video content. Encourage people to



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choose this option where possible and/or provide alternative means of connecting for youth who are uncomfortable with group video chats or sharing video content.

- Remind those creating accounts to activate Two-Step Verification/Two-Factor Authentication for all accounts (where available). This is an extra layer of security for their account, requiring a code in addition to a password to access their account. Remember to print off the back up codes when setting this up.
 1. Two Step Verification WhatsApp <https://faq.whatsapp.com/26000021>
 2. Two Factor Authentication Instagram
<https://help.instagram.com/566810106808145>
 3. Two Factor Authentication Snapchat
<https://support.snapchat.com/en-US/article/enable-login-verification>
- Update all apps as required to benefit from the latest security and privacy options.
- Digital wellbeing features are also available for many popular Apps, allowing users to control how much time they spend on that App, see their daily activity, turn off notifications and set reminders to take a break. Encourage people to look after their mental health online by accessing the platforms wellbeing features (where available)
 1. Digital Wellbeing TikTok
<https://www.tiktok.com/safety/resources/digital-wellbeing?lang=en>
 2. Instagram Wellbeing <https://wellbeing.instagram.com/digital%20>
 3. Snapchat Here for You Tool, which shows resources from expert localized partners when you search for certain topics related to mental health, anxiety, stress etc.
<https://support.snapchat.com/en-US/news/safety-first-news>



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Checklist

1. Are the platforms we are encouraging people (especially youth) to use Age Appropriate?
2. For those under 16 years, have I asked youth to discuss the platform/s with parents and seek parental permission?
3. For those under 16 years, have I provided parents with updated information guides on the platform's we are using with youth, so they can understand the associated benefits and risks?
Common Sense Media <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/>
and National Online Safety UK <https://nationalonlinesafety.com/guides> offer up-to-date guides and advice regarding current popular Apps.
4. Have I informed people of the privacy settings of the platforms I am encouraging them to use?
5. Have I set clear guidelines on what is acceptable/unacceptable to share on the platforms we are using?
6. Am I connecting people through a platform who would not have been in contact previously (e.g. the creation of a group where all members now have access to contact details of all other members)? If so, have I gained consent for their personal information to be shared in this way?

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

Instagram's Privacy Settings and Information contains instructions on how to control a number of aspects on your account including filtering out comments you do not want to appear on your posts on Instagram, turning off comments for Instagram posts and removing Instagram images from Google search. These privacy settings can be accessed in their Help Centre under 'Managing My Account'. Link <https://help.instagram.com/196883487377501>

If you are encouraging people to use this platform, it would be advisable to remind them of the privacy setting Instagram offers and make sure they know how to block (detailed instructions in their Help Centre under Privacy and Safety Centre. Link <https://help.instagram.com/426700567389543>)



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and how to report issues (detailed instructions in their Help Centre under Privacy and Safety Centre. Link <https://help.instagram.com/372161259539444>)

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

The Dioceses Social Media policy does not encourage WhatsApp for any youth ministry, however it is important that you are aware of the following;

WhatsApp Privacy settings enable you to control your visibility when using WhatsApp, who can add you to a group chat, who can see your profile picture and whether or not contacts can see if you have read their messages/or when you were last online. You can also block contacts and report issues. Link to WhatsApp Privacy Settings <https://www.whatsapp.com/privacy>

A big issue on any online platform is the spreading of misinformation. You may have already come across a number of 'warning messages' which are circulating on WhatsApp. If a message has been forwarded on to more than 5 people, a double arrow icon will be present ➡️. WhatsApp have now introduced new stricter limits on forwarding messages.

If encouraging youth to use WhatsApp, remind them to secure their privacy settings and check out WhatsApp's advice on helping to "prevent the spread of rumours and fake news" Link <https://faq.whatsapp.com/26000216>

TikTok. Age rating 13+ (Digital Age of Consent in Ireland is 16 years)

TikTok's Safety Tools enable you to make an account private, control who can send you messages, control who can comment on your videos, delete comments, block and report issues etc. Link to TikTok's Safety Centre <https://www.tiktok.com/safety/tools>

To help parents understand what TikTok is about and the associated risks, Common Sense Media have put together a Parent's Guide. If you are encouraging youth to access this platform, it would be



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advisable to encourage both youth and parents to access TikTok's Safety Centre and check out
Common Sense Media's Guide Link

<https://www.commonsensemedia.org/blog/parents-ultimate-guide-to-tiktok>

Disclaimer

The information supplied in this document is intended as a guide, it does not replace the importance of parental involvement and supervision of their child's online activities. Links to external sites are provided as a convenience and for informational purposes only. They do not constitute an endorsement or an approval by MGMS Training Limited, of any of the products, services or opinions of the corporation/organisation/individual. MGMS Training Limited bears no responsibility for the accuracy, legality or content of the external site or for that of subsequent links. Links correct at time of publication 25/04/2020.