

Social Networking Sites and Scouting



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Social networking offers a world of possibilities to Scouting. Many young people in Scouting are already users of sites such as Facebook and Twitter

However, it is essential to ensure that you keep both yourself and young people safe online and, as an adult in Scouting, you have a key role to play in actively promoting these safety messages.

A common-sense approach

While social network profiles are easy to set up and use, it is important that you keep a professional distance online, just as you would in the 'offline' world.

Think carefully about how any digital communication might appear to a third party. Compared with a conversation in the real world, technology increases the potential for messages to be seen out of context, misinterpreted or forwarded to others. The use of sarcasm and innuendo are not appropriate and it is essential to remember that you are in a position of trust.

If you have a website or have set up a social networking site for your Scout Group, bear in mind that once you place something there, it is in the public domain, which means people can access it, change it and share it with others.

Guidance for adults

- Remember you are in a position of trust as a volunteer.
- Remember that some sites have an age restriction (i.e. Facebook has a minimum age of 13 years)
- Conduct yourself in an appropriate way as you would face to face - be aware of what you say and how you say it.
- Don't engage in one-to-one conversations with young people via chat facilities or instant messaging - this is the same as going into a private room with a young person and closing the door.
- Do not provide personal details about young people on your website or social networking group (this includes school name, email address, ID, etc).
- Always ensure you have parental permission to use any photos of young people and only use their first names on any caption.
- Only use appropriate photos on your site, the sort that you would be happy putting on a public notice board - remember that everyone can view them.
- If you are concerned about the way a young person is attempting to contact you, report it immediately to your line manager.
- If you need to email or text young people, always copy the message to another adult from your Group or Unit and if sending e-mails to groups of people use the 'BC' facility to avoid sharing e-mail addresses.
- Don't use your personal social networking account to communicate with young people.
- Monitor places where interaction occurs including walls, discussions boards, comments on photos, tagging of pictures and 'Group' or 'Fan Pages'.
- Only set up pages for events, activities or groups for which you are responsible.

The Scout Association

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- If you sign yourself up to social networking sites you need to be aware that content is speedily updated. Photos can be tagged and posted on your account.
- Use separate profiles and communication routes for email or social networking to keep contact with any young people in Scouting and your private life separate.
- ALL communications with Beaver or Cub Scouts should be done through their parents or carers, not directly.
- Remember the Young People First, Code of Behaviour (Yellow Card) at all times.
- Do not post inappropriate images of yourself online which send out the wrong impression and make you vulnerable.
- Remember that online friends are just that and if they are not known to you in the real world, they may be lying about who they are.
- Children and young people should never meet up with a person they have met online unless they take a trusted adult with them.
- Think before opening files from people you do not know in the real world. They may contain anything from a virus to an inappropriate image or film and should be deleted.
- Know how to block someone online and report them to the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) if you feel uncomfortable. Save the www.clickceop.net website to your favourites so that you can report any suspicious behaviour straight away.

Safety for young people

Most children and young people assume they are safe when using the internet because they are in their own home. They will usually assume that the person they are chatting with is who they say they are and most of the time this is true.

However, the only way to protect young people is to teach them to understand the online environment – including the risks it poses – so that they can learn to stay safe themselves. This is even more important now that the internet is available on many mobile phones.

It's a good idea to share this basic advice with young people:

- Never give out personal information to online friends. This includes an instant messaging ID, email address, mobile number, school name and any pictures of you, your family and friends.
- If something is published online, anyone can access it, change it or share it with others. Keep social network profiles private.
- Use webcams with caution and only with family and friends who are already known in the real world, as images can be copied, changed and shared.

Training and advice

CEOP has developed an education programme for 11 to 16 year-olds, called Thinkuknow. This can be used as part of the Scout or Explorer Scout programme. For details contact your local Safeguarding Awareness Co-ordinator or the Safeguarding Team at Gilwell Park - safeguarding@scouts.org.uk

The Scout Association has also produced a range of leaflets for Beavers, Cubs, Scouts and Explorers called 'Stay Safe' which include advice for young people when they are online. These are available from the Scout Information Centre.

Further information

For further information visit:

www.thinkuknow.co.uk
www.scouts.org.uk/safeguarding