

A guide to Pastoral Contacts for ministers in a virtual world

BEING SAFE AND TRANSPARENT ONLINE

During this period of restrictions brought about by the Corona Virus a number of ministers have been increasing their pastoral work through virtual online means and requests have been made for simple guidance about what to be aware of so we have produced a short guide with do's and don'ts. If you have any questions please contact your DSO or the Connexional Safeguarding Team.

Pastoral contacts and on-line meetings

- Ensure you are using reputable software (Zoom, Skype etc.) that is encrypted to help prevent malicious interference by others. Make sure you set and review your privacy settings use passwords wherever possible.
- *YouTube* is not an appropriate platform for interactive communication although it would be appropriate to post information for a large number of people e.g. a prayer, pre-recorded worship.
- If possible, use a Methodist Church email account. Try not to use your own personal email/online accounts.
- When hosting a meeting, ensure you are the first one online and the last one to leave.
- Be clear about your remit and agree rules and boundaries if doing group/conference chats so everyone is clear about what is expected. An email covering this could be sent out in advance.
- Make a log of group calls i.e. who was present, how long the contact lasted, a brief description of the nature of the meeting and any areas of concern. Keep this secure.
- Most video conferencing software allows the session host to record the meeting, but this would require separate permission for data capture and there are additional considerations around storage, GDPR etc. We recommend that you do not record meetings.
- Do not set up private, one to one, meetings with children, young people or adults who may be vulnerable. You will need parental consent to include children in any virtual meeting space. It is

essential that parents/carers are on board and willing to have a supervisory presence during meetings. Use the same principles as for face-to-face contacts, including having more than one adult present when meeting children online.

- Do not to give out very personal information or seek personal information about others.
- Do not post photographs of anyone without their written consent (verbal consent would be sufficient if it was a staff member).
- If the group call is a virtual staff meeting, minutes can be taken, if agreed in advance and circulated to participants as for a face-to-face meeting.
- You should always maintain confidentiality, unless there are safeguarding concerns.

On-line Forums

- Think carefully about anything you post on line. Be mindful of what you say, how you say it, and how it could be interpreted. Would you say this in a face-to-face conversation? Could it compromise you or the Methodist Church?
- Be careful about endorsing a post by someone else, as it could appear that you are endorsing everything they are saying, when other things they have said may be offensive to others.
- If you see anything posted on-line that concerns you, you must take the additional step of talking to your minister in oversight, line manager or District Safeguarding Officer (DSO). Inappropriate posts on social media can be part of a larger spectrum of issues (family abuse, peer-to-peer abuse, severe mental health concerns etc.) and other organisations may be aware of these.
- Report anything you consider to be offensive to whatever online platform you are using - if you need help with this contact your DSO.

Using Email as a means of reaching out to people

- Any emails sent to multiple people should have their individual email addresses put into the BCC section so emails addresses are kept confidential.

- Be alert to fraudulent emails and links, beware of opening attachments from email accounts you are unsure are valid or where the content of the email from a known account is just a hyperlink

Safeguarding

If someone says something that concerns you and they are part of an online group arrange to speak with them outside of the group so you can obtain further information and decide if any further action needs to be taken. **You should always consult with your DSO.** If you are unable to contact your DSO, get in touch with the Safeguarding Casework Supervisor who covers your district (contact details at the end of this document).

Safeguarding concerns and disclosures of abuse reported through a social networking site must be dealt with in accordance with The Methodist Church Safeguarding Policy, Procedures and Guidance. Please make sure you contact your DSO in the first instance. If urgent, contact the police and/or your local social care agency.

SAFEGUARDING CASEWORK SUPERVISORS

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