

Online Communication Guidance



Document Owner Lead Safeguarding Officer

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Primary Document Family B. Staying Safe

Additional Document Family D. Data & Communications
H. Membership, Volunteering & Complaints

Applies To

☒ Volunteers	☒ Staff
☒ Groups & Districts	☒ Centres & Campsites
☒ Contractors & Partners	☒ Projects & Events
	☒ DFs

Background

Woodcraft Folk makes use of social media and other online communications at a local and UK-wide level to:

- Create an identity for our organisation and groups online
- Drive attendance and attract new members
- Promote events, training, campaigns and volunteering opportunities
- Promote its aims and principles
- Communicate with groups and individuals
- Undertake campaigning linked to our aims and principles

The benefits to the organisation of communicating online should be carefully weighed against the increased risk this can present to children and young people, and these risks must be managed appropriately. Woodcraft Folk's responsibility to safeguard children and young people extends to the online spaces used by its young members, volunteers, groups, centres and projects.

Key Principles

1. Group leaders must communicate clearly with volunteers, parents/carers and young members about how, why and when apps, platforms or other technologies will be used to communicate with them
2. Groups should include age-appropriate education around online safety as part of their programme

3. Children and young people should be encouraged to tell a trusted adult about any communications that make them feel uncomfortable, or that they've been asked to keep secret from their parent/carer
4. All communication, whether by text, email, social media or instant message, should be restricted to the group's activities and topics linked to Woodcraft Folk; it is not appropriate for adults to have private non-group related electronic communication with Woodcraft Folk's young members, or engage in 'banter' online, either publicly or privately
5. Groups & Districts are responsible for ensuring all content hosted or shared on their websites, social media channels, and any associated message boards or blogs are appropriate for all members, irrespective of their age or level of involvement
6. Groups & Districts should appoint a minimum of two volunteers to monitor and moderate the content of websites and social media channels they control (e.g. a local group's Facebook or Instagram page)
7. Individuals should consider how their communications will be received or construed, especially if shared without context, and avoid the use of sarcasm or innuendo
8. Practice online should mirror that in physical spaces, to protect volunteers and young people, i.e. obtain informed parental consent for young members to participate, a minimum of two screened and vetted volunteers should be present, adult volunteers should avoid one-to-one contact with young people

Good Practice for Groups

Group Agreements

Group Agreements or groundrules co-created with young members should acknowledge and address the risks and issues associated with online communications and social media, in a way that is appropriate to the age and engagement of the young members. Ensure that young people understand racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic or other cruel and hateful language is inappropriate in online as well as physical spaces, and that they know how to share concerns if they are exposed to any messages or images that make them uncomfortable.

Consent & Personal Data

Obtain consent from parents/carers, as well as from young people themselves if you are going to communicate directly with young people (from age 13 upwards) via any direct electronic communication. You should outline what method (e.g. texts, email, WhatsApp) you will be using for communication and what you will be communicating (e.g. programme, camp information). Ensure that individuals' personal data (e.g. phone numbers, email addresses) is not shared with others

without specific consent. Ensure that parents/carers and young people know who they should contact if they have any concerns about the group's communications.

Responsible Use of Technology

Adults have an important role in modelling good behaviour and supporting young people to understand their rights and responsibilities when using technology. Knowing how to identify and respond to bullying, threatening, illegal or unsafe behaviour will help them stay safe online.

Responding to Concerns

Volunteers, parents/carers and young people should be encouraged to share concerns about the use of online communication as part of Woodcraft Folk's groups and activities, whether these concerns relate to the behaviour of adults or of young people themselves. If concerns are shared with you about online bullying, abuse or any inappropriate or illegal activity:

- Don't panic
- Reassure the individual that they have done the right thing by telling you
- Listen to what they have to say and record it as soon as you can, using the words of the individual where possible
- Do not delete any messages
- Share the information with the Local Safeguarding Lead for your group, and other other agencies as relevant
- Support the individual sharing their concerns
- Be clear with the young person what action you and they will take, e.g. not to open any further messages from this source, explain that you need to share this information with others to protect them

If you believe a young person is in immediate danger, you should call 999 and inform the police.

Online Platforms

Groups, districts, projects/events and individuals will make use of a range of platforms to support effective communication. These have a range of different features and functions, safe use of which will require different considerations and safeguards, e.g.:

- email, text & instant messaging
- social networking
- virtual meetings & video calls

Some platforms are designed to provide only one of these key functions (e.g. Zoom is primarily a video conferencing platform), others (e.g. Discord) provide a wider range of features.

When choosing to use platforms/services to communicate with young members you should have due regard age restrictions/guidance and terms of use - you must not recommend, require or promote a service to be used by young people under the minimum age.

Email, Text & Instant Messaging

These should be used predominantly for communicating factual information, e.g. sharing session programmes or advising a change of venue. When emailing group members, make use of a distribution list (e.g. Google Groups) or use the 'bcc' or Mail Merge functions to ensure that individuals' email addresses are not disclosed to other recipients.

Groups and districts are strongly advised to use @woodcraft.org.uk email addresses to communicate with volunteers, parents/carers and young members. This enables communications relating to the group's activities to be easily identified, and avoids the need for volunteers to share their personal email addresses widely. It also means that group leaders can share the responsibility for communication, and access contacts, message history etc. as required. An @woodcraft.org.uk Google Workspace account can be set up for registered groups and districts on request.

Volunteers should avoid calling, texting or sending instant messages to groups of young members during school hours, or late at night; sending communications between 16:00 and 21:00 is ideal.

If communicating directly with young members, include parents/carers in group emails, texts and messages. If young members respond, copy their parent/carer into any response, and do not be drawn into discussion of matters not related to Woodcraft Folk.

Social Networking

Platforms such as Facebook and Instagram are popular ways to promote groups for young people, attract new young members and volunteers, share updates on groups' activities and connect with like-minded organisations.

Ensure that you familiarise yourself with the privacy settings for your chosen platform, and that volunteers, young members and parents/carers understand whether content posted will be visible publicly or not. Public groups, pages or channels should not be used to have private conversations, share personal information or discuss detailed arrangements for activities or camps. Pay attention to the age limits for platforms - you should take care not to create an expectation that young people make use of an app or site where they are under the minimum age.

Moderators/administrators should remove any inappropriate messages or content, and provide details to the Local Safeguarding Lead, who will advise if further action is necessary.

Photos of young members should only be shared on social media with consent, and young people should not be 'tagged' in photos.

Unless the relationship between a child/young person and an adult volunteer started before their engagement with Woodcraft Folk (relation, neighbour, family friend), group leaders or other volunteers must not add young members as 'friends', accept friend requests, or request to follow their locked accounts. Volunteers should not send personal messages to young members or initiate communication with them about matters unrelated to Woodcraft Folk.

Virtual Meetings & Video Calls

Zoom, Skype and similar platforms for group conference calls can be used for planning events and activities, or as an alternative to meeting for face-to-face activities. An @woodcraft.org.uk email/Google Workspace account will give free access to Google Meet. If a different platform is required (e.g. to access additional functionality such as recording meetings) you should choose a platform that:

- enables individual users to join without setting up an account
- allows individuals to join without sharing their email address or other personal details with other participants
- is free from marketing and advertising
- enables individuals to switch on and off their mic and webcam
- uses a secure and encrypted connection
- has a waiting room so facilitators can moderate who attends the call
- has a text chat function for those who may not want to contribute orally or appear on camera

Groups should agree groundrules or make a group agreement, as they would for a face-to-face session, and minimum of two fully screened volunteers should be present to facilitate an online meeting. Facilitators should ensure that they are familiar with the features and controls of the chosen platform before the session begins. Start and finish times should be communicated clearly in advance to participants and parents/carers.

Where the facility to record audio and video of a session is provided, this should not be done without consent from young people present and their parents/carers, and any resulting recording should not be kept, or remain publicly accessible, for longer than necessary.

Joining details for meetings aimed at young members should not be posted publicly, instead invites should be circulated to group members in advance - other

platforms are more appropriate for live broadcasting to the wider public, where responses are limited to text comments.

Video calling platforms should not be used by group leaders or other volunteers for one-to-one communication with young people.

Misconduct

Misuse of online communication by volunteers, including breaches of this guidance, may lead to appropriate action being taken under Woodcraft Folk's disciplinary procedures.

Further Information & Support

- www.ceopeducation.co.uk is CEOP's one-stop shop for internet safety. Has a section for teachers and trainers to access free resources
- www.saferinternet.org.uk collects resources, links, research and guidance for all ages, including professionals and parents
- www.childline.org.uk offers online and phone based counselling and support service. Will not appear on phone bills and is a Freephone number – 0800 1111
- www.iwf.org.uk is an internet industry funded body who seek to remove images of child abuse from the internet