

# Guidelines for safe online ministry with young people

These guidelines are provided to assist the safe online formation and running of traditional local small groups and other local youth ministry. The information in this document is not intended for ministry to young children, rather to teenagers who may not need direct supervision within the home and young adults who would normally socialise with these teenagers. However, the key principles and procedures apply to all online ministry, including for adults.

## For the ministry group...

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1. This ministry should be considered like any other LCA event/program – it should be established with the knowledge and formal endorsement of the governance body of your ministry group. Permission to proceed should be sought by the designated leader after detailed planning and confirmed before the program commences. A high level of internal accountability is required.
2. Online meetings may include audio and video functionality and would normally also have a chat facility. Documents and other media may be shared.
3. Develop a specific, moderated channel for your ministry group where only those who are invited can access information and activities. The purpose of this channel should be to provide a structured means of meeting at specified times (possibly similar to 'normal' face-to-face meetings) and not as an 'open/anytime' forum. As with other ministry programs it should be reviewed at least annually.
4. In order to protect the confidentiality of interactions of both leaders and participants, every user should have their own login ID with a unique password.
5. The channel must be moderated by a ministry leader and at least one other leader. They must both have the ability to be able to:
6. manage all participants including granting and denying access
7. monitor all communication (including each other's)
8. remove any inappropriate material
9. do all of the above in a timely manner.
10. Some sites allow the use of "breakout rooms". Use of these rooms should follow normal ministry guidelines where there should never be one adult and one young person alone in a room. Each room should have at least two trained and screened leaders present. Every room must be accessible by channel moderators.
11. Ministry specific social media sites will often provide for ongoing sharing and group chats outside of meeting times. Communication on these sites must remain in public and also be closely moderated. Refer to the [LCA Social Media Policy](#) for detailed guidance on appropriate use.
12. It is important to know who your online participants are in real life. A thorough registration process is required. Introductory information about the ministry program and the Online Code of Practice should be provided to a young person's parents/caregivers. Written consent (email would be fine) from

parents/caregivers for participation is required. If there is a desire to reach out to participants who are not well-known, also having a (preferably in-person) conversation with that young person's parents/caregivers would be essential. Clear identification is essential.

13. All ministry leaders should hold a current Working with Children Check<sup>ii</sup> and currency in LCA/NZ Safe Church training<sup>iii</sup>.
14. Reinforce with your ministry leaders the need to comply with all Codes of Conduct<sup>iv</sup>, policies and procedures relating to online interactions between adults and children. This protects participants, leaders and other volunteers.
15. Ensure ministry leaders understand that privately messaging children is not appropriate.
16. Be aware of the increased risks that have arisen from ministry leaders having less supervision in their interactions with children.
17. Monitor what data your ministry leaders have access to and how it is being used.
18. Ensure that when ministry leaders are interacting with participants in group sessions that the participants are located in appropriate places (eg. preferably not bedrooms and bathrooms).
19. Encourage ministry leaders to contact parents so they understand the expectations of participants in terms of this ministry event, what they're doing, and who they're expected to be in contact with (and how).
20. Remind ministry leaders to encourage participants to only access online material from appropriate sites.

## **Ministry leaders...**

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1. Gain permission from parents or caregivers for any child/teenager to participate in this program.
2. Let parents know how you will be interacting online with their children and what rules are in place for that interaction.
3. Be aware of your organisation's Codes of Conduct and policies regarding interacting with children and young people online.
4. When interacting with participants, do so in an online group setting where possible.
5. Only communicate with participants at times you would normally be in contact with them.
6. Ensure participants have a Code of Conduct for interacting with you online.
7. Actively moderate the site and communications:
  - a. Address inappropriate behaviour quickly
  - b. Ensure any inappropriate material is removed as soon as practicably possible.
  - c. Remove access of anyone who repeatedly ignores the Code of Conduct.
8. Discuss with participants what they're accessing, and remind them of the importance of telling a trusted adult if they have been contacted by someone they are suspicious of, or any adult they don't know.
9. Listen to participants' concerns as you would in your normal settings. Follow procedures in handling any suspicions of harm.

## **Young people (participants)...**

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- Only be in contact with adults like your ministry group's leaders at a time they're supposed to talk to you.
- Make video calls in the living room if you can. If you're in the bedroom, leave your door open. Make sure the clothing you're wearing is appropriate for interacting with adults.
- Remember to be respectful and kind to people. Bullying is never okay, and just because you're online doesn't mean you can hurt people's feelings. Treat people with respect.
- Talk to a trusted adult if you feel concerned about anything you've seen or heard online.
- Talk to a trusted adult if you're worried about your situation.
- Find a good balance between time online (including study, work and with friends), exercise, meals, family life, and sleep.

## Parents and carers...

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In relation to your children, including teenagers:

- Reach an agreement with them about rules on using the internet at home – including whether you are intending to view their search histories.
- Be aware of what apps they are using to communicate with each other as some may be easier for predators to access.
- Understand how the ministry group is connecting with them – how do you know they are safe?
- Encourage an open dialogue about online activity.
- Consider installing software to block access to certain sites.
- Where possible, don't allow devices in bedrooms.
- Make sure they understand that some sites are not appropriate for them and they should avoid them.
- Ask them how they know a person they're in contact with or a site they're visiting is 'safe'.
- Understand that children may be feeling isolated or worried. Encourage them to engage with family activities – or to talk to a professional if they feel they need to.

## Other relevant documents and resources...

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1. LCA NZ Policies:
  - a. LCA Standards of Ethical Behaviour
  - b. 03.01 Information and Communication Technology Policy
  - c. 05.02 Social Media Policy
  - d. 06.03 Child Protection Policy
  - e. 06.09 Privacy Policy
  - f. SP3 Code of Practice
  - g. Other policies and procedures also apply
2. [LCA Social Media page](#)
  - a. Information and Communication Technology 'Social Media Guidelines'
3. Office of the Children's Guardian – NSW
  - a. [Online Safety](#)
4. Child Family Community Australia
  - a. [Online Safety](#)
5. eSafety Commissioner
  - a. [The eSafety Guide](#) (information on apps and social media)
  - b. [Report abuse](#)
6. Netsafe [www.netsafe.org.nz](http://www.netsafe.org.nz)

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<sup>i</sup> In the context of ministry, a "moderated channel" is an online forum where responsible persons consistently monitor and manage the participants and content.

<sup>ii</sup> Working with Children Check (WWCC) means the appropriate background screening check required under the LCA NZ Child Protection Policy and Procedure as relevant to the country, state or territory of your ministry group.

<sup>iii</sup> [LCA NZ Safe Church Training](#), defined on the [LCA website](#).

<sup>iv</sup> Refer to the [LCA NZ Standards of Ethical Behaviour and the SP3 Code of Practice \(CSE3-COP\)](#)