



PresSafe Leaders - Communication With Children

Communication with children is an important part of ministry, but all communication must be undertaken appropriately. For all communication with young people, there must be:

- **Parental permission**
- The communication must be **age appropriate** (see Communication Table)
- **Transparency** (in ministry teams and in the method of communication, e.g. do not use means of communication that cannot be audited - e.g. SnapChat and WhatsApp) If you have any questions about this, please discuss with the PresSafe Safety Administrator.

Electronic Communication with Children and Parents

Electronic and digital communication through the use of email, social media (e.g. Facebook) and messaging (e.g. SMS), Apps (e.g. bible apps) and games is an essential part of interaction in today’s society and will continue to grow and change as technology develops. Children’s Ministry can frequently involve communicating with children through the relevant technology available to them. Such communication can significantly aid and enhance these ministries.

Since a key trend in grooming children for abuse is achieved through secretive electronic communication, it is required that all electronic communication with children and parents be open and transparent.

Below is a table to that outlines how to approach various forms of communication with young people:

PRESSSAFE COMMUNICATION TABLE v.040620			
Platform	Primary School	+13 up to Grade 10	Grade 10 to <18 years
Phone Calls	Only with a specific request by parent or guardian	Only leaders approved by parent or guardian	Only leaders approved by parent or guardian
Emails	Logistical purposes only for mass communication about upcoming events	Logistics, and transparent encouragement – transfer pastoral matters to a meeting as appropriate.	Logistics, and transparent encouragement - transfer pastoral matters to a meeting as appropriate.
Text SMS	Logistical purposes only for mass communication about upcoming events	Logistics, and transparent encouragement - transfer pastoral matters to a meeting as appropriate.	Logistics, and transparent encouragement - transfer pastoral matters to a meeting as appropriate.
Video Calls	With Parental Permission & Transparency (Groups only)	With Parental Permission & Transparency	With Parental Permission & Transparency
Gaming	Do not participate	Group settings only with parental permission	Group settings only with parental permission
Social Media Facebook, Instagram	Do not participate	Logistics, and transparent encouragement – transfer pastoral matters to a meeting as appropriate. Monitoring of posts	Logistics, and transparent encouragement – transfer pastoral matters to a meeting as appropriate. Monitoring of posts

Transparency

In leading ministries we seek to create safe environments for children, including in electronic communication. These ministries need to promote **transparency** and avoid secretive behaviour.

A key part of transparency is having **parental permission** for any communication with children. This can be sought when parents provide permission to be part of a children's ministry program, event or activity. This permission can last up to an entire calendar year, though parents have discretion to change these preferences at any time. Permission does not need to be sought every time a conversation takes place, however it is good to encourage transparency between leaders and parents. The frequency and form of communication should not come as a surprise to parents.

As part of encouraging transparency in **leadership teams**:

Ministry Coordinators should have a regular 'check-in' with you. This is part of taking care of you, but will also include discussing which young people you have been in contact with and any pastoral concerns or encouragements that arise. These 'check-ins' may occur during a leaders meeting, but may be a conversation at another time. However they occur, they should happen with regularity as part of pursuing transparency.

Your records: whilst recording attendance in Elvanto, will need to record on the same form a brief description of contact you've had with children, including method of communication, and any significant concerns.

- *e.g. "Met with Bill and Fred at McDs to read bible. Texted Jim, Alfred, & Geoff and thanked them for serving at church. FB Messaged Alex a couple of times to check he's coping with his father's illness. Talked with him about his father's health and faith. Prayed."*

You are able to include these notes in the free text field labelled "Notes Specific To The Entire Group" at the end of the Group Report form. If you are not involved with recording attendance in Elvanto, please discuss with your Ministry Coordinator how your notes will be recorded.

Contacting Young People

Interaction and contact with young people will differ depending upon the age range of the ministry and should be in line with existing PresSafe Communication guidelines.

Email Contact: Organisational emails (or emails sent through Elvanto) are encouraged for emails sent to parents and young people. If for any reason you need to use a personal email, please blind copy (BCC) in 'transparency@pcq.org.au'.

Video Calls: Video calling/conferencing may be used, and is even encouraged, provided the following criteria are met:

- Parental permission is given to participate in such video calls.
- Session has approved that communication platform.
- Where a video call is planned with a **group of youth** then the call/conference can be undertaken with only one leader. The leader should attempt to ensure that there are multiple youth in the call with them at all times. If technical difficulties/dropouts mean that the leader is alone with one child for a short period in the call, they are to simply notify their ministry coordinator later (when they are able) that this has happened and outline any conversation that has taken place. If there is extended difficulty reconnecting others to the call, the call should be concluded and restarted when these issues have resolved, or measures taken to ensure that transparency has occurred, such as requesting a family member to be with the child in the call.
- Where a video call is to be with only **one child** there must be at least two leaders or parents in the call/conference. The two leaders must ensure they are the first on the call/conference so there's no one to one conversations with the child. If a leader has technical difficulty and drops out and has problem reconnecting to the call, the call should be ended and restarted when these issues have resolved, or take measures to ensure that transparency can occur.
For planning a video call with one child where you can't get two leaders in the video call/conference, provided the child's parents are aware of this and approve of this arrangement, it may be suitable to arrange for another family member or parent to be present in the room and able to hear and see the video call.

For clarity, children under 13 can be part of group video calls as part of a ministry program. However, they should not participate in direct one-to-one video calls.

Pastoral Nature

Communication of a pastoral nature, with children should be discussed with the Ministry Coordinator and the best method of dealing with situation determined.

Social Media

Any social media (e.g. Facebook) used for ministry to children must be approved by Session and include leaders (who are to monitor posts), and parents.

The major issues surround privacy, identity theft, and the amount of information disclosed, particularly through social media. Bullying and children becoming distressed through “unfriending” have also come to the forefront as major stressor of children. As a consequence, Team Leaders will monitor Church social media platforms and provide advice to parents and children on acceptable social media behaviour as required.

Exceptions and Transparency

For any exceptions or difficulties experienced in communicating with children and social media, advice must be sought from your Ministry Coordinator and/or the PresSafe Risk Management Officer.

In general, please ensure parents are aware of the frequency and kinds of contact their child should be receiving from leaders .

Prohibited Practice

All persons involved in Children's Ministry are prohibited from:

- One on one social media communication with children under 13 years;
- Communicating with children via any electronic or digital communication without parental permission.
- Contacting children or parents by secretive message systems which leave no trace of the communication and cannot be transparent.