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 delete messages - e.g. SnapChat)

If you have any questions about this, please discuss with the PresSafe Risk Management Officer.

Electronic Communication with Children and Parents

Electronic and digital 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 and caregivers through such means. Such communication can significantly aid and enhance these ministries. However, from 10 December 2025, leaders are prohibited from contacting young people under 16 via online communication platforms that are included in the social media age restrictions as part of the Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act 2024. If you are unsure of what platforms are prohibited, please consult information provided by the Australian E-Safety Commissioner (https://www.esafety.gov.au/)
It is also important to note that secretive communication is used by predators to from children for abuse. Since a key trend in grooming children for abuse is achieved through secretive electronic communication. In order to safeguard vulnerable people, it is required that all ministry 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:

PRESSAFE COMMUNICATION TABLE	v.081225		
Platform/ Context	**Primary School**	**Up to 16 years** ***Do not use online age restricted communication platforms prohibited by the Australian Government social media delay for those 15 and under.***	**16 years and over**
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	For non-age restricted platforms, with Parental Permission & Transparency (Groups only)	For non-age restricted platforms, with Parental Permission & Transparency	With Parental Permission & Transparency
Gaming	Do not participate	For non-age restricted platforms, group settings only with parental permission	Group settings only with parental permission
Social Media and other communcation platforms	Do not participate	For non-age restricted platforms, communication may include logistics, and transparent encouragement – transfer pastoral matters to a meeting as appropriate.	Logistics, and transparent encouragement – transfer pastoral matters to a meeting as appropriate.
In Person	Group settings or publicly observable conversations. Offsite meetings in exceptional pastoral circumstances only, with parental permission.	Group settings or publicly observable conversations. Offsite meetings conducted in observable location and with parent permission.	Group settings or publicly observable conversations. Offsite meetings conducted in observable location and with parent permission.

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 be 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: In addition to recording attendance (e.g. in Elvanto), leaders/team members will need to record on the same form a brief description of contact they'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. Phoned to alk with him about his father's health and faith. Prayed."*

Leaders/Team Members using Elvanto 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.

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: Wherever possible, use organisation issued email accounts for email communication sent to parents and young people. If for any reason you need to use a personal email account, please either copy in a ministry coordinator, minister or elder, OR blind copy (BCC) in 'transparency@pcq.org.au' in all your communication to young people.

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

• Parental permission is given to participate in such video calls.
• Where a video call is planned with a group (highschoolers) 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 adult 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 on non-age restricted platforms as part of a ministry program. However, they should not participate in direct one-to-one video calls. Age restricted online communication platforms should not be used for video calls with any young person under 16..

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 platform used on behalf of a ministry directed to children must be approved by Session and include leaders (who are to monitor posts), and parents. With the implementation of the Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act 2024, churches must not use age restricted online communication platform with the intention of communicating with those 15 and under. Any social media presence should presume parents, caregivers and those 16 and over as the audience for posts or content. Minstries directed to children (those under 18) should carefully consider how communication regarding the program takes place.
The major issues in the use of social media include privacy, identity theft, and psychological harm. Bullying and ostracization have been identified as stressors for young people. As a consequence, Ministry Coordinators (or a designated individual/s) will moderate public-facing social media platforms used by the church 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 by secretive message systems which leave no trace of the communication and cannot be transparent (e.g Snapchat or WhatsApp.
- Contacting children under 16 via age restricted online communication platforms (as per advice from E-Safety Commissioner https://www.esafety.gov.au/)