SAFE PRACTICE GUIDE

Engaging Safely Online

Why is this important?

While communication technologies and the internet offer significant opportunities to enhance the delivery of activities, ministries and services, they also bring new risks. It is important that Archdiocesan workers adopt safe practice when using the online environment and the array of communication technologies at their disposal, particularly when interacting with children and adults-at-risk.

What should we be doing?

Wherever possible use online accounts or communication devices provided or authorised by the parish, ministry or agency. Avoid using personal online accounts or communication devices, particularly when interacting with children and adults-at-risk.

Obtain authorisation before creating an online account on behalf of a parish, ministry or agency. Archdiocesan authorised online accounts should be suitable for purpose and clearly identify the parish, ministry or agency. More than one worker should have administrator access (i.e. username, password). Appropriate security setting should be used.

Establish safe 'rules of engagement' for all online communications with children and adults-at-risk.

Be respectful in all communications.

Workers should use their real name when communicating online (i.e. not a fictitious name or nickname) and clearly identify themselves and their role.

All workers and participants engaged in online video or live stream communications should be dressed appropriately and use a suitable location that is not personal/intimate (e.g. bedroom).

Obtain written consent from parents or guardians before engaging with children online. Whether or not written consent should be obtained to engage with an adult-at-risk online should be determined on a case-by-case basis and with recognition of their rights and personal choices.

Parents and guardians should be provided with information on the purpose of the interaction, others involved, rules of engagement, scheduling, set up requirements and security/safety arrangements.

Wherever possible, use open and transparent arrangements to communicate online with children and adults-at-risk (e.g. group emails, group messaging). Avoid one-on-one communication.

Where practical and appropriate, have two adults present during online communication with children and adults-at-risk.

One-on-one online communication with a child or adult-at-risk should only occur where there is a valid and compelling work related reason.

Protect the privacy of others at all times when communicating online. Avoid sharing information that should not be made public, especially an individual's personal or sensitive information (including images).

Report all inappropriate, offensive or illegal communications.