

Social Media and Social Networking

The impact of social media on the workplace is increasing. Social media is the broad term for internet-based tools used on PCs, laptops, tablets and smart phones to help people make contact, keep in touch and interact.

This trend can affect communications among managers, employees, how organisations promote and control their reputation and how colleagues treat one another. It can also distort what boundaries there are between home and work.

What is social media?

Social media is the term commonly used for websites which allow people to 'network' and interact with each other by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests.

Here are some of the main 'types' of social media websites

1. **Social Networking** – services that allow you to interact with other people of similar interests and backgrounds, ability to add friends, comment on profiles, join groups and have discussions. For example: *Facebook, LinkedIn*.
2. **Social Bookmarking Sites** – services that allow you to interact by tagging websites, search through websites bookmarked by other people and share these. For example: *Delicious, Blinklist and StumbleUpon*.
3. **Social News** – services that allow you to interact by voting for articles and commenting on them. For example: *Digg and Reddit*.
4. **Social Media Sharing** – services that allow you to interact by sharing photos or videos and commenting on profiles and user submissions. For example: *YouTube, Flickr, Instagram, Pinterest*,
5. **Microblogging** – services that focus on short updates that are pushed out to anyone subscribed to receive the updates. For example: *Twitter*.
6. **Blogging / Forums** – services that allow you to post a comment and reply to other comments, thus developing discussions. In both cases, you can leave comments which may or may not be moderated and you may have to identify yourself with a name and email address. For example: *blogger*.

Guidance to writing a policy - your responsibilities

Whilst the widespread availability and use of social networking applications brings opportunities to engage and communicate with people and organisations in new and exciting ways, it is also important to ensure that we balance this not only with our legal responsibilities to safeguard and protect our children and staff but also with the need to safeguard your settings image and reputation.

As an employer, it is important to take a "common sense stance" in regulating social media conduct and treat 'electronic behaviour' as it would 'non-electronic behaviour'.

Why do we need a policy?

Setting out key principles and expected standards of behaviour in your setting about using social networking media is vital:

- To support safer working practice
- To ensure children are safeguarded
- To ensure the reputation of your setting is not damaged or compromised
- To minimise the risk of misplaced or malicious allegations being made against staff members
- To reduce the incidence of positions of trust being abused or misused
- To ensure your setting and staff are not exposed to legal risks.

What does the law say?

- **The Human Rights Act 1998** gives a 'right to respect for private and family life, home and correspondence'. The provision is directly enforceable against public sector employers, and all courts must interpret other existing legislation in relation to the Human Rights Act. Case law suggests that employees have a reasonable expectation of privacy in the workplace.
- **The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000** covers the extent to which organisations can monitor or record communications at the point at which they enter or are being sent within the employer's telecommunications system. It applies to public and private communication networks. It gives the sender or recipient of a communication the right of action for damages against the employer for the unlawful interception of communications. There are two areas where monitoring is not unlawful 1) where the employer reasonably believes that the sender and intended recipient have consented to the interception 2) Without consent, the employer may monitor in certain circumstances for example, to prevent crime, protect the business or to comply with financial regulations.
- **The Data Protection Act 1988** covers how information about employees and job applicants can be collected, handled and used.

What should a 'Social Media Policy' include?

Key 'Social Media Practice' principles to consider:

1. Staff members need to be aware that everything they post online is public, even with the strictest privacy settings. Once something is online, it can be copied and redistributed and it is easy to lose control of it. They should therefore assume that everything they post online will be permanent and will be shared.
2. Staff members must be conscious at all times of the need to keep their personal and professional lives separate and to always maintain appropriate professional boundaries.
3. Staff members are responsible for their own actions and conduct. They should avoid behaviour which might be misinterpreted by others or which could put them in a position where there is a conflict between their work and their personal interests.
4. Staff members must use social media in a professional, responsible and respectful way and must comply with the law, including equalities legislation, in their on-line communications.
5. Staff members must not engage in activities involving social media which might bring the setting into disrepute.
6. Staff members must not represent their personal views as those of the setting on any social medium.
7. Staff members must not discuss personal information about children, their family members, staff or any other professionals or organisations they interact with as part of their job on social media.
8. Staff members must not name or otherwise identify children, former children or their parents, family members and working colleagues past and present in social media conversations.
9. Staff members must not use social media or the internet in any way to attack, insult, abuse, defame or otherwise make negative, offensive or discriminatory comments about children, their family members, colleagues, other professionals, other organisations.
10. Staff must not browse, download, upload or distribute any material that could be considered inappropriate, offensive, defamatory, illegal or discriminatory.
11. Staff must, at all times, act in the best interests of children and young people when creating, participating in or contributing content to social media sites.

Key principles to consider including – regarding ‘Personal Use’ of Social Media

1. Staff members need to be aware of the dangers of putting personal information such as addresses, home and mobile phone numbers, email addresses etc. onto social networking sites.
2. Staff members should ensure that they set the privacy levels of their personal sites at the maximum and opt out of public listings on social networking sites to protect their privacy.
3. Staff members should keep their passwords confidential, change them often and be careful about what is posted online. It is a good idea to use a separate email address just for social networking so that any other contact details are not disclosed.
4. Staff members should not identify themselves as employees of the setting or organisations associated with the setting **in their personal webspace**. This is to prevent information on these sites being linked with the setting or the sector. Where possible it may be useful to add a disclaimer such as “these are my own views and opinions and not those of my employer”

Taking the above steps 1 - 4 will avoid the potential for staff members to be contacted by children, their families or friends outside of the setting environment and will reduce the chances of them becoming victims of identity theft.

5. All staff members should try to regularly review their social networking sites to ensure that information available publicly about them is accurate and appropriate. This should be suggested to new staff when they join your setting. It is also good practice to close old accounts as they may contain personal information about you.
6. Staff members must not give their personal contact details including details of any blogs or personal social media sites or other websites to families of children attending the setting and former families.
7. Staff members must not have contact through any personal social medium with any family member of a child that attends the setting. If staff members wish to communicate with families, they can only do so with the approval of the setting and through official / setting approved sites and mediums.
8. If the setting provides a service for the children of family members, staff members are not expected to discontinue contact with them via personal social media, however any information staff members obtain in the course of their employment must not be used for personal gain nor be passed on to others who may use it in such a way.

It is strongly recommended that staff members do not have any contact through personal social media with families of the children who attend the setting. If staff members wish to communicate with families through social media sites or to enable families to keep in touch with one another, they can only do so with the approval of the settings official sites.

9. Staff members must not establish, or seek to establish, social contact via social media/other communication technologies with children who may have attended the setting years before and must never “friend” an ex attendee through social media. These actions could be construed as being part of a “grooming process” in the context of sexual offending. In the case of some social networking sites, be aware that it is possible to be ‘followed’ without your consent, if this happens staff members must be aware that they can and must delete the ‘follower’ (to protect themselves)
10. Staff must never use or access other staff / family members social networking sites.
11. Staff members must decline ‘friend requests’ from family members they receive in their personal social media accounts. If they receive such requests, they must discuss these with their manager and/or in team meetings or 1:1’s and signpost them to become ‘friends’ of the official setting site.
12. Confidentiality needs to be considered at all times. Social networking sites have the potential to discuss or publish inappropriate information. Staff members must therefore make sure that they do not publish confidential information that they have access to as part of their employment on their personal webspace. This includes personal information about children, their family members, colleagues, the setting and other partners/organisations or setting related information. This requirement continues after staff have left employment.
13. Photographs, videos or any other types of image of children at your setting and/or their families must not be published **on personal webspace**.
14. Photographs, videos or images depicting staff members wearing setting uniforms or clothing with logos or images that identify your setting or location must not be published **on personal webspace**.
15. The settings service, team, logos, marketing must not be used or published **on personal webspace**.
16. Staff members must not use the settings email addresses and other official contact details for setting up personal social media accounts or for communicating through.

17. Staff members must not edit open access online encyclopaedias such as *Wikipedia* in a personal capacity at work. This is because the source of the correction will be recorded as the employer's IP address and the intervention will appear as if it comes from the employer.
18. Staff members are advised to be cautious about inviting work colleagues to be 'friends' in personal social networking sites. Social networking sites blur the line between work and personal lives and this may make it difficult to maintain professional relationships or be embarrassing if too much personal information is known in the work place.
19. On leaving the setting, staff members must not contact current children and family members by means of personal social media sites. Similarly, staff members must not contact family members from previous settings they may have worked at schools by means of personal social media.

Using Social Media to Promote Your Business – some general reminders (taken from the NSPCC)

Whatever you say online can be made public

Your privacy settings wont necessary stop other people sharing your posts (deliberately or accidentally)

Be the best person you can be online

Be courteous and respectful of other people and their views, religions, cultures

Think before you share

Never disclose non-public and confidential information about the setting, staff, volunteers and most importantly service users

Be an online ambassador

Remember by spreading the word about your setting can help you to build/enhance your reputation and attract new customers / families

Give credit where it's due

Respect copyright regulations. When using somebody else's content, ensure you seek approval before using and give them a mention

If in doubt

Don't post or comment

Using Social Media to Promote Your Business - what can you do?

Social media is an inexpensive way to promote your business and can play a significant role in communicating with busy, vulnerable or difficult to engage parents, as users can now access interactive services across a multitude of devices such as mobile phones, tablets, computers etc.

The key things for early year's settings to remember when incorporating social networking services / social media into your provision is

1. To strike the balance between the **benefits** of social media (for example marketing, promoting your business and communicating with families) with the potential **risks** to children and their families.
2. To ensure that social media is used as **part of** your overall communication strategy. (For example starting up a Facebook group to share information about your setting should not mean abandoning other well-established methods of communication. Some parents may prefer an informative paper newsletter or quick reference display board. Two-way conversations must still take place between key workers and parents/carers on a regular basis)

Other key things to consider:

- **To understand the safety aspects:** Make sure you are familiar with your chosen method of social media **before** setting up an account. This should include a thorough understanding of privacy and safety tools, the terms of service (which normally covers what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour), and how to contact the company in case of a concern or complaint. Follow relevant legislation and good practice guidance when using and engaging with such companies – see the 'Further Support' resources for more information.
- **To decide how, and by whom, the page will be managed:** Designate responsibility for: the setting up, the management and the moderation of the account (including overseeing, reviewing and responding to posted content). This person should be appropriately vetted and have recently accessed relevant Safeguarding training; it may also be useful to involve your designated safeguarding person. Use official 'setting' email addresses and details (not personal ones) to set up any accounts and keep the log-in details to both secure within your setting.
- **To consider privacy and safety settings:** Failing to set appropriate privacy levels could result in the sharing of inappropriate information about your setting and/or the children and families who attend. Also ensure you monitor content that is uploaded by others – for example some social networking services have an 'accept comment' setting which enables you to check all messages before they appear on your page.

- **To ensure that practitioners, students, volunteers and parents are aware of the need to protect their own privacy online:** All those associated with your social media site must be aware of the need to not share content with those not directly involved with the setting and/or their child. Your 'social media policy' will clearly cover this and highlight the importance for staff and families to keep their online personal and professional presence separate.
- **To take care with personal details or information about children/families:** Ensure anything you share online is suitable and that you have full parental permission, for example to share images of children. Families should not be asked to divulge any personal details online – instead be encouraged to use the settings private contact methods for example email address. Personal details of practitioners, children and their families attending the setting should not be shared. Prior to sharing messages, photos, videos or other information online, always ASK YOURSELF: does this comply with our policies and is the content appropriate?

Facebook is a popular social media forum for early years settings. Setting up a business page can provide a 'safe' space for parents / carers to communicate with you and can also support staff with differentiating their personal and professional online presence.

Some Facebook Tips:

- **Post regularly** - ideally three times a week. Keep updates relevant to your audience and mention other useful links
- **'Like' other pages** - this will allow you to see other useful pages and keep up to date with changes for example '*Community Playthings*' or '*Learning through Landscapes*' and other influential bloggers, journalists, industry analysts, and others that have a significant influence on your setting.
- **Ask opinions and respond to those of others** - this will let parents/carers know you are listening and keep them interested in your page.
- **Advertise events** - you can create events linked to your page – such as 'stay and play' sessions or 'parent consultations'
- **Encourage people who 'like' your page to add their ideas** - this helps create that sense of community that Facebook encourages.

