

Social Networking - Online Safety Guidelines

INTRODUCTION

The internet is changing the way we live. Young people have taken to technological advances very quickly, taking advantage of the opportunities they provide to socialise, communicate and learn. However, new technologies bring new risks that we need to be aware of and manage in order to safeguard the welfare of our members.

These guidelines are intended to help Leaders ensure that we make the best of new technologies while protecting both the young people in our care and preventing ourselves from being placed in a vulnerable position. Leaders are encouraged to share the guidelines with girls in their units to ensure that they are also aware of the risks involved in using new technologies and to encourage good practice in managing these.

The General Guidance section provides good practice guidance covering all online activity. There are also some specific points to note in relation to unit [websites](#), [social networking sites](#), and [email](#).

GENERAL GUIDANCE

Contacting young people by email or online

- Girls under 16 cannot give permission themselves for their contact details to be shared. Parents and guardians must give written permission on their behalf. This means that if you email or text anyone under the age of 16 you should have written permission from their parent or carer to do so.
- Think about the content of any message that you send - ensure that you use appropriate language; try not to include any words or phrases that could be misinterpreted; if you are sending images, make sure that they are appropriate; ensure that any external [hyperlinks](#) you include do not lead to inappropriate content.
- Always copy another adult into any message that you send to a member under the age of 18.

Sharing information online

- Avoid mentioning the specific time and place of your meetings on websites, [social networking](#) sites, or in [chatrooms](#). Provide some way for people to contact you if they would like this information. You can then use your own judgement to decide whether this person is legitimate.

Sharing photos and/or video

- Think carefully before sharing photos or videos of girls in your unit on websites, general social networking sites or specialist media-sharing sites like [YouTube](#).
- If you do want to share photos or videos of girls in your unit make sure you have written permission from their parent or carer before going ahead and

avoid mentioning their full names or including other information that could inadvertently reveal their identities.

- Make sure girls are aware that they shouldn't share photos or videos of their friends online without permission from their parent or carer.

Making and communicating with friends online

- Ensure that girls are aware that new friends who they meet online are really strangers so they need to be careful who they trust.
- The only way someone can physically harm you is if you're both in the same location, so - to be completely safe - encourage girls not to meet friends they have met online in person. If they do decide to meet someone who they've contacted online it is important to tell a parent or guardian and take them along. Meet in a public place in daytime.
- Encourage girls to look out for their friends too and tell a responsible adult if they think a friend is at risk.
- Encourage caution when using [chatrooms](#). It is possible to get away from an unpleasant situation in a chatroom by logging out or by changing your screen name.
- Make sure your girls know how to [save a copy](#) of their conversation. This may help if they want to report something they feel uncomfortable about to the chatroom provider or moderator.

ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES

Unit Websites

- Make sure you follow the [general guidelines](#) above - particularly those which relate to [sharing information](#) and [photos/videos](#) online.
- If you are planning to include a [guestbook](#) on your site make sure that you have good security measures in place. In particular, make sure that every message is checked by an adult prior to publication and any unsuitable messages are removed immediately.
- Protect yourself legally too - if you have taken any text, images, or code from any other website, make sure you have permission from the website owners. The [Clipart](#) and [photo library](#) images featured on this website are copyright cleared for your own use, but the majority of photos are not licensed for use outside of this website. If you would like to use any information or imagery from the Girlguiding UK website please contact us first.

Social networking websites

A social networking website is an online community where members interact with their friends and can make new friends. Members can chat, message, email, video, voice chat, share photos, download images and applications, blog, start discussion groups, share their interests and activities and explore new ones. Facebook, Bebo and Myspace are all examples of social networking sites.

- Make sure you protect your personal details. The default is often set to disclose all information to others in your network. It is safer to limit access to people you know personally or who belong to any closed groups you join.

It is also safer not to add your address/telephone number to your online profile.

- Remind girls that that new friends they meet online are really strangers. Suggest that they only accept people as 'friends' who they know already.
- If setting up a group for girls from your unit, District etc, set it up as a '[secret](#)' or '[closed](#)' group. Ensure that girls are aware of the status of any groups they join. Some groups are '[open](#)' to anyone who chooses to sign up. None of the open guiding groups currently in existence have been officially endorsed by Girlguiding UK and there is no guarantee that all members of an open guiding group will be genuine members of Girlguiding UK.
- Think carefully before accepting girls as 'friends' on social networking sites. Is all the content of your profile page appropriate? Are you sure that this won't give girls access to discussions you would rather keep private?
- If you are concerned about a guiding group that you come across or have any other child protection concerns please report your concerns to Girlguiding UK's Membership Support Services Manager on 020 7592 1730 or email confidentialrecords@girlguiding.org.uk.

Email

- When emailing a group of people use the bcc (blind carbon copy) box to enter the distribution list. This will ensure you don't share anyone's contact details without their permission. It will also help to protect everyone against spam.
- Be aware of the possibility of your contact details being 'sold' to another party.
- Do not forward chain emails to young people.
- If you receive an email from a young person that causes you concern, refer to your District or Division Commissioner or designated person. For more information, please refer to our [Safe from Harm](#) guidelines.

For more online safety tips for parents and carers, refer to:

www.safekids.com
www.ceop.gov.uk
www.nspcc.org.uk
www.nch.org.uk
www.kidscape.org.uk