



Digital Safety

Creating a safe sanctuary goes beyond the physical building of the church and must include intentional thought about how adults in ministry interact with children, youth and vulnerable adults in the digital world, which includes the use of cell phones and social media. Ministry can take place using modern technology, but as with all forms of ministry there are some inherent risks involved with the use of electronic communications. Smartphones, instant messaging apps, and other digital tools offer an array of options for planning events, staying in touch, and reaching out to ministry participants. However, digital communication can open your ministry to liability in many ways, especially when adults are interacting with minors.

It's important to understand the impact of digital media on communication, so you can develop policies and training to keep everyone safe. Following written policies and procedures helps your ministry clarify its expectations about acceptable behavior. This is true for youth ministry staff and volunteers as well as for the students they guide.

Educating youth ministry staff, volunteers, and participants about your ministry's expectations regarding their digital communication with each other can help promote an environment of safety and accountability.

Safety Guidelines

1. Employee and volunteer youth workers who want to communicate with minors using smartphones, instant messaging apps, email, group chat, social networking websites, or other forms of digital media must first sign a consent form and agree to follow the ministry's communication policy. The policy outlines the recommended practices, limitations, and legal parameters for texting, social media, and other forms of digital communication within youth ministry.
2. Ministry youth workers may not transmit any content that is illicit, unsavory, abusive, pornographic, discriminatory, harassing, or disrespectful when communicating with each other or with minors involved in ministry activities.
3. Except in an emergency, youth workers may not transmit any personal information pertaining to a minor without the youth ministry participant and his or her parents or guardians signing consent forms. This applies to group texting, group email, group chats, instant messaging, or any other public method of digital communication. Personal information may include such things as a minor's name, phone number, email address, or photograph.

4. Youth workers will instruct youth occasionally about the Youth Ministry Digital Communication Policy and the dangers of such conduct as “sexting.”
5. Youth workers who become aware of possible child abuse through digital media must immediately notify their supervisor. The ministry will consult with its attorney and report abuse as required by law.
6. All information, images, or videos shared digitally on public ministry communications channels aren’t considered confidential.
7. To participate in ministry digital communications, youths must sign a related consent form.
8. Youths who violate this policy may lose the right to interact on the youth ministry’s digital channels or be removed from the youth ministry program. The ministry’s pastoral leadership will notify parents immediately of any violation.
9. Youth workers on ministry business may never use a mobile phone while driving — even hands free — unless it’s an emergency.
10. Any texts, chats, instant messages, or emails sent by ministry youth workers must go to a group rather than to individuals.
11. There shall always be two unrelated authority figures with administrator rights on any account that is posting official ministry content.
12. Should an adult in leadership receive a private phone call, text or other electronic message from a child, youth or vulnerable adult that is questionable, the adult should end the conversation and offer an opportunity to have the conversation in person and in compliance with Safe Sanctuaries (i.e. with another person present, in an office with windows, etc.).

[Sample Worker Consent Form for Youth Ministry Digital Communication](#)

[Sample Participant Expectations for Youth Ministry Digital Communication](#)

[Sample Parent Consent Form for Youth Ministry Digital Communication](#)