

E-mails and text messaging guidance for Leaders



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The Internet and mobile phones are changing the way we live. For young people, they offer the opportunity to socialise, communicate and learn. Young people have taken to the technological advances very quickly, and often faster than their older counterparts. This sometimes leads to parents and carers being left behind, and unable to appropriately monitor young people's activity on the Internet and communications through mobile phones. This inability to keep an eye on these communications leaves young people increasingly vulnerable, and therefore more susceptible to being exposed to inappropriate contact and even more serious instances of child abuse.

As adults in The Scout Association we have a duty to safeguard the welfare of all young people in our care. The guidelines set out in this document are to help Leaders and other adults ensure that we make the best use of new technologies, while protecting both the young people in our care and preventing ourselves from being placed in a vulnerable position.

All communication should be in a Scouting context. Decide the most appropriate method of communication depending on the message/information being sent. Gain permission from Parents/Carers to contact the young person and ask them what the most appropriate forms of contact for that young person is.

Before sending an email or a text, ask yourself "would you be happy to copy in the young person's parents/carers?" If the answer is 'no' then do not send it.

Arrangements about activities or events for Beaver Scouts and Cub Scouts should always be addressed to the young person's parent or carer. Information for those in the Scout and Explorer Scout Sections may be sent to the young people themselves if necessary, with copies to their parents or carers.

Social Networking Sites:

Social Networking sites eg. Facebook, Bebo, Myspace, have become increasingly popular for contacting people, discussing issues and advertising up and coming events. The Scout Association recognises that they can be useful for specific Scouting projects. Our advice is that Leaders need to be very conscious of the context in which these sites are used and ensure the public cannot view any personal information of our Members.

Leaders need to be especially careful about those they accept as 'friends' on sites such as 'Facebook'. These sites are essentially designed for peer-to-peer contact. It is vitally important to ask yourself "Is the content of the messages and photographs available to be viewed on my profile suitable for young people (or their parents) in my Section to see?" If the answer is 'no or even a hesitation then do not put it up.

The Information Centre has guidelines on the photographing and video recording of Scout events.

The Scout Information Centre

Gilwell Park Chingford London E4 7QW Tel + 44 (0)20 8433 7100 Fax + 44 (0)20 8433 7103 email info.centre@scout.org.uk www.scoutbase.org.uk

Emails:

Many young people have email addresses and this can be a cheap and effective way of communicating with youth members. To help ensure that our communications with young people are appropriate, the following are some points for best practice when sending emails to young people.

- Ensure you use appropriate language; try not to include any words or phrases that could be misinterpreted.
- Try to have a separate email account for your Scouting communications, this is better than using your personal one as then all e-mails are contained within the same box and can then be accessed by other adults in Scouting as required.
- If you are sending images, make sure they are appropriate.
- Do not forward chain emails to young people.
- Make sure that any hyperlinks you include do not lead to inappropriate content.
- Always copy another adult into your emails.
- Always save a copy of all the e-mails you send.
- Blind copy e-mail addresses to ensure you are not broadcasting peoples contact details.

If you receive an email from a young person which causes you concern, refer to the 'Young People First' code of good practice (yellow card) <http://www.scoutbase.org.uk/hq/child-protection/> in the first instance and follow the guidance in it. You should then immediately seek advice from your District Commissioner.

If you receive any unsolicited messages from people you do not know which contain obscene or racist images these should be reported to the Internet Watch Foundation at www.iwf.org.uk

Phones and Text Messages:

Most young people have a mobile phone and most of them will say they can't do without it. With mobile phones also come text messages. Leaders of Scouts and Explorer Scouts may well find this the best method of sending out quick notices, like asking Members to remember to bring summer camp fees with them or to remind them of the meeting venue and time. When you send a text message or telephone a young person, you should once again try to ensure that the content of the message or call could not be misinterpreted. The following are some points for best practice when sending texts to young people.

- Ensure you use appropriate language, try not to include any words or phrases that could be misinterpreted i.e.
 - Having things in capital letters translates to them being shouted.
 - "LOL" can be translated as "Laughs Out Loud" or "Lots Of Love".
 - Using a kiss at the end of a text or within a signature may be taken out of context by some recipients and is likely to be seen as inappropriate in virtually every instance.
- Always copy another adult into your text messages.
- Be conscious of the time when sending messages or making calls, avoid late at night and the early hours of the morning.

If you receive a text message which causes you concern from a young person, refer to the 'Young People First' code of good practice (yellow card) <http://www.scoutbase.org.uk/hq/child-protection/> in the first instance and follow the guidance in it. You should then immediately seek advice from your District Commissioner.

More information about staying safe on the Internet for young people and adults can be found and www.thinkuknow.co.uk