

Diocese of Elphin



SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN

MOBILE PHONES, ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION AND PHOTOGRAPHY POLICY



POLICY FOR USE OF MOBILE PHONES

Introduction

The possession and use of mobile phones by children and young people is now extensive in society at large and therefore impacts on safeguarding best practice within a church context. Mobile phone technology has advanced significantly over the last few years - and it continues to evolve. Wireless connections in particular have extended the capabilities of mobile phones, enabling access to a wide range of new content and services globally. Many phones now offer Internet and email access, alongside the most often standard functions of messaging, camera, video and sound recording.

Mobile phones, alongside other forms of technology are changing the way and speed in which we communicate. They can provide security and reassurance; however there are also associated risks. Children and young people need to understand these risks in order to help them develop appropriate strategies for keeping themselves safe. As with e-safety issues generally, risks to children and young people can be broadly categorised under the headings of content, contact and conduct and managed by reducing availability, restricting access and increasing resilience.

This policy applies to all individuals who have access to personal or work-related mobile phones working or ministering within a church context in the diocese. This includes all clergy, lay staff, volunteers, committee members, children, young people, parents, carers, visitors and community users. This list is not exhaustive.

Use of mobile phones (particularly with the advent of increasingly sophisticated equipment and camera phones) presents a number of problems, including:

- Mobile phones can be valuable items and might render a child/young person vulnerable to theft.
- Mobile phones (and their cost and level of sophistication - or otherwise) can make students objects of envy or disparagement and could have implications with regard to discipline and potential bullying.
- Even when apparently silent, the use of mobiles phones for texting purposes could be potentially undermining of established codes of behaviour within various church contexts.
- Use of phones with integrated cameras, sound recording facilities and internet access could lead to child protection and data protection issues with regard to inappropriate capture, use or distribution of images and audio recordings.
- Children or young people using vulgar, derogatory, or obscene language while using mobile phones;
- Children or young people using mobile phones to menace, harass or offend another person.
- Children or young people engaging in personal attacks, harassment of another person by posting private information about another person using electronic messages, taking/sending photos, video recordings, audio recordings or objectionable images or video recordings, and phone calls.

- Children or young people posting images, video recordings, audio recordings of other students, staff members, school activities and facilities on the internet.
- Children or young people using mobile phones to bully others with the various church contexts in which they gather.
- Privacy concerns mainly related to the ability of many phones to take photographs, make video recordings or record conversations in the ignorance of those being recorded.
- It is also recognised that mobile phones can cause an unnecessary distraction during church activities and can be intrusive when used in the company of others.
- When mobile phones are misused it can impact on an individual's dignity, privacy and right to confidentiality. Such concerns are not exclusive to children and young people; hence there is a duty to protect the needs and vulnerabilities of all.

Notwithstanding the above it is not regarded as realistic to have a policy which prohibits clergy, staff, volunteers, children and young people from having mobile phones on their person within the various contexts in which they gather under the auspices of the Diocese. Not only would it be impractical to forbid individuals from carrying them, when the latest phones are so slim that they could be hidden easily, but it is understood that many parents would be concerned for health and safety reasons if their child were not allowed to carry a phone at all and might therefore be unable to contact their parents in respect of any situation that might arise.

Policy

Church personnel should be aware of the potential misuse of digital and mobile phone technology and should take appropriate steps to prevent it occurring.

Church personnel responsible for the supervision and safety of young people should not use mobile phones, for social or business purposes, unless in the case of emergency. To do so in front of children or young people would be considered both unsafe and inappropriate conduct. Anything which compromises the ability to maintain a safe environment and give full attention to the supervision of children should be actively discouraged.

Many mobile phones have a facility to take photographs and videos which can be immediately uploaded onto the web or social networking sites without permission. Therefore, group leaders should discourage the use of mobile phones during church activities. Each particular group may wish to produce its own mobile phone code of conduct to ensure safe usage.

Mobile phones with photographic and video facilities are not to be used in changing facilities or residential accommodation.

Inappropriate use of videos, DVD's, cameras, land line phones, mobile phones and picture mobile phones will not be allowed by adults working on behalf of the Church and children and young people while participating in Church activities. All mobile phones will be kept on silent or turned off during Church activities.

Contacting children by phone, text or e-mail should never be undertaken without parental knowledge or consent. Additional communication should be directed to the child's parent/guardian.

Other than in agreed exceptional circumstances, phones must be switched off/put on silent and calls and texts must not be taken or made during gatherings of children and young people within the church context.

Any child or young person who uses vulgar, derogatory, or obscene language while using a mobile phone will face appropriate sanctions as pre-determined by the particular group code of conduct.

It should be noted that it is a criminal offence to use a mobile phone to menace, harass or offend another person. As such, if action as sanctioned by the group leader is deemed ineffective, as with all such incidents, the particular group leader may consider it appropriate to involve the Gardaí. Hence, children/young people with mobile phones must not engage in personal attacks, harass another person, or post private information about another person, via SMS messages/chat rooms/social network sites, taking/sending/uploading photos, phone calls. Circulating objectionable images will also be treated as a serious disciplinary issue.

Children/young people using mobile phones to bully other students will face appropriate sanctions as pre-determined by the particular group code of conduct.

Appropriate sanctions for breaking with code of conduct will include confiscation of mobile phone until group activity is completed and informing the parent/guardian. Illegal activity will result in the matter being referred to the Gardaí.

There are situations when access to a mobile phone will make a positive contribution to the safety and welfare of children, particularly when an emergency occurs.

PHOTOGRAPHY/VIDEO POLICY

Introduction

The key concerns regarding the use of images, video and photographs of children/young people relate to:

- The possible identification of children/young people when a photograph is accompanied by personal information and possible inappropriate use afterwards.
- The inappropriate use, adaptation or copying of images for use in child pornography or illegal websites.
- A common sense approach is required when deciding on what may or may not be appropriate as the Diocese does not wish to prohibit the recording of celebrations at parish level through the use of photography or recording on video equipment.
- Outlining photography and recording policy at the outset will clarify matters for all concerned.
- It should be noted that the Diocese has little or no influence on what photographs may be taken and published in local or national newspapers as such photography is covered by a different set of guidelines.

Policy

Any piece of equipment which has the capability of capturing an image of child or a young person is governed by this policy.

Parental/Guardian consent should be sought before any media photographs/digital videotape/film is taken.

In the case of First Communion or Confirmation, where children are prepared in school, parental permission for any media images should be obtained by the school. This may be done by the teacher or, by agreement or by the Manager of the School.

Photographs should only be taken by an authorised person for legitimate reasons related to the child or school or parish.

In the case of First Communion and Confirmation ceremonies, parents should be informed, in advance, that photography may not be permitted in the Church until the ceremony is over. However this will depend on the local policy of the individual church or parish.

The press should be informed of this policy beforehand. It is not illegal to take photographs at a public event, even if asked not to do so but, if an event is private, then one can insist that the policy is followed.

A photograph should not allow an unauthorised person to identify a child or their whereabouts. If the full name of a child is used, there should be no photograph; if a photograph is being used the full name should not be given.