

E-Safety Safe Church Guideline

The introduction of online activities for all age groups, has caused the Church to consider measures to keep people safe while interacting online. Children, and indeed some adults, do not always understand the implications of interacting online so it is important that safeguarding measures be put in place for any online church activity particularly those where children are in attendance (e.g. zoom church services, zoom Sunday school).

The following points should be considered for children's and youth activities which are held online but are also helpful for general live streaming, particularly where both children and adults are in attendance.

Online platform system protections

- Only use the social media and collaboration platforms that have been authorised by your church council and use the congregation's account for that platform
- Keep any links to online activities private to invitees and ensure parents are aware of the activity and that they remain nearby during the activity.
- If certain platform functions are not permitted (e.g. video,-audio recording, chat functionality), use system level controls to disable them. Recording or taking screen shots of any children's online activity or worship service which includes children should be carefully considered. If an activity is to be recorded, parental permission should be sought and the participants made aware of this and the subsequent use of recordings on social media sites is discouraged-
- Ensure that appropriate privacy settings are in place.
- Consider restricting the chat function for users to communicate to the host or everyone. Be aware that the chat function may be used for side conversations during the activity.

Supervision of online activities by leaders

- For children's activities, ensure at least two adult supervisors are online, exactly the same as if a children's activity was in person. All adult supervisors require working with children checks or working with vulnerable people checks. This will include any IT specialists involved in the online ministry.
- Make sure all leaders know how to apply platform security and privacy settings to online activities. Leaders should know how to prevent uninvited attendees accessing online sessions, how to use waiting rooms on the platform if applicable, how to block video, audio or chat functions, and how to avoid exposing personal information. Leaders should also know how to mute people on arrival and block or remove uninvited attendees.
- Keep to allocated schedule, particularly for live video or audio sessions. Communicate any variations to the participants and parents.
- Ensure privacy is maintained and encourage all participants to have a neutral or blurred background and to use first names only-
- As with other children's ministry, ensure that content and language is age appropriate.
- Parents and church leaders should review the material on the e-safety commissioner's website. It includes detailed information on the various online platforms. <https://www.esafety.gov.au/>

Online codes of conduct

- Establish, communicate, and consistently apply clear rules for how adults and young people will interact online. For example, is live video and/or audio conferencing permitted? In what circumstances?
- Ensure that children and adults are reminded of the online code of conduct you have established before each activity begins.
- Ensure adult-to-adult and adult-to-young person interactions via all media always remains professional. It's a good idea to avoid using emojis due to the risk of misinterpretation.
- Avoid using personal email or social media accounts, or personal mobile phones when communicating with children and young people.

Use of recorded content on public platforms

- Churches also need to consider the appropriateness of publishing 'zoom' or other online services which show children, to their Facebook and web pages. Even closed Facebook pages can be hacked.
- Where children are featured within the livestream broadcast (eg doing the bible reading) which is going to a public platform including a closed FB group, parental permission is required first.

National Safe Church Unit Resource

The National Safe Church Unit ran a zoom webinar in October last year. Those churches who do livestreaming are encouraged to watch it. It provides useful information on a range of things regarding safe online interactions and live streaming of church services and youth groups.

<https://www.facebook.com/101345863273091/videos/347666019871293>