



PAN DORSET INTER-AGENCY SAFEGUARDING PROCEDURES

CHAPTER 4

4.4 GUIDELINES FOR TEXT MESSAGING AND E MAILING

Procedures Effective from: 2008

Review Date:

If you have any comments or queries about the pan-Dorset procedures please contact your agency representative on the Pan Dorset Policy and Procedures Group or notify the LSCB using the following email addresses:

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GUIDELINES FOR COMMUNICATIONS WITH CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE.

These Guidelines for Text Messaging, e mailing and e safety are produced to complement the Guidance for Safer Working Practice for Adults who Work with Children and Young People. (Nov 2007). The guidance document was commissioned by the Department for Children, Schools and Families. (DCSF). It does not replace or take priority over advice or codes of conduct produced by employers or national bodies.

It is a generic document that should complement existing professional procedures, protocols and guidance which relate to specific roles, responsibilities or professional practices.

The section that applies to technology is paragraph 12.

Paragraph 12 of Guidance for Safer Working Practice for Adults who Work with Children and Young People. (Nov 2007)

12. Communication with Children and Young People (including the Use of Technology)

Communication between children and adults, by whatever method, should take place within clear and explicit professional boundaries. This includes the wider use of technology such as mobile phones text messaging, e-mails, digital cameras, videos, web-cams, websites and blogs. Adults should not share any personal information with a child or young person. They should not request, or respond to, any personal information from the child/young person, other than that which might be appropriate as part of their professional role. Adults should ensure that all communications are transparent and open to scrutiny.

This means that the organisation should:

- have a communication policy which specifies acceptable and permissible modes of communication.***

Adults should also be circumspect in their communications with children so as to avoid any possible misinterpretation of their motives or any behaviour which could be construed as grooming. They should not give their personal contact details to children and young people including e-mail, home or mobile telephone numbers, unless the need to do so is agreed with senior management and parents/carers. E-mail or text communications between an adult and a child young person outside agreed protocols may lead to disciplinary and/or criminal investigations. This also includes communications through internet based web sites.

Internal e-mail systems should only be used in accordance with the organisation's policy.

This means that adults should:

- ***not give their personal contact details to children or young people, including their mobile telephone number (unless agreed as part of your organizations policy)***
- ***only use equipment e.g. mobile phones, provided by organisation to communicate with children, making sure that parents have given permission for this form of communication to be used***
- ***only make contact with children for professional reasons and in accordance with any organisation policy***
- ***recognise that text messaging is rarely an appropriate response to a child in a crisis situation or at risk of harm. It should only be used as a last resort when other forms of communication are not possible***
- ***not use internet or web-based communication channels to send personal messages to a child/young person***

GUIDELINES FOR TEXT MESSAGING AND E MAILING

Whilst these guidelines refer specifically to text/email communication, all staff should be aware of the need for appropriate professional recording and boundaries in ALL communication with children and young people, whether written or oral.

1. TEXT MESSAGING

- 1.1 A written record should be made of all calls from/to a mobile phone in the same way as calls from a landline, according to agency/service procedure.
- 1.2 It is good practice to make a specific note of any mobile phone contact outside of normal working hours.
- 1.3 Work mobile numbers should only be given out to children/young people in accordance with agency/service protocols and policies. Line managers should be informed of all occasions when a number is given.
- 1.4 The use of texting is accepted as an essential tool of social contact for young people. Adult users must be aware of this. **It is recognised that texting is increasingly becoming a 'normal' professional tool of communication between adults and young people alongside meetings, telephone calls and letters.**
- 1.5 Texting should only contain information of a professional nature and written plain, unambiguous language, reflecting dialogue that would occur face to face. The language used should be professional and appropriate to the service/agency. It would not be appropriate to use 'text language' in a professional communication.
- 1.6 Texting should only be used if previously agreed by the child/young person e.g. for a specific agreed reason or purpose. The reason should be noted in the case record.
- 1.7 Texting should not normally be used as third party communication i.e. to ask one

service user to pass on a message to another service user.

- 1.8 All texts sent/received must be recorded by being transcribed and put in the case file, timed and dated when recorded.
- 1.9 It is not recommended that personal home or mobile numbers are given to children or young people (or any service user). This should only happen where a service/agency policy specifically allows it and should be agreed with the line manager.
- 1.10 Any texts/calls of an abusive, threatening or nuisance call should be recorded and reported to line manager.
- 1.11 Agencies/services should be clear about when a work mobile should be switched on or off. A nuisance call received out of work hours can be very distressing. If the phone is off no nuisance call can be received.
- 1.12 The law is very clear about the use of mobile phones when driving, all users have a responsibility to comply with the law. Some agencies/authorities instruct that all mobiles are switched off when driving.
- 1.13 It is possible for mobile phones with Bluetooth capability to receive unsolicited material, including images. Any such images received should be reported to line manager and then deleted. Please be aware that the Bluetooth issue is a complex one, all phones differ. Mobile phones can be configured to prevent unsolicited material. Please contact your provider to clarify this.

2. POLICE ADVICE REGARDING INDECENT VIDEO, FILM OR STILL IMAGES TRANSMITTED BY MOBILE PHONE

- 2.1 No young person should be asked to forward any material by staff as this is inadvertently asking the young person to commit an offence of distributing indecent images.
- 2.2 If a young person is volunteering the images for a member of staff to view the staff member should get the young person's permission to hold on to the phone and contact the police to see if they want to view the images.
- 2.3 If a staff member has an image received on their phone they should contact their Headteacher/Line Manager/Head of Service immediately so that a manager is aware that the image has been received. The police can then be contacted and the image viewed by them if necessary and then deleted.
- 2.4 If a young person refuses to give their phone to a member of staff the young person should be advised to delete the material and a record of such kept on the agency file. The same advice should be given to staff.
- 2.5 **SCHOOL STAFF SHOULD NEVER DOWNLOAD ANY INDECENT IMAGES BUT IF IN DOUBT OF THE CONTENT, CONTACT THE POLICE SRU (Safeguarding**

Referral unit), OR DESIGNATED MEMBER OF STAFF FOR SAFEGUARDING WITHIN THE LOCAL AUTHORITY.

3. E MAIL COMMUNICATION

- 3.1 Many young people and children have a personal e mail address.
- 3.2 Any adult working with children or young people should only use a work email address, as defined by service or agency.
- 3.3 Any communication by e mail must be compliant with any individual service/agency protocol and guidance.
- 3.4 All communication should be for clear professional reasons and the content must reflect this.
- 3.5 E mail communication should only be used as part of an agreed strategy or plan with the child/young person and parent/carer should be aware of this, according to age of young person and agency/service protocol and guidance. Any e mail communication without parent/carer knowledge should only happen with the agreement of a line manager and the decision recorded
- 3.6 **A record of all e mails sent/received should be kept as part of the agency add 'or service' record, printed off or copied into a computer system.**

4. SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

- 4.1 It is not recommended that adults working with children/young people correspond through social networking sites.
- 4.2 If you become aware of a social networking site which contains any personal information about activities of concern about a young person known to you, this should be recorded and the line manager should be informed.
- 4.3 Staff should be aware of possible implications when entering any personal details on any gaming or social networking site e.g. you tube, my space, facebook etc.