

# A guide to safeguarding young volunteers on social media

## Why is this important?

**Safeguarding** involves protecting everyone from harm, abuse or neglect and young people are one of the most vulnerable groups in terms of safeguarding. Additional provisions must be made when an organisation regularly comes into contact with young people.

**Social media** is one of the most popular inventions of the online revolution. As well as many benefits, social media can pose new risks to young people. For that reason, organisations should prepare and adapt specific guidelines and policies if they are interacting with young people on social media to protect volunteers, beneficiaries and themselves.



## Risks and challenges of social media

**Age/Maturity of young volunteers.** Social media platforms have age limits. So, young volunteers may have not had as much exposure as you think to social media and may not know what is acceptable and unacceptable in terms of conduct, especially when using social media professionally.

**Professional conduct.** As an organisation, the conduct expected of you is the same online as it is in person. It can be tempting to conduct yourself in a more casual manner online than in person. The same goes for your young volunteers.

**Accidental misuse.** For example, people accidentally 'like' an inappropriate post or open a link to malicious software. Organisations can also be tagged or mentioned in inappropriate content without knowing, if relevant security settings are not in place.

**Posting personal information** can identify and locate a young person offline. Some online location services can embed the exact location of where the post was uploaded, or where a photograph was taken. For young people this can present an issue of safety and security.

**Exposure to inappropriate content** or sexual grooming, luring, exploitation and abuse.

**Personal messaging.** Young people may want to engage with the organisation through private messaging services where there are no best practice guidelines.

## Case study

An organisation raising awareness about climate change wanted to **increase the reach** of its social media posts. They **appointed a volunteer** to run the organisation's social media accounts. The organisation gave the volunteer an **induction to its social media policy**, provided **guidelines on how to comply with the organisation's strategy** and appointed a **supervisor** who would offer support and oversee the published content.

The volunteer has posted **regular posts** on diverse content, interacted with **other organisations'** social media profiles and established **guidelines for each social media platform** for future volunteers. The organisation, by engaging a young volunteer, **increased social media engagement** by 60%.

## Practical tips



**Check privacy settings** on each social media platform and choose options that protect the privacy of both the organisation and volunteers. [How to set your privacy settings.](#)

**Check the age of young volunteers:** do not allow access to company social media accounts to volunteers who are below the relevant age limit for the specific platform (e.g. Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram have an age limit of 13) or engage on social media with people under those limits.

**Don't engage with volunteers' personal social media** through becoming Facebook friends, liking or sharing posts.

**Provide social media training** to all young volunteers that will use social media as part of their role in the organisation. Limit access to social media accounts to the individuals who have had this training.

**Make sure volunteers know how to use social media** in line with your policies, standards and platform terms of agreement. Don't tag under-18s in social media posts.

**Discuss ideas with volunteers** about the kinds of content they should and should not be sharing on your social media accounts.

**Ensure that guidelines for reporting an issue are clear** and understood by every volunteer before they use your social media platforms.

**Do not delete any private messages**, so that they can be monitored if necessary. Avoid using messaging services that require the sharing of personal data or where you cannot retain evidence of communications (e.g. Snapchat).

**Keep an eye on the content** being published by volunteers so you can edit or delete any inappropriate content, and explain changes you have made to volunteers, so they can learn and adapt.

**Ensure that volunteers know** about your safeguarding policy and what measures will be taken in case of a breach of policy. For example, a volunteer may be asked to remove an inappropriate Facebook post or change their privacy settings.

## Suggested content for social media guidelines

**Why is your organisation on social media?** For example, for promotion or sharing what is happening in your organisation, searching for partnerships with other organisations or inspiring your audience.

### What are the key themes of the published content?

For example, social media posts of an international affairs organisation focuses mainly on world issues, international development, global citizenship, sustainability, fair treatment of individuals, human rights, climate change and volunteering.

### What type of content?

For example - upcoming events, news from your organisation, short movies, surveys, articles relating to current affairs but also cycles of similar social media posts (e.g. quote of the day, 'on this day in history') which will ensure continuity.

### What is the tone?

How should the content be presented - optimistic and positive or controversial and thought provoking? Should the posts sound official (passive voice, 'our supporters') or personal (we, you etc.)

