



# Obligations when using Digital Media

C/2.2.1.1

## Purpose

Outline the mandatory minimum requirements to demonstrate compliance with the [Safe Church Policy](#).  
Complements the [Safe Church Training](#).

## Scope

Applies to all persons involved in worship or ministry online or using digital or social media.

## Mandatory Reporting Process and Reporting Links

Follow the [Mandatory Reporting Process](#), and:

Report online abuse or exploitation - <https://www.accce.gov.au/report>

Report cyberbullying or have inappropriate material removed from online - <https://www.esafety.gov.au/report>

Make an anonymous report to crime stoppers - <https://crimestoppers.com.au/#report>

## Meeting the requirements to provide safe online ministry

### 1. Parental permission

- 1.1. Before any young or vulnerable person takes part in online or digital church activities, make sure to get permission from their parents, carers, or guardians. Following the wishes and permissions of parents, carers, or guardians shows respect.
- 1.2. When asking for permission, make sure to tell parents or carers about the type and how often their child will participate in online or digital groups.
- 1.3. Please obtain an email from a parent, carer or guardian providing their consent. Alternately, [Attendee Information Forms](#) are on the Synod website, and are also available via the church management software [UCare](#) to assist you with this process.

### 2. Leadership ratios

- 2.1. Make sure the [required number](#) of leaders for activities is followed in digital settings too. At least two adult leaders should have administrator access to any digital church platform. All interactions should be visible to everyone.

### 3. Confidentiality

- 3.1. Be careful to keep things private in electronic communications. Do not share names, contact details, or other personal information online unless you have permission from the person, and/or their parent, carer, or guardian. The [Image Release Form](#) must be used to obtain written permission for the sharing or use of photos or images.
- 3.2. Only share someone's contact details with another person if you have permission from both the person whose details are requested and their parent.
- 3.3. If you are not using email list software, make sure all emails are sent using BCC (Blind Carbon Copy) to protect privacy. Treat a person's email address as private information, just like other contact details.

### 4. Privacy and sensitive matters

- 4.1. If someone starts a sensitive or pastoral conversation with you electronically, think carefully about the best way to respond. Remember that young and vulnerable people might not understand

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boundaries as well. As the Church representative, it's important to recognise when a conversation has crossed boundaries or is discussing a sensitive topic. Think about the ratio of leaders to children present. One approach is to suggest to the young person to continue the conversation later with a parent, a support person, or another appropriate leader present.

4.2. Sometimes, when people ask for prayers, it might mean they need to talk about something pastoral. Know your role and abilities, and if needed, refer them to more specialised help.

### 5. Age restrictions

5.1. Before using social media for your ministry, make sure you know and follow the rules about who can use it, how old they need to be, and how to keep things private or controlled. Many social media platforms have age restrictions, often starting at around 13 years old. In cases where young people are involved, using platforms like Zoom for group meetings might be a better option. Zoom offers the option to set up closed meetings, where only invited participants can join through email invitations from the host. For more specific guidelines regarding age and digital media, you can refer to the document titled [Digital and Social Media Age Guidelines](#).

5.2. If you're unsure about the suitability of a digital or online media platform, you can check the eSafety Commissioner's [website](#) for guidance. If you're still unsure, it's better to exercise caution and use a known safer alternative for online communication.

## Social Media content

### 6. Build a social media ministry team

6.1. When forming a social media team, seek individuals with skills in photography, graphic design, writing, and social media management. Ensure that each social media account has at least two administrators to prevent loss of access in case the main account holder leaves the Church.

6.2. Additionally, it's important to have a team leader who is either part of the church leadership or reports to them. This ensures that the social media ministry team aligns with the church's goals and accurately reflects its vision and values.

## Reporting requirements

### 7. Reporting

7.1. Understand your reporting responsibilities by reviewing the Mandatory Reporting Process [for Lay Workers](#). If you have any questions, reach out to your ministry agent. Refer to the [Reporting and Referral Guide](#) for guidance on where to report. Ministry agents also have their own [Mandatory Reporting](#) Process.

7.2. It's crucial to remember that mandatory reporting of suspected abuse, neglect, or exploitation of children, young people, and adults applies equally to the digital world. If you suspect sexual abuse or grooming, you **must** report it to the police in all cases.

7.3. When interacting with children, whether directly or indirectly, you are representing yourself as a leader or ministry agent. Therefore, some of your online interactions with family and friends may not be suitable for the children or vulnerable people you work with. It is best practice to:

7.3.1. Create a public page (with the right privacy settings) specifically for ministry purposes and engagement; and

7.3.2. Make sure that there are multiple administrators who can manage and access the public page; and

7.3.3. Keep your private account for communicating solely with family and friends.

7.4. If the social or digital media platform doesn't allow for a public page with multiple administrators, **avoid** using it for messaging or chatting as part of your ministry. Establishing clear boundaries for your ministry in the digital and online media space sets a positive example for both young people and adults.



## Taking, sharing/using photographs and videos

### 8. Gaining permission

- 8.1. Before using any photograph or footage of children, you need written permission from their parent or guardian. It's also important to ensure that the child themselves agrees to their image being used.
- 8.2. If someone declines to give permission, you can't use their image. Tools have been developed to assist in this process. You can find photo permission clauses in the following resources on the Synod website, or you can ask for permission via email:
  - 8.2.1. [Image release form](#)
  - 8.2.2. [Attendee information form](#)

### 9. Taking and sharing images

- 9.1. When taking photos of children, focus on small groups rather than individuals. Leaders mustn't identify people in the photo in writing (like tagging on Facebook or Instagram) unless they have explicit permission from the person in the photo and the young person's parent or guardian.
- 9.2. All young people should be dressed appropriately when photographed, meaning no swimsuits or pyjamas. Photos should be taken and shared in a way that doesn't allow children to be identified or tracked down, like avoiding showing school uniforms or name tags.

## Live streaming and broadcast

### 10. Clear signage

- 10.1. When recording services or activities for distribution or streaming online or through broadcast media, it's important to clearly post signs or notifications to inform all attendees and participants that the service or activity will be broadcasted. Consider using large fonts and providing signage in multiple languages if needed for your congregation or community. Place the signs in several noticeable locations to ensure they are easily visible to everyone attending the event or service.
- 10.2. It's best practice to also make a verbal announcement at the beginning of worship, ensuring that individuals who are vision impaired are aware that the service or activity is being broadcast.

### 11. Participation

- 11.1. Everyone participating in the activity or service, such as someone doing a Bible reading, must be informed beforehand that the activity or service will be recorded or broadcasted. It's best practice to obtain written permission from them for their image to be used. The [Image Release Form](#) can be used for both children and adults.

### 12. Sensitive information and children present in broadcast or streaming

- 12.1. Before sensitive parts of a service or activity, like personal sharing time or prayer requests, it's important to remind everyone that the service or activity is being recorded.
- 12.2. During a youth service where participants are sharing testimonies or prayer requests, it may be necessary to **stop** or **mute** the broadcast to protect the privacy of the participants.
- 12.3. If prior approval and agreement have been obtained from the parents regarding the content and process of sharing their child's testimony, then the broadcast or streaming may proceed without interruption. Each young person sharing their testimony in this manner will need to have a signed [Image Release Form](#).

### 13. Children

- 13.1. **All** children or young people under the age of 18 **must have** a signed [Image Release Form](#) to participate in a worship service or activity that is being broadcast or streamed (e.g. a child aged 12 doing a bible reading or a 16 year old leading a worship service). All documents are available on the Safe Church [Webpage](#).



## Creating a safe online community

### 14. Communication

- 14.1. Whenever you can, communicate electronically with groups rather than individuals. A group chat is the best option. If you're using social media for group ministry, consider using closed groups or community pages with secure settings. If a social media platform or app doesn't offer this, **avoid** using it for ministry purposes. Always direct people to the group account instead of your individual one.
- 14.2. If you're using the closed group model, make sure several leaders or ministry agents are administrators to ensure transparency and safety for everyone involved. It's best practice to provide parents with a schedule of proposed meeting times and ensure that all children have express permission from their parents or guardians to participate.

### 15. Social media

- 15.1. Platforms like Facebook offer churches and ministry groups a convenient way to communicate information, share details of upcoming programs, pictures, videos, articles, and more. However, it's essential to understand that the way people interact with Facebook groups versus Facebook pages differs significantly, and this should be taken into account when deciding which option is best for your ministry
- 15.2. Think about how you can strengthen the church community without causing division or showing favouritism, which might make others feel left out or inferior.
- 15.3. Be mindful, especially with requests from young people, that accepting some and not others might be viewed as favouritism and could work against your ministry goals. Remember that social media friends may share content that isn't authored by you and could be inappropriate. If you decide to accept friend requests, maintain clear boundaries and be vigilant about inappropriate or ambiguous posts. In a Christ-centred ministry, interactions should be appropriate, non-discriminatory, and inclusive. It's especially important to follow the age guidelines outlined in the [Digital and Social Media Age Guidelines](#) document.

### 16. Pages

- 16.1. These platforms are great for sharing information, and a well-maintained page can foster its own community. You can adjust the security settings to allow anyone to post, enable owner moderation for posts, or restrict posting to just the owner. These systems can help in building community and sharing information publicly.

### 17. Community groups

- 17.1. These platforms are commonly used for forming smaller subset communities. They can be entirely public and open for anyone to join, or inclusion can be moderated by group administrators.

## Information and support

Information and support can be obtained from the Safe Church Assurance and Support Officer on 07 3377 9833 or [safechurch@ucaql.com.au](mailto:safechurch@ucaql.com.au)

## Revisions

Document number		C/2.2.1.1			
Version	Approval date	Approved by	Effective date	Policy owner	Policy contact
7.0	19.07.2024	General Manager Risk and Safeguarding	19.07.2024	General Manager Risk and Safeguarding	Safe Church Assurance and Support Officer
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