

CHURCH@THEPEAK SOCIAL CONTACT POLICY

1. PREAMBLE

The purpose of this policy is to provide clarity around the appropriate use of social media, communication, and general social contact between church leaders and the children and youth that we lead.

While this policy is intended to give direction and clarity to church leadership, it is in effect a statement of principles, not a rigid set of rules. There may be times where exceptions will need to be made. The approval of two-thirds of Parish Council is needed to approve exceptions.

This policy ought to be read in conjunction with:

- (a) ***Faithfulness in Service:*** a national code for personal behaviour and the practice of pastoral ministry by clergy and church workers.
- (b) ***Safe Ministry Blueprints:*** guidelines aimed at ensuring greater awareness, transparency, and accountability within our churches and to help foster a culture of safe ministry at all levels of the church.¹
- (c) ***Church@thepeak Online Youth Guidelines: For Leaders, Parents, Caregivers, and Youth:*** guidelines aimed at ensuring the safety of our children, youth, and youth leaders during times of pandemic, restrictions, and lockdown whereby regular youth meetings may be held using online video communication software (i.e., Zoom).

2. SOCIAL CONTACT POLICY

We want to encourage healthy, appropriate, relationships with the children and young people we lead. Depending on the age of the children this can at times involve contacting them outside of the main program and can include calling, talking online, and meeting in person.

While some conversations are private it is important that relationships are transparent. Parents and church leaders should be aware of the relationships that exist between leaders and the children and youth even if they are not aware of every conversation.

Listed below are the guidelines for social contact between church leaders and the children and youth, beyond the structures of the regular program.

¹ <https://safeministry.org.au/blueprints/>

(i) Faithfulness in Service

5.32 *When meeting a child privately you should:*

- *have parental or guardian consent, where practicable;*
- *ensure where appropriate that a parent, guardian, or suitable adult is present;*
- *inform another member of the clergy, an adult church worker or another adult of the time, location, and duration of the meeting;*
- *not invite or have children to your home or visit children in their home when no other adult is present; and*
- *make a record of the time, location, duration, and circumstances of any meeting where it is impracticable to follow these guidelines.*

(ii) Gender

- In general, leaders should limit their contact with young people of the opposite gender.
- During a program, leaders should focus their attention on young people of the same gender.
- Contact outside of the program should be by someone of the same gender.
- It is appropriate to send generic invitations or reminders to young people of the opposite gender.

(iii) Primary School Students

- Phone
 - Any phone contact should be for ministry purposes only.
 - Contact should be with parents and then, if appropriate, with the child.
 - If the child answers the phone the leader should speak to the parent first and explain why they are calling, and then speak to the child if appropriate.
 - Leaders should never contact a primary school student on their mobile phone.
- SMS
 - SMS can be sent to the parents or guardians for logistical purposes (e.g. event reminder).
 - Leaders should never SMS a primary student on their mobile phone.
- Email
 - Email can be sent to the parents or guardians for logistical purposes (e.g. event reminder).
 - Leaders should never email a primary school student directly.
- Social media
 - It is inappropriate to contact or talk with primary school students on any social networking site.
- It is never appropriate to meet primary school children socially unless it is in the context of socialising with the child's family.

(iv) High School Students

- Phone
 - Phone contact is permissible for ministry purposes; however, long conversations are to be avoided.
 - Where practicable and possible, the leader should speak to the parent first and explain the reason for the call.
- SMS
 - SMS should generally be limited to logistical purposes and encouragement (e.g. "*praying for you today, don't forget the event this week*", etc.) with a BCC/CC to the person the leader reports to for accountability, safe keeping, and future reference.
 - All other SMS (e.g. arranging discipleship meeting, follow up, etc.) should be sent to the young person with a BCC/CC to their respective parent/s for accountability, safe keeping, and future reference.
- Email
 - Email should generally be limited to logistical purposes and encouragement (e.g. "*praying for you today, don't forget the event this week*", etc.) with a BCC/CC to the person he or she reports to for accountability, safe keeping, and future reference.
 - All other email (e.g. arranging discipleship meeting, follow up, etc.) should be sent to the young person with a BCC/CC to their respective parent/s for accountability, safe keeping, and future reference.
- Online
 - Youth group members, their friends, and parents should be directed to the Church or youth group's official social media account (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, etc.).
 - The information posted online should be limited to logistical purposes and basic encouragement.
 - Caution should be observed with the use of any sites that delete posts, images, and comments.
 - As such, there should be at least 2 designated leaders whose role it is to moderate each account for accountability.
- Discipleship Groups (Yrs 9-12)
 - A leader can meet with two or more youth for discipleship in a public place (e.g. McDonalds, café, etc.).
 - Written or verbal permission from the parent/s is required to ensure they are aware of the meeting and its purpose.
 - Leaders can communicate with their discipleship group using an agreed social media platform (e.g. Facebook Messenger,

WhatsApp, Instagram), providing it includes a second leader whose role it is to moderate the group for accountability.

- The information posted on these groups should be for logistics, encouragement, discipleship, and prayer.
- The Youth & Young Adults Pastor should be informed of all discipleship social media groups and ensure all groups have a designated second leader.

(v) Social Media

- Caution must be used when communicating with young people online. Leaders must maintain transparency and be accountable for what they say. Leaders must also take care with the message they intend to communicate through both the words and images used as it may be perceived differently by those who view it.
- Where possible, young people should be directed to the official church social media group/accounts (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, and Discord).
- Leaders are not to initiate friend requests with young people, including asking young people to initiate friend requests with them.
- However, as leaders aim to model the Christian life to those they lead and disciple, a leader may accept a friend request **if** it is initiated by the young person
- Under **NO** circumstances is a leader to communicate directly with a young person using their private social media account. **ALL** forms of direct communication with young people must be via the designated channels outlined above.
- In the event a child/young person initiates or sends a private/direct message to a leader, the leader is to inform the child/young person that they cannot communicate with them in that way and direct them to the official church social media group/accounts (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, and Discord). The leader is then to inform/communicate with the leader they report to Youth Minister, Kid's Church Co-ordinator, or Senior Minister of the communication. If the communication is sensitive in nature, the leader is to inform the child/young person that they will also be informing the Youth Minister, Kid's Church Co-ordinator, or Senior Minister of the communication.
- A senior leader (e.g. Youth Minister/Senior Minister) should be informed of all social media platforms, accounts, and groups used by the children's and youth ministry teams.

3. PHOTOGRAPHS

We often want to take photos as part of life together, however, the use and storage of these images must be carefully considered.

- An appointed leader should take photos of youth/children's ministry activities.

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- Photos should be saved to a secure location as soon as practical and kept secure (e.g. a ministry specific Dropbox or Google Drive folder that is accessed only by the senior leader/s). The photos should then be deleted from the respective leader's camera or phone.
- Leaders should not be taking photos of children or youth during ministry activities for any reason other than official ministry purposes which have been clearly discussed with the ministry leader.
- When taking photos:
 - Do not photograph any child/young people without parental consent.
 - Do not photograph any child/young people who has asked not to be photographed.
 - Focus on small groups rather than individuals.
 - All children/young people must be appropriately dressed when photographed.
 - Embarrassing or possibly degrading photos must be deleted immediately.
 - Children/young people should only take photos of ministry leaders as part of a group.
- When using photos of children or young people in print or online:
 - Seek written permission annually from parents/guardians (e.g. via Registration form) before posting photos of children/young people on the church website or social media.
 - Avoid identifying the person/s in the photograph in physical publications.
 - Do not tag youth in pictures online.
- Ministry leaders should monitor the Church's social media to ensure photos and comments are appropriate.

4. VIDEO PHONING (MOBILE PHONE/INTERNET)

- Leaders should not use video calling to communicate with children or young people.

5. POLICY REVIEW

The Social Contact Policy will be reviewed and revised by Parish Council as often as needed, with a thorough review every three years.

Parish Council must approve all reviews, amendments and changes to this policy.

Approved – August 2021.

APPENDIX 1

CHURCH@THEPEAK ONLINE YOUTH GUIDELINES For Leaders, Parents, Caregivers, and Youth

1. OPENING

The purpose of this document is to provide guidelines for Altitude Youth as we meet online due to Covid restrictions. During this time, Altitude Youth will meet via Zoom (an online video communication software). For the safety of both our youth and the leaders, we are encouraging everyone to follow the guidelines outlined below.

2. ONLINE GUIDELINES

(i) Participants must use their full name when joining Zoom meetings.

Participants' Zoom username must be their first and last name. This allows us to know who we are allowing to enter our Zoom meeting. If they are not using their full name on their Zoom account name (i.e., Dan Tooma) then we will not be allowing them to enter for the safety of others because we are unsure of who they are.

(ii) Where possible, participants should join Zoom from an appropriate location.

Appropriate locations are shared spaces like living rooms or kitchens, which are easily accessible to parents and caregivers. Less than ideal locations are private places like bedrooms and bathrooms. Please also consider what is in the background of your chosen meeting space.

(iii) Participants are not to record or share Altitude Youth meetings.

Where possible, leaders will turn this function off. There are legal ramifications for recording people without consent. In the case of breakout rooms, and where there is only one leader present, we are required to record the meeting and store the recording. Participants do not have permission to show others the content of the meeting by sharing the screen or audio with others including as it happens. We do recognise that parents and caregivers are an exception and ask that they respect the privacy and confidentiality of other participants, treating any personal information that is overheard with discretion.

(iv) All Altitude Youth meetings will use the official Church@thepeak account, be scheduled, and have trained adult leaders present at all times.

Each meeting will operate on an official account and invitations to the scheduled meetings will be sent out. We will have trained adult leaders with a current Working with Children Check and current Safe Ministry qualifications present in each Zoom meeting and breakout session.

(v) Participants must wear appropriate attire while on Zoom.

We ask that participants wear appropriate attire. This means no pyjamas, revealing or inappropriate clothing.

(vi) Participants must not share any inappropriate text, images, videos, backgrounds, or any other content in the live feed, chat function, or by any other means. Participants must not engage in any inappropriate conversations.

Any content considered by the leaders to be inappropriate (obscene, abusive, derogatory, etc.) will not be tolerated. This includes what participants say both verbally and using the private chat function. Leaders reserve the right to delete any inappropriate content.

(vii) All regular Safe Ministry and Faithfulness in Service guidelines will be followed by all leaders.

For more information on these guidelines please see:

- Safe Ministry:
www.safeministry.org.au
- Faithfulness in Service:
www.safeministry.org.au/faithfulness-in-service-code-of-conduct

(viii) All Altitude Youth ministries will be held virtually until otherwise advised.

We are being diligently compliant with all government law and guidelines and will communicate when we are able to meet face to face again.



LEADER SIGN OFF

I have read and understood the Church@thepeak *Social Contact Policy* and agree to follow the principles of social media, communication, and general social contact between church leaders and the children and youth we lead that this policy outlines.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Position: ² _____

² For example: Kids' Church Leader, Altitude Youth Leader, Discipleship Mentor