

## Sample Electronic Communication Policy

A major component of the abuse prevention code of conduct used by many youth serving organizations is that no communication is allowed outside of program activities. Current technology has made monitoring and enforcement of that standard extremely challenging, yet it must be done to protect both staff and the children/youth in their programs. Well-defined screening and hiring protocols combined with detailed staff training and thorough parental education and feedback practices will work together to meet the goal of protecting children and youth.

Implementing an Electronic Communication Policy is an important means of keeping children safe. Designed to guide and protect both staff and the children and youth serve, it should be shared with parents and participants so that all expectations and controls are fully understood.

Your policy should include at least the following:

- **Phone Calls / Text Messages** – Staff members are prohibited from initiating or receiving personal phone calls or text messages with youth who are in or whom they have met through (Name of YSO) programming. A call or text is considered personal if it does not involve both a (Name of YSO) device and (Name of YSO)-specific subject matter. Staff members are required to report incoming calls or texts to their supervisor immediately.
- **Email / Instant Messaging** – Staff may not share any personal email address or instant message name or nickname with youth. Staff may neither initiate nor respond to email or instant message communication from youth while using any personal (i.e., non-(Name of YSO)) account or connection to the internet).
- **Social networking websites** – Any communication with youth using this medium (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, etc.) must use (Name of YSO) sponsored or approved sites – no personal blog or social networking website may be used. Also,
  - Any staff profile or blog must be private and inaccessible to youth; the site should not have pictures of, or make references to specific youth.
  - Staff with profiles on social networking sites may neither request to be friends with nor accept as a friend a youth as described in the policy.
- **Appropriate protocols** - All communication with youth must be from (Name of YSO) accounts and devices. Communication from youth must be forwarded to supervisory staff and the youth's parents or guardians must be notified. All other communication with youth must be documented immediately with the staff member's supervisor.

Programming with older youth who volunteer or are paid to assist adult staff in (Name of YSO) activities will often require communicating with them electronically. Youth staff are required to use only (Name of YSO) devices and accounts for such communication and contact records will be regularly monitored to identify excessive communication with any particular participant. If

this type of behavior is identified, (Name of YSO) staff will determine the appropriateness of the contact. Such communication may have been appropriate, but excessive contact with a particular child is a pattern common to abusers that must be investigated.