Safeguarding Children Online Guidance

Queen Mary Students' Union
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Safeguarding Children Online Guidance

Introduction

Safeguarding children and young people (anyone under the age of 18) is as important online as it is when conducting volunteering activity face-to-face. This is to protect the young people from harm but also to protect students when working or volunteering with young people. The Students' Union Safeguarding Policy outlines in more detail the responsibilities for activities that involve children or young people, including the responsibilities of students when working or volunteering in these activities. This policy underpins the guidance given in this document.

If you are planning on delivering activities online with young people then please let us know at su-volunteering@qmul.ac.uk so that the correct safeguarding measures can be put in place and relevant risk assessments are carried out.

This document covers:

- Safeguarding children online control measures
- Using Social Media
- Reporting your concerns
- Choosing the right online platform
- Accessibility

Safeguarding Children Online Control Measures

There are safeguarding measures that are embedded within the Students' Union Safeguarding Policy that should still be implemented when delivering activity online, these are:

- Make sure all volunteers are aware of and know how to recognise the signs of abuse, especially in relation to online harm and abuse. There is a useful resource from the NSPCC that explains these in more detail
- All volunteers working or volunteering with young people must sign a copy of the Safeguarding Agreement and e-mail a copy to su-volunteering@qmul.ac.uk
- Make sure to contact the school or community group that you are going to be working with to make sure that you are adhering to their online safeguarding policy and guidance
- Always use age-appropriate language in your communications and make sure all your communications are relevant to the work of the project you are involved in e.g. avoid using explicit language when communicating with young people
- Use organisational accounts to communicate with children and young people via email or social media, never personal accounts i.e. use your university e-mail account and their school e-mail account
  - o If you are planning on using social media to communicate with young people, please contact su-volunteering@qmul.ac.uk as there will be further measures that you need to put in pace to maintain the safety of young people and volunteers
  - o Note: No student should be using their personal social media account to contact young people in any circumstance

- Remember – you should never be in a one-to-one conversation with a young member, this includes through e-mail.
    - When using electronic forms of communication with a young person then a teacher, parent or guardian should always be copied in
- Student groups always need permission to use photos or videos of children/young people (most schools should have these permissions already)
    - Personal devices should not be used to take or store photos or records videos of children/young people

When running activities online you will need to make sure to follow additional safeguarding measures to make sure that the young people and volunteers are staying safe online. There are some simple but very important steps to ensure that your activity is safe in the virtual environment:

- Make sure that the platform that you are using is age appropriate for the group that you will be working with, you can check the age restrictions for each platform on this useful tool created by NSPCC: https://www.net-aware.org.uk/
- You must have at least two adults on the call whether you are speaking to one or a group of children/young people
    - Check with the school if there are specific safeguarding requirements e.g. DBS checks or whether ensuring a parent or guardian is within the room with the young person when on calls
- There should be no one-to-one contact between a volunteer and a young person through the digital messaging systems, like e-mail and social media
- No recordings of video calls should be made if under-18s have live video on/profile names or photographs
- Talk to the young people about online safety at the beginning of the session
    - If using messaging functions on video calls/live streaming explain the different ways that they can interact in the comments
    - Remind them not to share any personal information
    - Make sure that young people know who to speak to if they see or hear something inappropriate during the session
- Utilise waiting rooms/ensure that your sessions are locked to only those participating so that members of the public cannot enter the calls

As well as these safeguarding measures that should be put in place for online activity, when using video calls it is also important to consider:

- Where are you as a volunteer having the call? What might be in the background of your image – is it age appropriate?
- Are you wearing appropriate clothing? Make sure that this is the case even if it is not in camera shot, you never know when you may need to get up to grab something! e.g. are there any expletives or explicit imagery on your clothing, make sure you are fully dressed!
- Think about utilising the blur function and be careful of who may be coming into your background while on the call
- Young people should try and avoid calling from their bedrooms where possible
    - If young people must be in their bedroom encourage them to blur their background/use one of the virtual backgrounds

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Using Social Media

Social media is a great way to engage with a wider audience and engage young people with content in a way that they interact with every day. However, there are also things you need to put in place to protect young people and yourselves. Here are some measures that you should consider implementing:

- Don't use Snapchat – there is no record of what is sent, and this is really difficult to monitor for inappropriate behaviour

- When creating social media profiles make sure that they have increased privacy settings e.g. use a Facebook page for communicating with under-18s

- Make sure that the log-in details change each year with the incoming committee and only those that require access to the accounts are made admins

- Create an automatic reply to redirect enquiries to a monitored inbox where relevant people (such as a teacher, parent, or guardian) can be copied in – this can be added to Facebook page messages automatically

- Posts and comments should be monitored by a nominated person in a student group who should remove inappropriate content and report any inappropriate content posted or raise any safeguarding concerns to su-volunteering@qmul.ac.uk

- Plan what is going to be said during a livestream to make sure that the content is age appropriate and inappropriate language is not used - either send it to su-volunteering@qmul.ac.uk and/or your clinical lead (if you have one) for advice or get the content signed-off by the school/organisation you are working with

Reporting concerns

The normal Students' Union processes are to be followed when reporting concerns relating to safeguarding issues, including when online.

- Raise your concern with the Students' Union's Nominated Safeguarding Officer (Bronwen Eastaugh, b.eastaugh@qmul.ac.uk), but do not discuss it with anyone else

- Make a full written record of any incident or disclosure using the Safeguarding Record Form, making sure that you date and sign the form – a copy of this can be requested by contacting the Nominated Safeguarding Officer

- Report it as soon as possible and don't be worried about reporting concerns

Choosing the right online platform

When deciding to move your content online there are lots of different tools that you can use to facilitate it. They all have different benefits and features so think about what would be best for the different types of activities/content that you are looking to deliver. There are a few ideas listed below that you could utilise, always make sure to check the age appropriateness of the platform.

Microsoft Teams

You can see all the features of Microsoft Teams on their website.

Good for: Interactive sessions, live-stream, screensharing, in-meeting chat and video chat.

Bad for: Cannot see all participants on the screen at one time – will only show 9 people on the call at one time. Only able to message everyone on the call through the chat function.

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Age limit: 13 and over – if they are using an Education subscription through their school then there is no age limit

Zoom

You can see all the features of Zoom on their website. Read their terms and conditions.

Good for: Interactive sessions, screen sharing, video calling and in-meeting chat.

Bad for: Time limit - on free accounts there is a 40-minute limit for group calls (more than 3 people)

Participant limit – the numbers of participant are capped dependent on the plan that you have, the free version is 100 participant limit

Be careful of: Uninvited guests who take over the meeting and display offensive or inappropriate images and video. To protect meetings from this, Zoom have added passwords to all online meetings. Remember to share the meeting password so everyone can join in. There is some useful guidance on how to make your virtual classroom safe on the Zoom website.

Age limit: 16 and over

Google Hangouts

You can see all the features of Google Hangouts on their website.

Good for: Group messaging, screensharing, video chat, interactive sessions and you can join without having Google account.

Bad for: Not great for large group chats, requires good internet connection, no file sharing function.

Age limits: 13 and over

Facebook Live

You can see all the features of Facebook on their website.

Good for: Live streaming video, can engage a larger audience through group's social media channels

Bad for: Interactions would be public

Age limits: 13 and over

Instagram Live

You can see all the features of Instagram on their website.

Good for: Live streaming video, can engage a larger audience through group's social media channels. Many young people use Instagram already so would likely get good engagement

Bad for: Interactions would be public

Age limits: 13 and over

Accessibility

Not all young people will be able to access online content in the same way due to different personal circumstances, here are some helpful tips for you to when developing your online activity:

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- Get a member of your committee to scribe Q&A sections so they can be sent out to the schools to share with their pupils following the live sessions

- If using slides, try and keep them quite plain – this means that a young person could utilise their screen overlay if they use one on their laptop

- How can students access the information post event? Perhaps recording audio or sharing notes from speakers about what they discussed afterwards could be a good idea

- Is your content able to be subtitled anyway or a transcript shared post event?

- When using text or share screen would the content you are sharing be compatible with a screen reader?
  - It is normally best to check with the children and young people beforehand if they have any accessibility needs and how you can facilitate them – they normally know best! You can do this in your sign-up forms before the sessions.
  - If you know of a student that would benefit from a converted document in advance, the university offers a conversion service: http://www.dds.qmul.ac.uk/sensusaccess/convert-a-document/

If you have any questions about anything in this document, please contact us on su-volunteering@qmul.ac.uk.

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