



Staff and Volunteer Youth Communication Policy

General

The purpose of this policy is to direct staff and volunteers in their practice with regards to communicating with students through social media, email, and mobile phone. Students communicate in these ways and it is essential for our ministry that we engage with them effectively and safely. Social media platforms are continually changing therefore this policy will be reviewed and updated annually. This policy is designed to provide a framework to protect children, students, staff and volunteers. It also serves to help children, students, and volunteers understand appropriate use of social media and modern technology.

Scope

‘Students’ are defined in this document as those in school grades 6-12th, or equivalent. If a student reaches the age of 18 before finishing high school, it is still good practice to adhere to this policy. Children in grades 5th and below should not be communicated with using social media or mobile phone.

Consequences for Non-Compliance

Violation of guidelines below may result in temporary or permanent suspension of volunteer’s role or termination of employment at the discretion of Gaines Church.

Consent Forms

Parents and guardians will be given the option to consent to the following in the **Student**

Release Form:

- Photos to be taken at youth events and then used in official Gaines Church publications, our Facebook group, and Instagram account, the Gaines Church website and displays.
- Students to have email contact with staff and volunteers in accordance with this policy.
- Students to make and receive calls and texts to and from staff and volunteers in accordance with this policy.
- Students to connect to their group’s Facebook page and Instagram account in accordance with this policy.

Note for All Forms of Communication

Communication should not take place with students between the hours of 10:00pm and 7:00am unless in an emergency initiated by student. Examples of emergencies initiated by students

include, but are not limited to, a student contacting volunteer or staff with suicidal/self-harm ideations, a student running away, etc.

Note this does not mean staff and volunteers have to be available to students at all other times. Students should also note that, while staff and volunteers will exercise appropriate discretion in dealing with the substance of communication, they cannot promise confidentiality. An effective way to speak about sensitive matters with youth is to give options. For example, “If we get to a point where I think it would be important for your parents to know this, I’ll give you some options. You can tell them. Or, we can tell them together. Does this sound ok?”

Emails

1. Once permission is given via the annual **Student Release Form**, staff and volunteers can use email addresses for students in their care.
2. Emails should be short and should usually be a one-off communication to arrange a meeting or remind young people to attend an event.
3. Conversations should not be had over email. Staff and volunteers should arrange to meet one-on-one with a student if the student would like to talk.
4. If an email raises any child protection concerns, the staff or volunteers must raise the issue with their supervisor, according to the **Gaines Church Abuse Prevention Policy**.
5. When a volunteer leaves the Gaines Church student ministries team, student’s email addresses should be removed from private phones and any other digital or written record, unless approved by a student’s parent.

Phone Calls and Texting

1. Once permission is given via the **Student Release Form**, staff and volunteers can use mobile phone numbers of the students in their care.
2. Text communication should be short and should usually be a one-off or quick conversation to arrange a meeting, check in, or remind the student of an upcoming event.
3. Staff and volunteers should use an appropriate tone; friendly, but not over-familiar or personal. While communications should be warm and friendly, they should not suggest or offer a special relationship beyond spiritual guidance and support.
4. Staff and volunteers should only give personal contact details that are within the public domain of Gaines Church, including their mobile phone number.
5. Conversations should not be had over texts. staff and volunteers should arrange to meet one-on-one with a young person if the young person would like to talk, in accordance with the **Gaines Church Abuse Prevention Policy**.
6. Staff and volunteers can have phone calls with students, but these should be short and within the specified time boundaries.
7. If a disclosure is made that raises a safeguarding concern, verbatim notes should be made as soon as possible. The staff or volunteer must raise the issue with the supervisor, according to the **Gaines Church Abuse Prevention Policy**.
8. When a staff member or volunteer leaves the Gaines Church student ministries, students numbers should be removed from private phones and any other digital or written record, unless approved by a students parent.

Social Media

This policy does not list every social media platform, but the principle for all of them is that staff and volunteers should carefully consider following/befriending, and being followed by/befriended by, students. *This should only occur when initiated by the student.*

This also applies to private messaging. Private messaging should only be done when a student initiates and in accordance to the above communication rules. All contact must be done in a way that can be saved and shown to the supervisor if necessary.

Facebook Groups

Each Gaines Church student ministry group can have a Facebook group. They should follow this policy on the group page:

- The group must be closed.
- The group must be monitored by at least two staff/volunteers who have admin rights.
- Students, student's parents, staff, and volunteers can become a member of this group, provided they are 13 or over.
- Communication can occur openly through comments and posts on the page.
- Events can be posted on the page.
- Gaines Church personnel are forbidden to post or distribute personal identifiable information of any child under the age of eighteen. Personal identifiable information includes but is not limited to: full name, home address, email address, telephone number or any information that would allow someone to identify or contact a student or that would jeopardize their safety or well-being in any way.
- As an exception to this policy, a student whose parent or other legally responsible adult has signed a Student Release Form may be identified by name in photographs or videos posted to an official social media account unless the child or his/her parent has requested otherwise.
- Privacy settings on photographs should be set up to ensure only members of the group can see them.

Instagram

- This platform is currently popular amongst students and should be carefully attended to by volunteers and staff. No student that is not under the specific care of the volunteer or staff member should be followed. Only follow and be followed by students when initiated by the student and never initiate private messaging.

Snapchat

- Because this platform deletes message history, unless otherwise opted out of, staff and volunteers are not permitted to use it to engage with students. If a student wishes to add a staff member or volunteer on Snapchat then the staff member or volunteer should refer them to another allowed platform for communication. *The preferred avenue of communication is always text messaging or phone calls.*

Any other social media requests from students not mentioned above should be discussed with the youth pastor in order to determine which actions to take.

I have read and will adhere to the guidelines outlined above.

Printed Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____