



Minnesota Conference

United Church of Christ

Tips for Maintaining Healthy Boundaries for Online Youth Ministry

1. Boundaries are always the responsibility of the adult, not the minor
2. Understand the inherent power imbalance in your relationship with a minor
3. Remember your role as facilitator/guide/leader/mentor/etc.; you are not a friend or pal
4. Obtain permission from minor's parent/guardian to interact with minor using social media/technology and to add minor to any communication distribution list
5. Have accurate, accessible contact info for parents/guardians
6. Communicate your availability and boundaries to youth (for example, if you don't want them to text you after a certain time, except in case of emergency – tell them that, and stick to it)
7. Group interactions ideal (like group zooms or group chats); if using breakout spaces online, always have an adult present in each breakout group/room
8. Have at least two adults present for any online group gathering
9. When possible invite parents to remain within listening/viewing area for group gatherings; inform parents in advance of any group gatherings; send reminders at least an hour before each gathering
10. Sometimes private 1:1 interactions are part of ministry, especially with youth; be thoughtful and intentional about when and why
11. In your communications with minors, especially 1:1, be as clear as possible to avoid misunderstanding or confusion.
 - a. Avoid emoji, emoticon, memes
 - b. Avoid sarcasm, shorthand, abbreviations, slang
12. Have a safety plan. What will you do if the minor expresses intention to harm self or others?
13. Make sure minors understand you are a mandated reporter, and what that means. Make sure you know what that means ([State of Minnesota mandated reporter training](#))
14. Only use apps that you are fluent in, and use them for their intended purpose (for example, if youth wants to have a longer conversation over Instagram DM, encourage a switch to more appropriate platform like texting or video)
15. Be thoughtful regarding self-disclosure through social media; why are you sharing something, and for whose benefit? Err on the side of caution; if in doubt, don't share.
16. Use apps that keep a record of interactions and/or take screenshots
17. Utilize a supervisor or accountability partner (always another adult) to ensure your practices are appropriate and for processing dilemmas/difficult situations

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