Leading with Care Online

Suggestions for Working with Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults in Online Forums

With so many ministries and congregational activities using online media and forums for meetings and activities due to the COVID-19 public health restrictions, it is important to remember that even though the way we carry out ministries may have changed, concern for the safety and well-being of children, youth and vulnerable adults in accordance with the *Leading with Care* policy has not. Those in leadership positions are advised to re-read and re-familiarize themselves with the *Leading with Care* policy, in particular the Risk Assessment Guide chart on p. 21, to see how the policy would be applied to an online setting. Some excellent suggestions can be found in Tori Smit's article on the CNOB Synod blog, "Applying Leading with Care to Zoom Meetings for Children and Youth," which can be found here.

General Principles

- Under no circumstances should online one-on-one meetings take place without taking steps to minimize risk. Care should be taken to ensure that online gatherings involve two or more non-related leaders, or that a parent/guardian is in attendance, or at least close enough to the same area as the vulnerable person's computer to monitor activity.

- Where possible, and especially with children and youth activities, make sure the date, time and purpose of the meeting are clearly communicated to both the participants and their parents/guardians.

- Police record checks are still required for those leading online meetings and events by video conferencing where children and youth are participating.

Below are additional suggestions and best practices to consider. Some of them are applicable to all online events and meetings and not just those involving children, youth and vulnerable adults.

Electronic Communication, Media and Online Video Conferencing

- No Internet-based communication can be guaranteed to be completely secure and confidential, so make every reasonable effort to implement technical security measures and best practices to reduce the risk of a confidentiality breach.

- To protect personal privacy when sending mass emails to congregations or other parties, always use the blind copy (BCC) option.

- Staff or volunteers of the ministry, congregation, or its affiliates should not capture, post, or promote personal images or videos for any reason without the express written consent of those who appear in the images or videos.

- Ensure that your computer or device is password protected and that you alone have access to the password. Additionally, use a password-protected private Internet connection (VPN) when on a video conference call for additional security. Consider choosing a username without personal identifiers (e.g., your full name or your birthdate) to ensure more privacy.

- Leaders who are hosting a video conference meeting should familiarize themselves with the privacy and security features of the video conferencing program they are using (e.g., Zoom, GoToMeeting, Skype).

- Control who attends the event by inviting only those who should be present and sending an invitation via email with a link to the event and instructions not to forward the link to others.

- Use the Waiting Room feature to monitor online arrivals to the meeting and only allow participants who should be there into the main meeting room.

- If necessary, the host can mute other participants' audio or turn off their video.

- Headphones can be used to increase privacy during confidential conversations with vulnerable parties, though with the kind of appropriate "open door" supervision used for in-person meetings.

- For the safety of all parties, consider first obtaining permission from participants' parents/guardians to record the meeting or event. Keep the recorded event file in a secure location and delete it after a reasonable period of time.

- When using the screen sharing feature in a video conference call, be sure to close all other programs on your computer to prevent confidential material from appearing in the background when the screen sharing feature is enabled.

- At the conclusion of the event, make sure you stay on the video call until all the participants have left. The host should be the last one to leave the meeting by closing it out.

- Watch for signs of anxiety, grief, or mental health concerns among children and youth who may be struggling during this uncertain time and dealing with emotional issues.

If you have any questions about implementing the *Leading with Care* policy in an online environment, please contact David Phillips, Leading with Care Administrator (DPhillips@presbyterian.ca).

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