

Central Bedfordshire Council's Children's Homes Digital Safety Policy

A great place to live and work.

1. Introduction.

1.1 The online world is an integral part of the lives of our children and young people, we need to understand the benefits and potential risks to ensure we are able to effectively support the children and young people we work with.

1.2 Social media, websites, games, and applications can be easily accessed through smart mobile telephones, computers, laptops, and tablets. The online world has become even more important to children and young people in the Covid-19 pandemic, providing a platform to continue with their education but also allowing them to communicate and socially interact with their peers.

1.3 Whilst the online world can support learning and development it is not without its risks. It is our role to ensure that we can educate and support our children and young people to keep safe when online. Children and young people should be able to use the internet for education and personal development, but safeguards need to be in place to ensure they are aware of the risks and can keep themselves safe.

1.4 This document provides guidance as to how Children's Homes should use the internet and social media, and how we can ensure children and young people use it safely. It also outlines the online behaviour we expect of the staff who work for us and all the children / young people who are supported at our Children's Homes.

1.5 The Pan-Bedfordshire safeguarding children's board (SCB) provides detailed guidance children/young people exposed to abuse through digital media as well as guidance around child safety online:

https://bedfordscb.proceduresonline.com/p_esafety_abuse.html?zoom_highlight=internet

2. Aims:

2.1 The aims of our online safety policy are:

- to protect all children and young people who may use technology (such as mobile telephones, games consoles, tablets, iPads, and the internet) whilst in our care
- to provide staff with information about online risks, potential indicators of abuse and inform them how to respond to any incidents
- to ensure all staff operate in line with our values and within the law regarding how we behave online

3. Understanding the online world:

3.1 As part of using the internet and social media all staff will:

- understand the safety aspects - including what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour for staff and children/young people when using websites, social media, applications, and other forms of digital communication
- apply the safety principles regardless of the electronic device being used
- support our children and young people to understand the potential risks
- report and record any concerns of abuse or disclosures made that take place online
- ensure when using social media platforms, such as Facebook, twitter, Tik Tok and Instagram etc that they adhere to the Council's guidance for employees using social media: <https://centralbedfordshire.app.box.com/s/8grw7hgmhsnz6eqhymaivu802mrt4die>

4. Managing our online presence

4.1 Due to the nature of the service provided at Kingfishers and Maythorn Children's Homes, staff will be responsible for supporting many of the children and young people with accessing the internet. A number of our young people bring in equipment from home however they are reliant on staff to log in and access their applications for them.

4.2 Some young people may use their tablets to settle at night, in these instances staff should be aware that the young people may become frustrated if their film/clip has finished and they are unable to start another clip, movie etc. Supervision and support are key in ensuring that young people are not left feeling frustrated/upset.

4.3 The young people living at Number 32 have access to their own devices such as telephones, laptops, tablets etc. and access applications, social media, and the internet through the Council's wi-fi. Young people will often listen to music or watch videos to help them relax and settle at night. Parental controls are enabled to prevent young people accessing inappropriate content. The use of online gaming through games consoles is also monitored.

4.4 As part of the support provided, staff help to educate young people to understand the potential risks of using the internet and help educate them so that they can keep themselves safe.

4.5 All devices used in the homes, regardless of whether or not they are the property of the child / young person, must enable parental controls to manage content.

4.6 iPad/telephones/tablets should be turned off and stored when not in use. If they need to be charged they should be removed and safely charged. Staff should be aware that devices must not be charged overnight in bedrooms.

4.7 Staff should make themselves aware of how iPads/tablets/telephones etc. work i.e., whether they need to be linked into the home's public or staff wi-fi. Public wi-fi will allow some apps to work however some will need to be logged into the staff wi-fi in order to access 'You Tube' etc. Some communication applications may work whilst offline.

4.8 Time spent using iPad/tablets/telephones should be monitored and limited (where possible). Young people should be encouraged to engage in activities or with the group.

4.9 Young people should be encouraged to spend time with the group or engaging in constructive activities. Time using tablets/telephones should be limited to ensure that young people are communicating with staff/other children/young people.

5. Keeping Safe Online

5.1 Whilst we understand the importance of learning opportunities provided with being able to access the internet we also understand that there is a danger if not managed appropriately. Young people may be able to access inappropriate content often innocently and /or inappropriate adults being able to access children's profiles often presenting as a child/young person themselves.

5.2 The risks to having access to the internet and in particular a number of social media applications could potentially be damaging/dangerous for the children/young people. Staff should be aware of these risks/threats to children which could include:

- Exposure to violence
- Exposure to content of a sexual nature
- Exposure to harmful language
- Exposure to cruelty to animals
- Risks associated with online paedophiles
- Grooming/exploitation
- On-line bullying
- Feelings of disempowerment

5.3 The children/young people supported for short breaks with iPads/other electronic devices, have access to the internet and can access applications themselves and should therefore have a thorough risk assessment.

5.4 Any young people who are at a higher risk of accessing inappropriate material should have a plan of how their online time is managed with their iPads/tablets being taken out of their rooms at night. Staff should supervise the use of such equipment and as stated above they should be encouraged as much as possible to enjoy their time at the home as technology free as possible.

5.5 There is also an SCB training pack available for staff. This training pack covers 'safeguarding children in the digital age' and has some useful information to effectively achieve better outcomes for our children and young people.

5.6 Staff at each Home also need to be aware of how to keep themselves safe online. This includes thinking about security settings, passwords, what is being posted online and how this may reflect on the employee as an officer of the Council and who they are linked with.

5.7 There are a number of useful online resources and information available to support staff to understand how to keep safe and to support the children/young people to keep safe online:

- www.thinkuknow.co.uk
- www.saferinternet.org.uk
- www.net-aware.org.uk
- https://parentzone.org.uk/Digital-Parenting_Magazine-order-here
- <https://h2bsafetycentre.com/>
- [Http://www.esafety-adviser.com](http://www.esafety-adviser.com)

6. What we expect of staff:

- 6.1 Staff must familiarise themselves and be aware of this policy and behave in accordance with it.
- 6.2 Staff will regularly check what children/young people are accessing on-line and ensure only appropriate material is being accessed. If concerned that children/young people are accessing inappropriate material and with consent from parent's/carers, staff can check the individual's online history.
- 6.3 Staff will ensure children/young people do not have their tablets/iPads in their rooms overnight.
- 6.4 Staff will supervise the use of the 'Alexa' or equivalent that is currently used by a Looked After Child to access stories and music.
- 6.5 Staff will limit time young people spend on devices and encourage them to communicate/play with staff during their stays.
- 6.6 Staff will be aware whether wi-fi is enabled and at what level, i.e., Council public or staff and whether they have 3 or 4G active.
- 6.7 Staff will encourage the children/young people to use the internet to access learning and communication and to supervise where appropriate.
- 6.8 Staff must seek advice from their manager if they have any concerns about the use of the internet or social media.
- 6.9 Staff will not 'friend' or 'follow' children/young people from any personal accounts on social media.
- 6.10 Staff will not communicate with children/young people via personal accounts or private messages.
- 6.11 Staff will ensure any disclosures of abuse reported through social media will be dealt with in the same way as a face-to face disclosure, according to our reporting procedures.
- 6.12 Staff must not engage in 'sexting' or send pictures to anyone that are obscene, indecent, personal or menacing.

7. Using mobile phones and other digital devices

7.1 The principles in this policy apply no matter what technology is used, including computers, laptops, tablets, wi-fi-enabled games consoles and smart televisions, and whether an application, programme or website is used/appropriate.

7.2 If any digital devices are used as part of activities within the organisation:

- we expect children and young people to adhere to the guidelines surrounding online use and behaviour set out in our acceptable use policy
- we will establish appropriate restrictions, more commonly known as 'parental controls' on any device provided to prevent misuse or harm
- young people must not engage in 'sexting' or send pictures to anyone that are obscene, indecent, personal or menacing

7.3 Staff that are smartphone users should respect the private lives of others and not take or distribute pictures of other people if it could invade their privacy.

As an organization we commit to implementing this policy and addressing any concerns quickly and within these guidelines.

Central Bedfordshire in contact

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