1.13.6 Correspondence, Communication and Social Networking

Scope of this chapter

This Chapter applies to all forms of communication that children may have with others, including written correspondence, telecommunications, including all mobile communications and web or internet enabled communications, including Social Networking sites.

For additional guidance regarding computers and internet safety, see **Computers and Internet Access Guidance**

Contents

Regulations and Standards

England

- Regulation 22: Contact and access to communications
- Regulation 38: Storage of records, etc.
- Regulation 12: The protection of children standard
  http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/541/regulation/12/made
- General data protection rules (GDPR)
  https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation

Wales

- Regulation 26: Safeguarding – overarching requirement
  https://www.legislation.gov.uk/wsi/2017/1264/regulation/26/made
- Regulation 27: Safeguarding policies and procedures
  https://www.legislation.gov.uk/wsi/2017/1264/regulation/27/made
- Regulation 48: Facilities and equipment
  https://www.legislation.gov.uk/wsi/2017/1264/regulation/48/made

1. Key Principles

Bryn Melyn Care Ltd. (BMC) makes every effort to put in place hardware and safeguarding tools / software to protect all young people and employees. This includes web site blocking of known malicious and inappropriate sites, including any site that is not categorised correctly or simply does not have any classification at all. These sites can be made available if a request from senior staff is made and they are happy for other staff or young persons to access these.

BMC uses hardware and software firewalls to monitor inbound and outgoing traffic. It also has policies in place on it's hardware platforms to limit access to it's secure networks.

The key principles, outlined below, apply to all forms of communication that children/young people may have with others, including:

- Letters and other forms of written correspondence;

- Telecommunications of any sort, including all mobile communications;

- Web or internet enabled communications, including 'social networking' websites, such as 'Facebook';

- Informal or formal 'face to face' social occasions.

The principles of keeping children safe are exactly the same, no matter what technologies they use or have access to:

1. Children should be given every opportunity to communicate with parents, relatives and friends, so long as they and others are protected from harm or from committing a criminal offence.

2. Before permitting a child to communicate with anyone, in any way, a risk assessment must be undertaken, on a planned or 'on the spot' basis.

Social media sites on the internet are used for the purpose of creating, sharing, exchanging and commenting on ideas and information. They can be used for:

• pooling resources, or working collaboratively, both internally and externally.

• communicating for business or social reasons.

• research.

• teaching, learning and assessment, and for giving feedback to students, or for providing support to students.

• helping to build useful relationships and to enhance the student experience.

A few examples of social media sites include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Instagram and Snapchat.

We positively encourage staff and students to take advantage of any opportunities provided by social media, in line with the guidance contained within this policy.

It is a key principle of this Policy that staff consider, when using these sites, whether they are speaking on behalf of the Bryn Melyn Care, or in their own personal, capacity. This applies whether they are using Bryn Melyn Care equipment, or their own personal devices.

Social media sites should be used responsibly and professionally. Staff should think carefully about the consequences of anything they write or send within social media sites

Staff should not use social media sites in such a way that damage might be caused to the reputation of the Bryn Melyn Care, its staff, or young persons. Defamatory comments should not be made on social media sites

Staff must be aware that any records that they produce, with regard to Bryn Melyn Business or especially young peoples information must not be stored or transmitted to any social media site.

2. Risk Management and Planning

Before a child/young person undertakes any communication, a risk assessment must be completed and suitable arrangements agreed or permitted.

2.1 Planned Arrangements

Preferably, the arrangements for a child/young person to communicate with others should be risk assessed and shared with the child/young person, social worker and those affected; with the arrangements clearly agreed, preferably in writing e.g. in their My Life Plan.

If it appears that communications need to be limited or withdrawn, the manager of the home should consult the social worker and change the arrangement as necessary. All changes must be set down in writing, preferably in their My Life Plan.

2.2 In an emergency

If no plan exists or circumstances are such that the agreed plan is compromised, staff must act as they see fit in the circumstances - taking account of the overall principle that they have a duty to take all reasonable steps to protect the child/young person and others from harm or to prevent any criminal offence from being committed.

This means that staff may limit or withdraw access to any form of communication in order to protect the child or another person from injury, to protect property from being damaged or an offence being committed.

If such exceptional action is taken, the child's social worker must be notified within 1 working day.

If a child is prevented from having access to a telephone, or access is reduced, it is deemed to be a sanction, and must be recorded as such.

3. Images and Photographs

Children/young people should not be permitted to have access to cameras or other technologies, including mobile 'phones, for the capturing of images or photographs unless it has been explicitly agreed by the placing authority in consultation with their parent(s) or a person with Parental Responsibility.

If agreement is given, consideration must be given to whether and how any images will be passed or given to third parties who may exploit them or may place the child(ren) or others at risk. If any risk is posed, to the child or others, the arrangements must immediately be reviewed. If the risks cannot be reduced or prevented, access to the camera/technology must be withdrawn.

The agreement and any arrangements must be put in writing, preferably in the child's My Life Plan and reviewed regularly or in the light of any events or incidents which have placed the child or others at risk.

Under no circumstances may images or photographs of children be taken or captured without the approval of the home's manager, in consultation with the placing authority.

4. Web Enabled or Internet Technology/Social Networking

Children/young people may not be given access to any form of web enabled or internet technology unless arrangements have been made to ensure that the exchange of information is filtered to protect the user and those being communicated with e.g. on 'social networking' (see definition in italics below) sites, from any illegal or potentially harmful images of information.

Children/young people should not be permitted to use sites that are also used by adults unless a full risk assessment has been carried out, in consultation with the social worker and a reputable IT specialist and suitable arrangements put in place to protect the child and others. These arrangements must be outlined in the child's My Life Plan and/or in the Statement of Purpose for the home, and must be reviewed regularly or in the light of any incident or event which compromises the safety of the child.

Staff who use social networking sites, chat rooms or other web enable/internet technology when they are off duty must ensure they take precautions to ensure they do so safely. If, at any time, they suspect that a child or someone known to a child has communicated with them, they must cease the communication immediately and report the matter to their manager.

Social networking sites are websites where you can create a profile all about yourself and contact other people. You can also upload photos, music and videos to share with other people, and on some sites, chat to other people on forums. Popular social networking websites include MySpace, Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, Habbo Hotel, Piczo and Bebo, but there are lots of others as listed earlier. They are used by people of all ages and some people have profiles on more than one website.

For more detailed guidance in relation to computers and internet safety, see **Computers and Internet Access Guidance**

5. Guidance

When considering whether to permit a child/young person to utilise or have access to any form of communication, consideration must be given to:

1. The child's background;

2. The circumstances 'on the day' or at the time;

3. Any risks posed by or to the person(s) being communicated with;

For example, the manager/staff should consider the following:

-   Is there any Contact Order in force in relation to the child or any member of his/her family?

- Is the child or person(s) being communicated with subject to a Child Protection Plan or a Child in Need?

- Is there anything in the Child's Care Plan, Placement Information Record or Chronology that indicates s/he or others may be at risk?

- Have the parent(s) been consulted about the arrangements or given consent?

- Are the person(s) being communicated with known, is the person an adult or does s/he pose any risk?

- Is there any risk that the child is being or may be bullied, mistreated or abused?

- Is there any risk the child may use the communication to bully or mistreat others, or to commit a crime?

- Before permitting any form of web enabled or internet communication, staff should be satisfied the child and others are safe;

- If the person(s) is not known or poses any risk at all, staff must limit or withdraw contact and immediately consult a manager, who must undertake a full risk assessment in consultation with the social worker;

- This can include temporarily withdrawing or removing mobile phones, internet access or computers from the child.

Revision History

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End