

(OSC) WhatsApp Guidelines



These guidelines apply to OSC staff using OSC work mobile phones for contacting young people (up to the age of 18) using WhatsApp. Personal phones are not permitted for this purpose. OSC volunteers are not required or permitted to communicate with young people in this way.

Regarding the use of personal mobile phones by OSC staff and volunteers, this is permitted for adult contact only.

It is necessary to use an OSC work mobile phone in order to keep professional and personal boundaries separate - OSC staff are working in a professional capacity for OSC and will not be communicating on a personal level (with students or young people under 18). OSC staff are not permitted to join an OSC related WhatsApp group if they do not have use of an OSC work mobile phone.

Young people need to be 13+ years old to use this app, in line with WhatsApp's legal guidelines.

Parental written permission should be given for communicating with their young person.

The OSC staff member will need to set up the group (after receiving parental permission for obtaining the young person's phone number) and be the main administrator, this is so that members can be managed and content monitored with an eye for any safeguarding issues. If any safeguarding issues are raised these should be referred to the DSL at the student's school as soon as possible.

For accountability purposes, at least two adults will need to be added to the group chat, e.g. OSC staff (Co-Directors), or/and a member of school staff.

Communication should be for information purposes or for arranging meetings (e.g. a CU planning meeting with CU leaders) only and not as a means for general conversation.

The video calling function within WhatsApp should never be used with a young person.

For many, especially young people, using social media and personal messaging is an extension of physical face to face relationships. The widespread availability of these platforms means it is important to understand how to use them responsibly. This requires extra care when dealing with young people and vulnerable adults to avoid the risk of:

- Forming inappropriate relationships
- Saying/typing things you should not, such as offensive, sexual or suggestive comments, or saying/typing comments which might be misconstrued
- Blurring the boundaries between public work/ministry and your private life
- Grooming and impersonation
- Bullying and harassment

OSC staff should never contact an individual young person using the 'Reply privately' function.

If there is a situation where a young person DMs one OSC staff member on the group chat, then they should respond with an acknowledgement by copying in the other OSC staff member, including a reminder to make sure all group members are included in future messages.

All conversations and threads should be kept and not deleted so that evidence of exchanges can be produced should the need arise.

Do not allow content to contain or share links to other sites that contain:

- Libellous, defamatory, bullying or harassing statements
- Breaches of copyright and data protection
- Material of an illegal nature
- Offensive sexual references
- Inappropriate language
- Anything which may be harmful to a child, young person or vulnerable adult
- Anything which may bring the OSC into disrepute or compromise its reputation