

**North York (Chinese) Baptist Church**

**CHILD, YOUTH AND VULNERABLE PERSONS POLICY  
ADDENDUM:  
DIGITAL MEDIA GUIDELINE**

**Version 2.0  
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# Overview

North York (Chinese) Baptist Church recognizes the value of using virtual platforms to reach and connect with fellow church members, other Christians outside of our church, and non-Christians. These tools are an important part of Family and Children's Ministry and Youth Ministry work, not just for disseminating and sharing information, but also for building community and caring for each other in real time. However, there is a need to use strict discernment, vigilance, and care in the application of these tools/platforms for ministry purposes and programming. The improper use of these tools can potentially result in serious abuse and/or consequences.

NYCBC's church code of conduct applies to all Digital Media interactions. Social media is a public platform (even if it is something set as private) and our actions and words will be visible to all. Everything shared on these platforms should be treated as if it were public. Even with deleted posts, traces will remain online. Be responsible, professional, accountable, and aware of all content and interactions on social media. Exercise common sense and safety. Herein, "social media", a form of digital media, will be collectively referred to as "Digital Media".

## Scope

The Digital Media Guideline applies to all digital, online and mobile platforms used for official, but not limited to, NYCBC Family and Children's Ministry (FCM) and Youth Ministry (YM) purposes. It is intended for all those ministering to Minors (e.g., pastors, Sunday School teachers, youth leaders, VBS staff). This information should be shared with Ministry Leaders/Volunteers, children, young people, and their parents as appropriate.

## Definitions

**Digital Media:** Social networking sites, text messages, email and other forms of electronic communication; all digital, online and mobile platforms, such as Zoom, Google Meet, Facebook, Instagram, Whatsapp, Discord.

**Minors:** any children and youth under the age of 18

**Ministry Leader:** any Family and Children's Ministry member (as approved ministry member by the church, not just a helper or volunteer) and members of the Youth Ministry Pastoral and Administrative Teams

**Offensive:** (with reference to language, material, content or any other kind of submission) obscene, hateful, indecent, sexist, defamatory, abusive, bullying, harassing, discriminatory, racist, or violent. It includes but not limited to ethnic slurs, religious intolerance, sexual orientation/identity or personal attacks.

**Personal Information:** information about an identifiable individual, including, but not limited to, a Minor's name, parent's names, phone number, e-mail address, and photograph.

**Volunteers:** Church Staff, Ministry Leaders and all other Volunteers directly involved in Family and Children's Ministry or Youth Ministry

## Guiding Principles

1. Conduct yourself on the internet as you would for in-person interactions. If you wouldn't say or do something in the "real" world, don't do it online.
2. You are a representative of the church. Practice extra caution when communicating on any platform, whether personal or official. Be mindful that what is communicated online has the potential to be misinterpreted.
3. Have a purpose/goal for each particular media platform and consider if the right platform is being used. (e.g., What are we using Instagram for?)
4. Stay within the legal framework and make yourself aware of issues with respect to privacy/permission, copyright, libel and defamation, and data protection (see [Safeguarding](#) section for additional details).
5. If you are unsure about something, consult a pastor, deacon, or Ministry Leader for clarification.

## Roles and Responsibilities

### Church Staff and Ministry Leaders

1. Church staff and leaders need to assess the risks and benefits of communicating through the various digital media platforms.
2. FCM/YM leadership should be aware of what digital media platforms are currently being used.
3. For those with public roles within the church (e.g., Pastor, Deacon, Ministry Leaders), it is important to separate personal social media account(s) from the "official" church account(s).
4. Wherever possible, links between Minors and church workers should only be made on an "official" church or youth group organisational page and not a personal page. Do not use personal social media accounts to communicate directly (esp. on a one-to-one basis) with Minors.

### Volunteers

1. Do not connect with anyone under the legal age set by a specific website/platform.
2. Set stringent privacy settings and personal boundaries on social media accounts that are consistent with all students and across all platforms.
3. No matter who can view it, do not post anything that is offensive, pornographic, or compromising when communicating with each other and with Minors involved in ministry activities. This includes photographs, use of language, affiliation with groups/causes, and check-ins. Use the same discretion for platforms where availability of a post is timed, i.e.) Snapchat, Instagram Stories, Facebook Stories, etc.
4. Avoid texting, chatting, or emailing back-and-forth with students at a time one would not normally call their home phone line (e.g., before 8:00 AM or after 9:00 PM).
  - If a Minor texts you after hours and it is not an urgent matter, use your discretion in when to reply.
  - FCM: If a Minor messages you directly, inform FCM Committee Members immediately and wait for guidance on next steps

5. It is not advisable to use one-on-one chat and/or private messaging with Minors as it could potentially leave a Volunteer open to allegations. Interactions should be done in an open environment.
  - Where possible, include at least one other adult in the conversation.
  - Communication and media should be sent to entire groups, on their wall or in public areas, and not in private messages.
  - Where private messaging (including email) is needed to communicate with a Minor, or where there is need for regular contact with a Minor, the pastor and the Minor's parents/guardian should be aware of the contact being made and permission has been provided.
  - FCM: Note that volunteers should not have direct contact with Minors within FCM and should bring any communications that arise to FCM Committee Members immediately and wait for guidance on next steps
6. Do not engage in any form of counselling (e.g., discipleship) via Digital Media platforms unless prior permission has been given by a Minor's parent/guardian. Phone conversations and/or face-to-face meetings are the preferred mode of communication.
7. Do not delete any correspondence. This provides transparency should a query or complaint arise.

## Parents/Guardians

1. Parents/Guardians are the main point of contact and communication and should be copied into any communications to their children.
2. Parents/Guardians should be engaged with their child/youth regarding Digital Media and be aware of their online interactions.
3. YM: Nothing should be recorded, shared, or posted.  
FCM: Sessions, including breakout rooms, will be recorded for revision and protection purposes (parents / guardians will sign a consent form during the registration period)

## Students

1. Do not make personal or make defamatory statements. When disagreeing with others' opinions, keep it appropriate and polite.
2. Students should not misrepresent themselves or provide content that is not truthful, or is inaccurate or misleading.
3. Digital Media users should not post anonymously or under a false identity.
4. Profanity or offensive language in any form will not be tolerated.

## Safeguarding

### Privacy Issues

1. Permission is required from parents/guardians for Volunteers to communicate with Minors via social networking sites or by any other means of internet communication (e.g., email). This can be included on the annual consent forms.
2. Except in an emergency, Volunteers may not transmit (texting, email, or other method of electronic communication) any personal information pertaining to a Minor without signed consent from his or her parents/guardians.

- If personal information is to be transmitted, it should be done through platforms that have encryption and in manners where access can be restricted.
  - Refrain from keeping personal information pertaining to a Minor on personal Digital Media accounts. If temporary possession of information is absolutely necessary, Volunteers must remove all acquired information from their accounts subsequently.
3. Photos and videos of Minors are not to be posted on any official Digital Media platform for any reason, including ministry purposes.

For more information, please refer to our church's Privacy Policy.

## Concerns that Arise

1. If there are concerns with written content (e.g. emails, texts), share it with a pastoral staff member or Ministry Leader.
2. Anyone who becomes aware of possible child abuse or neglect **must immediately** notify a pastoral staff member. The Pastoral Staff member(s) are to **immediately** report the abuse to a children's aid society (CAS), as required by law. The local CAS can be found on the Ontario government's website.
3. If there are concerns about the behaviour or profile of a Minor or Volunteer and/or their safety, notify a pastoral staff or Ministry Leader and address it with the person involved as needed.

## Use of Personal Digital Media

Lines between one's personal and work identities are often blurred in Digital Media. Readers may not necessarily distinguish between the two and you may be seen as speaking for the church even on a personal platform.

1. When posting something, carefully consider what you are posting. Do not post photos and videos of Minors for any reason, including ministry purposes (unless identities are anonymized).
2. Be aware of what you are tagged in, as well as pictures and comments that you "like".
3. Do not post anything that could divide or bring your church into a bad light. Political statements, addressing local controversies, and attacks on leaders need to be carefully considered.
4. Contact via social media between an adult and Minors should be at the Minor's instigation. It is not advisable for an adult to "friend" a Minor; however, the adult may respond to a "friend" request.
  - a. FCM: Volunteers are not permitted to respond to or accept friend requests on social media with Minors

## Approach

### Use of Social Media Accounts (e.g., Instagram, Facebook)

1. Make sure to get approval from Pastoral Staff before setting up a social media account.
2. Create private groups (not hidden) that youth and leaders can join by invite only.
3. Be aware of the age limits on social media sites and purpose of usage.
4. The role of "Group Administrator" should always be assumed by a Ministry Leader and/or Pastoral Staff. Appoint at least two people to monitor, evaluate, post, and manage content on group accounts.

5. Appropriate members in the group would be Minors, Volunteers and parents. Group membership should be updated as required.
6. Covenants should be created to govern digital groups, addressing:
  - a. appropriate & inappropriate language and behavior
  - b. who may join and/or view group activity and when they should leave the group
  - c. content that can/cannot be posted/published on the site or page
  - d. adherence to mandatory reporting laws
  - e. consequences for breaking the covenant
7. Any form of bullying or inappropriate use will not be tolerated. Inappropriate material posted on any online groups must be deleted immediately. It is advisable to keep a copy of the post prior to deletion. All such incidences should be reported or addressed as necessary.
8. For social media platforms that have the ability to comment, consider restricting or disabling the ability to comment.
9. Content and history should be open to other Volunteers (i.e. should not have closed groups or conversations where no other adult can review and have oversight).

## Use of Group Virtual Meets (e.g., ZOOM)

1. Get approval from a Ministry Leader before setting up a group meet.
2. Create private meets that Minors and Volunteers can join by invite only. Use password protected meetings or platforms that allow you to review and admit attendees.
3. When starting virtual meets, have at least two volunteers present at the beginning of the meeting to avoid situations in which a student may be alone with one adult while waiting for other adults / students.
4. Do not share meeting links publicly - use closed groups or private forms of communication to share links
5. If students are bringing friends, they should notify Ministry Leaders prior to the program
6. Remind attendees to use their real names when joining online platforms. Keep an eye on who joins the meeting - confirm attendees / take attendance
7. Other adults can be invited to attend / observe at the discretion of the Ministry Leaders and/or Pastoral Staff (e.g. guest speaker / teacher).
8. Appropriate members in the group would be current children/youth members, Volunteers and parents/guardians. Group membership will be adjusted, as necessary.
9. Do not tolerate any bullying or inappropriate use. Inappropriate material posted on any online groups must be deleted immediately. It is advisable to keep a copy of the post prior to deletion. All such incidences should be addressed or reported if necessary.
10. Covenants should be created to govern digital groups, addressing:
  - a. appropriate & inappropriate language and behavior
  - b. who may join and/or view group activity and when they should leave the group
  - c. content that can/cannot be posted/published on the site or page
  - d. adherence to mandatory reporting laws
  - e. consequences for breaking the covenant
11. If virtual meet is a video call, FCM/YM leaders, volunteers, and guests should have their video on as they should be transparent in what they are doing. Students may choose to not have video on if they do not feel comfortable with it.
  - a. FCM: Students in FCM events are required to have their cameras turned on and using their real names for class engagement and attendance purposes (parents / guardians will sign a consent form during the registration period)

- b. FCM: Sessions, including breakout rooms, will be recorded for revision and protection purposes (parents / guardians will sign a consent form during the registration period)

## Use of Group Chats (e.g., WhatsApp)

1. Get approval from a Ministry Leader before setting up a group chat.
2. Create private chats that Minors and Volunteers can join by invite only.
3. The role of “Group Administrator” should always be assumed by a Ministry Leader and/or Pastoral Staff.
4. There should be at least two Volunteers to monitor, evaluate, post and manage content.
5. Appropriate members in the group would be current children/youth members, Volunteers and parents/guardians. Group membership will be adjusted, as necessary.
6. Do not tolerate any bullying or inappropriate use. Inappropriate material posted on any online groups must be deleted immediately. It is advisable to keep a copy of the post prior to deletion. All such incidences should be addressed or reported if necessary.
7. Covenants should be created to govern digital groups, addressing:
  - a. appropriate & inappropriate language and behavior
  - b. who may join and/or view group activity and when they should leave the group
  - c. content that can/cannot be posted/published on the site or page
  - d. adherence to mandatory reporting laws
  - e. consequences for breaking the covenant

Note: for digital media platforms (i.e. Discord) that have a combination of the above elements (social media, virtual meets, group chats), all guidelines under each element applies to that digital media platform.