Guidelines for Professional Boundaries for Youth Serving Organizations Offering Virtual Programming

During this unprecedented time, many youth serving organizations have chosen to move to virtual programming so children can still experience the connection and positive support extracurricular activities can provide in difficult times.

However, virtual programs come with new considerations and learning for everyone. This includes best practices for how staff can maintain professionalism with the same rigor as offline program settings. To provide a standard of measure on best practices, the Canadian Centre for Child Protection has developed guidelines to help youth serving organizations establish professional boundaries for operating children's programs online.

Suggested Best Practices:

- Apply professional standards to all online interactions with children and parents.

- Maintain professional boundaries by communicating with children and parents during appropriate times of day and through established and authorized platforms by the organization (as opposed to staff using their own personal accounts).

- Keep communication goal oriented and tied to outcomes for a specific programs.

- Keep all forms of communication transparent by including parents on all correspondence.

- Staff should avoid sharing personal videos or requesting a child share personal videos. If a video is created tied to a program/activity, it should be posted to an organization approved platform for children/parents to access as opposed to sending directly to a child's personal account.

- Follow your organization's privacy policies regarding posting any digital pictures or other identifying information on social media or websites.

- Set appropriate restrictions to maximize your privacy on your personal social media accounts, ensuring that children cannot view or post content.

- Refrain from sending or accepting friend requests from children or liking content on children's personal social media accounts.

- Ensure transparency during video chat discussions with children. While chatting, all parties should be located in common/high traffic household areas (bedrooms/bathrooms are off limits). Proper clothing attire should also be worn.

Questions to Ask Yourself:

- Would a parent/guardian consider my interaction as reasonable and professional?

- What are our protocols and procedures if something happens (e.g., an incident of inappropriate behaviour between staff and a child, another child coming into the program who isn't technically registered, etc.)?

- What are reporting procedures should we need to reach out to child welfare or the local police department?

Examples of Inappropriate Electronic Communication Include:

- Intimate, sexualized, or personal exchanges (texts, pictures, etc.) with children.
- Using informal and unprofessional language, such a profanity, with children.
- Criticizing children, parents, or colleagues.
- Posting or forwarding content, links, or comments that might be considered inappropriate, offensive, discriminatory, or inconsistent with professional or ethical standards.
- Communicating with children through personal social media accounts or apps.

Commit to Kids — A program that focuses solely on child protection

We strongly recommend each organization offering any virtual/online programs participate in the Commit to Kids program.

Commit to Kids provides policies, strategies, and a step-by-step plan to help reduce the risk of sexual abuse happening within child-serving organizations, utilizing both print material and online training.

To learn more about the program and how to implement it in your organization, visit commit2kids.ca