Safety Considerations for Child-Serving Organizations Offering Virtual Programming

To support child-serving organizations offering digital programming, the Canadian Centre for Child Protection has developed the following considerations for platform/technology safety and professional boundaries for engaging with child/youth program attendees online. These safety planning guidelines are intended to support the valuable work you do as it shifts to online interactions, where necessary.

Digital Platform Safety

Choosing Digital Programs/Platforms

Consider the capabilities:

- Can you close a session urgently, if the need arises?
- Can you limit the personal information children/youth share (usernames/profiles, images/videos)?
- Can you mute attendees, control camera use, control recordings, disable chat functions?
- Can you limit access to a room and admit only those who are part of your session?
- Can you control the end of the session for all participants or can participants be in the room after you exit out?

Consider how the company uses and manages data:

- What/how much private information do children/youth need to share to set up an account/use the platform?
- How does the company or website collect, store, and process data of its customers and visitors: where is their data stored, and does information remain confidential, or can it be shared with or sold to third parties?

Review age-appropriateness:

- What other content may be on the platform that children/ youth may inadvertently be exposed to?
- If there are age verification restrictions, who can use the platform?
- Does the platform have a social component where others may have contact with a child/youth outside of the programming/sessions you are offering?

Planning Safe Sessions

Manage unauthorized access:

- Are you able to create unique and strong passwords and/or ID for access?
- Can you provide access to the session while avoiding publically posting any links or passwords?

Establish expectations with children/youth:

- Consider having children/youth use a screen name that is different than a name they use on their social media platforms;
- Communicate about use of webcams, limiting their use during sessions where it is unnecessary;
- Prohibit children/youth from recording/taking screenshots of sessions (within the platform or with a third party app or device);
- Remind children/youth to keep chat on topic and appropriate for the session.

Professional Boundaries with Children/Youth

Communication

- Communicating with children/youth and parents during appropriate times of day and through established and authorized organization platforms (as opposed to using personal accounts);

- Keeping communication goal-oriented and tied to session outcomes;

- Keeping all forms of communication transparent by including parents on all correspondence;

- Ensuring transparency during video chat discussions with children/youth: while chatting, all parties should be located in common/high traffic household areas (bedrooms/bathrooms are off limits), and proper clothing attire is worn;

- Refraining from sending or accepting friend requests from children/youth or liking content in their personal social media accounts;

- Examples of inappropriate electronic communication include personal texting with children/youth, using informal and unprofessional language, posting or forwarding content, links or comments that might be considered inappropriate, offensive or inconsistent with professional or ethical standards, or communicating with children/youth through personal social media accounts or apps.

Privacy

- Follow your organization's privacy policies if posting any work, digital pictures, or other identifying information of children/youth on social media or websites;

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

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

Ask yourself

- Would a reasonable observer consider my interaction with children/youth/parents as reasonable and professional?

- Would I be comfortable if the session was inadvertently shared with others?

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

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

If you have any concerns about a child online, report to Cybertip.ca

COMMIT TO KIDS — A PROGRAM THAT FOCUSES SOLELY ON CHILD PROTECTION

We strongly recommend that child-serving organizations use 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