Keele University

Guidance: Online Safeguarding

1. Introduction

We recognise our responsibility to develop awareness of safeguarding responsibilities and are committed to practice which reflects the University's duty of care and protects children and adults at risk from harm.

We are committed to working in partnership with those for whom we have a duty of care and with appropriate individuals and agencies to promote safeguarding.

This guidance should be read in conjunction with the University's Safeguarding Policy and Procedure and has been developed to assist University staff and students to safely use online platforms.

This guidance on the use of online platforms applies to staff, students, contractors and volunteers interacting with anyone aged under 18, or any adult at risk, whether they are a current student, prospective student, or otherwise participating in University-led activity. Relevant activities would include tutorials, webinars, virtual tours, outreach activity, recruitment and admissions, or student support (including Professional Services and Academic/Learning Support).

"Online platforms" means any tool or system used to deliver or run these activities remotely or online, and includes virtual learning environments (eg Blackboard/KLE), video/text conferencing tools (eg MS Teams/Zoom) and other communication/social media tools such as WhatsApp, Facebook and other messaging applications.

2. Safeguarding and Online Abuse

Children and adults at risk may suffer abuse via social media, text messages, and emails, or during online chats and other interactive online media. Abuse can take many forms, but includes cyberbullying, emotional abuse, grooming, sexting, sexual abuse and sexual exploitation. The NSPCC provides further detailed advice on online abuse in relation to children.

Signs of abuse that may be apparent in the course of online interactions could include unexpected behaviour, such as coming across as uncharacteristically distant, upset or angry and the use of language that would be viewed as inappropriate or unexpected for a child of that age. Please refer to the University's Safeguarding Policy for further information regarding signs of abuse.

3. Assessing and managing risk

A safeguarding risk assessment must be undertaken for any new online activity involving children or adults at risk, which is not covered by an existing risk assessment.

A Safeguarding Risk Assessment should take into account things such as:

1. Whether the platform being used has a "moderator" with oversight of the online activity or has built-in capability to identifying inappropriate language or images, and options for reporting any such inappropriate use to moderators. In the majority of cases the member of staff will act as moderator.

2. If the platform used is not moderated or otherwise monitored, will a responsible adult (member of staff, teacher, parent or carer) also be online. (NB this applies to synchronous platforms where access is only at specified times; where access is provided on an ongoing/asynchronous basis then extra caution is advised around ensuring that moderation tools are available).

    Note. When possible, ALWAYS avoid one-to-one online interaction with anyone you believe may be aged under 18 if no other trusted adult is also involved in the call, if this situation occurs by accident for instance because a participant has lost connection, you are advised to terminate the meeting and reschedule it.

3. Whether the platform being used is approved by the University. Check with IT Services before accepting an invitation to use an unknown online platform hosted by another organisation.
4. Ensure that all participants are advised to choose a suitable location/environment from which to join the session, and caution them on what others might be able to see/hear.
5. Where appropriate, participants should be able to join by default with cameras and mics turned off.

In addition:

6. Ensure that all participants understand who is taking part and who will be able to see or hear them.

7. Ensure that all those involved, and any trusted adult also present, are aware of what platform is being used and its constraints and limitations with respect to safeguarding and moderation of content.

8. Ensure that your background environment which may be visible to all participants is appropriate.

   Note: Many platforms provide a facility to blur or replace backgrounds.

9. Ensure that appropriate precautions are taken to ensure privacy and confidentiality. If working from home do all that is reasonable possible to ensure that family members cannot view participants or overhear the conversation.

10. Ensure that all pop-ups or notifications of income emails etc. are disabled during any activity where your screen is or may be visible to participants.

11. Ensure that no contact details are exchanged during the activity.

12. Ensure that staff and students who engage in University-related online activity that may involve children or adults at risk, receive safeguarding training as detailed below.

4. Safeguarding Training

University staff and students taking part in online activities involving children and / or adults at risk should complete appropriate training. There are a number of training packages available depending on need. Further information regarding training can be found via the Staffordshire Safeguarding Board and/or the NSPCC.

5. Online Platform

All online activities which involve participants that are, or maybe under 18 or adults at risk must be hosted on a platform that has been approved for that use. Advise can be sought from Information and Digital Services (IDS) and/or Keele Institute for Innovation and Teaching Excellence (KIITE).

Any such platform **must** have the following features:

- The ability to restrict access so that only the intended participants may take part.

- Access to sensitive personal information, including contact information (email, mobile phone, social media) are only available to the meeting organiser / host and can be kept confidential.

- The ability for the host to remove anyone who is behaving in an inappropriate manner.

Careful consideration must be given to the suitability of a platform for its intended used. Staff at Keele University can access more guidance through Keele Institute for Innovation and Teaching Excellence and the KIITE Educational Technology Toolbox.

Staff also need to ensure they have read the IT Conditions of Use Policy.

6. Guidance for online events and meetings

In addition to the general guidance provided above on risk assessments, training and online platforms, also consider the points below when engaging online with participants who are aged under 18 or who are adults at risk:

- Where possible / practical always record sessions, but always make it clear to the participants that the session is being recorded.

- Always get parental approval if involving anyone under 16.

- Avoid "live sessions" when at all possible for anyone under 16, (i.e. use recorded content with no live interaction).

- Do not let participants share screens.

- Do not let participants directly contact any other participant i.e. all chat goes though the host so that it can be moderated.

- Always have a second member of staff on the session to monitor and moderate the chat boxes

- Use platforms that allow you to disable the participants' cameras and microphones when this is desirable, for instance if a participant becomes disruptive.

- Use waiting rooms to monitor and control who joins the meeting.

- Set out "community rules" so that participants are aware of the expected behaviour in the online session.

- Ensure the host is aware of the University's Safeguarding Policy and Process and is aware how to escalate concerns.

- Ensure the content is appropriate for the participants' age group.

- Ensure participants are aware of how to raise concerns if they should see or hear anything upsetting or inappropriate in the course of the online event.

7. Additional Guidance

The NSPCC: Online safety during coronavirus