

FUMC Guidelines for Electronic Communication with Youth

All Electronic Communication:

- If a youth contacts an adult electronically via text, social media, or email for anything other than information about a Youth Event, it is our practice to reach out to their parent or guardian to let them know and give permission to continue the conversation. Permission need only be granted one time for each youth, not for each individual instance of communication.
- Our designated times for communicating with youth are 9:00 a.m.-9:00 p.m. Unless in an emergency situation, Volunteers should not send or respond to messages outside of these hours.
- If an emergency situation should occur outside the designated times, it is paramount to notify Church Staff and, if necessary, the authorities right away.
- Should there be an emergency, and the Youth requests you to come help, you must also find another Safe Gatherings Certified Adult Leader to join you. If it is not possible for another Safe Gatherings Certified Adult Leader to join you in a timely manner, you may call one and have him/her on speaker phone. If no Safe Gatherings Certified Adult Leader answers the phone, and the situation is of utmost urgency, you should leave a voicemail notifying Church Staff of the situation. Our immediate concern is ALWAYS the safety of our Youth. Use your best discernment in handling all scenarios in the timeliest manner based on the urgency of the situation. Do not delay a Youth's safety.
- Adult Leaders should not regularly communicate with Youth about intimate information or advice. Some situations require professional help and counseling. While our goal is to help steward and guide the lives of our Youth, we should always seek to maintain the integrity of our relationships and our Youth program. Protect the Youth from being dependent on your leadership alone. Protect the Youth from becoming too attached to your advice rather than the ministry at large.

Social Media:

- Set boundaries: In the end, social media is simply a communication platform. It can be misused or abused and, to prevent that, you should set boundaries.
- Youth should always initiate friend requests online. You should never send a friend request to a Youth. The power dynamic between Adult Leader and Youth may lead the Youth to feel they have no choice but to add you. You are allowed to be followed by or accept a friend request from a Youth, but only if parent or guardian has given written consent for their child to be contacted via social media. If the parent or guardian has requested that their Youth not be contacted via social media, or we do not have that information, the best practice is to not accept or to block the individual until we have clarity. (Adult Leaders may have access to FUMC Youth Social Media accounts, if they prefer to use those instead of their private accounts.)
- Use the Youth ministry’s official accounts as much as possible.
- Apps like Snapchat where messages disappear are not permitted for contacting Youth.
- As always, be mindful of what you put on the internet, for all, especially our Youth to see.
- To protect yourself and the Youth you work with, keep copies of online communication. A paper trail can be important.
- If you are uneasy about any topic addressed in an email, send a BCC to a parent or guardian (if appropriate) or another Adult Leader. Honor privacy, but not secrecy.
- If abuse is divulged electronically, follow standard reporting procedures as described in the FUMC Child, Youth, and Vulnerable Adult Safety Policy.

For any further safety guidelines, you are invited to visit:

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/social-media-guidelines-samples-links>

- I acknowledge that I have received and read a copy of the FUMC Guidelines for Electronic Communication with Youth.
- I agree to abide by this policy of First United Methodist Church and seek information and clarification from Staff as needed to maintain my compliance.

Printed Name

Signature

Date