

Electronic communication with children and young people protocol

1. Purpose

The use of electronic communication such as phone, email, SMS, social media and video calling provides different platforms for people to interact with each other. Children and young people can be especially vulnerable to harm caused by the inappropriate or unsafe use of electronic communication. Uniting is committed to working within the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations and supporting its workforce to interact with children and young people in a positive and appropriate way, ensuring the safety of children and young people is upheld.

This purpose of this protocol is to outline the expectations for Uniting representatives in electronic communication with children and young people.

This protocol should be read in conjunction with Uniting's **Child Safety Policy** as part of Uniting's response to keeping children and young people safe from all forms of abuse and harm.

Ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children and young people is an organisation-wide responsibility – any breaches of the requirements outlined in this protocol are to be reported to and addressed by senior management. Any representatives found to be in breach of the requirements outlined in this protocol, may be subject to disciplinary procedures as appropriate at Uniting.

Noting that the relationship between some Uniting representatives (i.e. those living with a child or young person) may differ to those in professional working relationships, the following expectations apply.

2. Protocol

2.1 General principles for electronic communication with children and young people

Whenever possible, consent from the parent/carer/guardian or other authorised representative and the child/young person must be sought before communicating with a child/young person via electronic communication. Permission should be obtained at intake to the Uniting service as part of recording consent. In order to ensure the safety of children/young people in Uniting programs and services,

Uniting representatives must not:

- Engage in closed conversations with children/young people electronically. At least one other third-party adult (parent/another Uniting representative) is to be included, unless it is a program requirement, or living with child/young person
- Knowingly engage in any personal communication with a child/young person outside the scope of their work role via any communication medium.
- Engage in any communication with a child/young person outside of normal Uniting business hours which are usually in the range of 9:00 am to 5:00 pm, or which are specified in program requirements.
- Provide their own personal email or internet details to children/young people.
- Permit access by children/young people to their personal computer, mobile phone or other personal equipment.
- Send any electronic communication that attempts to hide the identity of the sender or represent the sender as someone else.
- Knowingly transmit, retrieve or store (except when the information is required as evidence, which must be retained) any communication that is:
 - discriminatory or harassing
 - derogatory to any individual or group
 - obscene, sexually explicit or pornographic
 - defamatory or threatening
 - in breach of an individual's right to privacy
 - in violation of any license governing the use of software
 - could be perceived as grooming behaviour
 - for any purpose that is illegal, or in contradiction to the Uniting **Code of Conduct**

2.2 Telephone

- Phone calls must be made on a Uniting phone, not the representative's personal device, unless it is a program requirement authorised by program manager or living with a child/young person.
- Whenever possible Uniting representatives must ensure that the parents/carers/guardians are aware of the phone call, by seeking their approval before making contact with the child/young person.
- There must be an established need for a call to the child/young person and the purpose of the call must be made clear to all parties and recorded in case notes. Every effort must be made to conduct and resolve the call in accordance with its purpose.

2.3 Email

- Emails from Uniting representatives to children/young people must be restricted to purpose-only emails i.e. details about program or seeking formal feedback.

Complex matters involving the child/young person must not be discussed in email and should be redirected to a face to face meeting with the Uniting representative and child/young person and their parent/carer/guardian as appropriate.

- All emails to children/young people must be from a Uniting email address, not the representative's personal email address or any other address.
- All email to children/young people must have a third-party adult included (e.g. parent and/or another Uniting representative).
- Emails to children/young people are not to be deleted, thereby keeping record in the software system.
- Pictures, including photos, should not be forwarded via email or text to children/young people unless relevant to service delivery.

2.4 SMS

- SMS must be sent from a Uniting phone, not the representative's personal device, unless it is a program requirement authorised by program manager or living with a child/young person.
- SMS communication sent to the child/young person is restricted to purpose-only communication e.g. details about program or seeking formal feedback.
- Group based SMS communication is preferable (i.e. communicating to a group of children/young people at once).
- All SMS communication to children/young people must have a third-party adult included (e.g. parent and/or another Uniting representative). If a response is received only by the representative, further communication should include a third party.
- All records of SMS communication with a child/young person must be kept. This includes the content, time, date and the recipient/sender. This can be included in case notes.

2.5 Social media

The following protocols apply to the use of social media in communicating with children and young people:

- The Uniting representative must ensure there is a valid reason for the communication to a child/young person via social media prior to any such communication. This should be Uniting program or service related.
- Messaging groups of or individual children/young people via social media must be in line with Uniting social media standards. Refer **Social Media Protocol**.
- Uniting representatives must not connect/engage with consumers that are children/young people via the representatives' personal accounts.
- Social media communication is restricted to purpose-only messaging e.g. details about program or seeking formal feedback.

- All social media communication with children/young people must have a third-party adult included (e.g. parent and/or another Uniting representative) – no closed conversations between the Uniting representative and child/young person can occur.
- Uniting representatives must not give out any personal details of children/young person when communicating on social media (e.g. name of school, email address, home address, etc.)

2.5.1 Social media platforms

Uniting social media platforms that engage with children or young people will have a moderator appointed to ensure all content is appropriate and doesn't breach policy, laws or individual privacy.

- Only social media platforms with a Uniting account is to be used for communicating with children/young people.
- Inappropriate comments on Uniting social media platforms will be removed.
- If the use of any other social media tool not described in this protocol is proposed by a child/young person, the Uniting representative should report this to their line manager and Child Safety Champion for further guidance on how to proceed with this engagement.
- There are numerous social media tools currently in use including many not supported by Uniting; these are changing and will grow over the years to come and cannot all be listed in this protocol. The following protocols apply:
 - Uniting representatives must not use any platform that allows for anonymity (e.g. Formspring) to communicate with children/young people. These applications can make children/young people vulnerable to cyber-bullying.
 - Uniting representatives must not use applications where no records of communication are retained (e.g. Snapchat) to communicate with children/young people. As messages and photos are only available for set time after viewing, children/young people are vulnerable to cyberbullying and sending/receiving of inappropriate images.
 - Uniting representatives must not seek out children/young people to be friends on their personal social media accounts (e.g. Facebook).
 - Posts on other people's profile or comments on their posts must be general and kept to a minimum. These posts must be kept public so that other people can see what's going on.
 - If using messenger platforms (e.g. Facebook), no private messages are to be sent. If messages are sent, they must be Uniting program or service-related and have at least one other Uniting representative or parent/guardian in the conversation.
 - If a representative receives a message via a private message (e.g. Facebook Messenger), they must file a copy of this message in case notes and move

the conversation to either face to face or telephone or include another person in the conversation as noted above.

2.6 Video calling

- The Uniting representative must ensure there is a valid reason for the communication to a child/young person via video call or conference (e.g. FaceTime) prior to any such communication taking place. This should be Uniting program or service related, or if living with a child/young person.
- Unless a program requirement, this method should only be used when an in-person meeting is unable to be held (e.g. due to illness, social distancing restrictions), and face to face communication is essential for ongoing program service delivery. Otherwise, the representative must use other forms of electronic communication (i.e. phone, SMS, email, etc.) as described above.
- All video communication with children/young people must have a third-party adult included (e.g. parent and/or another Uniting representative) unless it is a specific program requirement authorised by program manager or living with a child/young person.

Responsibility	All employees are responsible for:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Complying with the instructions outlined in this protocol
	The ELT, Executive Officers and Managers are responsible for:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Monitoring awareness of and adherence to this protocol• Overseeing all action and outcomes pertaining to this protocol

3. Definitions

Term	Meaning
Child or young person	Includes all children and young people under the age of 18 years receiving Uniting services
Social media	Websites and applications that enable users to create and share content and to participate in social networking. This includes, but is not limited to websites such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, or any other web-based media which allows for public comment and sharing of information
SMS	Stands for short message service and is the text messaging service component of mobile phone systems.
Video conferencing	Using a live, visual connection between two or more people for the purpose of communication.

Facetime	An application for mobile communications devices that enable people to speak to each other whilst simultaneously being able to see each other on video display.
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4. Related Policy, Instructions and Advice

External

National Principles for Child Safe Organisations

Victorian Child Safe Standards

Reportable Conduct Scheme (Victoria)

Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic)

Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)

Crimes Amendment (Grooming) Act 2014 (Vic)

Criminal Code and Related Legislation Amendment (Child Abuse) Act 2019 (Tas)

Privacy Act 1988 (Cth) and the Australian Privacy Principles

Internal

Child Safety Policy

Code of Conduct

Child Safety Code of Conduct

Reportable Conduct Scheme Protocol

Reporting Allegations of Child Abuse Protocol

Acceptable Use Policy & Protocol

Privacy Policy

Social Media Protocol (*coming soon*)

Image & Story Consent form

Revision Record			
Version	Date	Document Writer	Revision Description
0.0	26/03/2020	Compliance & Policy team	First draft of new protocol.
0.1	02/04/2020	Compliance & Policy team	Updates following discussion with Child Safety advisor.
0.2	03/04/2020	Compliance & Policy team	Updates following discussion with Child Safety advisor.
0.3	22/04/2020	Compliance & Policy team	Updates following review by Head of Marketing and Communication.

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<i>0.4</i>	<i>18/06/2020</i>	<i>Compliance & Policy team</i>	<i>Updates following review by Senior Manager Risk.</i>
<i>0.5</i>	<i>06/08/2020</i>	<i>Child Wise Advisor</i>	<i>Updates following consultation with ELT and/or representatives.</i>
<i>1.0</i>	<i>24/08/2020</i>	<i>Child Wise Advisor</i>	<i>Approved by GM, Quality & Compliance.</i>