



Digital Safety 101



Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA



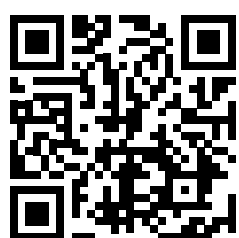


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To help break down the 'Guidelines for Safe Ministry Using digital media', here are ten key areas that form our Digital Safety 101. Make sure you check out the full guidelines and other resources at safechurch.ucavictas.org.au



Username, Handles and Avatars

Never hide your identity or pretend to be someone else online. Your username/handle/avatar is a key feature that represents your digital identity and should not be confused with deception. In digital communities, it's vital for members to associate your username/handle/avatar with you personally.

Consistency is key; using the same username/handle/avatar across different platforms reduces confusion and makes it easier for people to find you. Additionally, providing direct links to your profiles on various platforms enhances accessibility and helps protect you from impostor accounts by linking back to your verified profile. If you have established personal and professional accounts, it is important for appointed leaders to understand that these distinctions serve as communication boundaries, not behavioural ones.



If you want to explore these areas further, you can find more information in the Guidelines for Safe Ministry using digital media (SSC 23.60.12) on [pages 3, 6–7](#).



Online Communication

All communication should be clear and respectful. In online spaces, we strive to build safe and genuine communities. As a ministry agent or appointed leader, it's important to adhere to the Ministerial Code of Ethics and Lay Leaders Code of Conduct, and to be aware of the power dynamics in communication.

Whether in public or private forums, remember that your words are visible to others. Avoid language that divides, shows favouritism, or makes anyone feel excluded. Choose your words and images carefully to avoid offending anyone. People have different levels of digital skills, which can lead to misunderstandings. Show grace and forgiveness when mistakes happen.

Remember that while everyone has personal opinions, social media is public. It should not reflect or imply the Uniting Church's stance on political or social issues. If a journalist wants a comment on behalf of the Church, direct them to the manager of the Synod Communications and Marketing team.



If you want to explore these areas further, you can find more information in the Guidelines for Safe Ministry using digital media (SSC 23.60.12) on [pages 4-5–7](#).





Understanding your Ministry Environment

When gathering online and/or participating in conversation it is important to know your areas of oversight. All ministry agents and appointed leaders need to be mindful of:

- **Your physical environment:** When using digital tools that have audio, let the community know who can hear you. Being clear about who's around you helps others understand who they're talking to. If you're using a visual platform, be aware of what people can see in your background, like objects or posters.
- **Their physical environment:** If a child is communicating with you online, remember that their parent/guardian is responsible for their safety and wellbeing. Clear communication with the parent/guardian keeps safety a priority and reminds them that they still need to monitor their child's internet use beyond the designated activity.
- **The digital community environment:** It's the responsibility of appointed leaders to interact on the digital platform. To do this well, you need to understand your own digital

skills and ensure that you can meet the community's security needs.



If you want to explore these areas further, you can find more information in the **Guidelines for Safe Ministry using digital media (SSC 23.60.12)** on [pages 2 – 6](#).

Community Accessibility

When facilitating programs or discussions be sure to know how and when your community can access the platform or server. If the platform you are using cannot limit access to specific times, inform the parents/guardians when the platform is not supervised so they're able to adequately monitor their child's digital exploration.



If you want to explore these areas further, you can find more information in the **Guidelines for Safe Ministry using digital media (SSC 23.60.12)** on [pages 3 – 5, 7](#).



Two appointed Leaders

Digital gatherings still require two appointed leaders. Even if you are livestreaming a service, ensure all chat features are moderated by appointed leaders. If your community can interact in an asynchronous, self-paced manner, it is important to consider:

- A minimum of two appointed leaders having full administrative access to effectively moderate, connect and oversee community safety.
- Whenever possible, communicate with groups rather than individuals, and include other leaders and parents/guardians in emails or texts.
- When using social media, carefully consider your ability to moderate content and think about limiting responses, such as turning off comments.

Multiple appointed leaders provide transparency and safety for all people.

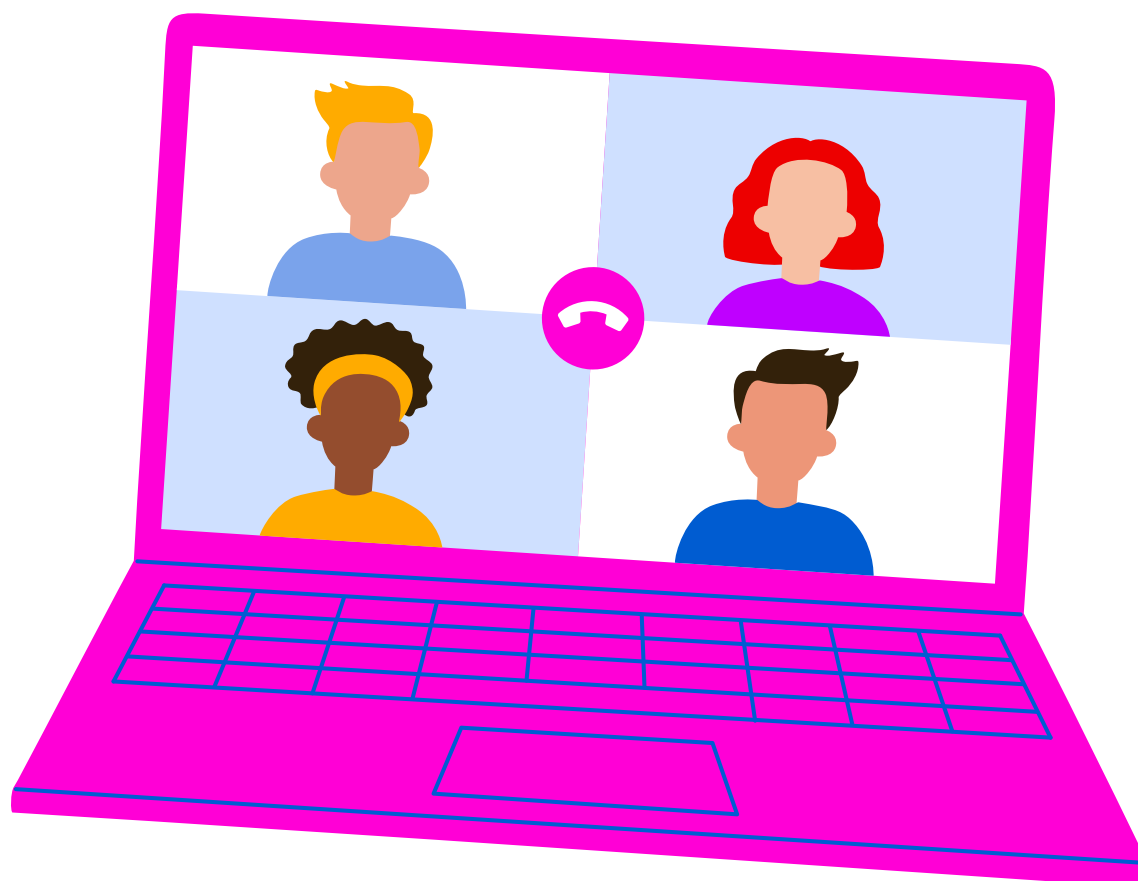
If you want to explore these areas further, you can find more information in the Guidelines for Safe Ministry using digital media (SSC 23.60.12) on [pages 4 – 5](#).

Training and Safety Checks

Even if your gathering or event is only in an online environment all ministry agents and appointed leaders need to complete Safe Church Training, and have up to date Working with Children Check (Victoria)/Vulnerable People (Tasmania) Registration.

<https://safechurch.ucavictas.org.au/safe-church-training/>





Establishing Community Boundaries

Be sure you set clear guidelines and boundaries – setting community rules are a standard practice in the digital world. Having clear guidelines helps to maintain safe and healthy communications for you and all community members. The boundaries should help establish the expectations of appropriate or inappropriate actions. Ensure the community guidelines are spoken of, written out clearly and are easily accessible by all community members.

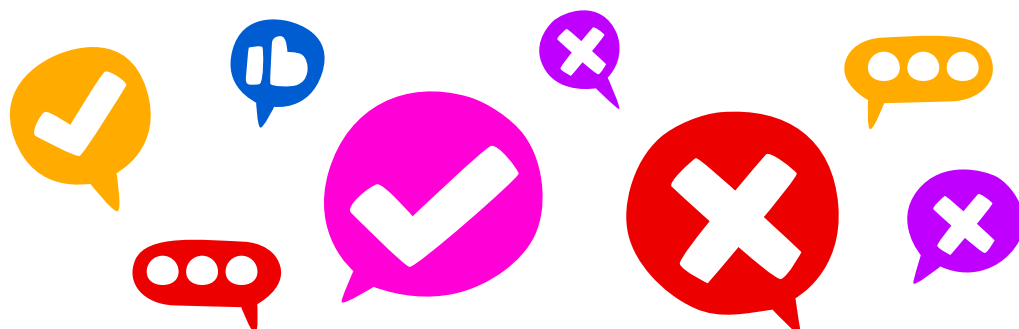
Appointed leaders should also be mindful of their online connections and behaviour beyond the community. One way of establishing communication boundaries is by having different personal and professional accounts, such as:

- social media profiles
- phone numbers
- emails
- usernames/handles

It's important that our different personal and professional accounts are understood as communication boundaries, not behavioural.

Remember, communication should go through the parent/guardian until permission has been explicitly requested to contact the child directly. Do not initiate connection on any social media, gaming platform or messenger app, and be aware of user age limits, as platforms vary in age restrictions.

If you want to explore these areas further, you can find more information in the Guidelines for Safe Ministry using digital media (SSC 23.60.12) on [pages 3–4, 7](#).





Establishing community boundaries and communication guidelines can help to maintain safe and healthy communications for you and all community members.



Permission Forms

Even in online communities, obtaining permission forms for the use of photo, audio, and video is crucial for privacy and safety. They ensure parents/guardians are fully informed about what activities their children are engaging in.

- You must obtain written permission from the parent/guardian of all children prior to using them in any image/text/audio/video. Permission forms for children must be updated annually. This applies to:
 - General community connection activities
 - Weekly gatherings
- For one-off events, a separate permission form will be required for each individual activity, including camps, pageants (including livestreams), and excursions. This is necessary due to the broader engagement and networking involved in these events.

If permission is not granted, then their image/name/voice/video must not be used.

The distribution of images/text/audio/video often occurs in the digital and online environments. It is important that parents/guardians are notified where their children's photos are being used. In addition, you should ensure the child is willing to allow their image to be used.



If you want to explore these areas further, you can find more information in the Guidelines for Safe Ministry using digital media (SSC 23.60.12) on [page 11](#).

Permission forms can be found at <https://safechurch.ucavictas.org.au/programs-events/>





Your Building and Livestreaming

If your community livestreams, it's essential to clearly indicate when the broadcast is taking place. Use appropriate signs and notifications to inform participants. If your community culture allows children to wander freely, be sure to communicate with parents, guardians, and caregivers about which areas the camera can capture. While signs serve as a helpful reminder, transparent communication is vital for ensuring digital safety.

Additionally, it's crucial to avoid sharing personal or identifying information about individuals during gatherings. This includes names, addresses, phone numbers, or any sensitive details that could compromise safety and privacy. When discussing prayer requests or sharing testimonials, exercise discretion and avoid unnecessary specifics.

If your community offers open-mic opportunities during prayers, consider pausing the livestream to allow for more private sharing of requests. This ensures that everyone's privacy is respected while fostering a supportive environment.

Reporting

If anyone is in immediate danger, contact 000 immediately.

If you have concerns about the safety of a child or vulnerable person, make sure you go to <https://safechurch.ucavictas.org.au/reporting/> for appropriate procedures and reporting methods.

If you have any other concerns about abuse towards an adult, bullying, harassment, misconduct or historical abuse, please contact the Culture of Safety Unit on **03 9116 1400** or cultureofsafetycontact@victas.uca.org.au.



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Access more resources and the digital guide
by scanning the QR code below or visiting

safechurch.ucavictas.org.au



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