Information Technology, Communications, Policies & Procedures Policy

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Author	Dan Boxall-Simpson
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Introduction

Information Technology is a key tool in enabling effective communication and collaboration between friends, colleagues, family, peers, service users and anyone else we come across in our daily lives.

The internet has made communication in many ways much easier, but like many things, it has become more complicated and easier to make mistakes. It should always be a preference when trying to understand something/someone or get an important point across, that you can talk face to face. Microsoft Teams and other similar video conferencing technology has made this much more accessible, particularly since the Covid lockdowns.

There are some key points to the effective use of Technology and Communications:

- Getting clarity in a face-to-face conversation wherever possible
- Confirming important communications/conversations in writing
- Ensure the I.T. you are using is secure, and only digitally share what is appropriate, always remaining conscious of Confidentiality.

If the above is done promptly and efficiently, then everyone should have a good understanding of what is expected, what is going on, and relationships remain positive (even if not everyone agrees!)

Employees and Team Members should read the EMAIL & INTERNET POLICY contained within the Staff Handbook which forms part of your Terms & Conditions of Employment, alongside this policy.

Acceptable Use

We provide our Team Members with tools to carry out business for work purposes. Although we have a flexible approach to allowing some occasional personal use, this needs to be appropriate and well considered, ensuring boundaries aren't crossed.

The use of I.T. for personal reasons such as personal banking, social media, research, shopping should be limited to break times and out of working hours. The use of business I.T. for illegal reasons is prohibited and may result in Instant Dismissal for Gross Misconduct.

I.T. provided by The EPIC Family CIC is NOT to be used by others ie friends, family. It is for your sole use only! Where Independent providers and Foster Parents are using personal equipment, it is important that unauthorised users do not gain access to confidential data and systems.

Confidentiality and Data

The EPIC Family Community Interest Company recognises that it is important that we protect our children, young people, fostering households, clients, team members, and our businesses from unauthorised disclosure of confidential information.

It is also illegal for any person to use price sensitive information for financial gain or for the avoidance of any potential financial loss. It is also unlawful to the information to any third party.

It is therefore important to both The EPIC Family Community Interest Company and you to ensure that confidential information is handled with care. If you have any doubt as to the status of information, you should discuss it with the CEO who is Dan Boxall-Simpson, or his Deputy who will advise you accordingly.

All Team Members, whether employed, or contracted independently are required to sign a Confidentiality Agreement.

Network Access

Accessing our systems and data is for business use only. Access to highly confidential information is for the purposes of fulfilling your role within The EPIC Family CIC. Should you be found to be accessing data for personal reasons, this may be treated as Gross Misconduct with Instant Dismissal, along with a referral to the appropriate agencies.

Emails

All employees are to use Microsoft Outlook as their nominated email software. Licenses are provided by EPIC Family CIC. This is across all devices including phones, laptops, PC's and tablets. It is preferred that where possible, the app can only be accessed by password or additional security. All Team Members are expected to use their EPIC Family CIC email account and not use their personal or alternative accounts. Foster Parents are required to set up a fostering specific free email account with a platform of their choice.

An EPIC Family CIC email account and Microsoft 365 Licence can be purchased by the Foster Parents if required. Where a Fostering household chooses to purchase an EPIC Microsoft licence, they should then follow the 'Employee rules' for the purposes of this policy!

Careful consideration should be made as to when to send an email. Where another form of communication may be better suited to short questions, then other platforms should be considered, such as a text message or a Microsoft Teams message. Sending information in emails risks 'clogging up' inboxes and is a higher risk of email-related security incidents. All notes wherever possible, should be inputted directly into Intuitive Care.

Passwords

Passwords must regularly be changed and always changed if you suspect that the password has been leaked to a third party. Passwords should be made up of a combination of lower case & capital letters, numbers and symbols, being random and not easy to guess. It is not advised to use things such as important dates or names of individuals/pets.

It is important that individual user accounts are not shared. Everyone has their own access to Intuitive Care. Passwords must NOT ever be shared.

Physical Security

All devices that contain sensitive information, must have adequate security in place. The use of passwords, facial/fingerprint recognition to access the actual device as well as additional security to access the apps, programs, software and files.

Devices that access sensitive information, must not be shared with others. Devices must be stored safely and not left 'unlocked' if left at all.

Incident Response

Any loss of IT equipment, data leaks such as passwords or other data breaches, must be reported to the CED (Community Engagement Director) immediately. The CED will advise what course of action to take to further protect anyone at risk.

Policy Writing

EPIC Fostering may commission Tri-X for their full suite of Fostering related policies which are tailored to meet the needs of The EPIC Fostering Agency/Service. Tri-X can provide the foster Parents' Handbook which again is tailored to the needs of EPIC Fostering. Until Tri-X are commissioned, it is the responsibility of the RI to oversee the RM to ensure all relevant Fostering Policies and Procedures are in place. It is the RI's role to ensure that Ofsted is updated of any amended versions of relevant policies.

Policies for other parts of the organisation are written by Directors and/or appropriately appointed individuals with the relevant skills in the specific policy area.

Internal Communications & Policy Implementation

The Community Engagement Director is responsible for ensuring our communications throughout the organisation are in line with our core beliefs, values and mission statement. Communications for groups within the company are managed by our Service Support Manager. Policies are reviewed regularly by the Directors. Policies are drafted by the author, then proof read and edited by service support, before being signed off for implementation by the CEO.

Files are named appropriately in the following format:

1) First Letter of filename: **D = Draft F = Final**
2) Second Letter of filename is the strand of the Division within the organisation (EPIC meaning the document covers the whole organisation!):

E = EPIC F = Fostering A = Advocacy S = Support

3) The next part of the file name is it's main title ie. **Staff Handbook**
4) Version Number ie. **V1.0**
5) Initials of original author ie. **DBS**
6) Date file created ie. **41224** (for 4th Dec 2024)

Examples:

DE Homeworking Policy V1.0 DBS 201124

FE Safeguarding Policy V1.0 DBS.SG 071024

DE Staff Handbook V1.0 SG 041124

FF Missing Child Policy V1.0 DBS.SG 071024

Whatsapp and other Comms Apps

EPIC Family Community Interest Company recognises the importance of embracing technology as an efficient way of communicating with our colleagues, and service users. Although we welcome the use of alternative messaging and calling apps, we need to be mindful of how these are used appropriately to safeguard and adhere to confidentiality.

Our preferred methods of communications are:
- Face to face, is always the best option to discuss.
- Traditional telephone calls and texts using the UK phone networks
- Email using Microsoft Office, though being mindful of it not being a completely secure format

- Microsoft Teams for messages, calls, video calls, for both one on one and groups

It is against EPIC Family CIC Policy to use WhatsApp, or other types of social media messaging/group services to communicate in groups. Any groups representing the organisation that are formed outside of email or Microsoft Teams, need to be explicitly approved in writing by the CEO.

Social Media

Social Media has become an important part of business as well as everyday life for many. There are however, risks. Once information is posted on social media, it is very difficult to permanently erase from the public domain. It is therefore important that social media is used appropriately.

Social Media posts on behalf of The EPIC Family CIC are managed by the CED (Community Engagement Director). Please refrain from getting involved in social media activity that may be deemed negative. We have measures in place to manage these scenarios. It is important that personal views regarding business matters are not aired inappropriately on social media platforms.

Due to the risks associated with our work, it is important to ensure that your social media accounts are private and adequately protected when using in a personal capacity. You may choose to use an alias, or/and ensure that your 'posts' are not public.

We respect that relationships are formed through our work and that sometimes it may be appropriate to form connections across social media. We encourage you to be open and honest about any potential conflict of interests that may arise through social media connections. Team members are encouraged to appropriately network according to their role, for instance LinkedIn may be used to develop working networks for CPD.

Press Releases

Representatives of The EPIC Family CIC are not authorised to provide statements to the press or media without the content and context being first approved by both the CED (Community Engagement Director), and the CEO (or the COO in the absence of one other party).