

Correspondence, Communication and Social Networking Policy

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Regulations and Standards:

The Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015:

- Regulation 7 - The children's views, wishes and feelings standard.

Introduction:

This policy applies to all forms of communication that children may have with others, including written correspondence, telecommunications, including all mobile communications and web or internet enabled communications, including social networking sites.

Relevant Policies:

'Contact with Parents and Siblings Policy'.

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1. Key Principles

Children should be supported and encouraged to maintain and develop family contacts and



friendships, but this must be subject to any limitations or provisions set out in their care plan, placement plan and any court order.

The HND Children's Care LTD Home's manager shall ensure that children are provided, at all reasonable times, with access to a telephone on which to make and receive telephone calls in private; and facilities to send and receive post and, if the necessary facilities are provided for the use of children accommodated in the home, electronic mail, in private.

However, children do not have an absolute right to have access to these communications at all times. The home manager has an overriding responsibility to take measures to protect children, their staff and others from significant harm, injury and to prevent criminal offences from being committed; either as part of their care / placement plan or in an emergency. This can include the withdrawal or confiscation of mobiles and other devices, even those owned by the child.

The homes manager may impose such restriction, prohibition or condition upon a child's access to communications under which they are satisfied is necessary for the purpose of safeguarding or promoting the welfare of the child in question.

Such measures may not be imposed by the manager unless (a) the child's placing authority consents to the imposition of the measure; or (b) the measure is imposed in an emergency, and full details are given to the placing authority within 24 hours of its imposition; or (c) a court orders the restrictions as the result of a deprivation of liberty order for example.

Any measures of restriction placed on a child's communication must be regularly reviewed, taking the child's wishes and feelings into account.

2. Risk Management and Planning:

2.1 Planned Placements:

As part of the placement process, home's managers must ensure that consideration is given to whether children are allowed to use the telephone, mobiles, computers, the internet or other forms of communication in order to have contact with their family, relatives or friends.

If there is any risk from such contacts or from the use of mobiles or other communications, this must be addressed, and the arrangements or restrictions built into the child's placement plan. This can include restrictions on carrying mobile phones and / or supervising children when using them. However, if restrictions are imposed, the arrangements should be reviewed, and the arrangements changed if the risks reduce.

2.2 Emergency Placements:

If a child is placed in an emergency, without the possibility of giving proper consideration to the risks that may be posed to the child or others from having access to telephones, mobiles, the internet, computers or other communication, they will only be permitted to



have supervised telephone contacts with family or friends and will not be permitted to retain mobile phones until an emergency review has been conducted (within 72 hours of the child being placed) and a placement plan drawn up. However, even in the event of emergency admissions, we would endeavour to have as much information as possible for the purpose of impact assessment and risk assessment.

3, During The Placement

Children will have access to telephones, mobiles, computers or other forms of communication at reasonable time unless restricted by the social worker with the reasons set out in their placement plan.

At any time, the home's manager may withdraw use of mobile phones and other devices where it is considered that they are being used or may be used to place the child or others at risk of significant harm, in order to cause serious damage to property or to commit a criminal offence. Preferably, withdrawal should be by agreement with the child; if agreement is not forthcoming, the home's manager should apply the same principles as set out for searching a child without consent, in '[Searching Children and Bedrooms Policy](#)'.

At any time, if HND Children's Care LTD staff consider that a child or others may be at risk from having access to telephones, mobiles, computers / the internet or other forms of communication, they must take steps to reduce or prevent the risk.

If any such restrictions are imposed, the home's manager and child's social worker must be notified within 24 hours and consideration must be given to whether any ongoing restrictions should be imposed upon the child; any arrangements for ongoing restrictions must be outlined in the child's placement plan and / or risk assessments.

If a child is prevented from having access to a telephone, or access is reduced, it is deemed to be a sanction and must be recorded as such.

4. Images and Photographs:

See also '[Digital and Photographic Image Policy](#)'.

Children should not be permitted to have access to cameras or other technologies, including mobile 'phones, for the capturing of images or photographs unless it has been explicitly agreed by the placing authority in consultation with the child's parent(s) or a person with parental responsibility.

If agreement is given, consideration must be given to whether and how any images will be passed or given to third parties who may exploit them or may place the child(ren) or others at risk. If any risk is posed to the child or others, the arrangements must immediately be reviewed. If the risks cannot be reduced or prevented, access to the camera / technology must be withdrawn.



The agreement and any arrangements must be put in writing, preferably in the child's placement plan and reviewed regularly or in the light of any events or incidents which have placed the child or others at risk.

Under no circumstances may images or photographs of children be taken or captured without signed consent in place from the local authority, and / or those with parental responsibility.

4. Web Enabled or Internet Technology / Social Networking:

Children may not be given access to any form of web-enabled or internet technology unless arrangements have been made to ensure that the exchange of information is filtered to protect the children and those being communicated with e.g., on 'social networking' (see definition in italics below) sites, from any illegal or potentially harmful images of information.

Children should not be permitted to use sites that are also used by adults unless a full risk assessment has been carried out, in consultation with the social worker and possibly, a reputable IT specialist and suitable arrangements put in place to protect the child and others. These arrangements must be outlined in the child's placement plan or in the Statement of Purpose for the home and must be reviewed regularly or in the light of any incident or event which compromises the safety of the child.

Staff who use social networking sites, chat rooms or other web-enabled internet technology when they are off duty must ensure they take precautions to ensure they do so safely. If, at any time, they suspect that a child or someone known to a child has communicated with them, they must cease the communication immediately and report the matter to their manager.

Social networking sites are often used by perpetrators as an easy way to access children for sexual abuse. The Serious Crime Act (2015) has introduced an offence of sexual communication with a child. This applies to an adult who communicates with a child and the communication is sexual or if it is intended to elicit from the child a communication which is sexual, and the adult reasonably believes the child to be under 16 years of age. The Act also amended the Sex Offences Act 2003, so it is now an offence for an adult to arrange to meet with someone under 16, for the purpose of committing a relevant offence, having communicated with them on just one occasion (previously it was on at least two occasions).

In addition, radical and extremist groups may use social networking to attract children into rigid and narrow ideologies that are intolerant of diversity: this is similar to the grooming process and exploits the same vulnerabilities. The groups concerned include those linked to extreme Islamist, or Far Right / Neo Nazi ideologies, Irish Republican and Loyalist paramilitary groups, extremist Animal Rights groups and others who justify political, religious, sexist or racist violence.

Children may be drawn to adopt a radical ideology through a failure to appreciate the bias in



extremist material; in addition, by repeated viewing of extreme content they may come to view it as normal.

‘Internet Abuse’ relates to four main areas of abuse to children:

- Abusive images of children (although these are not confined to the Internet).
- A child being groomed for the purpose of sexual abuse.
- Exposure to pornographic or other offensive material via the Internet.
- The use of the internet, and in particular social media, to engage children in extremist ideologies.

5. Guidance:

When considering whether to permit a child to utilise or have access to any form of communication, consideration must be given to:

- the child's background.
- the circumstances 'on the day' or at the time.
- any risks posed by or to the person(s) being communicated with for example, the manager/staff should consider the following:
 - Is there any contact order in force in relation to the child or any member of his / her family?
 - Is the child or person(s) being communicated with subject to a child protection plan or a child in need?
 - Is there anything in the child's care plan, placement Information record or chronology that indicates s/he or others may be at risk?
 - Have the parents been consulted about the arrangements or given consent?
 - Is the person(s) being communicated with known, is the person an adult or does she /he pose any risk?
 - Is there any risk that the child is being or may be bullied, mistreated or abused?
 - Is there any risk the child may use the communication to bully or mistreat others, or to commit a crime?

Before permitting any form of web-enabled or internet communication, staff should be satisfied the child and others are safe.

If the person(s) is not known or poses any risk at all, staff must limit or withdraw contact and immediately consult a manager, who must undertake a full risk assessment in consultation with the social worker.

This can include temporarily withdrawing or removing mobile phones, internet access or computers from the child.

End.