

**Cwm Taf Safeguarding Children Board**

**Cwm Taf Safeguarding Adult Board**

**Social Networking:  
Practice Guidance for those whose work  
brings them into contact with children,  
young people and adults at risk in the  
Cwm Taf area**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

This document is intended to provide guidance for those whose work or volunteering brings them into contact with children, young people and adults at in the Cwm Taf area. It features information which can be related to work, and offers guidance regarding the use of social networking sites and the possible impact on and implications for our personal as well as our professional roles.

This guidance does not replace individual agencies' policies and disciplinary procedures. Social networking websites have been added to the list of restricted websites for many of our organisations and employment settings and as such, access to such sites may be blocked on work based computers. Therefore staff should comply with their organisation's policy on the use of digital equipment to access social media websites.

The widespread availability and use of social networking applications bring opportunities to understand, engage and communicate with others in new ways. It is important that we are able to use these technologies and services effectively and flexibly. However it is important also to ensure that we balance this with our duties, roles and responsibilities to our service users and partners, our legal responsibilities and our reputation.

Cwm Taf Safeguarding Children Board (CTSCB) and Cwm Taf Safeguarding Adult Board (CTASB), (hereafter known as the safeguarding boards) recognise that people use the internet at home for personal purposes, and many participate in social networking sites. In the majority of cases this is uncomplicated and is not cause for concern. However, there are some occasions where our personal lives and work life can start to overlap through these sites and we must be aware of the potential personal, legal and employment related implications of material which could be considered abusive or defamatory.

## **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this guidance is therefore to:

- promote safe practice in safeguarding children and adults at risk
- to raise practitioner awareness about the potential risks involved in using social networking
- protect service users from inappropriate use of online media by practitioners
- to provide a model of safe practice for online media

## **PERSONAL USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES**

The safeguarding boards recognise the value of the enhanced levels of communication that social networking sites and advancing technology can offer. There is an acknowledged right to freedom of expression, however we must be aware of the potential implications of material, which could be considered abusive or defamatory, or call into question the employee or volunteer's judgement and capacity to fulfil a position of trust. Users must be mindful that the right to freedom of expression attaches only to lawful conduct.

In order to ensure confidentiality and that the reputation of the employing organisation is protected, employees using social networking sites should be required to:

- Ensure that they use privacy settings that protects their private life to allow for safe boundaries between their practice and their private life
- Ensure that they do not conduct themselves in a way that is detrimental to their employer
- Not refer to their employer or their role in a way that is detrimental
- Not to make public comments or status updates which refer to their practice; Confidentiality must be maintained
- Not publish any content, which may result in actions for defamation, discrimination, breaches of confidentiality or copyright, data protection or other claims for damages. This includes, but is not limited to, material of an illegal, sexual or offensive nature that may bring you or your organisation into disrepute
- Not post images of service users or incidents that take place during an employee's working day on a personal social networking site
- Not send or post abusive or defamatory messages. Employees should be aware that social networking websites are a public forum, particularly if the employee is part of a 'network'. Employees should not assume that their entries on any website will remain private
- Take care not to allow their interaction with others on these sites to damage working relationships between members of staff, clients, service users or partner agencies
- Not use employers' logos on personal web pages;
- Not to gather information about service users from social networking / online sources

You should always use your own judgement but should bear in mind the codes of conduct and policies, which are part of your professional and employment requirements. Examples include:

- Care Council for Wales Code of Practice for Social Care Workers;
- General Council for Teaching code of conduct
- Nursing and Midwifery College
- Other codes of conduct (e.g. confidentiality and the clauses in your Contract of Employment)
- Relevant Employment Policies from your organisation/employer (e.g. Dignity at Work, Whistleblowing, Equality Schemes, Internet Use, Disciplinary)
- *Include other bodies e.g. teachers, health professionals etc*

**Employees should notify their manager:**

- If they receive press or media contact regarding the content of their personal web page which relates to their employment or the work of their organisation
- If they feel that they, or someone else, are subject to abuse by colleagues through use of a social networking site which has some reference to employment roles, or to incidents during their working day

- If information on the site raises a cause for concern with regard to conflict of interest
- If they are unsure as to the appropriateness of information or images they wish to publish on their personal web page
- If a service user is seeking to clone a social networking site using an employee or volunteer's identity
- If a service user has sought to make contact with an employee or volunteer via social networking

## **OFFICIAL USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES**

Any use of social networking sites for official purposes must follow the appropriate approval process for your organisation.

### **Safe Practice includes awareness and consideration of the following:**

- Journalists increasingly use the online media to research stories and may report on photographs or comments they find
- Similarly, service users are able to search the internet for information on persons with whom they have involvement. Check your security settings on social networking sites so your information is visible only to those who you decide should have access
- Put your name into an Internet search engine to see what people can find out about you. Are you happy with what they can see?
- Help your friends and colleagues out – let them, or your manager know if you notice things on social networking pages that might be misconstrued
- Social networking allows greater access to your personal life than ever before – if what you do personally would be of concern to your employer there may be repercussions
- Your personal circumstances can be identified via some of the information that you place on websites e.g. photo recognition software can be used to trace you/persons connected to you
- Make yourself familiar with and check your security and access settings – putting your personal contact details such as your mobile phone number may make it publicly accessible
- If you place personal photos online, family members can be traced e.g. a picture of your child in school uniform tells everyone where your child can be located
- You should check your agency policy – but it is not advisable to accept people you work with as 'friends' on social networking sites. Digital conduct should be treated the same way as non-digital behaviour
- If you are using online media to make friends or relationships, ensure that you take reasonable steps to establish that the individual(s) you are communicating with are adults. Be aware that some vulnerable young people may lie about their age to meet older people.

## **OUTCOMES**

Inappropriate social use of the internet outside the work place could bring the organisation/agency reputation into disrepute, destroy working relationships or expose the organisation to potential liabilities.

A breach of the policies within your organisation could be considered gross misconduct and the consequence may be disciplinary action up to and including summary dismissal.