

## Best Practices for All Youth-Serving Adults:

- **Utilize technology (devices, applications and platforms) sanctioned by the organization.** This also includes maintaining private your personal phone number whenever possible, as most online video conferencing options have built-in audio and voice options.
- **Keep personal social media accounts private.** Adults working or volunteering with youth should not use their personal emails or social media accounts to communicate with minors (or their personal phone numbers). If the organization does not have its own official account for you to use, work with supervisors to create one that allows them to also have oversight.
- **Avoid "friending" or communicating with minors using personal accounts or private messages.** Under no circumstances should a caring adult be utilizing a personal account to send a "friend" request to a minor who is in their care, or known to them, because of work or ministry.
- **Meet with minors in online groups, never alone or 1/1.** Virtual meetings can include other students or parents to maintain transparency. Other adults in your organization should also be included when possible and/or necessary for proper oversight.
- **Maintain appropriate communication with both minors and other adults.** Anything sent to an individual minor should also be copied to their parent or guardian. Keep language professional and formal, just as you would "in person."
- **Communicate with youth during appropriate timeframes.** While it is understandable that sometimes normal operating schedules can be interrupted, it is imperative that proper boundaries are observed when communicating specifically with minors.
- **Be mindful of what students will view and hear from your own surroundings during online meetings/classes.** This includes what is visually shown/seen and heard. Consider how certain spaces may be inappropriate, such as, sitting on a bed to videoconference, or showing an environment with underclothing strewn about, etc.

## Additional Best Practices for *Parents and Guardians*:

- **Model appropriate behavior.** Everything that you do with technology can be observed by others—this includes how much time you spend on the computer, the balance between Internet time and home life, what you do online and on your technological devices such as a phone or tablet, how you respond to inappropriate situations you encounter, how you communicate about yourself, the language you use, the images you post, etc. In the case of parents with youth at home, all of it is being observed by developing, impressionable brains.
- **Be available.** First, try as much as possible to be directly engaged in the technology utilized by the child, seeing what they see online, hearing what they hear—asking them questions and processing it together. However, sometimes we temporarily utilize technology with youth while something else is being accomplished—preparing a snack within eyesight, answering a quick work email next to them, etc. Depending on the child's age, if you cannot be immediately and directly engaged in the online interaction or material with the youth, then ensure that you are nearby and ready to communicate if/when necessary.
- **Expect to be included in all communication between the youth-serving adult(s) in your life, and your youth**—then follow up to ensure it happens. Your written permission should be obtained for any youth-serving person/organization to communicate electronically with a minor. Monitor closely any video calls made.
- **Control access.** Communicate to the youth about what sites and apps are acceptable to use; control what apps are actually accessed or purchased, utilize password access and share them with each other, install safety protection software, etc.
- **Limit minor's use of technology.** Schedule technology "down time," since minors (depending on age) could be online all day in classes, or... gaming. Consider limiting digital devices to particular times during the day so it doesn't dominate everyone's day and attention. And, get everyone outside for exercise and fresh perspective!
- **Monitor youth behavior on the devices or apps themselves.** There's no tool you can use that will work as well as personally communicating and reviewing the technology, but it is also helpful to install safety protection software and utilize all of the apps' "parental controls." This could also mean reviewing the apps on the device, creating parallel accounts so that you can interact with, and observe your youth on the site, etc. Additionally, enable and regularly monitor privacy settings of apps and devices your child uses. Develop and discuss family internet rules/expectations and how to hold each other accountable. Keep things consistent.

- **Assist minors with understanding what it means to maintain privacy in the digital world—and the importance of it.** This has to do with what youth share about themselves online, intentionally and unintentionally. We take the time to teach them to take a second look before posting anything personal, including what information can be gleaned about them from their surroundings, location, clothing, communication, etc.
- **Instruct "next steps" if inappropriate behavior or material is observed via any of their apps or digital devices—**this could include material that intimidates/bullies, manipulates, harasses or reveals private information. The first step is for the youth to tell a trusted adult—they need to know they can come to you or another adult if they feel uncomfortable or shaken (even if you're in a meeting, or doing something else that is important). The second step is to report. There may be reporting features within the app to report abuse; the CyberTipline is also an excellent reporting tool.<sup>2</sup>
- **Maintain boundaries even with your friends and family who "aren't in the know,"** and educate them when possible. But, just remember that their behavior isn't dictated by any organization's "social media" or "technology use" policy and despite their good intentions, there could be some issue that crop up. Monitor these interactions as well, plan to monitor, interrupt, educate and then have conversations with youth afterward if something was amiss.