

Mobile Phones and Digital Images

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MOBILE PHONES AND DIGITAL IMAGES

1.0 Introduction

1.1 This protocol addresses the use of mobile phones in four areas relevant to residential child care and should be read in its entirety:

- Mobile phones owned and used by looked after children.
- Departmental mobile phones provided to each home/house;
- Staff member's personal mobile phones;
- Specific issues relevant to 'camera phones' and digital imaging.

2.0 Principles

2.1 In general terms, it is recognised that mobile phones when used appropriately are a valuable form of inter-personal communication for children and adults. It is acknowledged that mobile phones can contribute positively to the welfare of children in care, and can be an important means of communicating with children whilst they are away from the home.

2.2 It is, however, also recognised that in some circumstances the ownership and usage of mobile phones by children in care can impact negatively on their welfare, particularly so in respect of adult carers being able to have oversight of, or regulate, contact from others external to the home (e.g. adults wishing to procure children for the purposes of criminal/sexual exploitation).

2.3 The principal assumption will be that children in care should have the opportunity to demonstrate an ability to use their mobile phones appropriately and in a positive manner. In circumstances where this is not evident, or where evidence indicates that the use of a mobile phone may be prejudicial to the welfare of a child, then staff should seek to restrict or curtail its use for a period of time relevant to the individual circumstances.

- 2.4 There is currently limited, yet inconclusive, evidence of potential health risks from mobile phones radiation – risks which may be greater for children. As a consequence, children should be made aware of the possible risks to their health and be encouraged to avoid excessive usage.

PRACTICE GUIDANCE

Text messaging is presently considered to be less of a health risk than voice calls.

- 2.5 Mobile 'phones which have the capability to capture and transmit still or moving digital images (camera 'phones) have an additional potential to be used for activities which are prejudicial to the welfare of children in care. It is therefore necessary to establish supplementary risk minimising strategies which are specific to this issue. (See [Section 3.4](#)).
- 2.6 Mobile phones or “Smart Phones” that have access to the internet should have parental control services activated by the children’s carers which will allow the carers to install limits around age appropriate games and social media sites and the amount of time spent using the internet and social media sites. All children in care are made aware that when having a “Smart Phone” or any hand held device that can be used to access the internet will be monitored and they are expected to adhere to expectations explained in a mobile phone agreement. (see Section 3.2)

3.0 Mobile Phones owned and used by children and young people in care.

- 3.1 All children in care should be made aware of the core expectations placed upon them in terms of mobile phones being used appropriately and in positive ways. They should also be made aware of the expectations of staff to intervene in situations where mobile phone use is problematic or in other ways contrary to the promotion of individual welfare. These expectations should be shared with other relevant individuals where appropriate e.g. parents, social worker.

PRACTICE GUIDANCE

Staff will regularly screen mobile phones for racist, sexist, abusive content

- 3.2 Children should be provided with the information in written form and sign an agreement about the use of the phone whilst living in the home (See attached Mobile

phone agreement)

- 3.3 All children in care who own a mobile phone should be offered current and relevant information in respect of potential health risks. They should also be made aware of security issues given the very high incidences of mobile phone theft.
- 3.4 All children living in the home are expected to complete Social Media and Internet Safety training before being allowed access to a mobile phone or hand held device with internet access.
- 3.5 Children must provide the home with their mobile phone number and this should be recorded alongside other key information. Children should be encouraged to store the home's telephone number in their phone's memory.
- 3.6 Children will be provided with £10 credit per month for their phone and will be able to earn an additional £10 credit through positive behaviour within the home and community.
- 3.7 In situations where concerns arise about problematic usage, then attempts should be made to establish a written agreement with the individual child making explicit reference to the specific concerns, and setting out a strategy for dealing with the difficulties (e.g. handing the phone to staff at night time). Consideration should be given to including others (e.g. parents) in this agreement.
- 3.8 Where problems persist, and a written agreement has failed (or not been possible to establish), then staff should actively seek to prevent its continued use by taking possession of the mobile phone and keeping it safely subject to regular review of the young person's circumstances. It may be appropriate in some situations to give the phone to parents or another responsible adult.
- 3.9 The Registered Care Manager should agree the appropriate strategy for removal of a mobile phone. All such removals should be reviewed within 48 hours and be revised as appropriate.

4.0 Residential Home Mobile Phones

- 4.1 The care home has 2 work mobile phones and staff are expected as part of safeguarding to routinely carry when out on any activities away from the home. The other mobile phone is carried in the homes emergency bum bag. Staff are expected to check at handovers that the mobile phones are present and ensure that they are fully charged.
- 4.2 A record of all the residential home mobile numbers should be should be recorded in the homes phone book and staff are expected to carry a work mobile whilst on duty out in the community.
- 4.3 All staff should be familiar with the phone's basic operation and functions and it should be charged and ready for use on a daily basis.
- 4.4 Staff should be aware that the use of a mobile phone by the driver of a moving or temporarily stationary motor vehicle (e.g. traffic hold-up), is a criminal offence and is not permitted in any circumstances.
- 4.5 The use of a work mobile phone should ordinarily be limited to the making and receiving of work related calls. Only in exceptional circumstances should it be necessary for staff to make personal calls, the details of which should be recorded and brought to the attention of the home's manager so that they can be identified on the subsequent itemised invoice and the appropriate payment made.

PRACTICE GUIDANCE

The restrictions on the use of the home's mobile phone apply equally to the use of landlines whilst working.

5.0 Personal Mobile Phones

- 5.1 Staff members who bring personal mobile phones into the workplace should not carry them on their person whilst on duty, and should not allow them in any way to interfere with workplace duties. They should be switched off or silenced, and kept in an appropriately safe place with other personal belongings, e.g. office.
- 5.2 In the exceptional circumstance of a member of staff on duty awaiting an urgent phone

call from a family member etc., it should be agreed in advance with the Home Manager for the staff member to keep their phone on for the period necessary to receive the call.

6.0 Camera Phones

- 6.1 The mobile phone issued to residential staff mobile have built in cameras, and have the capability to capture, copy and transmit images through a range of current technologies and formats, e.g. to other phones, email attachment & website posting.
- 6.2 There exists significant opportunity for the misuse of camera phones, particularly in respect of the invasion of privacy and the potential for covert image taking. Responsibilities in respect of safeguarding and the rights to privacy and confidentiality which are applicable to all individuals working and living in children's homes, are paramount concerns and take precedence over any other considerations.
- 6.3 However as most mobiles are equipped with the technological capability to take pictures and record images, ownership does not necessarily reflect a specific intention to make use of this feature.
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- 6.5 The residential staff can use the works mobile phone during their day to day duties to capture images within the home and on activities with the consent of all parties involved.
- 6.6 All children who have ownership of a camera phone at the time of their admission or at any time whilst they are in care when it is known that they have ownership of a camera phone they must have consent to use their mobiles to capture images of other's.
- 6.7 Members of staff should maintain heightened levels of vigilance when it is known that a child has possession of a camera phone. In circumstances where there is evidence,

or suspicion, that unacceptable images are being taken or images are being taken without consent, then active attempts should be made to prevent further misuse. This may necessitate taking possession of the phone or returning it to a parent or other responsible adult external to the home.

Mobile Phone agreement including hand held device.



We, the co-signed, agree for (Child) to have full and safe use of his I Phone and Nintendo Switch

(Child) has completed E-Safety training on the (date)

(Child) has agreed to allow staff to keep the charger for the phone and Nintendo Switch in the office.

(Child) has agreed to hand his IPhone in every night at (time) for safe keeping and charging.

(Child) has agreed to give the password to his/her mobile phone and understands that staff will make regular checks on his/her mobile to ensure he/she is using the phone responsibly.

(Child) has agreed to hand in his Nintendo Switch in every night at (Time) for safe keeping and charging

(Child) has agreed to use his/her IPhone safely and responsibly.

(Child) has agreed not to take his IPhone to school.

(Child) knows he/she is not to attempt to obtain the home Wi-Fi password.

(Child) is aware that he/she is not to use his/her IPhone or Nintendo Switch for any illegal or inappropriate uses. For example, cyber bullying, sending or receiving inappropriate photos, looking at websites that are not suitable for persons over the age of 13 years.