

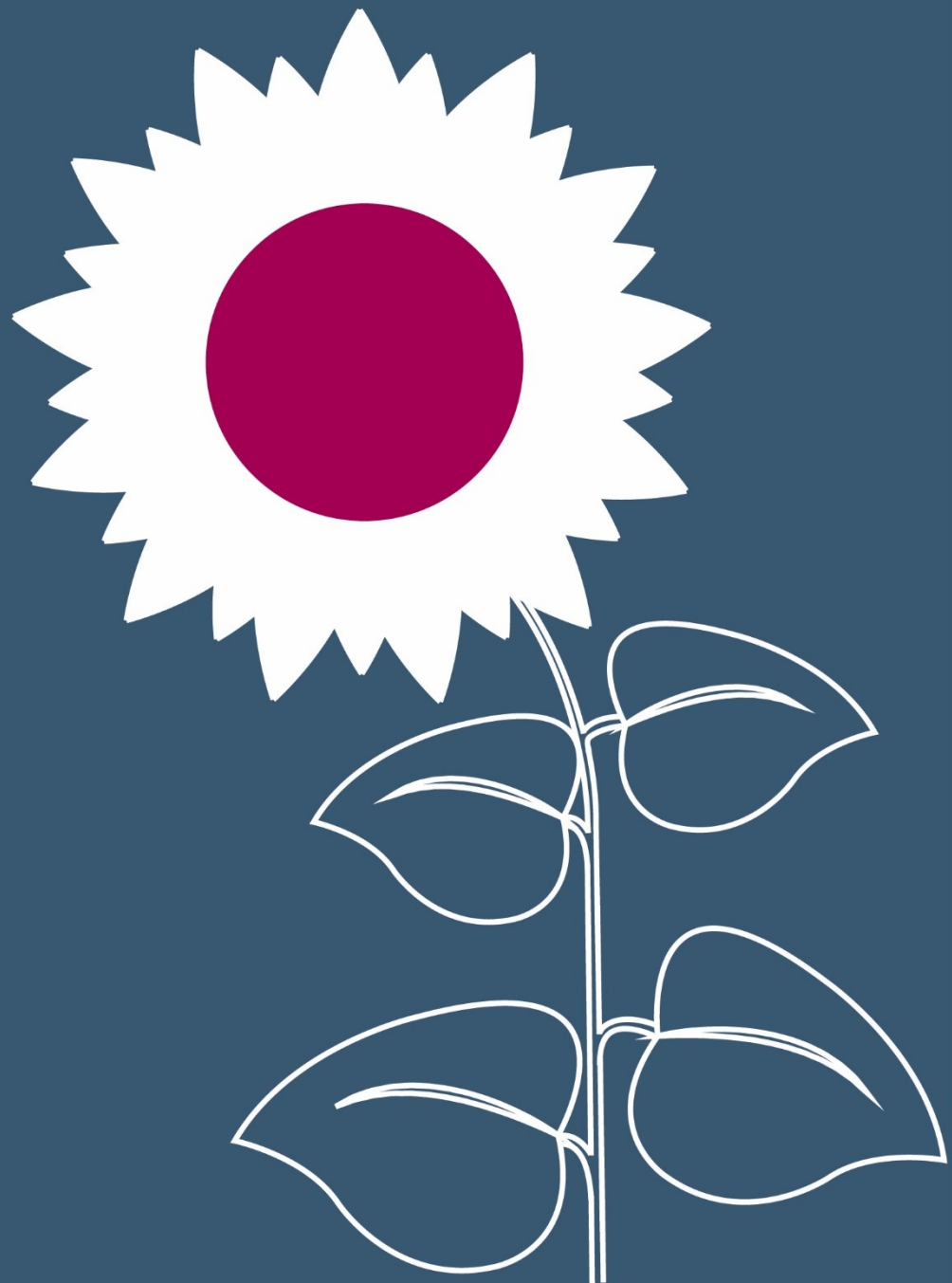


City of
Stoke-on-Trent

Mobile Phones and Digital Images

Tri X 5_4_4 (July 2024)

Review date July 2025



INFORMATION SHEET

Service area	Childrens Social Care
Date effective from	Dec 2013
Responsible officer(s)	Strategic Manager Children in Care
Date of review(s)	Dec 2014 March 2021 July 2022 July 2023 July 2024
Status: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mandatory (all named staff must adhere to guidance) • Optional (procedures and practice can vary between teams) 	Mandatory
Target audience	Residential Staff
Date of committee/SMT decision	
Related document(s)	
Superseded document(s)	July 2023
File reference	5_4_4

Contents

1	Introduction	3
2	Principles	3
3	Mobile Phones owned and used by looked-after young people.....	4
4	Home Mobile Phones	5
5	Personal Mobile Phones	5
6	Camera Phones.....	5
7	Digital images	6

1 Introduction

1.1 This procedure 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 young people.
- Departmental mobile phones provided to each home.
- Carers' personal mobile phones.
- Specific issues relevant to 'camera phones' and digital imaging.

2 Principles

2.1 In general terms, it is recognised that mobile phones when used appropriately are a valuable form of inter-personal communication for young people and adults. It is acknowledged that mobile phones can contribute positively to the welfare of looked-after young people, and can be an important means of communicating with young people 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 looked-after young people 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 young people for the purposes of sexual exploitation, county lines, substance misuse or other exploitation CCE etc.).

2.3 The principal assumption will be that young people 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 young person, then carers 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 and young people. As a consequence, young people 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 mostly have the capability to capture and transmit still or moving digital images (camera phones) to a high quality, these have an additional potential to be used for activities which are prejudicial to the welfare of young people in care. It is therefore necessary to establish supplementary risk minimising strategies which are specific to this issue. (See Section 3.5).

3 Mobile Phones owned and used by looked-after young people

- 3.1 All young people 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 carers 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.
- 3.2 All young people 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.
- 3.3 Carers should encourage young people to make available their mobile phone number and should record it alongside other key information. Young people should be encouraged to store the Home's telephone/mobile phone number in their phone's memory.
- 3.4 Carers should ensure that young people who are using 'smart phones' are only accessing sites and applications which are appropriate for their use, this includes sites and apps such as Facebook, Instagram and other social media. Applications will have age ratings on them depending on the content they have available. Age restrictions are able to be put onto a phone if this is deemed to be necessary, parents/social worker should be consulted before getting a mobile phone and putting on restrictions.
- 3.5 In situations where concerns arise about problematic usage, then attempts should be made to establish a written agreement with the individual young person making explicit reference to the specific concerns, and setting out a strategy for dealing with the difficulties (e.g. handing the phone to carers at night time). Consideration should be given to including others (e.g. parents) in this agreement.
- 3.6 Where problems persist, and a written agreement has failed (or not been possible to establish), then carers 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.
- 3.7 The Residential Manager should agree the appropriate strategy for removal of a mobile phone, and decide upon the timescale for review of the circumstances.

4 Home Mobile Phones

- 4.1 The individual home mobile phones are an integral part of the risk management strategies for a wide range of activities and tasks that are undertaken by carers outside the home.
- 4.2 All carers should be familiar with the phone's basic operation and functions and it should be charged and ready for use on a daily basis.
- 4.3 Carers 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.
- 4.4 The use of the home's mobile phone should ordinarily be limited to the making and receiving of work-related calls. Only in exceptional circumstances should it be necessary for carers to make personal calls, the details of which should be recorded and brought to the attention of the manager so that they can be identified on the subsequent itemised invoice and the appropriate payment made.

5 Personal Mobile Phones

- 5.1 Carers who bring personal mobile phones into the workplace should ensure that personal calls do not in any way interfere with their workplace duties and do not conflict with their duty of care to the young people.
- 5.2 Any carer who is a representative of the Union and uses their personal phone for this should ensure that this causes minimal disturbance to their work-based duties and does not conflict with their duty of care to the young people.

6 Camera Phones

- 6.1 The majority of mobile phones have built in cameras, and have the capability to capture, copy and transmit images and videos through a range of current technologies and formats, e.g. to other phones, email attachment, live video calling and 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 precedent over any other considerations.
- 6.3 It is, however, recognised that mobile phones are increasingly equipped with the technological capability to take pictures and record images/videos – ownership will therefore often not reflect a specific intention to make use of this increasingly standardised feature.

- 6.4 **The use of camera phones by any individual (young person, carer or visitor) should be limited to its capability for voice communication or in terms of the young people – decent images of themselves. Visitors and carers are not to take images on their camera phones. In certain circumstances is it permissible to use a camera phone for the capturing of images either within the home, or the immediate environment where this is with consent of all parties involved.**
- 6.5 All young people should be made aware of this restriction at the time of their admission, or at any time whilst they are looked after when it is known that they have ownership of a camera phone. All visitors should also be made aware of this prohibition at the point of them entering the home.
- 6.6 Carers should maintain high levels of vigilance when it is known that a young person has possession of a camera phone, being aware when they are using this, and what this is being used for. In circumstances where there is evidence, or suspicion, that images are being taken which are not appropriate or are being taken of other young people or staff, 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.

7 Digital images

- 7.0 Before images are taken there needs to be agreement from Parent or social worker.

Digital images of the young people should be taken using a house camera, not the house camera phone / personal phones; the house camera is to remain at the house and is to be connected only to the house computer for uploading images. If photos need to be printed out at a printing facility (e.g. Tesco) the memory card should be removed and taken instead of the camera. These images can be printed to be added to a book at the house or added to a memory stick for the young person to take with them when they leave the residential home.