

6 Steps for Preventing Adult Sexual Misconduct & Child Sexual Abuse.

[ESCAPE Program Logo: End Sexual abuse of Children with Prevention, Awareness and Education]

Educational Video Series. Developed in conjunction with Diane Cranley, an expert in child sexual abuse prevention. This module is part of a series designed to help school staff identify and report suspicious behaviors that may indicate child sexual abuse. A Discussion Guide accompanies each module of the series. A Collection of educational reading materials and resource lists are also included.

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Module 7: Electronic & Social Media Boundaries

[Sources cited in this video are included at the end of the transcript]

Narrator, Diane Cranley: Hello, I'm Diane Cranley, Author of 8 Ways to Create Their Fate and a Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Consultant. Welcome back to the Adult Sexual Misconduct and Child Sexual Abuse Prevention in Schools Series.

We'll continue today with the topic of Electronic and Social Media Boundaries which is a crucial element of protecting students from sexual abuse in our schools.

Many educators use technology to communicate with students and their parents about assignments which is valuable and acceptable.

However, the interactions should be limited to posts that are visible by other users, including parents and administrators and done using district electronic platforms, never through personal email or personal social media. Our focus today will be on restricting private electronic communications.

Sources: 1

Electronic devices and social media are increasingly common tools for communicating in our current culture and a high percentage of children have their own devices, even in elementary school.

Research has shown that: 18% of children have cell phones by grade 3, 25% by grade 4, 39% by grade 5 and 83% of children have cell phones by middle school.

In addition; 64% of kids have access to the Internet via their own laptop or tablet, 54% have access via a shared, family computer in a public space and 50% of kids have social media accounts by age 12

Sources: 1, 2, 3

Clearly the potential for your staff to access students via electronic communication is a matter of when, not if.

Private electronic communication opens a whole new arena where inappropriate and risky personal relationships can flourish and once established this communication is difficult to stop and almost impossible to manage.

Sources: 1

Child molesters seek to leverage student's access to electronic devices and common social media applications such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. They may also encourage students to communicate with them via specialized apps that hide the trail of their interactions, including; Text & Call Apps that don't show on their phone bill, Temporary Apps where texts and photos disappear within seconds of viewing, Live Streaming Video Apps which allow interactions without recording and Photo Vaults & Ghost Apps which mask private photo libraries, web browsers, and even contacts.

Researchers have found that 70% of teens have hidden on-line activity from their parents and child molesters exploit that longing for independence and privacy.

Source: 1, 4

Strict policies are required to protect your students from exploitation by staff who use these social media apps for inappropriate purposes. Let's look at several things your district can do to intercede.

For district provided devices, we recommend the use of security software that restricts download and access to all social media applications. This includes devices provided to staff and students.

To mitigate access via personal devices, we recommend a policy that prohibits staff from; Calling or texting students and vice versa or sharing phone numbers, Sharing email addresses or user names used for any social media app, including but not limited to Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, or Instagram and Connecting with students on social media apps regardless of who initiated the request. Communication regarding school activities should be conducted only on district provided platforms.

Sources: 1, 5, 6

To keep the relationship between district staff and students strictly professional, we also recommend a policy that prohibits employees from showing any sexually inappropriate images or comments, or highly personal information on social media accounts that are set up to allow visibility to the general public.

This type of information can be avoided altogether, or the account can be set up as "private," providing visibility of posts only to those connected rather than the general public. In addition, school staff should not engage with any students' post on a public social media thread. These policies must be regularly communicated to employees, parents, and students in order to be effective.

We acknowledge that policies in and of themselves may not prevent the exploitation of students via phone or social media apps but they do provide a clear expectation that allows administrators to take action if any of these boundaries are violated.

REFLECTION QUESTION:

How do your current electronic and social media policies compare to best practices and how should they be changed to better protect the students in your care?

Thank you for taking the time to watch this video and engage with us in preventing child sexual abuse. If you have questions or would like additional information, please contact your Human Resources Department.

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Sources:

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3. "Kids & Tech: The Evolution of Today's Digital Natives," influence CENTRAL, accessed March 9, 2017, <http://influence-central.com/kids-tech-the-evolution-of-todays-digital-natives/>.
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6. Sandy K. Wurtele, "Preventing the Sexual Exploitation of Minors in Youth-serving Organizations," *Children and Youth Services Review* (2012): 2447, 2449, doi:10.1016/childyouth.2012.09.009.