




Adventist Risk Management, Inc.



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Working with Kids Online

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Currently, ministries across the Seventh-day Adventist Church are working in new and creative ways to continue to serve their communities, members, and young people under extraordinary circumstances brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of these efforts have moved online to stay connected and maintain some elements of normalcy. Our church's child protection policies apply to the online environment (cyberspace) as well. Keep in mind that cyberspace changes quickly, and we will need to update our practices and skills as we go.

Let's look at our policies and see how we can apply them to our work in cyberspace in practical ways. These policies can be found in the Church Manual on [page 175](#).

The first two concepts are really closely linked to what they are trying to accomplish.

- **Two-Adult Policy**—Have two adults present in children's classrooms or activities.
- **Open Door**—Discourage private or one-on-one contact and encourage an open-door policy in all situations. Where an open door is not possible, station a second adult at the door.

How do we do this online?

Ensure that your "class" or "group" is led by at least two adult supervisors. Both should be copied on every communication. Meetings should include both adult supervisors, and one-on-one sessions should not be allowed with minors. **No individual contact should be allowed.**

Ensure that you have permission to communicate with their minors from the parent or legal guardians. Copy parents on all electronic communication or ensure that parents can access emails or messages sent through other channels. Communicate to parents that they are expected to monitor, attend, and supervise any communications and meetings in which their child participates. **Parents should be able to see everything that is going on.**

Use systems such as Zoom, WebEx, or Microsoft Teams that allow for group meetings. Avoid the use of systems that allow for access to individual accounts and private communication such as Facebook or WhatsApp. It is essential to define expectations with volunteers, parents, and minors that all communication must remain in the group and include both supervisors and a parent at all times.

This idea leads to a rule whereby volunteers are prohibited from independently connecting with children or youth on social media outside the group setting. Volunteers should be advised that this is not permitted, and parents/guardians should be informed of this rule as well. Obviously, this would not apply to a volunteer connecting with his own children. Violating this rule should form a basis for discipline, up to a dismissal of the volunteer.

RESOURCE CALLOUT: [School Administrator's Guide to Rolling Out Zoom](#) (PDF) Zoom has some excellent information for school administrators that is very helpful for ministry leaders working with children.

What about having young people send in photos and videos?

This is a fun way to stay engaged and helps to bridge the gap since we can't meet in person. However, we must understand the risk associated. Everything online exists forever. This is where parental supervision will be especially critical. From the ministry organization's perspective, it is crucial to be able to ensure that the files received do not contain viruses or other malware. The content must meet the group's code of conduct before it is seen by the group. It is also essential to have a photo/video release signed by the parent/legal guardian. Your organization should also have a document retention policy that addresses when the files will be destroyed.

Consent to participate in Cyberspace

Some have asked if a [new consent form](#) would be appropriate to meet the needs of working with kids in cyberspace. You may find the example attached to this article a good starting place. Still, we encourage you to work with your local legal counsel to meet your jurisdictional needs. This could be attached to your photo/video release.

Privacy and Personal Information of Minors

In the US, a small number of states have legislation aimed at protecting minor's privacy and personal information for online activity. Also, the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) attempts to prohibit the unauthorized collection of personal data and tracking of personal information of children 13 years old and younger.

Compliance with COPPA should involve thoughtful analysis of your online ministry. This analysis should include your information technology professionals, your conference attorney, management, and those performing the ministry. Initially, you must determine if you collect personal information from minors 13 or under. If so, COPPA applies. If it applies, you must obtain parental consent and post a COPPA-compliant privacy policy. You can access more information [here](#).

Canadian federal law has protections for personal information and privacy for online activity. Also, several Canadian provinces have online privacy laws, as well. In Canada, there is no legislation at the federal level explicitly aimed at personal information and privacy of minors for online activity.

This is a developing area, however, so please watch for changes. You should connect with legal counsel in your state or province to determine if there is applicable legislation.

Recording Meetings

Many places require the consent of all parties to any recording. Whether your state or province is an "all-party" state or not, it is best practices to avoid the practice of recording group meetings.

Copyright

Be aware that some information or media you want to use online may be copyrighted, and you need permission to use it. This article is not meant to fully address the issues surrounding copyright. If you are unsure about whether or not something enjoys copyright protection, we recommend you consult with local legal counsel.

Back to the Church Manual

The next three concepts from the Church Manual are still critical as we move to cyberspace. We need to be sure that any adults working in our Sabbath Schools or various Children's or Youth groups go through these processes, whether in person or online.

- **Volunteer Screening**—Have all volunteers complete a volunteer information form, check their references, and, if required by law, do a police background check.

- **Six-Month Policy**—Require a waiting period of six months for newly baptized or transferring members who have indicated a willingness to work with children.
- **Training**—Provide regular training for teachers and volunteers to help them understand and protect children and how to nurture their faith.

Let's ensure that our young people continue to have adequate supervision in cyberspace with oversight that protects the volunteers as well as the minors we are trying to minister to.

Related articles or resources:

- [Church Streaming Liability](#)
- [How to Safely Use Social Media for Your Ministry](#)
- Additional information on Copyrights in this short [video](#)
- Parental Consent form mentioned in the article: [Form](#)
- [Volunteer screening for background checks](#)

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