

▶ getting up to speed

■■■ on engaging with families

Social networking policies

Competence and integrity using technology may soon be a determining factor when recruiting educators and when families choose who to trust, not just with their children but with their data. Most organisations either have a social media policy or think they should. Organisations tend to adopt one of two approaches to social media policy making. They either let it evolve, developing an understanding of risks and opportunities and allowing rules to develop in response to situations. Or they take control from the beginning and have a clear policy on social media. Insurers, legal advisers and employment specialists often recommend a clear policy on social media use that emphasises risk and control elements.

Each approach has advantages but, whatever approach is taken, it needs to match the values and capacity of the early childhood service.

As a minimum a social media policy will clarify and protect children's right to privacy, their right to be treated with respect and the need to limit image sharing of children and ensure written permission from parents or guardians is always granted.

A social media policy will usually also note general privacy and legal obligations that might affect families, educators and others in their communications.

Social media policy checklist

Here's a quick checklist for considering elements of a social media policy for early childhood settings. Think about the primary aim of the policy and whose interests it will serve.

- ▶ Is the intention to control and limit behaviours or collaborate and guide?
- ▶ Will it provide a channel between the early childhood service and the wider community or a closed forum for members of the early childhood service only?
- ▶ Will the protocols include families and educators or be aimed primarily at one or the other?
- ▶ How will it deal with former members such as families, educators, children and staff who have moved on?
- ▶ Will it recommend that educators separate their personal online socialising from their educator role or will it accept and encourage integration and specify conditions?
- ▶ Will it seek to limit educators, parents and families from speaking about or identifying their connection with the early education and care service when they are socialising online?
- ▶ How will it clarify the circumstances, if any, when educators, parents and others may speak about their role and the organisation?
- ▶ What steps are in place to monitor social media activity? Will it be monitored by a leader, an educator or others within the community or will monitoring be outsourced?
- ▶ Will specific tools be named, endorsed and preferred or named and banned in the policy?

Quick tips for selecting social media tools

Now that you have a social media policy it's time to think about the tools you are using or introducing and whether they match the policy and support the goals of your education practice.

Consider how different social media tools direct relationships and which tools will shape communications the way you want them to go, not vice versa. Check the factsheet for a list of tools popular with Australian users. When making a choice consider whether the tool works for you.

- ▶ Does it support leadership, mentoring and supervisory relationships within the education and care setting or does it go around these?
- ▶ Does it support or divert focus from the child's learning and the daily program?
- ▶ Who uses the tool and whose interest does it primarily serve?
- ▶ Does it prioritise images and messages to parents over the learning and exchange between educator and child?
- ▶ Does it help connect educators and colleagues on issues of mutual interest?
- ▶ Do its features reinforce privacy of individual educators, parents, and most importantly, children?
- ▶ Does it create expectations and workloads that are sustainable in the longer term for educators and carers? For leaders, managers and support staff?

- ▶ Does it easily integrate with existing systems and help meet regulations and the *National Quality Framework* or does it add additional layers of work?

More resources

For resources and links about social media and working well online including legal tips and safety: www.digitalbusiness.gov.au.

For more information on privacy, copyright and other legal implications of online digital technology:

- ▶ Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA): www.acma.gov.au and www.cybermart.gov.au and the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner: www.oaic.gov.au.

For plain language examples of social media policy communicated online and in video see:

- ▶ The NSW Department of Education and Training policy online at: www.det.nsw.edu.au/policies/technology/communication/techguide.pdf.
- ▶ The Department of Justice, Victoria video at: www.justice.vic.gov.au/utility/social+media/social+media+policy.

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