

Adults communicating with under 18s guidance.

At AIUK we want under 18s to feel fully encouraged in activism and included in the work we do. We therefore need to find ways to do this whilst keeping safeguarding at the forefront of our minds, managing risks and being attentive to power dynamics to minimise oppressive behaviours and exploitation. The AIUK safeguarding policy and procedure, digital safeguarding guidance, and events guidance, all help to do this. However, this guidance aims to help all adults involved with AIUK's work to communicate with under 18s in a safe way, following good practice that ensures appropriate boundaries are maintained and that under 18s can recognise when poor or inappropriate practice/communications occur.

For under 18s the safeguarding risks posed through digital communication are:

- inappropriate access to/use of/sharing of personal details;
- image based abuse, including risk of artificial intelligence technologies being used to create images
- cyber bullying by peers;
- exposure to offensive or otherwise inappropriate materials;
- glorifying activities such as drug taking or excessive drinking;
- grooming;
- unwanted contact and direct abuse.

For adults involved in digital communications with under 18s the risks of inappropriate use include:

- causing distress or harm to the young person, even inadvertently;
- misinterpretation of their communication with young people;

This may lead to adults being involved in:

- potential investigations (internal or by statutory agencies);
- potential disciplinary action.

Main Principles:

1. When meeting with an under 18 get parent/carer consent and arrange meetings in advance.
2. Do not connect with under 16s on social media
3. Unless previously agreed, a one of contact or in an emergency, always include another adult in communications with under 18s.

Digital Communications Guidance:

Messaging (e.g. texts, emails, teams messages)

- Include a parent/carer or another adult from AIUK when messaging an under 18.
- Include a minimum of one other responsible adult into any group communications with under 18s.
- Before communicating digitally, explain to parents/carers the purpose and method for communicating with their child.
- If a parent/carer declines to be included in group communications, get informed consent in writing or via email before communicating via group messages with their child, and keep a record of this consent. Informed consent should include clarifying who else will be part of the group communications and whether those people will be able to contact their child.
- Always keep contact details safe and only accessible to those with a legitimate need.
- If sending bulk emails, use the blind copy (Bcc) function to keep contact details private, but describe which group the email has gone to so that recipients are aware who has received the communication.
- Always communicate respectfully and professionally, maintaining appropriate boundaries.
- Make sure messages are only in relation to specific activism work. Photos or videos should only be shared if they are relevant to the group and if any individuals in the images have consented to them being shared.

On some occasions, an under 18 may get in touch with a query such as how to join a group or activity, on these occasions, sending one reply with details and next steps which include need for parental consent is okay. However, no further communication should happen without the above guidance being followed.

If the under 18 getting in touch is from a school or youth group, their teacher/youth worker should be included in any email communication.

Social Media

- Avoid connecting with under 16s on social media from personal accounts (unless they are a direct relation or known personal outside of AIUK connection). If you are linked to a 16–17-year-old on social media, avoid any private direct messages as detailed above.
- If you have a social media account for your activity, make sure there are at least two responsible adults with administrator permissions who are able to oversee messages and comments, etc.

Phone calls

- Only directly call an under 18 in emergency circumstances, for example you are concerned about their safety, or if they have not turned up to a meeting they should be at. There may also be situations where an under 18 wants to disclose a safeguarding

concern, attempts should be made to avoid this being 1:1, such as having another adult on the call, but on occasions a 1:1 phone call may be needed and should always be recorded immediately after and shared appropriately.

- If you need to call them to arrange something, it is best to call their parent/carer and then ask to speak to the under 18, therefore the parent/carer is aware of the call and giving consent. Or organising to call in advance, with the parent/carer cc'd into any email communication.

Meeting Guidance:

Our general guidance is to avoid meeting under 18s alone whether online or in person. However, we recognise that there are some circumstances where meeting 1:1 is needed, for example in a mentoring situation. In these circumstances the following steps should be followed

1. Consent should be sought from parent/carer and the under 18 prior to meeting, this consent should agree details of where when, and how (for example if virtually, will it be a video call) you will be meeting and the purpose of meeting.
2. When organising to meet include parent/carers in communications
3. If meeting in person, you should meet in a public place, for example a coffee shop or a room in the office used by others. The point is that other people are around, reducing risk of harm or accusations of harm happening.
4. If meeting virtually, make sure parent/care is aware of the meeting beforehand. If you as the adult in the situation are uncomfortable with meeting 1:1 in this way, ask another adult to be present, being clear with the under 18 that this is the case.
5. If a regular meeting, try to meet at a regular time and try to avoid 1:1 communication outside of this time.
6. If meeting for mentoring, make a record after the meeting to record what was discussed and keep secure.
7. Anyone regularly meeting with an under 18 1:1, online or in person, should have the appropriate criminal record check in line with the AIUK policy.

If you have any questions or feedback regarding this guidance, contact the safeguarding manager via safeguarding@amnesty.org.uk