KEEPING YOUR CHILDREN SAFE ONLINE

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INTRODUCTION

During this time of covid19 isolation, technology and internet is being used more heavily for school, entertainment and communication. A recent Guardian article (link here https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/may/14/child-abuse-predator-handbook-lists-ways-to-target-children-during-coronavirus-lockdown) explains how the current situation has made children more vulnerable as they are spending increasing time online in order to stay in touch with friends and reduce their feelings of isolation.

The intention of this information is not to create panic but to equip parents and carers and the leaders of church groups working with children so that we are all working towards keeping children safe from those who intend them harm. Even families who monitor closely their children's use of social media and technology have been affected by unwanted online contact and grooming.

Children are a gift of God, created in the image of God, part of the body of Christ, with their own gifts and skills which help to form our church community. They are precious and, at Manningham Uniting Church, we will always work towards keeping them safe whilst taking seriously any allegations.

Manningham Uniting Church operates under the guidelines of the VicTas Synod's Culture of Safety Unit. We offer regular UCA Safe Church training, we have a designated culture of safety officer, Lynda Anderson, and we screen all employees and volunteers according to the Synod guidelines. Our church leaders have current Working with Children Checks.

You will no doubt have received information and advice from your children's schools. This may repeat or supplement what you already know but it is important that we communicate about this as a church. If you need to talk at any time, phone Rev Claire or Lynda.

HOW DO YOUNG PEOPLE GET INTO TROUBLE ONLINE?

Online groomers hide on social media platforms where children are active. They built trust by pretending to be another child, by pretending to know the child's friends and they are skilled at asking questions to find out personal information which they will later use to manipulate the child. Very quickly, the situation escalates so that child agrees to do things they feel uncomfortable doing. Children do not have the knowledge or emotional skills to deal with these professional abusers. Some young people are exploring their sexuality and do so online eg in dating apps where they pretend to be older and thus become very vulnerable to manipulation and threats.

HOW TO HELP YOUR YOUNG PERSON AVOID TROUBLE ONLINE

- encourage a relationship of trust and open conversation with your young people – this will help in all areas of their lives

- tell them to never accept friendships from people they don't directly know

- know who your children are speaking to online

- know which platforms your children are using

- ensure all settings for all platforms are set to private – most do not default to private

- help them to control their content and posts

WHAT TO DO IF YOUR YOUNG PERSON GETS INTO TROUBLE

- reassure your child

- do not judge or blame – easy to do but very unhelpful and can destroy any trust that exists between you

- if anyone is in physical danger, phone the police immediately

- take screenshots of all inappropriate messages so there is evidence for police, then delete and block

- report to social media platform

- report to the safety commissioner https://www.esafety.gov.au/report

- report to Australian Federal Police on the AFP website. https://www.thinkuknow.org.au/

- contact the support services and seek professional help for your child

- never engage the abuser in conversation – block and delete once you have recorded the evidence for police

SUPPORT SERVICES

- Emergency: Police – 000

- eheadspace https://headspace.org.au/eheadspace/

- Bravehearts - 1800272 831

- Blueknot Foundation - 1300 657 380

- Lifeline - 131114

- Kids Helpline - 1800 551 800

- Survivors and Mates Network (SAMSN) - 1800 472 676

THE E-SAFETY OFFICE

The e-safety office is a fantastic resource for the whole community. Take a look now before you need the information.

- Video from e-safety for children which they may have seen already at school: https://www.esafety.gov.au/educators/classroom-resources/cybersmart-challenge/cybersmart-detectives

- e-safety office advice for parents:
 https://www.esafety.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-04/aus-global-parent-online-safety-advice_1.pdf

- e-safety tips for parents for staying safe online during covid19 pandemic: https://www.esafety.gov.au/educators/classroom-resources/cybersmart-challenge/cybersmart-detectives

VICTAS SYNOD

The Synod's Culture of Safety Unit has put together a very useful guide to staying safe online for churches but it is equally useful advice for parents.

VicTas Synod – Guidelines for safe online ministry for UCA churches:

https://victas.uca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Version-2-GUIDELINES-FOR-SAFE-ONLINEDIGITAL-MINISTRY.pdf

NATIONAL CHILD SAFETY UNIT

This is a very simple outline of staying safe online from National Child Safe Unit which may be a place to start for anyone new to the online world:

file:///C:/Users/clair/OneDrive/Documents/Safe%20church/Being-a-Safe-Church-in-Cyber-Space%20(1).pdf

FOR YOUTH GROUP AND CHILDREN'S GROUP LEADERS

Additional resources for those working and volunteering with children and young people in church.

- Children's ministry: https://childrensministry.com/trauma-informed-ministry/

- Youth ministry: https://conversationsonthefringe.com/2016/09/14/trauma-informed-youth-ministry/