Internet Safety Tips and Best Practices for Online Ministry

We are grateful for the technology that enables us to continue our ministries remotely during this time of pandemic. Nevertheless, it is of utmost importance that all minors involved in Online Ministry are kept safe by observing healthy boundaries and maintaining open communication during internet use. We encourage teachers, catechists, youth ministry leaders and other instructors to observe the following internet safety tips along with best practices as they conduct online faith formation, youth ministry and classroom sessions.

Parental Permission and Release

- **Required Forms** – If online gatherings are going to be part of your ministry with children and teens under 18 years' of age, make sure you have a signed Video / Photo / Media / Audio Release and Electronic Communications Acknowledgement on file. This should be added to the registration process for faith formation and youth ministry.

Online Class Session/Meeting Etiquette:

- **Ratios apply** – Just like in a live meeting, at least two Live Scan screened and safe environment trained adults should be present in an online meeting. This applies to large gatherings and to small groups.
- **Send Notification to Parents** - Whenever possible, inform parents beforehand and provide them a schedule so they are aware of the proposed meeting dates and times. Allow parents the option to "opt out" and make the necessary accommodations for those families.
- **Send Instructions and Materials Prior to the Meeting-** Always send the pertinent meeting information and details including any materials the students will need for the session.
- **Be on Time and End on Time** - Punctuality for your meeting is important. Remember, most meetings, classes, gatherings and appointments are being done online. Be respectful of people's schedules.
- **Be Prepared-** Have your agenda prepared or your lesson plan ready with any activities you plan to share.
- **Situate Yourself in a Suitable Place** - This will help to avoid distractions or interference with background noise.
- **Dress Appropriately -** Dress as if you were meeting your group in person.
- **No Eating during the Meeting -** Eat before or after your meeting. Eating during the meeting can be distracting.
- **Be Aware of Your Surroundings -** If you are meeting on a mobile device, please be cautious where you go and what you do while you are meeting. Remember, everyone meeting online can see you and your immediate surroundings.
- **Be Cognizant of your Audience -** Be mindful of who you are addressing and be attuned to the needs or struggles that each person might experience. If meeting online is not the best means to meet with some individuals, find alternative ways to incorporate them into the group. Also, present age appropriate materials that are conducive to their learning experience.

Technology Tips:

- **Check your Meeting Settings, Camera and Check your Sound -** Before the meeting begins, ensure the necessary security features are in place. (See Safety tips below on how to do this). Fix your camera so it points at your face and not the ceiling or wall. Make sure there is good lighting and finally, check your audio/ sound settings.
- **Mute your Microphone -** when you are not talking to avoid feedback. Mute students' microphones when you are speaking.

Internet Safety Tips:

If you are using **ZOOM** for online meetings, please make sure you are following best practices:

- Do not make meetings or classrooms public. In Zoom, there are two options to make a meeting private: require a meeting password or use the waiting room feature and control the admittance of guests.
- Do not share a link to a teleconference or classroom on an unrestricted publicly available social media post. Provide the link directly to specific people.
- Manage screen sharing options. In Zoom, change screen sharing to "Host Only."
- Ensure users are using the updated version of remote access/ meeting applications. In January 2020, Zoom updated their software. In their security update, the teleconference software provider added passwords by default for meetings and disabled the ability to randomly scan for meetings to join.
- Check these sites for additional information:
    - School Administrator's Guide to Rolling Out ZOOM: https://zoom.us/docs/doc/School%20Administrators%20Guide%20to%20Rolling%20Out%20Zoom.pdf
    - How to Keep Uninvited Guests Out of Your Zoom Event: https://blog.zoom.us/keep-uninvited-guests-out-of-your-zoom-event/

Protect your Digital Identity and Reputation:

- Ensure that no personal information is shared online by you or your students.
- Keep personal matters offline. If the meeting has a sharing component, please ensure that it is done appropriately and on topic.
- Your username(s) should be professional and profile pictures or any other photos appropriate.
- Accountability is important, hold a professional standard with all participants. This includes but not limited to: language, gestures, humor, discussion and online behavior.
- Be careful of using copyrighted material. Check your sources before sharing.

Electronic Communication with Minors

- Must have a signed Electronic Communications Acknowledgement on file.
- One on one digital communication between minors and adults is not allowed.
- Two adults should be included in digital messaging groups.
- Always copy parents in on messages to youth or children.
- Include parents in any messaging groups.
- No messages should be sent outside the hours of 8am and 8pm.

Internet Safety Tips and Social Media Rules for Students

TIP 1. Do not put any personal or identifiable information on Instagram, Snapchat, or any other social media channel (name, school name, home address, current location).

TIP 2. Do not share your passwords with friends or with people you meet online.

TIP 3. Do not tag friends in a photo without their permission. Remember that photos stay online forever. If you do not want everyone to see, do not post.

TIP 4. If someone you do not know asks to follow you or sends you a friend request, do not accept their request or communicate with them. Let an adult know right away.

TIP 5. If someone is making you feel bad or bullying you on social media, talk to an adult right away.

TIP 6. Be courteous respectful and kind when addressing your classmates and instructors.

TIP 7. When writing comments or sending messages, ask yourself "if my parent, pastor or principal reads this, would I feel embarrassed by what I have written?" If the answer is "yes", then do not send the message.

TIP 8. Be careful what you post online. Just because you deleted it does not mean it is deleted forever and untraceable.

Media Safety Tips for Families

- **Keep Screens Visible:** If possible, set up your student's desktop and laptop computers in a family room or kitchen, so you can monitor what your child is viewing online.
- **Collect Passwords from Younger Children: Because of exposure to risks and vulnerability online, parents should have access to all passwords and accounts**.
- **Clean your Electronic Devices and Do it Often:** COVID-19 has taught us that proper and frequent hygiene will keep the virus away! Now that most of the instruction is done online, it is important to clean all electronic devices frequently and keep them fully charged.
- **Set Parental Controls:** This will help to avoid any possibility of stumbling upon inappropriate sites. Here is how you can set parental controls: https://www.internetmatters.org/parental-controls/
- **Teach Kindness:** Let your child know that they do not need to be friends with everyone, but they also should never type something mean about someone online. That is the same as saying it to their face. Recognize the signs of cyber-bullying.
- **Discuss Stranger Safety:** Make sure children know not to share where they live, their name, where they go to school, or any other identifiable information.
- **Other Suggestions**
- **Schedule a Family Evening:** Now that most children are at home, we encourage you to set aside time as a family to watch a movie together. FORMED is offering families a **FREE** 40-day membership to a vast collection of Catholic movies and programs for all members of your family. Click the link above for more https://formed.org/
- **Have an open-door policy:** Make sure your children know they can always come to you, even if they make a mistake.
- **Additional Resources**

http://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/a-parents-guide-to-screen-time-during-coronavirus/