HILL STREET
Presbyterian Church

Technology, Communications and Online Safety Policy

Approved by the Kirk Session June 2026

Review every 3 years

1. Purpose

Hill Street Presbyterian Church (HSPC) recognises that technology, social media and online communication are important tools for ministry and communication. We are committed to ensuring that all online activity reflects our Christian values and promotes the safety and wellbeing of children, young people and adults at risk.

All staff, volunteers and leaders must follow this policy alongside HSPC's Safeguarding Policy and Procedures.

1.1 General Principles

All online communication should be:

- Open, transparent and accountable
- Age-appropriate
- Positive, encouraging and faith-building
- Consistent with the values and witness of HSPC

Online communication should be treated in the same way as face-to-face communication. Any safeguarding concern disclosed online must be responded to and reported according to normal safeguarding procedures.

Communication through church platforms should normally take place between 9.00am and 9.00pm.

2. Communication with Children and Young People

2.1 Children (Under 16)

- Communication should normally be directed to parents or guardians.

- Messaging groups involving children under 16 should not be used.

2.2 Young People (16–17)

- Parental consent is required before joining any church messaging group involving leaders.
- Only approved and vetted leaders may participate in these groups.
- At least two leaders must be included in all group communications.
- Mixed adult(non-leaders)/young people messaging forums should not be used, other than one-way platforms such as Whatsapp communities

Messaging groups should be used for sharing information, reminders and practical arrangements, not for personal conversations.

3. Social Media

3.1 Church Accounts

All church social media accounts and websites must:

- Be approved by Kirk Session.
- Have at least two authorised administrators.
- Be regularly monitored.
- Reflect the values and ethos of HSPC.

Any inappropriate content should be removed promptly and followed up appropriately.

3.2 Leaders' Personal Accounts

Leaders must not:

- Friend or follow children or young people's personal accounts.
- Communicate with children or young people through personal social media accounts.
- Use disappearing-message platforms for ministry communication.

Leaders should ensure that any public content on their own accounts is consistent with their role as representatives of HSPC.

4. Photography, Video and Livestreaming

- Parental consent must be obtained before identifiable images of children are used online (including in private whatsapp groups)

- Images should only be used for church purposes.
- Personal information such as addresses, schools or contact details must never be shared.
- Photographs should not routinely be stored on leaders' personal devices.
- Care should be taken when livestreaming or recording services and events involving children or adults at risk.

5. Online Meetings and Gaming

Where children or young people are involved:

- At least two leaders should be present.
- Parents should be aware of the activity.
- Appropriate supervision and safeguarding arrangements must be in place.

For online gaming activities:

- Specific parental consent must be obtained.
- Age restrictions must be respected.
- Clear start and finish times should be set, with activities ending by 11.00pm.

6. Mobile Phones

Mobile phones should be used respectfully during church activities.

During residential events, leaders should agree appropriate overnight phone arrangements with parents and young people. Phones should not be taken into bedrooms overnight.

7. Reporting Concerns

All concerns about online safety, inappropriate communication, cyberbullying, grooming, exploitation or abuse must be reported immediately to the Designated Person and managed in line with HSPC safeguarding procedures.

If a child or adult is at immediate risk of harm, contact emergency services without delay.

8. Responsibilities

8.1 Leaders and Volunteers

Leaders and volunteers must:

- Maintain appropriate boundaries online.
- Act with openness and transparency.
- Complete safeguarding training as required.
- Report concerns immediately.
- Use technology responsibly and in a manner consistent with Christian leadership.

8.2 Parents and Guardians

Parents and guardians should:

- Support the safe use of technology by their children.
- Protect their child's privacy online.
- Engage positively with church communication channels.
- Raise concerns promptly with church leaders.

9. Further Advice

If you are unsure about any aspect of online communication or technology use, please speak to the Designated Person, Minister or Kirk Session.

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility, both online and offline.