

The Friendship Project Guidelines on mobile phone communication between Older and Younger Friends

The project recognises that many young people now have mobile phones and that this is primary method of communication for most people. Furthermore, parents of our younger friends may feel that their teenage children should be responsible for arranging their own outings with their older friends. The project, therefore, supports contact between older and younger friends via mobile phones as long as the following guidelines are adhered to:

Parental/Carer Consent

Parents must give written consent for contact to be made between older and younger friends. Permission will be sought as part of the signing up process and it will be for the parent to determine when they are happy for mobile phone contact to start. Parents will be made aware that concerns regarding mobile phone contact should be reported to the area co-ordinator.

Sharing of mobile phone numbers with Volunteers

Mobile phone numbers will not be shared with older friends until they have completed all stages of the induction process.

Purpose of communication

Contact via mobile phone should primarily be for the purpose of arranging outings. However, it is recognised that as the relationship is a 'friendship' there may be occasions where the younger or older friend wish to make contact outside of this e.g. to share some good news, to ask how an important event went, to check-in if sad news was shared, to send birthday greeting etc. Older friends should limit these sorts of communications.

Parents/Carers must be informed of outing arrangement

Although these guidelines support older and younger friends to make arrangements for their outings between themselves, Parents/Carers must be provided with details of the outings e.g. times/dates/locations. The specific arrangement for how parents/carers are kept in the loop should be agreed in advance between the parent/carers, younger and older friend. An approach used by a number of older friends is to set up a WhatsApp chat group to which both the younger friend and their parent/care is invited: this ensures the parents have access to information regarding the outing without the need for a separate communication.

Messaging Groups

Many people use messaging platforms such as WhatsApp, which allow for the creation of 'chat groups' as their preferred platform for sending text messages. Volunteers are free to use such platforms and may wish to set up a group that includes the younger friend's parents to ensure they are in the loop regarding planned outings. Where such a platform is used, it should only be used for communication with the Younger Friend, and if desired, the Younger Friend's parent. No other people should be invited into the group e.g. other family members or friends of either the older or younger friend and should this occur we ask that the Older friend leave the group immediately.

Style of communication

To avoid misunderstanding, text messages should use clear and unambiguous language and avoid abbreviations that could be mis-interpreted.

If there is a concern

Concerns may arise for several reasons:

- Sharing of information that makes the older friend worry about the younger friend's wellbeing or safety

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- Inappropriate contact or comments that could be misconstrued – whether from the older friend or young friend

In these instances, the safeguarding procedure should be followed: the area co-ordinator should be contacted, and a decision will be made regarding the most appropriate course of action.