

GUIDE 11: YOUTH AND THE SAFE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

This guide provides information on management of social media in a defence youth environment. While the appropriate use of social media can be a positive experience, its misuse can cause serious and long lasting adverse effects on an individual's health and wellbeing. The misuse of social media can also damage an organisation's reputation.

This guide aims to help personnel:

- a. identify social media and online environments
- b. understand practices for safe social media use
- c. understand dangers associated with social media and online environments
- d. maintain boundaries
- e. adhere to reporting requirements

This guide should be read in conjunction with the Defence [Youth Manual](#).

Definition of social media and online environments

- a. Facebook, Instagram, Tiktok, Snapchat, YouTube and X (formally known as Twitter)
- b. blogs, chat rooms, video and telephone conferencing sites
- c. online gaming
- d. online health, education and other services
- e. apps, clouds, and sharing sites

These platforms form part of a broader online environment.

Creating a safer online environment

Defence will comply with Australian Government social media legislation and industry regulations to assist in protecting youth from harm, including abuse and sexual exploitation.

The [eSafety Commissioner](#) website contains online safety information, including the social media age restrictions, to empower positive online experiences.

In a Defence youth context, Defence must ensure that:

- a. youth know and understand their obligations concerning the use of social media
- b. youth are aware of online risks¹ and how to manage them²
- c. adults are aware of their obligations towards interacting with youth on social media

Defence personnel have a duty of care to be aware, vigilant and to take appropriate action when it is suspected that a young person is at risk of becoming a victim of an offence. Appropriate action may include [reporting](#) the offence and providing support³ to the victim.

Defence personnel should encourage a culture of help-seeking that supports people to feel safe and comfortable reporting online incidents.

¹ [Negative online experiences | eSafety Commissioner](#)

² <https://www.esafety.gov.au/young-people>

³ [Counselling and support services | eSafety Commissioner](#)



Youth within Defence and Defence youth programs should be made aware of, and abide by the [Defence Media and Communication Policy](#). Everything posted online is stored, even if deleted from a user's account. Using social media to air grievances or complaints is inappropriate as there may be negative or unintended consequences. The inappropriate use of social media is considered unacceptable and will constitute a breach of the relevant Defence organisation's code of conduct.

All youth in Defence and Defence youth programs have an individual responsibility for their safety and to carefully consider the nature of their social media activity. One of the best ways to prevent online issues from arising is to provide online safety education. The [Infographic - Social Media for Personal Use](#) highlights considerations that should be taken when using social media. This resource could be shown to youth to assist in using social media wisely.

Dangers associated with social media and online environments

Some of the dangers associated with social media include cyberbullying, grooming and access to harmful or offensive content. The dangers may be amplified for youth due to their vulnerability.

Cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is the use of information and communication technologies for deliberate, hostile behaviour directed at an individual with an intention to harm, belittle, harass, insult or molest. Cyberbullying can include:

- sending offensive, abusive or insulting texts or emails to another individual
- taking or sharing offensive, obscene or indecent imagery
- posting offensive, abusive or insulting messages about another individual or excluding the individual from online forums
- assuming the identity of another individual and representing them in a negative manner or in a manner that may damage their reputation and relationship with others
- posting provocative or offensive content in an online community, such as a forum, chat room or blog

Under the *Criminal Code Act 1995*⁴, it is an offence to use a carriage service to menace, harass or cause offence and to use a carriage service to make a threat.

Grooming and Pornography. Grooming is the use of manipulative and controlling techniques on a vulnerable individual in a range of interpersonal and social settings, in order to establish trust or normalise sexually harmful behaviour with the overall aim of facilitating exploitation and reducing the likelihood of exposure of the exploitation. Grooming is an offence regardless of whether it is conducted in the physical or online environment.

Taking, sharing or posting sexualised photographs or videos of yourself or other people under the age of consent is a crime under child pornography laws. Grooming or taking, sharing or posting sexualised photographs or videos of youth who are over the age of 18 but subject to special care provisions due to their participation in a Defence youth program is an offence subject to disciplinary and/or administrative action.

⁴ [Federal Register of Legislation - Criminal Code Act 1995](#)



Keeping youth safe

Before taking images of youth personnel should obtain informed consent from the youth and their parent/guardian. Only imagery that depicts youth in an appropriate manner should be created.

All adults who engage with youth on behalf of Defence have a responsibility to be a positive role model⁵. This includes complying with [Defence social media](#) guidelines and demonstrating safe, respectful and responsible behaviour in physical and online situations.

Maintaining boundaries

Defence personnel are to keep social media contact with youth to official business only and limit online contact to groups and general announcements. They have a duty of care in managing appropriate boundaries.

Defence and non-Defence personnel must not use social media to initiate contact with youth. This includes outside work or voluntary roles such as babysitting, sports coaching, house-sitting or tutoring. If personnel are contacted by youth, they should not return contact, or redirect the youth to an appropriate communication means, such as a work inbox.

Scenario

After attending a week-long Defence youth program, 16-year-old Kym reached out to one of the program supervisors, Niko, on Facebook Messenger one evening. Kym wanted Niko's advice on how to improve his fitness because he wanted to join Defence. Niko loved their job and wanted to help Kym, but understood they needed to maintain their professional boundaries.

Niko replied, 'Hey Kym, please shoot me an email tomorrow. My work email address is xxxxxxxxxx@defence.gov.xx. I'm happy to link you in with some great resources, but can only assist when I'm at work'.

Niko's response was supportive, but set clear, professional boundaries.

Reporting

Defence personnel who become aware or suspect abuse or neglect involving a young person has occurred, or is occurring, have a duty to report it directly to the relevant state or territory child and youth protection authority, or police, and then to their line manager/chain of command in accordance with the youth protection complaint and event/incident management guidance (see Defence Youth Manual Section 3 Chapter 3).

Contact details for state and territory child protection authorities relating to making a report can be found in the Defence Youth Manual Guide 8: Defence Youth Event or Incident Management Process.

Further assistance

For further information and assistance contact defence.youth@defence.gov.au

⁵ [Creating positive change | eSafety Commissioner](#)