

Social workers – social media

*“The social networking genie is out of the bottle and whether it is Twitter, Facebook or sites that supersede them, the world of interpersonal relationships is now much wider than the pub and the supermarket”
(Denise Turner, 2015)*

Note: this knowledge bite should be read in conjunction with the Use of Texts and Social Media & Staying Safe Online training on MySkills.

General issues:

- Social media is an unavoidable part of our lives. There are 1.5 billion¹ monthly Facebook users and 307 million monthly Twitter users² worldwide.
- People tend to use social media platforms for different purposes. For example, Facebook tends to be more personal and private, while Twitter and LinkedIn tend to be more professional and public.
- Widespread use of social media is particularly challenging for those working with children and families and can present unique ethical dilemmas.
- During social work training, case scenarios tend to focus on the ethics of bumping into service users in real-world situations but rarely consider the implications of crossing paths with them online
- There have been several incidents in which use of social media has led to the involvement of the HCPC, including Siobhan Condon who posted about a child protection case on Facebook and received a 12-month ‘conditions of practice’ order as a result.
- Social workers need a better understanding of the technology and the risks it poses. They also need to understand how to behave appropriately and safely online to protect both themselves and their professional reputation.
- Social media should not be regarded purely in a negative light. The sharing of best practice on appropriate platforms can be hugely beneficial to social work practice.

Risks:

1. Service users contacting social workers via social media
2. Social workers discussing cases on social media

¹ <http://www.statista.com/statistics/264810/number-of-monthly-active-facebook-users-worldwide/>

² <http://www.statista.com/statistics/282087/number-of-monthly-active-twitter-users/>

3. Service users posting details about social workers on 'Social work hate sites'
4. Fear of sanction creates anxiety and alienation around use of social networking.

Published guidelines and standards:

The HCPC's broad guidelines for social workers on using social media: http://www.hcpc-uk.org/Assets/documents/100035B7Social_media_guidance.pdf

Relevant HCPC Registrant standards:

- Standard 1: You must act in the best interests of service users
- Standard 2: You must respect the confidentiality of service users
- Standard 3: You must keep high standards of personal conduct
- Standard 13: You must behave with honesty and integrity and make sure that your behaviour does not damage the public's confidence in you or your profession.

BASW social media policy:

http://cdn.basw.co.uk/upload/basw_34634-1.pdf

Good Practice:

Note: This list is not exhaustive and should be considered in conjunction with the following guides:

Protecting social media privacy on Facebook:

<http://www.communitycare.co.uk/2014/09/11/simple-guide-protecting-social-media-privacy-facebook/>

UK Safer Internet Centre safety tools:

<http://www.saferinternet.org.uk/advice-and-resources/parents-and-carers/safety-tools-on-online-services>

1. Don't accept friend or follow requests on personal accounts from service users, even those with whom you are no longer working.
2. Review your privacy settings on all social media sites. For example, Facebook regularly changes privacy settings without notifying users so it's worth checking your settings periodically
3. On Twitter, you can set your account to private by selecting 'protect my tweets' so that you can accept or decline requests to follow you. Your Instagram account can also be made private.
4. On Facebook, as well as ensuring that your posts can only be viewed by 'Friends', you can customise posts by limiting the information that certain people see. However, this does not guarantee privacy as a friend could pass on information to others
5. Think carefully about commenting on friends' profiles or photos. If their account isn't private, your comments can be seen by anyone.
6. Think before you post. Never post anything you wouldn't want your work colleagues to see.
7. Consider what your profile picture might say about you.
8. Search for your name regularly on public search engines to monitor your digital identity.

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