Early Years Social Media Information: April 2013

Facebook. Twitter. YouTube. Have you thought about the benefits of social networking services and social media for your Early Years setting?

Half of the UK population use Facebook. Around a third use Twitter. YouTube is the country's second most popular search engine.

In short, today's internet users are drawn to websites that encourage them to be active participants in online communities, where they can generate content and share it easily with others (NSPCC '*Using Social Networking Services and Social Media: Promoting Safe and Responsible Use*' 2011).

For Early Years providers this can prove difficult in terms of striking the balance between the **benefits** of this form of communication – including reaching more vulnerable parents – with the potential **risks** to children and their families.

It is worth recognising the significant role social media can play in communicating with busy, vulnerable or difficult to engage parents though – especially as users can now access interactive services across a multitude of devices, such as mobile phones, tablet computers etc.

It is also important that Early Years providers give careful consideration to the use of social media, as **part of** their overall communication strategy.

Starting up a Facebook group to share information about your setting for example, should not mean abandoning other well-established methods of communication. It is important to consider the needs of **all** your parents, some of whom may prefer an informative paper newsletter or quick reference display board, and ensure that vital **two-way conversations** still take place between Key Person's and parents/carers on a **regular** basis.

It is important to know that within Early Years settings the **Registered Person** has overall legal, personal and moral responsibility to ensure online safety will be effectively considered.

This means ensuring the safety of children in their care **and** the behaviours and expectations of all adults who affect or come into contact with the Early Years setting – practitioners, managers, parents/carers, visitors and contractors (Plymouth City Council '*Online Safety: Toolkit for Early Years Settings*' 2010)

Key things to consider when incorporating social networking services and social media into your provision:

Understand the safety aspects: Make sure you are familiar with your chosen method of social media **before** setting up an account. This should include a thorough understanding of privacy and safety tools, the terms of service (which normally cover what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour), and how to contact the company in case of a concern or complaint. Follow relevant legislation and good practice guidance when using and engaging with such companies – see the 'Further Support' resources for more information.

Decide how, and by whom, the page will be managed: Designate responsibility for: the setting up, management and moderation of the account (including overseeing, reviewing and responding to posted content). This person should be appropriately vetted and have recently accessed relevant Safeguarding training; it may also be useful to involve your Designated Safeguarding Person. Use official email addresses, rather than personal ones, to set up any accounts and keep the log-in details to both secure within your setting.

Privacy and Safety settings: Consider the privacy and safety settings of the site carefully; taking into consideration your target audience and the content of anything you might be sharing. Failing to set appropriate privacy levels could result in the sharing of inappropriate information about your setting and/or the children and families who attend. You may also wish to monitor content uploaded by others – for example some social networking services have an 'accept comment' setting which enables you to check all messages before they appear on your page.

Remember: many social media channels are available to the public unless you choose otherwise. It is vital therefore that you only share information that you want to be in the public domain, especially when you work with vulnerable people, such as young children and their families.

Ensure that practitioners, students and volunteers are aware of the need to protect their own privacy online: *it may be useful to share this advice with your parents/carers too* Ensure that your practitioners, students, volunteers (and others associated with the setting i.e. a music and movement co-ordinator) are aware of the need to protect their own privacy online – especially if you allow them to associate themselves with the setting through social media sites. Ensure practitioners, and parents/carers too, understand the need to ensure the privacy and safety of your page by discouraging them from 'over-sharing' content with those not directly involved with the setting and/or their child. It may be useful to pull together a 'social media policy' for your setting, and to make both practitioners and parents aware of its content.

Take care with personal details or information about children/families: Ensure anything you share online is suitable and that you have full parental

permission – if sharing children's images for example. Avoid asking people to divulge any personal details online, instead supply private contact details such as the setting's enquiries email address. In the same way you should avoid sharing the personal details of practitioners, children and their families attending the setting. Before sharing messages, photos, videos or other information online, think: does this comply with any existing policies within my provision? Is the content appropriate?

Information taken from: NSPCC 'Using Social Networking Services and Social Media: Promoting Safe and Responsible Use'

Twitter Top Tips:
1. **Choose an accurate username.** It will make it easier for parents/carers to find you, including those from existing and prospective families.
2. **Set up an account and complete your profile before posting.** Add an image, a link to your website and a short, descriptive biography of your provision.
3. **Use hashtags.** They will increase your appearance in Twitter searches and enable more people to see what you are doing.
4. **Be brief.** Don't worry about using abbreviations. 140 characters doesn't allow for much text, but avoid 'text speak' as it looks unprofessional.
5. **Include links to resources but ensure there is supporting text.** Share positive images, interesting articles etc – but let your followers know why. This could be a great way to positively influence the Home Learning Environment!

Facebook Top Tips:
1. **Post regularly.** Ideally three times a week. Keep updates relevant to your audience and mention other useful links.
2. **'Like' other pages.** This will allow you to see other useful pages and what they are doing. '*Elizabeth Jarman for families*', '*Community Playthings*' or '*Learning through Landscapes*' for example.
3. **Ask opinions and respond to those of others.** This will let parents/carers know you are listening and keep them interested in your page.
4. **Advertise events.** You can create events linked to your page – such as 'stay and play' sessions or 'parent consultations'.
5. **Encourage people who 'like' your page to add their ideas.** This helps create that sense of community that Facebook encourages.

Online Blog Top Tips:
1. **Ask questions.** Blog's aren't about one-way communication. Encourage parents/carers to interact with you and respond to what they suggest.
2. **Think about tone.** Be personable, rather than formal and stuffy. Use plain English and avoid too much 'jargon'.
3. **Be real.** Write about things that are meaningful to your setting, the children and their families.
4. **Share.** Use your blog to link to others, and share key points of information relevant to good Early Years practice.
5. **Diversify.** Write different types of blog's to keep it interesting: lists, 'how to' articles, top tips, summaries and reviews.

Information taken from: Family Strategic Partnership '*Getting started with social media*'

Further support:

NSPCC 'Using Social Networking Services and Social Media: Promoting Safe and Responsible Use' 2011
http://www.nspcc.org.uk/inform/cpsu/resources/briefings/social_networking_services_wdf69029.pdf

Plymouth City Council '*Online Safety: Toolkit for Early Years Settings*' 2010
http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/early_years_toolkit.pdf

Family Strategic Partnership '*Getting started with social media*'
http://www.familyandparenting.org/news/Press-releases/2012+Press+Releases/Engaging+families+with+social+media

 The Byron Review – Children and New Technology

Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP)
www.ceop.gov.uk

Information Commissioners Office www.ico.gov.uk