

To be read in conjunction with the code of conduct policy

1. Introduction

Social media can be defined as “websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking” (Oxford Languages). This includes, but is not limited to: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Google+, LinkedIn, blogs, discussion forums and message boards, and comments on web articles.

East Sussex Parent Carer Forum (ESPCF) recognises the many benefits and opportunities that a social media presence offers, for example increasing parent and carer engagement.

2. Purpose of this policy

The purpose of this policy is to explain how ESPCF uses social media, its posting guidelines and moderation policy for user-generated content. This policy also outlines the standards ESPCF requires staff and volunteers to observe when using social media, the circumstances under which use may be monitored, and the action ESPCF will take in respect of breaches of this policy.

This policy is designed to safeguard individual staff, volunteers, parent carer representatives, and parent carers interacting with ESPCF. The intention of the policy is to avoid the publication of content that could damage the reputation of ESPCF, its staff, and parent representatives, and to avoid the possibility of legal action.

3. Scope of this policy

This policy covers all employees and volunteers of ESPCF using social media to communicate on behalf of the organisation. All employees, volunteers and ESPCF representatives are expected to comply with this policy at all times, to protect the privacy, confidentiality, reputation and interests of ESPCF and its service users and staff.

Breach of this policy could lead to individuals being disallowed from using official ESPCF accounts, and for members of staff could lead to the application of the Amaze Disciplinary Procedure (in Amaze’s capacity as back office/HR support), or in more serious cases, could be treated as gross misconduct leading to dismissal.

4. Examples of misconduct cited within the Amaze Staff Disciplinary Procedure include:

- Failure to follow ESPCF’s policy and procedures
- Activities or impropriety in relation to the employee’s tasks for ESPCF, whether or not within working hours, which ESPCF reasonably considers to be detrimental to or conflicting with the interests of ESPCF, or likely to affect the employee’s standard of work
- Bullying and harassment

- Discriminatory behaviour on the grounds of age, sex, race, colour or ethnic origin, disability, religion or beliefs or sexual orientation
- Any breach of confidence relating to ESPCF or its affairs

All of these standards could potentially be breached through the misuse of social media. See also the code of conduct policy.

While not employed and therefore not subject to this disciplinary procedure, volunteers are expected to adhere to the guidance in this policy.

ESPCF believes that any parent carer working with ESPCF should feel safe, confident and able to express their personal views outside of the forum as they would usually do. The scope of this policy does not extend to an individual's personal/private use of social media when not acting on behalf of ESPCF.

5. Responsibility for implementation of the policy

The Chair of ESPCF has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy.

The ESPCF steering group are responsible for monitoring and reviewing the operation of this policy and making recommendations for changes to minimise risks to ESPCF operations.

All employees and volunteers of ESPCF are responsible for their own compliance with this policy and for ensuring that it is consistently applied. Any breach of this policy should be reported to the Chair. Any breach of the policy by the Chair should be reported to the DCEO at Amaze, as the Chair's line manager, who will liaise with the ESPCF steering group on next steps.

6. Use of Social Media

ESPCF currently actively uses Facebook and Twitter, and also has a YouTube channel and Instagram account. It uses these to engage with parent carers and the general public, such as to provide updates and information on the forum's work. These channels are also available to give parent carers opportunities to share views, experiences and give feedback, to ask questions and provide mutual support.

All official communications on behalf of ESPCF as an organisation should be made through official ESPCF accounts. Use of ESPCF account details to post on social media platforms are limited to those approved by the ESPCF Chair or delegated officers. Those using these account details must have read and understood this policy, and the terms of use of the platform they will be using.

All communications should be appropriate, and staff and volunteers must be aware that things that are said may be taken out of context, misinterpreted or forwarded to others.

Always bear in mind the potential impact on the reputation of ESPCF when engaging in any communication on social media platforms, whether public or private. Communications should be respectful of others. Individuals are asked to be mindful of how personal use could reflect on ESPCF's image and act responsibly to avoid any damage to the forum's reputation.

7. Moderation

ESPCF does not pre-moderate user-generated content before it goes “live”. However, all of the channels are monitored regularly. ESPCF will delete comments or messages that do not meet posting guidelines (see below).

ESPCF is not liable for user-generated content. It makes no commitment to respond to every individual comment, message, post or tweet, as this will often not be necessary or appropriate – for example peer-to-peer support posts.

Content posted by ESPCF staff and volunteers is for general informational purposes and is not meant as a substitute for professional advice.

Individuals should report any communication or other activity which is inappropriate or appears to breach the social media policy in any way.

8. Personal Use

ESPCF employees, parent carer representatives and volunteers are of course permitted to use social media platforms using a personal profile, and as stated above, the scope of this policy does not extend to private/personal use of social media.

It is recognised that some employees and volunteers are, or have been, users of ESPCF services and may wish to retain personal contact with other current service users. Therefore, it follows that they may wish to personally offer/accept ‘friend’ or ‘follow’ invitations to/from them. However, there may be a risk that these communications could be incorrectly identified as relating to ESPCF. It must therefore be clear when this is not the case in order to determine whether the terms of this policy, including the rules and code of conduct, apply or not.

It is also an individual choice whether to ‘friend’ or ‘follow’ ESPCF accounts, colleagues, or related organisations.

Individual personal profiles must not contain the ESPCF name or logo, and, where possible, for ESPCF staff a standard disclaimer should be included as follows: “All opinions and beliefs stated on this account are my own and do not represent the opinions, values or beliefs of my employer.”

9. Rules/posting guidelines

As per the ESPCF confidentiality policy, do not divulge any information that is not already in the public domain. If in doubt, speak to the ESPCF Chair.

Do not upload or forward any content belonging to a third party unless you have the third party’s consent, including photographs, videos and written material. Any material you are allowed to use should be appropriately credited or attributed. Particular consent should be obtained from parent carers for any images of children or young people.

If you wish to comment on an article, website content or other written material, provide a hyperlink by preference, otherwise ensure that any quotation is limited and accurate, and references are provided.

Do not post, upload, forward or post a link to cartoons, jokes, gossip or any other frivolous material, unless there is a very clear and appropriate link with the business of ESPCF.

Ensure that any facts, data or references you make are accurate and current. If you make an error, be prompt and open in admitting to and correcting it.

Do not make any communications or use any social media platform for your own personal gain or to endorse commercial products of any kind.

This policy will be reviewed annually by the ESPCF steering group or earlier if matters arise demonstrating gaps in its effectiveness or in light of any relevant legislation change.

Signed off: January 2022

Last reviewed: March 2023

Next review due: March 2024