

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY: LEARNERS

1. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Midstream College (**the College**) recognises that social media is a valuable tool for both communication and educational purposes. We want all our learners to benefit from the opportunities it offers. However, if not used responsibly, social media poses certain risks.

The College respects the right of all learners to freedom of expression but at the same time, has an obligation to protect staff, parents, its image, learners, and confidential information from any potential risks.

With this in mind, this policy regulates participation on social media, by providing guidelines as to what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable use of these platforms. The purpose of this policy is to ensure that a learner's use of social media does not compromise the reputation of the College and its stakeholders.

2. SCOPE

This policy applies to all College learners and to social media used in both a personal capacity as well as in relation to, or association with the school.

This policy is subsidiary to the Code of Conduct and any transgression of the principles, practices and guidelines set out in this policy, will be managed accordingly.

3. DEFINITIONS

“**College**” refers to Midstream College.

“**Social media**” refers to any facility that enables conversations / communication / dissemination of information over the Internet including blogs, forums, platforms such as Facebook, Google, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, Tik Tok, WhatsApp, YouTube, Gaming platforms (including games on Xbox and PlayStation, etc.) and any other forms of communication presently and in the future, classified or generally regarded as social media.

“**Adult**” refers to a parent, teacher, intern/student and/or guardian.

“**Online**” means on the Internet, and any social media applications.

“**Device**” refers to any electronic device (e.g. tablet, laptop, smart watch, etc.).

4. IMPORTANT SOCIAL MEDIA PRINCIPLES

The following are important principles that learners must keep in mind when using social media:

- 4.1 Learners at the College can be linked to the school, even if they do not list the school as their own school anywhere online.** For example, a learner's friends on social media could be mainly learners of the College or a learner could be tagged in photos of a school event. **This means that this social media policy and other applicable policies, apply 24 hours a day, seven days a week (including school holidays), as all individuals associated with the school serve as representatives of the school at all times.**
- 4.2 Digital content is dangerous content** – as soon as content exists in a digital format (i.e. as a photo, or typed note), it is at risk of being distributed and seen by many people. Even if content is not posted online, phones can be stolen; images are backed up to the Cloud (which may get hacked) and screenshots can be taken. As a result of this, all digital content is vulnerable. Content that is sent to someone or posted is especially vulnerable as it is out of the initial author's control.
- 4.3 Content on social media is “published” content** – as soon as one other person has seen your content on social media (WhatsApp is a form of social media), in the eyes of the law, that content is regarded as “published” content. This means that you are as responsible for it as the journalist who puts the headline on the front page of the newspaper.
- 4.4 It is a permanent record** – everything you post online is there to stay. Even if the content is deleted shortly after it is posted online, screenshots mean that your content can be distributed to others, not intended by you.
- 4.5 You are never anonymous online** – even if you use social media under a fake account it is easy to trace the identity and location of an account holder using an IP address.
- 4.6 It is not private** – there is no such thing as “private” on social media. Be very careful with posting any personal information that you would not want the public to see. Be particularly mindful of sharing information such as full dates of birth and current locations.
- 4.7 Chain of publication** – even if you did not create the content, in terms of South African law, **you could be held responsible for any content that you retweet, share, like or are tagged in on social media once you become aware of it, and if you have the ability to distance yourself from that content, for example, by un-tagging yourself. Any comments appearing on your posts are also your responsibility.** If you are in a WhatsApp group, you could potentially also be responsible for content on that group posted by other people (not just the content you posted yourself), if you do not distance yourself from the content by either leaving the group or voicing your objection.
- 4.8 Do not criticise the College on social media** – if you are dissatisfied at any time about any matter related to the school, it is your responsibility to raise your concerns **through the appropriate channels.** Turning to social media to air your concerns around the school is not appropriate and is in breach of this policy.
- 4.9 If you post something inappropriate about someone or the College but do not mention the name, it does not mean that you will not be held responsible for the**

post – if you are saying something inappropriate about someone or the College, you do not have to mention a person or organisation by name for the purposes of the offence of defamation or ‘crimen injuria’ (infringement of dignity). If it is possible to deduce to whom you are referring, you are as guilty or liable, as if you had mentioned the name.

4.10 Context and tone – be aware of the tone of your online communication and remember that what means one thing to you, could have a totally different meaning to someone else. Context is often unclear online. Emoticons can sometimes clarify context and tone but can sometimes cause offence or confusion, so use them wisely.

4.11 You have the right to freedom of expression but you cannot infringe on other people’s rights unfairly – for example, someone else’s right to a good reputation, dignity or privacy. Before you post something on social media, think about the impact that it could have on the school, its parents, your fellow learners and the general public. If in doubt, either give it some time and reconsider it at a later stage, or do not post it at all.

5. APPROPRIATE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

To ensure you use social media correctly and appropriately, you are expected to adhere to the following practices of good digital citizenship:

5.1 You must abide by all of the terms and conditions of the social media platforms and facilities that you are using.

5.2 Do not give or post your name, date of birth, address, telephone number, or the name, address or telephone number of the College or your parents/guardians, to anyone online.

5.3 Be sure to deactivate location tags for all social media applications so that your location is not made available to anyone.

5.4 Do not take or send embarrassing photos of your family, friends or classmates to others, unless you have their consent.

5.5 Do not say unkind or untrue things about people or use inappropriate language online.

5.6 If you have posted a photo of someone else or content which concerns someone else, and that person asks you to remove it, you need to do so immediately.

5.7 Do not distribute chain mail and/or fake news. Use available resources to verify information as true or not.

5.8 Do not message, phone, “add” or meet anyone that you have not met face-to-face in real life unless an adult gives their approval.

5.9 Often, people online pretend to be someone they are not. Even if you have an overlap in friends, or your friends introduce you to someone online, always be careful to establish that they are who they say they are.

5.10 Immediately tell an adult if:

5.10.1 You receive suspicious phone calls or messages from people you do not know.

- 5.10.2 You receive harassing, threatening, disturbing, offensive, illegal or inappropriate content.
- 5.10.3 You receive any content, or if you are part of any conversation (even if you started it) which makes you feel uncomfortable, unsafe, nervous or unsettled.
- 5.10.4 Someone asks you to send any pornographic material like provocative ('sexy') or nude pictures. In such an instance **you must always refuse to send the photographs**, as this could be a criminal offence.
- 5.10.5 Someone sends you any inappropriate or pornographic material. In such an instance, you must not show it or send it to your friends, as this could be a criminal offence.
- 5.10.6 You notice learners behaving inappropriately or making inappropriate comments to others online that you know they are not supposed to do or say.

- 5.11 Do not get into arguments or quarrels online. If someone tries to start an argument or quarrel with you, do not answer him or her and tell an adult.
- 5.12 Do not bully, shame, harass anyone or send threatening or hurtful messages to others online.
- 5.13 Never pretend to be someone else online or create a fake account.
- 5.14 Never give your passwords to anyone except your parent(s)/guardian(s).
- 5.15 Never use someone else's phone or log into someone else's account unless you have their permission.
- 5.16 Do not pretend that something that you found online is yours.
- 5.17 Do not download, buy or order anything online without asking an adult first.
- 5.18 Do not open any suspicious links or attachments.
- 5.19 The school emblem may not be used in such a way that the post may bring the College's name into disrepute.
- 5.20 You may not create accounts that appear to belong to the College. The College has its own official social media accounts on multiple platforms.

6. GUIDELINES FOR WHATSAPP GROUPS

The College recognises that many learners are part of WhatsApp groups which: have been established by the school for the purpose of providing a communication channel to discuss school-related matters (the "**school WhatsApp Groups**") and also WhatsApp groups comprising learners of the school for social purposes (collectively, the "**Group/s**"). The following guidelines are to be followed when engaging in any communication on the Groups.

- 6.1 **School business only** – All content on the College WhatsApp groups must relate to school matters only. There must be no unrelated memes, jokes or social issues discussed on the school WhatsApp Groups.

- 6.2 Deliberately excluding or removing learners from the Groups** – Groups may not be used to deliberately exclude or alienate anyone that you may not like, either for fun or to hurt them. Continuing to participate in Groups that do this, can make you an accomplice to that behaviour.
- 6.3 Distance yourself from inappropriate content** – if you are in a Group where other learners are doing or making inappropriate statements, you should take a stand against the inappropriate content by either leaving the Group, or strongly disapproving of the content. Silent participation can be regarded as silent consent to whatever is posted.
- 6.4 Only reply if necessary** – if a message does not require a response, please do not respond. The volume of messages on these Groups can be overwhelming. You do not need to acknowledge receipt unless specifically asked to do so.
- 6.5 Long conversations, especially if only involving a few members of the Group, should be had separately from the Group.**
- 6.6 Respect staff boundaries** – College staff are always available to help but it is important to establish boundaries in terms of time. Please do not contact them on the Groups outside of school hours unless necessary or outside the guidelines drawn up by the staff member and/or administrator of the Group, *e.g. “no communication on the Group whatsoever between 20:00 at night and 07:00 in the morning unless arranged in advance or in the case of an emergency”.*

7. GUIDELINES FOR THE USE OF ELECTRONIC DEVICES

The College recognises the fact that tablets are the preferred academic device to access electronic text books and study material and that cell phones or smart phones have become an integral part of our modern society and our daily communication with each other.

In order to advance the academic culture of the school and proper conduct in academic classes and stimulate social interaction with fellow learners and staff, the following guidelines are to be followed when using a device:

- 7.1 No cell phones in academic classes** – a cell phone must be in your school bag during academic periods, but it has to be switched off or on silent at all times and must not be visible at all.
- 7.2 No cell phones during assembly** – a cell phone may be in your possession during assemblies in the hall or the quad, but it has to be switched off or on silent at all times and must not be visible at all.
- 7.3 No tablets during break** – you are encouraged to interact with fellow learners or staff during break in order to advance your social skills and to take a visual break from your tablet screen. If you urgently need to make use of your tablet for academic purposes, it can be done in the library or a classroom with the necessary permission of a staff member.
- 7.4 No earphones outside of the classrooms** – once you step outside of a classroom, no earphones are allowed to be used anywhere on the school premises. They may be in your possession, but not visible at all and definitely not in your ears. If a staff member grants you permission to use earphones in a class, you may only use the device for the remainder of that period or session.

- 7.5 No devices during tests or exams** – no electronic device, apart from specified calculators, may be used during a test or examination. You may NOT have any device, other than a calculator, if permitted, in your possession for the duration of the test or exam.
- 7.6 Respect others and yourself** – make use of a device in such a way that it does not infringe upon your family or social life and be careful not to be so dependent upon it that it can be seen as an addiction. Remove devices from your room at night if needed in order to avoid additional exposure to screens.

When you are unsure whether you should post content online, or have it on your phone, remember the following:

- **The Billboard Test:** If you do not want the photo/video/messages to be on a huge billboard on the side of a highway accompanied by your name and the name of the College, do not post it online and do not let it exist in digital format on your phone/device or someone else's phone/device (as these can get stolen or hacked).
- **The 6 Ps:** If you do not want any of the following people to see the photos/videos or messages, do post them on social media or let them exist on your phone/device:
 - *The **P**olice*
 - *Your **P**arents*
 - *A **P**aedophile*
 - *A **P**rospective university admissions officer/employer*
 - *Your **P**rincipal*
 - *A **P**hisher (someone who is interested in getting your personal information).*