



Using Social Media with Children and Young People in Creative Practice

A Guide Assembled by Experts and Creative Arts Practitioners Who Work With Children and Young People.

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We use social media to connect with young people in our creative work together. From past experience, we know you might be worried about what this looks like in practice. So, we want to be upfront with you about how you can expect us to work.

This guide has been developed to help organizations, schools and parents like you understand why we think it's important to use social media to connect with children and young people and how we will do it safely and ethically.

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Our Approach

We know from our work with children and young people aged 10 and over over the last 13 years that they gain a lot from working with peers and adults to co-produce films, books, theatre and other creative outputs.

We also know that it's important to reach out to children and young people in the spaces they're already in. While we interact primarily face-to-face, using social media helps us stay connected to children and young people as their projects unfold. Connecting with them in this way makes sure they can get the most out of participating in creative projects, and benefit from our expertise.

We take a rights-based approach to our work with children and young people – one that's guided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

What Does This Mean in Practice?

So, broadly speaking, the Convention stipulates that children and young people 18 and under have three kinds of rights:

- a) Provision rights: rights to basic shelter, clean drinking water, healthy food and sanitation
- b) Protection rights: rights to be protected from all forms of harm, including online abuses;
- c) Participation rights: rights to have their views taken seriously and to participate in the decision-making processes that impact their everyday lives



Children and young people don't have a right to digital technology or social media platforms under the Convention.

But, because digital media is increasingly critical to all aspects of life in the contemporary world – from health to education; from one's cultural identity to one's freedom of expression – there is growing acknowledgement that children require access to digital media to develop and grow.[1]

Importantly, the Convention states that governments and other actors with responsibility for children and young people's growth and wellbeing – parents, teachers, creative practitioners and so on – must work to realise children's full range of rights simultaneously. This means that we must work to balance children's provision, protection and participation rights. One of the guiding principles for implementing the Convention is that whatever we do with children and young people must be guided by what is in their 'best interests'.

So, while we need to protect children and young people online and offline, we also need to make sure they have meaningful opportunities to participate in the grand project of life.

This is where we come from in our engagement with children and young people across the full range of work we do with them, including how we engage with them via social media. We aim to make sure that children and young people can feel and be safe and welcomed. At the same time, we want to support them to participate fully in creative processes, and thereby grow and develop important life skills and to become the kinds of adults we need to lead the future of this complicated planet.

Some Facts

Working well together requires that children and young people can comfortably connect with creative professionals, using their preferred modes of communication. Using social media is a great way for creative professionals and children and young people to communicate consistently during the life of a project. It supports children and young people to explore and develop their ideas and to realize their collaborative, creative vision.

So, let's put things in context...

FACT: Children and young people all over the world are communicating, learning, experimenting and growing online.

One in three users of the internet is under the age of eighteen and this figure is set to grow into the future. [2] Digital media is only going to become an ever more increasing part of children's lives and we need to make sure they not only have opportunity to engage with their peers but also with other members of their communities, who have their best interests at heart.

FACT: Children and young people overwhelmingly use social media to sustain their relationships with people they know IRL (in real life). Social media is an everyday part of their worlds.[3] Communicating via social media with children and young people in our creative work enables them to integrate the project into their everyday social worlds, to share their progress with others, and to seek guidance from their peers about their contributions.



FACT: Research shows that engaging with social media has a range of benefits for young people's learning, health, sense of social connection, and many other things.[4] If we harness social media effectively, we can help grow children's and young people's skills and capabilities.

FACT: Using social media to communicate with adults provides young people with important opportunities to learn with and from adults. Adults – whether they are parents, teachers, or other trusted adults – are critical role models for young people across online and offline spaces.[5] We aim to role model good online engagements with the young people we work with.

FACT: Taking measured risks in a supported environment is vital to children's and young people's development of resilience. When we work with children and young people via social media, we seek to create safe and welcoming environments and strong relationships through which they can take the kinds of risks that enable them to explore their ideas, identities and ways of being. If they fall down, we are there to help them pick themselves up.

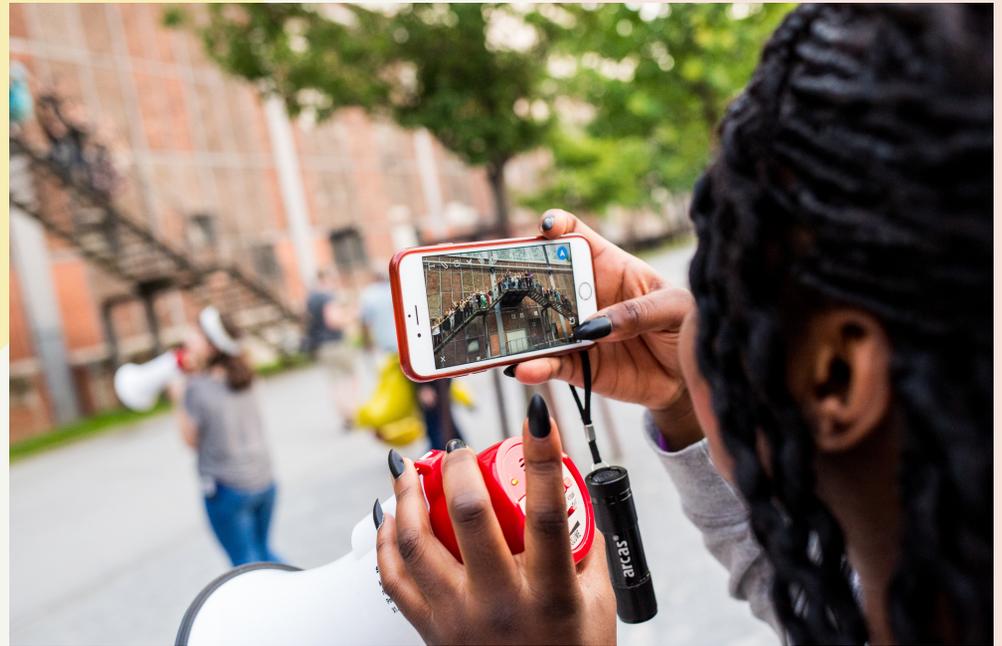
Legal Bits & Pieces



It's important that we work within the law. But there's a lot of confusion about how legislation relating to children's online engagement works. Here are a few key things you need to know about the legal landscape:

a) The Child Online Protection and Privacy Act – or, as it's known in the trade, COPPA[6] - is US legislation that has become, de facto, an international standard around how technology companies can collect and use personal information from children under the age of 13.[7] This is the legislation that established 13 as the age when children can legally access mainstream social media platforms, like Instagram and TikTok.

b) General Data Protection Regulation Act (GDPR) is European Union privacy legislation, introduced in 2018. It is currently the toughest legislation in terms of protecting users' privacy. It aims to give internet users greater control over how their data is collected, stored and used, and has become the de facto global standard. Among other things, one of the innovations of the GDPR legislation is that children have a 'right to be forgotten' - that is, to have content about their childhood removed from the public domain.



Technology

The use of technology can sometimes be challenging during our projects, when the children are more captivated by their iPads or the texts they are sending and receiving than what we are offering them.

However, we feel the onus is on us to provide activities more interesting than the games on their phones and, if we do not, that this is our failure, not theirs.

The Committee emphasizes that media “offers children the possibility of expressing themselves.”[16] In the report of its General Discussion on “The child and the media”, the Committee promoted children’s participatory rights in relation to the media. “The Internet and modern information and communications technology, including mobile phones, provide children with new opportunities to seek and impart information regardless of frontiers or adult restrictions.”[17] In the event the child’s activities disrupt our activities, we respond by informing the children of our feelings and allow them the opportunity to take responsibility for their actions.

We do not command them to put away any electronic technology, and we do not confiscate it.

In our work, we seek to ensure that children and young people understand the contracts they are entering into when they engage on social media, whether with us or with others.

Our Credentials

All of our staff have Working with Children checks – We requires all artists, performers, staff and volunteers hired by the company working with any defined “vulnerable members of society”* to obtain a police background check or vulnerable sector verification and provide a copy of it to the Company.

This is to ensure that the Company is in accordance with guidelines from the Ontario Arts Council (OAC). For more details, please visit:

<http://www.arts.on.ca/Page4053.aspx#newreq>.

Additionally all artists, performers, staff and volunteers must treat all Children in accordance with the Ontario Human Rights Code.

Our staff are qualified and follow policies we have made after years of working in a creative and collaborative environment with young people. Get in touch with us if you'd like to know more.

**WHAT
DO WE
NEED
FROM
YOU?**



TRUST

We undertake to do the right thing by the children and young people we work with. We've got a long track record of using social media effectively and ethically in our work with children and young people. Our reputation means everything to us. So, we will do everything we can to make sure this works out.



GET BEHIND THIS

Encourage your children and young people to engage with us. We know they'll get the most out of this thing if they immerse themselves. More broadly, also encourage them to understand how their data travels, as well as the kinds of risks of harm and the benefits they might encounter, so that they can make informed decisions about how to engage via social media.

SKILL UP!

Learn about how and why children and young people use social media so you can ask the right questions and feel confident that we are all on the right track. Know the risks of harm and the benefits so you can make critical judgments. At the end of this manual, we've suggested some things to read so you can get up to speed. And, if you don't already partake and the spirit takes you, sign up for a couple of social media platforms and use them yourself (though we recommend you don't go and friend or follow all the children and young people you know. They need their space).

STAY FOCUSED ON THE LONG-TERM GOALS

If something goes wrong, we will be on the case. We will seize the moment to turn any glitches into a 'teachable moment,' so that children and young people can learn from the experience and know how to handle things better next time around.



CHECK THOSE ANXIETIES

If you're worried about something, please, ask us questions. We will be happy to give you all the information you need, and to work with you to find a solution to anything you're concerned about.



Want to Know More?

We've compiled the following list of resources to help you understand more.

Third et al. (2017). Young and online: Children's perspectives on life in the digital

Third et al., (2014). Children's rights in the digital age: A download from children around the world.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment on Children's Rights in relation to the Digital Environment

The Benefits of Social Networking

Net Family News

Common Sense Media

eSafety Office online safety resources

LSE Digital Families Blog

GLOSSARY

Defined in the Criminal Records Act as persons who, because of age, disability, or other circumstances, whether temporary or permanent are:

- In a position of dependence on others or;
- Are otherwise at a greater risk than the general population of being harmed by a person in a position of authority or trust relative to them.

This includes children, youth, senior citizens, people with physical, developmental, social, emotional, or other disabilities, as well as people who are victims of crime or harm. The vulnerability may be a temporary condition or permanent.

References

[1] UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2021). General Comment 25 on children's rights in relation to the digital environment.

[2] Livingstone S, Jasmina B, John C. One in Three: Internet Governance and Children's Rights [Internet]. Florence: UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti; 2016. Available from: <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/795-one-in-three-internet-governance-and-childrens-rights.html>

[3] Third A, Bellerose D, Diniz De Oliveira J, Lala G, Theakstone G. Young and Online: Children's Perspectives on Life in the Digital Age (The State of the World's Children 2017 Companion Report). Sydney: Western Sydney University; 2017. Available from: https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/1334805/

[4] Swist T, Collin P, McCormack J, Third A. Social Media and the Wellbeing of Children and Young People: A Literature Review. Perth: Commissioner for Children and Young People, Western Australia; 2015. Available from: https://www.uws.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/930502/Social_media_and_children_and_young_people.pdf

[5] Third A, Moody L. Our rights in the digital world: A report on the children's consultation to inform General Comment 25. 5Rights Foundation and Western Sydney University. 2021.

[6] <https://www.commonsense.org/education/articles/what-is-coppa>

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