



## YSO Policy: Employee Internet Communication

In the digital age, youth workers must maintain professionalism in their organizations. Adults who work with youth must strike a balance by communicating with young people in a way that “meets the youth where they are” while also maintaining a professional relationship. Staff at YSOs must also be aware of how they represent their organization in online communities such as Facebook and Twitter, and how they communicate with one another.

This policy is from a youth serving organization. For this policy, BE SAFE recommends the following:

- Be aware of the legal implications of this policy.

With the increasing integration of social media into our daily lives, it is important to recognize the potential impact of one’s words and consider what constitutes professionalism in the digital realm. Over the past several years the news has been riddled with stories of people of influence who have found themselves in serious situations because they forgot the role of the professional in social media. Below are just a few headlines that have caught our eye:

- Teacher Suspended for Blog Posts About Students 2/2011- Philadelphia, PA  
“...rude, disengaged, lazy whiners”
- Teacher Loses Job After Commenting About Students, Parents on Facebook 8/2010- Massachusetts
- 1st-Grade Teacher Suspended For ‘Derogatory Facebook Posts About Her Students 4/2011- Paterson, NJ  
“...felt like a warden overseeing future criminals”
- Politician Shares Lewd Photos Over Twitter 6/2011- Washington, DC

Though social media is a relatively new advancement, we have come to see that both its positive and negative effects are serious and enduring. As an employee of Agency H, it is important that you are aware that your words and images have power - even when they are shared over a digital medium. By “friend-ing,” “following,” or “connecting” with any participant and, or staff member of Agency H after you have identified yourself as a Agency H employee, you elect to uphold the guidelines set out by Agency H in the *Internet Policy for Employees*.

As an employee of Agency H you serve as an ambassador of its programs, as such it is important that you are respectful of the organization, its youth and its staff. Agency H defines respect as refraining from blogging, tweeting and sharing posts that: use obscene and profane language; that engages in harassment or intimidation; that are derogatory towards a person’s race, gender, religion, sexual orientation or disability; or engages in sexually explicit, suggestive, humiliating or demeaning comments. Additional details are delineated in the “Agency H Policy for Employees Regarding Internet Communication”.

In sum, use common sense. It is important to know your audience and what is appropriate for that audience in all forms of communication; social media sites are not exceptions.





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### Policy:

We know that the Internet, when used wisely, provides many safe ways to stay in touch and communicate with your friends from an Agency H program. We view Internet venues as your right to self-expression and generally regard them in a positive light. Once you identify yourself as a Agency H employee in a social networking profile, website, group page or weblog, however; or use the name or logo of Agency H, we require you, as a condition of employment, to observe the guidelines below. Even if you do not intend to, and even if you state otherwise, once you identify yourself as an employee of Agency H or use our organization, program or logo or any official photograph or text, everything and anything that you post or say on the site can then be seen as a reflection of Agency H. These guidelines have been established to assure that all staff, employees, youth and families enjoy an emotionally and physically safe environment.

1) As a Agency H employee, before I...

- a. use the organization, program name or official logo or photograph;
- b. add a link from your group page, profile or other site to the official Agency H website;
- c. include text or photographs that are the property of Agency H;
- d. include photographs of Agency H youth or other staff members;
- e. or create a Agency H program "group page" with the above items...

...I must request and receive *prior written approval* from the Agency H.

2) As a Agency H employee I agree to be respectful of the organization, its programs, the youth that participate in them and its employees in all communications in your profile, blog or other Internet sites and communications. This includes the following:

- a. I will not use obscenities, profanity or vulgar language;
- b. I will not engage in harassment or intimidation;
- c. I will not post comments that are derogatory with regard to individual person's race, gender, religion, sexual orientation or disability;
- d. I will not engage in sexually explicit, suggestive, humiliating or demeaning comments.

3) As a Agency H employee I agree not to use a social networking profile, group page, weblog or other Internet medium to discuss behavior that is prohibited by our policy, including, but not limited to alcohol or drug use, sexual behavior, delinquent behavior, destruction of property, harassment or intimidation.

4) Once I identify myself as a staff member with Agency H, which is to say as an employee of Agency H, the general public may see me as an ambassador or spokesperson of the organization. I understand that is therefore a condition of employment that I agree to and adhere to the guidelines outlined above. I understand if any of the guidelines outlined in this measure are violated, it may result in disciplinary and/or legal action including possible termination of my employment.

I have read and understand the above guidelines and agree to these terms.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Staff Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

