



## Victoria Primary School

*During the lockdown, out of necessity to be able to communicate between parents and teachers, many Whatsapp groups were formed. In order for VP to follow the correct protocols and to establish rules and regulations within groups associated and approved by our school, our SGB have approved this policy which should be viewed in conjunction with our Social Media Policy.*

*Parents are requested to read the policy carefully and if they wish to remain or be removed as participants on any of the groups, to indicate this on the last page of this document and return this page to school. If we receive no response from a parent by 4 September 2020, we will have to remove them from all VP chats that they may belong to.*

### **VICTORIA PRIMARY SCHOOL SOCIAL MEDIA WHATSAPP GROUP POLICY**

WhatsApp is a messaging app and falls within the category of social media. Groups are usually set up to help with communication, to organise things efficiently, to promote transparency and to enable participation. In order to prevent abuse of the groups, harm to members and the infringement of individuals rights, as well as to protect the school from liability, and in general to educate all users of school WhatsApp, the following policy will be put in place.

If any group related to Victoria Primary School (i.e. a class, grade, sports team or committee) decides it needs its own group, such a group should refer to the school social media policy and make reference to the "WhatsApp Group Guidelines".

For many purposes a "broadcast group" would be best. Only the administrator and possibly a co-administrator (class parent and class teacher) would have the ability to post messages.

- Establish a WhatsApp group register managed by a designated staff member who will approve the group subject to conditions decided by the school. Each group should have a name, an administrator, a definite purpose, stated duration of its operation, and customised WhatsApp Group Guidelines that contain sufficient relevant detail. Before this group can be established permission must be granted by the school's SMT and the above information must be provided so that an accurate decision can be made.
- If this is approved administrators need to make reference and follow the school's guidelines and obligations for group administrators.
- Administrators of a WhatsApp group need to be aware that this task is time-consuming and carries many responsibilities. Groups should be established only if these demands are understood and accepted in writing.

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## WhatsApp Group Administrator's Duties

### Getting the group started:

- Obtain permission from the principal who will consult with the school's SMT to operate a group.
- Register the group in terms of the social media policy, providing its identifying icon and name, stating its purpose and identifying the category of persons who will be invited to join, and the language to be used.
- Invite members to join. In terms of WhatsApp policy only those over 13 years of age may use the app.
- Provide potential members with the Guidelines of the Group which have been developed using the "WhatsApp Group Guidelines" annexure of the school social media policy.
- Obtain written consent from the members to participate, to disclose certain personal information, for example, name, photograph, his/her child's information and anything else that a member might disclose while participating in the group. Remember consent must be: voluntary, specific, and informed. *Note: Information disclosed on WhatsApp loses POPI Act protection for the person who posted or disclosed it.*
- Obtain written agreement from members to adhere to the group guidelines.

### Administering group membership and records:

- Create the group by adding people who have consented to join and agreed to the guidelines.
- Store the consent forms safely. Enabling unauthorised access to these (even unintentionally), would be a POPI offence. These consent forms are to be kept in the office storeroom.
- Add new group members as and when necessary.
- Remove members as and when necessary.
- For the sake of understanding the effectiveness of the group, if possible, find out why a member chooses to leave.
- Destroy, in a safe manner, all documentation once a member leaves the group or the group stops operating. (In the event of a posting being the subject of legal action, these records would have to be kept safely until they will no longer be required.)
- Electronic records must be handled particularly carefully and deleted in a manner that ensures that they cannot be retrieved.

### Monitoring the group communication and conduct:

- Monitor the content posted by members. Watch out for hoaxes and fake messages. Verify the sources of the content, if in doubt.
- Confirm the authenticity of content a member might want to post such as a link to a useful website.



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### **Managing improper conduct and communications:**

- Delete improper content.
- Warn people who are not adhering to group guidelines and remove them, if necessary.
- Be decisive about this as the administrator may have to account for how the improper content has been dealt with.
- Take more stringent action if necessary, in terms of other school policies and codes. Liaise with the principal.

### **"WhatsApp Group Guidelines" - Members' responsibilities**

#### **Legal cautions:**

In the eyes of the law anything said on the WhatsApp group is "published" content, and the person who posted it as well as everyone in the group is responsible for it. A member who objects to the posting must register the objection and distance him/herself from it by stating that he/she does not condone the content posted. The objector/s can also leave the group immediately. A person who fails to act remains in the "chain of publication" and is as liable as the person who created the message.

A statement made on the group may constitute the offence of defamation or crimen injuria (infringement of dignity) even if the name of the person defamed is not mentioned. If it is possible to guess (correctly) who is being referred to, the person who posted the message is liable as well as everyone else in the group who did not object to it or leave the group. The same is applicable to a defamatory statement about the school, even if the school is not named.

#### **Protection of communications :**

- Communications on a WhatsApp group are for the purpose intended as stated in the agreement form when the member joined, and only for those who are members of the group.
- Protect your device from unauthorised use.
- Delete all communications once per week except for items that are needed for a longer period such as a fixture list or school calendar.
- Delete all communications when the group stops operating or on leaving the group.

#### **Hours of operation:**

- All groups must indicate the hours during which messages may be posted or responded to **UNLESS THERE IS AN EMERGENCY**. Recommended times for staff groups to be 06:00 -20:00. However, the hours for contact with staff should be

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controlled more strictly to avoid encroaching on their personal time, these should be 07:00—16:00 Mondays to Fridays only.

- Notifications should be sent well in advance. Just because you have contact with members on WhatsApp is not an excuse for poor planning and last minute notification.
- Members cannot be expected to monitor their messages continuously. If an urgent response is needed, a phone call may be necessary. Members are not on call 24/7.

#### **DO:**

- As Victoria Primary School's language of instruction is English and according to the school language policy it is recommended that English is the language to be used on groups. This must be clearly stated when the group is set up.
- Restrict messages to the business for which the group was set up.
- Keep messages as short as possible.
- Use a polite, professional and respectful tone in messages, even if you are annoyed.
- Be careful about what you share. Protect your personal information and that of children.
- Only reply to a message if necessary. Messages should state "Please reply (PR)" if a response is wanted from everyone, for example "Yes" or "No", "Monday" or "Wednesday". If a question such as "Who can help?" is asked, only reply "Yes" if you can. "No" or "Sorry" responses are not needed. If no response is needed state "Do not reply (NR)".
- Refrain from saying "Thank you" to a notification posted. Receiving "Thank yous" from thirty members indicates a very polite group but is not necessary and it can be annoying.
- Exercise caution with forwarded items. In general, if a message is forwarded, it must state from where it came.
- Limit the use of emojis that are commonly understood. Some emojis may be misunderstood.
- Avoid sending videos or files that are large as these consume phone memory and data.
- Respect silent observers. It is not compulsory for members to participate in group discussions.
- One-on-one discussions must be conducted outside the group.

#### **DO NOT:**

- Change the group's icon or name.
- Post personal information about other people and especially not children's information without the necessary prior informed consent. This rule also applies to photographs, videos and voice recordings.
- Forward any messages posted on the group to any other person or group without the administrator's permission.
- Post improper communications, including, but not limited to: gossip, defamatory and discriminatory remarks, hate speech, threats of violence or harm, swearing, blasphemy, pornography, incitement to any unlawful action, one-on-one arguments,



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birthday greetings, advertising, jokes, political comments, religious messages (unless a religious group/school), self-promotion, promotion of causes other than the school activity for which the group was set up, chain messages, and links unless authorised by the administrator.

- Use school-related groups for complaints against a parent, learner or staff member. The official school reporting channels must be used.
- Bother other members personally by communicating with them frequently. "Stalking" or "trolling" is not permitted.

### **When things go wrong:**

- Delete an improper communication immediately 'for all' if possible.
- If misinformation has been posted, do correct it as soon as possible. You may require members to respond indicating that they have noted your correction.
- If something inappropriate is posted by a member, ask the administrator to address it. Being reprimanded publicly on the group or even privately by 30 other members is not helpful.

### **Leaving the group:**

- Anyone may leave at any time. It is preferable to give a brief reason (to the administrator—who may inform the group of the reason but does not have to do so) for leaving but this is not compulsory.
- The administrator may remove persons who have been admitted incorrectly.
- The administrator may remove members who have breached the guidelines of the group. Prior warning may or may not be given depending on the circumstances.

Each group will need to add more specific guidelines depending on the purpose of the group. For example, a class group could permit or prohibit certain messages such as asking for help with transport, information about homework.

I have noted **VICTORIA PRIMARY SCHOOL'S "WHATSAPP GROUP RULES"** and agree to adhere to them.

**Please complete the table below:**

Please note that some groups are formed by parents and have not been approved by the school. We are not associated with these groups and cannot be held responsible for the content shared on these chats.

I (name) \_\_\_\_\_, and cell no \_\_\_\_\_ am currently a participant in one of the following Whatsapp groups associated with VP:

Name of group:	I wish to remain on this group	I wish to be removed from this group

*All new groups that may be formed as from 2020/09/04 need to be approved by the school principal in consultation with the school's SMT. The necessary notices will be shared prior to the initiation of a new group and the addition of participants.*

Signed at \_\_\_\_\_ on this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ 20\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_

Names of children of parent/guardian and grade

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_