

Social Media Guidelines for Drug Helplines

Context

These guidelines have been compiled as part of a project entitled 'Drug Helplines, online and interactive'. This Leonardo Da Vinci Partnership project is funded by the Lifelong Learning Programme. Eight partner organisations from Norway, Bulgaria, Cyprus, The Netherlands, Belgium and Ireland have worked together to improve how they learned and worked with Social Media. One step in this process was to draft Social Media Guidelines that might help to guide organisations on things to consider and make suggestions around best practice. This document is designed to help organisations in their first step towards drafting a Social Media Strategy. The next step is to use this projects' Social Media Strategy Template. It has also been noted that it is helpful to utilise a Social Media Calendar, once the strategy has been written. This can help organisations to plan, schedule and resource their social media activities.

Why?

To give guidance and some clarity to staff and volunteers who use Social Media as part of their work within a helpline service. It is hoped that his document can help clarify some aspects of how we interact with Social Media as service providers, rather than how we do it within the 'general public'/ as service users.

Consider these scenarios for example:

- One worker operates an organisations Social Media communications, they become unwell and no-one else understands any aspect of how it is operated.
- A worker tweets from a confidential meeting or criticises the organization he works for.
- A worker wishes to use a personal blog for writing about work-related issues and is not sure whether this is allowed or not.
- A director of an organisation tweets a photo during night of heavy drinking.

What do we consider social media?

These are new media that have a social nature. It is the common term for online platforms where its users, with little or no involvement of a professional editorial staff, deliver content (the so-called *user-generated content* which includes Wikipedia). Further, there are two more characteristics linked to social media:

1. The medium should enable interaction: sharing and forwarding and answering to content.
2. The content should be published and be searchable by its connected users.

Remember

Everything that you publish online can be found by anyone, anywhere and your post or publication can potentially become breaking news in the Newspaper or on TV. Always be aware of this when you are active online, whether you are representing yourself or your organisation. Also Social Media moves fast, so if some of the terms in these guidelines become out of date quickly, please understand that the essence of the checklist is that you remember the ethics and responsibilities that Drug Helplines need to maintain, while evolving along with the communication channels that our services users are choosing.

Guidelines Checklist

Share information responsibly

Have you considered the following?

- Do you have guidelines prohibiting information sharing that could harm your service, the public or others?
- Have you defined for your workers, what might be harmful material? Without an agreed standard, workers might judge things differently.
- If you re-tweet articles, comments or opinions, have you included clarification that these do not necessarily represent the values or opinions of you or your organisation? Does this disclaimer feature on all of your social media platforms? This is worth considering if you feel that it can be unclear at times what opinions or views you might be supporting or advocating when you share.
- Do you have a policy to regularly moderate or delete contributions that are seen as harmful to anyone (including the author)?
- Are your workers aware of the laws regarding usage of images, authorship and quotations?
- Do you clearly direct people to where they can ask questions or make comments in a way that protects their anonymity, particularly given the fact that they may be sharing information about drug use or illegal activities? It is our duty as the service provider to help the person to protect their privacy, as often on social media personal boundaries and privacy rules are less rigid. Can you make the environment 'safer' for service users?
- Do you clearly inform the public about the risks of making comments, sharing etc if under the influence of drugs/alcohol? Similarly here, we remain the service provider and need to consider our ethics and not putting service users in position where they might not protect their privacy
- Does your Social Media policy protect the anonymity of your organisations workers online, through email, telephone and other services that they provide? Are your workers named in correspondence? Does this present any challenges for your staff in terms of anonymity and privacy? Do you use an alias in communications?
- Do you have a policy on respect, outlining that ethnic defamation, personal insults and obscenity is not acceptable.

Who and when

Have you considered the following?

- Do you have clear guidelines on when workers can and cannot post on social media on behalf of the organisation eg. During their holidays; during weekends; while on sick leave? Are workers boundaries considered in this?
- Have you considered how many people should manage the page or account and how this might affect the consistency? How many is too many or too few?
- Have you addressed only those who work with social media or do all staff (paid and voluntary) in your organisation need to know your policies in this area?
- Is the role of Social Media worker in your organisation clearly defined and understood by all ?
- Do you have a rule that you never 'friend' service users from your personal account? Have you considered the implications of this type of policy?
- Have you considered how personal communications by workers on Social media could impact negatively on their work and on their personal privacy? Have you outlined a policy to safeguard against that?
- Have you discussed how the Board of Directors, managers and those represent the organisation have a special responsibility when publishing online (e.g. on Twitter or blogs). Based upon their position in the organisation they have to reflect on whether or not to publish from their own account. They are aware that co-workers will read whatever they write.

The voice of the organization

Have you considered the following?

- Are the organisations social media accounts set up by non-personal accounts, in a way that there is a separation between personal profiles and professional profiles. Would it be best to use a 'dummy' page to host or 'contain' your organisations public page or persona.
- Do you phrase correspondence in the 'first person?' ("I think...") Sometimes an organisation might decide to only use 'the third person' so would talk about "Our service..." "We are concerned for your welfare..."
- Are there clear distinctions made between your personal comments and the comments of your organisation?
- Are you clear about who corresponds through Social media on behalf of your organisation? Clearly defining roles in your organisation will help to give a clear and consistent message. It also will help with forward planning your social media outputs.
- Are your workers clear on your organisations stance on the expression of workers personal opinions on social media? Do you make an exception with blogs or forums where workers may be present as 'individuals'?
- Are you aware of the privacy settings on the account that you use and do these settings reflect the social media strategy of your organisation?
- Have you considered tagging and prepared a policy on how it could be managed through your security settings?
- If you host blogs or social networks, are you clear that they add value to your organisations goals and objectives?
- Is your online/ social media organisations profile as clear as possible? Is it clear who is responsible for the account? Why this medium is used? At what times the account is managed (opening hours) etc.? How you deal with negative communication/ complaints?
- Have you agreed a maximum time to reply to correspondence/ posts, such as within 24 hours, including weekends? Consider setting up an automatic reply that states that the correspondence has been received and that a response will be sent within a stated time period
- If your workers respond to issues that arise in the media out of hours, do you have a policy on what account these responses come from? Sometimes when things are seen as urgent and are not scheduled we can apply a different standard. Is that ok with you?
- Have you considered the Professional ethics of your discipline and organisation? How might your professional ethics influence your language or approach? Do you use more directive language in facebook correspondence than you would by email for example?
- Have you considered a policy where you try to be the first to correct your own mistakes, without adapting or removing previous messages? Make note of the fact that you have changed the message.
- Have you considered a policy where all outgoing communications are double checked? This can offer workers a second opinion before they communicate something online.
- Have you considered the use of proper language and grammar, in accordance with the status/reputation of your organization? This would involve restricting the use of slang, street language and abbreviations. Given that facebook etc often has a more friendly, less formal tone, do you need to define this or guide workers on this?
- Do you have a position on publishing 'Opinion vs facts'? Is it clear when communications are opinions? Are they referenced? This might come back to the disclaimer and your organisations policy on blogs etc.