

Merton Mencap

**Online Safety
Policy & Procedure**

Last reviewed
September 2023

Next review
September 2025

**This policy and procedure has been adopted by Merton Mencap
through its Executive Committee which remains responsible for its review**

Introduction

This policy is intended to safeguard people with learning disabilities and/or autism attending our services and activities in relation to their use of the internet..

Increasingly, children, young people and adults with learning disabilities and/or autism wish to use online resources. People with communication difficulties may find internet communication easier than face to face communication; other people use the internet to discover hobbies and leisure interests.

Alongside the many benefits of internet use, the risks include the potential for

- cyberbullying and online grooming
- risk of exposure to inappropriate content.

The purpose of this policy & procedure is to

- ✓ ensure the safety and wellbeing of children, young people adults with learning disabilities and/or autism (ie our service users) if accessing the internet during their attendance at our services and activities
- ✓ provide our staff with instruction

The charity recognises its responsibility to help keep people who attend our services and activities safe online, whether or not they are using Merton Mencap's devices and networks.

Policy

Electronic devices which have internet access may be present at our activities in the following circumstances:

1. Device is owned by Merton Mencap and provided to staff for business use only
2. Device is owned by Merton Mencap and provided for use by service user users
3. Device is owned by service user (which they bring to our activity)
4. Device owned by staff (which they bring work)

1. Device is owned by Merton Mencap and provided to staff for business use only (or the charity agrees that staff can use their own mobile for business use)

In cases where we provide staff with electronic devices (eg mobile phone, tablet) for business use, the staff member is responsible for ensuring the device

- is password protected and kept secure at all times
- is not used by unauthorised staff
- cannot be accessed by service users

Staff should also refer to our 'Information Technology, Personal Internet Presence & Social Networking Policy.

2. Device is owned by Merton Mencap and provided for service user use

In cases where the charity makes electronic devices available for use by service users, we will

- ensure wi-fi and devices are password protected, with passwords only known to staff
- ensure devices have internet filters installed which control content and restrict material
- install child-friendly browsers are installed which filter results (in the case of devices used by children)
- provide staff supervision during online activity

The relevant Service Manager is responsible for identifying the purpose for the service user wishing to access the internet, agreeing this with them and their parent/carer and ensuring this is stated in their care plan (eg access to music, sport, gaming)

In the case of service users under 18, online activity will only be undertaken if the parent/responsible carer has agreed its beneficial nature which will be included in their care plan.

The person responsible for the service/activity on the day (eg team leader) is responsible for ensuring that service users are always supervised when using Merton Mencap electronic devices, and that staff providing supervision are familiar with the service user's care plan/purpose for online use.

3. Device is owned by the service user (which they bring to our activity)

Service users may wish to bring their own electronic device (eg mobile phone) to our activities/services.

The person responsible on the day (eg team leader) will encourage service users use their devices minimally and engage in our activities.

The charity may refuse a service user from using their own electronic device when attending our sessions if

- we feel it is distracting them or other service users from our service/activity
- the service user is using their device inappropriately, eg taking photos of others/the public without consent
- we have identified a risk of inappropriate use.

Staff are not permitted to give service users passwords for our wi-fi access.

4. Device owned by staff (which they bring work)

Staff working with service users are required to switch off their personal electronic devices during work time except during permitted breaks. During break times, staff are not permitted to use the camera or recording facility on their device. Staff are not permitted to use the charity's wi-fi facilities with their own devices.

Staff must keep their personal electronic devices secure and away from service users at all times (even when switched off) and ensure they are password protected.

In the event of an emergency, the person responsible on the day may permit a staff member to use their device (eg to call an emergency service, parent).

[It should be noted that Merton Mencap may offer staff a charity mobile phone for business use if it is deemed necessary as part of their role. In such instances, if staff would prefer to use their own phone for business use, rather than accept a mobile from the charity, the provisions in this section do not apply, but staff in such circumstances should see section 1, above, instead].

Group communications

To assist our communications with service users and to encourage communication between service users, we may set up 'group chat' messaging (eg via Whatsapp) for a service user attending a service/activity. In these cases, we will identify a staff member to be the 'administrator' of that group chat. The administrator's role is to communicate the rules of engaging in group which are

- no bad language
- no cyber-bullying (ie sending messages of an intimidating and threatening nature)
- no sharing of inappropriate content (eg pornographic, sexist or racist material or any other material likely to cause offence to anyone, or promoting a illegal activity)

The 'administrator' reserves the right to remove a service user from the 'group chat'.

For group chats,

- staff are only permitted to use a permitted Merton Mencap device and telephone number for group chats (not their personal device and telephone number)
 - service users who wish to be included in group chats should understand that by participating their mobile number is visible to other service users in the group chat
 - for service users under 18, we will obtain the permission of parent or responsible carer for their being involved in the group chat
 - service users can leave the 'group chat' at any time by asking the 'administrator'
-