

Managing Conversations with Minors

Conversations with Minors are increasing in numbers and becoming more complex. Children are getting access to computers and phones at younger ages. They are also getting exposed to mature content and topics earlier in life.

The ministry wants to share Jesus and speak truth into all seekers, but we also have an obligation to adhere to the various rules and regulations that relate to conversations with Minors and privacy laws. For instance, in the U.S. there is the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) that is a federal law prohibiting certain types of communication with children 13 years or younger. There are similar laws in Europe that apply to children under 16 years of age. As such, **WE HAVE RECENTLY IMPLEMENTED A TERMS OF SERVICE AGREEMENT IN CHAT CONVERSATIONS WHERE THE USER MUST AGREE THEY ARE AT LEAST 18 YEARS OF AGE OR THEY HAVE RECEIVED PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT TO CHAT.** We are working in a similar solution for text messages.

There is nothing illegal about simply answering one of our conversations, even with someone under 18 years old, but we want to offer direction and protect you as well as the ministry in this time of growing complexity.

We want to guide your conversations with Minors with some Conversation Management Reminders and then provide direction and guardrails on how to proceed with 4 different conversation types

Conversation Management Reminders

First Reminder - The ministry does not seek to collect any personally identifiable information from any seeker. So, in addition to avoiding full names and addresses, the ministry does not ask seekers their age. However, there are occasions when the seeker will volunteer such information, or you will be able to ascertain during the conversation. Use your best judgement when speaking with someone that sounds like they are a Minor.

Second reminder - We recognize that conversations with Minors can be complex. As volunteers, we **do not** want to shy away from them, but we want to be conscious of who you are speaking to and what they are looking to discuss. Some of you may feel like walking with this young person over time would help but this is never allowed with a Minor.

Third reminder - As with all conversations, you should be evaluating the details the seeker shares. We are NOT asking you to determine each seekers age. We encourage you to simply evaluate the information you are presented. If words like school, my teacher, kids, my parents, and other phrases that are not commonly used by adults are used then that would be a red flag. In these obvious cases, proceed cautiously determining what the guest is looking to discuss. Determine whether they have someone they trust so you can encourage that connection. You should always use discretion and avoid getting pulled into personal details that are not relevant to the conversation.

We are not asking you to manage any conversation that you are not comfortable with having. If during conversation, you feel the specific details merit additional review then please flag the conversation for review by the ministry staff.

Conversation Types

Once you suspect or realize you are talking with someone under 18 years of age, we encourage you to determine the type of conversation they are seeking and follow these guidelines for each type of conversation.

1. **Spiritual Nature** - Conversation purely spiritual in nature. These could be focused on questions about the Bible or concerning forgiveness, faith, how to be saved, or changing their relationship with God. These should be handled like any other legitimate conversation. Feel free to pray with them but also set boundaries and do not get pulled into an ongoing or repeated conversation.
2. **General Life Discussion and Connection** – Many young people come to the ministry just looking to talk or connect. They may bring up issues like friendships, school, loneliness, purpose, parents, identity, and feelings (anxiety, worry, depression). These should be handled directly with biblical direction. We want you to be intentional in leading this conversation to a positive close. Feel free to pray with them but also set boundaries and do not get pulled into an ongoing or repeated conversation.
3. **Serious Life Issues** - If the conversation relates to a serious life issue such as teen pregnancy, gender confusion, homosexuality, premarital sex, abuse, bullying, etc. then we want you to be intentional in leading this conversation to a positive close. This includes sharing biblical truth while at the same time encouraging the Minor to get help and speak to their parents, Youth Pastor, School Counselor or other trusted adult. Feel free to pray with them but also set boundaries and do not get pulled into an ongoing or repeated conversation.
4. **Inappropriate Nature** - As with any aged person, when the conversation is of an inappropriate nature, then we encourage you to graciously bow out and close the conversation quickly. Always show grace but be guarded with your words and encourage the minor to talk with their parents, Youth Pastor, School Counselor or other trusted adult.

We recognize it is hard to fit every possible conversation into one of four categories, but the reminders and guidelines above should provide you with a safe framework for having conversations with Minors.

A few additional requirements as you manage these conversations:

- **Do NOT schedule or agree to ongoing conversations with a Minor.** If you happen to come across a repeat seeker in conversation, that is fine. Do NOT agree to connect in the future or schedule another time to continue the conversation via chat or keep the conversation open via text messaging when you know the guest is a Minor.

- *Use the Notes section in Echo to share the details of a conversation with a Minor.* You do not have to type out the entire story but include the most pertinent details about their age and nature of conversation so the next volunteer will be aware of what you learned about their age.
- *It is imperative that all conversations with Minors (Chat or Text) be closed and dispositioned the same day the conversation begins.* Please ensure that all conversations with Minors are closed when you finish your time on-line that day. This means if you have an ECHO Text Conversation you should send a closing message and then close it in the system.