Cornerstone Nurseries
Policy on Social Media and online conduct

Social media is an important part of modern life. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, X, Threads, Snapchat, WhatsApp and other social networking and messaging platforms allow us to communicate with friends, family and the wider community.

Cornerstone Nurseries does not intend to interfere unnecessarily with employees' private lives or prevent staff from using social media in their own time.

However, working in a nursery means that staff hold a position of trust and responsibility. The way an employee behaves online can affect how parents, colleagues and members of the public view that employee, the nursery and the quality of care provided to children.

This policy therefore sets clear expectations about what is and is not acceptable online.

The fact that something is posted from a personal account, outside working hours or in a private group does not automatically make it appropriate.

Employees are expected to exercise the same standards of respect, professionalism, confidentiality and good judgement online as they would in the workplace.

What Does "Professionalism" Mean?

We recognise that the word "professionalism" can mean different things to different people. For the purposes of this policy, professionalism means:

- treating colleagues, parents, children and the nursery with respect;
- protecting confidential and personal information;
- behaving in a way that maintains trust in you as a childcare professional;
- considering how something could look to a parent, colleague or member of the public;
- not posting, sharing or encouraging content that could reasonably cause offence, distress, concern or reputational damage;
- maintaining appropriate professional boundaries;
- thinking before posting, commenting, sharing or reacting to content;
- understanding that online content can be copied, screenshot, forwarded and made public, even when originally shared privately.

You do not have to agree with someone to treat them professionally.

You do not have to intend to cause offence for something to be inappropriate.

"It was only a joke", "I didn't mean it like that", "everyone does it" or "it was on my private account" will not automatically make inappropriate online behaviour acceptable.

Before posting, commenting, sharing, liking or forwarding something, employees should ask themselves:

- Would I be comfortable if a parent saw this?
- Would I be comfortable if my manager saw this?
- Would I be comfortable if a colleague showed this to someone else?
- Could this make someone question my judgement or professionalism?
- Could this identify or refer to a child, parent, colleague or the nursery?
- Could this be interpreted as bullying, harassment, discrimination or intimidation?
- Could this damage the reputation of Cornerstone Nurseries?
- Would I be happy for this to be shown to me in a workplace investigation?
- Am I posting this because I am angry, upset or frustrated and might regret it later?

If the answer to any of these questions is "yes" or "possibly", do not post it.

If you are unsure whether something is appropriate, speak to your manager before posting it.

Social Media Accounts and Privacy

Employees must understand that privacy settings do not guarantee privacy.

Content posted online can be screenshot, downloaded, forwarded, copied, shared outside the original group and viewed by people who were not originally intended to see it.

Employees must therefore not rely on having a private account or private group as a reason for posting something that would otherwise be inappropriate.

Cornerstone Employees must set their social media profiles to "Private" wherever the platform allows this.

Employees are strongly advised to use the highest privacy and security settings available.

Parents and Professional Boundaries

Employees must not send friend requests to nursery parents or clients. Employees should only accept a parent as a social media friend/follower if they knew that parent personally before the parent registered their child at the nursery.

Where an employee already knows a parent socially, the employee must still ensure that their online behaviour remains professional and does not compromise their role at the nursery. For example, a post showing an employee drinking heavily on a Monday night could cause a parent to question whether that employee is fit to care for their child the following day.

If a parent sends a friend or follow request, employees should politely explain the policy. For example:

> "I'm sorry, company policy prevents me from being friends/following parents from the nursery, so I'm unable to accept your request. I hope you understand."

When a child leaves the setting, an employee may befriend or follow the parent if the parent requests this. If the child subsequently re-registers at the nursery, the employee must explain sensitively that they can no longer follow or befriend the parent while the child is attending the setting.

Children and Confidentiality

Under no circumstances should employees discuss nursery children online.

This includes:

- names;
- photographs;
- videos;
- individual circumstances;
- behaviour;
- development;
- medical information;
- family circumstances;
- safeguarding information;
- attendance;
- incidents;
- complaints;
- personal information of any kind.

Employees must also comply fully with the nursery's confidentiality policy.

In line with the policy regarding personal cameras and mobile phones, employees must not upload photographs or videos containing nursery children. There are no exceptions simply because the employee believes the content is harmless, funny, positive or intended only for friends.

Complaints, Frustrations and Workplace Issues

Employees must not discuss nursery colleagues or nursery parents online. This includes direct posts as well as indirect references.

For example, employees should not post:

- “Some people at work really need to grow up.”
- “Another ridiculous day with management.”
- “Can't believe what one of the parents said today.”
- “My room is driving me crazy.”
- “Some staff really shouldn't be working with children.”
- photographs or memes intended to mock a colleague or manager.

Even where no name is used, a person may be identifiable from the circumstances, wording or timing of the post. If a reasonable person could work out who you are referring to, assume that the person has been identified.

Employees will naturally have difficult days and may sometimes be frustrated with work, however, social media is not an appropriate place to air workplace complaints or grievances. Employees should use the appropriate internal procedure to raise concerns.

Even where the employee believes they are simply “having a rant”, such comments can damage confidence in the nursery. If you have a genuine concern, raise it through the appropriate workplace process rather than online

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Uniform and Representing Cornerstone

Employees must not upload photographs of themselves wearing Cornerstone Nursery uniform where their behaviour is inappropriate.

For example, photographs showing an employee in nursery uniform:

- smoking
- behaving offensively or aggressively
- engaging in inappropriate or sexualised behaviour
- appearing intoxicated
- engaging in unlawful or seriously inappropriate conduct

are not acceptable.

When wearing the nursery uniform, employees are visibly representing Cornerstone Nurseries, regardless of whether the photograph was taken during working hours. If you are wearing the nursery uniform, assume that the public will associate your behaviour with Cornerstone Nurseries.

Alcohol, Drugs and Other Potentially Inappropriate Content

Employees should carefully consider photographs, videos, comments and other content showing them:

- excessively intoxicated
- behaving aggressively
- taking or appearing to take illegal drugs
- engaging in dangerous or reckless behaviour;
- engaging in sexually explicit or highly inappropriate behaviour
- using offensive or discriminatory language and swearing
- behaving in a way that could reasonably undermine confidence in their suitability to work with children.

Employees are entitled to have a private life. This policy is not intended to prohibit lawful personal activities. However, employees are responsible for considering whether their online behaviour could reasonably affect their professional reputation, their relationships with parents and colleagues, or confidence in their ability to undertake their role.

Posts, Memes, Reactions and Sharing Other People's Content

Employees are responsible not only for what they write themselves but also for what they choose to share, repost, comment on or otherwise endorse online. A person does not avoid responsibility simply because they did not create the original content.

For example, repeatedly sharing “bad manager” memes may appear to be harmless humour, but colleagues or managers may reasonably believe the content is directed at them.

If you would not say it respectfully to the person's face at work, do not post or share it online.

Bullying, Harassment and Sexual Harassment

Cornerstone Nurseries operates a **ZERO TOLERANCE POLICY** regarding bullying, harassment and sexual harassment of any kind. This applies to online behaviour as well as

behaviour in the workplace. All reported incidents will be taken seriously.

Harassment includes unwanted conduct related to a protected characteristic, including age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation, where that conduct violates a person's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

Sexual harassment is unlawful and includes, but is not limited to:

- unwanted sexual advances, comments or physical contact;
- inappropriate jokes, remarks or gestures of a sexual nature;
- displaying or sharing offensive or sexually suggestive material, including online;
- behaviour that coerces, pressures or intimidates someone based on their sex or sexual orientation.

This applies to social media, messaging applications and private group chats.

Cornerstone Nurseries will never cover up or ignore a complaint of bullying, harassment or sexual harassment.

Group Chats and Messaging Apps

Employees should not create or participate in unofficial work-related group chats which deliberately exclude managers or other employees where work matters, colleagues, parents or children are discussed. This includes WhatsApp, Messenger, Snapchat, Instagram, text messaging and similar platforms.

We recognise that employees may have private social groups with colleagues. However, once workplace matters are discussed, employees must remember that the communication may become relevant to the employment relationship. Private does not necessarily mean confidential.

Messages, photographs, videos and comments can be:

- screenshot;
- forwarded;
- copied;
- disclosed to management;
- used during workplace investigations;
- relevant to disciplinary proceedings;
- relevant to employment tribunal proceedings.

Deleting a message does not necessarily prevent it from being recovered or used as evidence. Employees must therefore communicate respectfully and professionally at all times.

Content that could be considered:

- bullying;
- harassment;
- discriminatory;
- defamatory;
- threatening;
- intimidating;
- sexually inappropriate;

- offensive;
- malicious;
- damaging to the nursery, its staff, families or children;

may result in disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal where appropriate.

“Private” Does Not Mean “Free From Consequences” Employees should understand an important distinction: Cornerstone does not expect employees to behave as though they are at work 24 hours a day. However, employees are expected to understand that certain online behaviour can have workplace consequences. For example, a private group chat does not make it acceptable to bully a colleague. A private Instagram account does not make it acceptable to disclose confidential information about a child. A Snapchat message does not make it acceptable to send sexually inappropriate content to a colleague. A personal Facebook account does not make it acceptable to make defamatory comments about the nursery or its families.

The key question is not simply: “Was I at work when I posted it?” The question is: “Could this online behaviour reasonably affect my professional relationships, the people I work with, the children in our care or confidence in Cornerstone Nurseries?”

Social Media During Working Hours

Social networking sites must not be used from nursery computers, tablets or other nursery equipment for personal purposes. Management may use social media from nursery equipment where this is required for legitimate nursery business, such as updating the official nursery social media pages.

Employees must not use personal social media during working time unless specifically authorised.

Competitors and Other Businesses

Employees must not share advertisements, recruitment posters or promotional material for other nurseries or competing business activities where doing so could conflict with their responsibilities to Cornerstone Nurseries.

Employees are encouraged to support the nursery's own legitimate advertising, recruitment campaigns and positive communications.

Official Cornerstone Social Media

Cornerstone Day Nurseries maintains an official Facebook page and may use social media as a communication tool for the setting.

The nursery managers and deputies are responsible for administering the official page. Page administrators reserve the right to remove comments where necessary to protect the privacy, rights and reputation of the nursery, staff and families.

Comments may be removed where they:

- name specific individuals negatively;
- are abusive or contain inappropriate language;
- contain defamatory, abusive or generally negative statements about an individual;
- fail to respect another person's privacy;
- breach copyright or fair-use requirements;

- contain photographs of children without the necessary parental consent.

Parents and Public Comments About the Nursery

We welcome positive feedback, recommendations and constructive comments about our services. However, parents and carers are asked to consider how their use of social media may affect the privacy or reputation of the nursery, its employees and the families who use our services.

Staff should not be named or mentioned online without their consent.

Where a parent or employee has a complaint, we respectfully ask that the formal complaints procedure is used rather than posting negative comments publicly. This allows concerns to be investigated properly and fairly and avoids unnecessary damage to the reputation of individuals or the nursery.

Social Media When Absent From Work

Employees who are absent from work due to sickness should think carefully before posting photographs, videos or status updates. We recognise that being unfit for work does not necessarily mean that an employee must remain at home or avoid all social activity. However, colleagues may not know the confidential reason for an employee's absence and may understandably question photographs or posts which appear inconsistent with the reason given for absence. Employees should therefore exercise discretion when posting while absent from work.

Photographs or posts which appear to contradict the reason given for absence may be considered as part of an investigation where appropriate. For example, if an employee reports that they are unable to walk because of a sprained ankle but subsequently posts photographs of themselves participating in activities at a theme park, the employer may reasonably need to question the circumstances.

Employees should always provide accurate information regarding their absence and follow the nursery's sickness absence procedures.

A Simple Rule to Remember

If you are unsure whether something is appropriate to post, **STOP - THINK - CHECK**

STOP: Don't post immediately, particularly if you are angry, upset or under the influence of alcohol.

THINK: Could this embarrass, upset, identify or offend someone? Could a parent, colleague or manager see it differently from how you intended?

CHECK: Does it protect confidentiality, maintain professional boundaries and uphold the reputation of Cornerstone Nurseries?

If you are still unsure, speak to your manager.

Breaches of this Policy

Cornerstone Nurseries expects all employees to take this policy seriously.

Online behaviour may be considered under the nursery's disciplinary procedures where it

breaches this policy or otherwise has a legitimate impact on the employee's employment, colleagues, families, children or the reputation of the nursery.

The seriousness of any action will depend on the circumstances, including the nature of the content, who was affected, whether confidential information was involved, whether the behaviour was repeated and the potential or actual impact on individuals or the nursery.

Serious breaches may result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.

Cornerstone Nurseries respects employees' right to have a private life and to use social media. This policy is not about telling employees what they can and cannot do in their personal lives.It is about understanding that working in childcare carries a responsibility and that online behaviour can affect trust.

- Parents trust us with their children.
- Colleagues trust each other to behave respectfully.
- Children and families trust us to protect their privacy.

Cornerstone Nurseries therefore expects every employee to use social media with good judgement, respect, discretion and professionalism.

When in doubt, remember:

If you would be uncomfortable with a parent, colleague or manager seeing it, it is probably better not to post it.

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