

WhatsApp Group Policy 2022

“Whatsapp Group Guidelines” - Members’ Responsibilities

1 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.

2 Protection of communications

1. 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.
2. Protect your device from unauthorised use. For example, a learner must not be able to access content of a parent’s Stepping Stones WhatsApp group. This would be an offence on the part of the parent in terms of the Code of Conduct for Stepping Stones members because it breaches the obligation relating to confidentiality.
3. Delete all communications when the group stops operating or on leaving the group.

3 Hours of operation:

1. All groups must indicate the hours during which messages may be posted or responded to UNLESS THERE IS AN EMERGENCY.
2. Notifications should be sent well in advance. Contact with members on WhatsApp is not an excuse for poor planning and last minute notification.

3. 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.

4 DO

1. Restrict messages to the business for which the group was set up. Stepping Stones has two class WhatsApp groups:
 - A Compulsory Formal School WhatsApp Group split by phase (Toddler, Pre-School and Elementary) – This is for official school business, class announcements, HWG updates. It will be broadcast only. If you have a question about a message PM (reply privately) to the sender or contact the school secretary during school hours. 07:00 – 17:00 Mondays to Fridays during school terms, UNLESS THERE IS AN EMERGENCY.
 - And a Voluntary Class Chat Group – here you can chat with fellow parents about social and school events arranged by the Class Reps. Please no general school admin, these queries should be addressed to the school secretary. This group will be monitored by school staff but they will only respond between 07:00 – 17:00 Mondays to Fridays during school terms.
2. Keep messages as short as possible.
3. Use a polite, professional and respectful tone in messages, even if you are annoyed.
4. Be careful about what you share. Protect your personal information and that of children.
5. Only reply to a message if necessary:
6. Message should state “Please reply” if a response is wanted from everyone (e.g., “Yes” or “No”, “Monday” or “Wednesday”).
7. If no response is needed, state “Do not reply”.
8. If a question such as “Who can help?” is asked, only reply “Yes” if you can. “No” or “Sorry” responses are not needed.
9. 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.
10. Exercise caution with forwarded items. In general, if a message is forwarded, it must state from where it came.
11. Limit the use of emojis that you think are commonly understood. Some emojis may be misinterpreted.
12. Avoid sending videos or files that are large as these consume phone memory and data.
13. Respect silent observers. It is not compulsory for members to participate in group discussions.
14. One-on-one discussions must be conducted outside the group.

5 DO NOT

1. Ask questions about general school administration issues. Please check the Website and transparent Classroom first and if you cannot find the information here, please contact the School Secretary by email or by WhatsApp during school hours.
2. Change the group’s icon or name.

3. Post personal information about other people, and especially not children's information, without the necessary prior informed consent.
4. The above rule also applies to photographs, videos and voice recordings.
5. Forward any messages posted on the group to any other person or group without the administrator's permission.
6. Post improper communications, including, but not limited to: "Fake News", gossip, defamatory and discriminatory remarks, hate speech, threats of violence or harm, swearing, blasphemy, pornography, incitement to any unlawful action, one-on-one arguments, birthday greetings, advertising, jokes, political comments, religious messages, 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.
7. Post improper communications on the Class Chat Group, including, but not limited to: "Fake News", gossip, defamatory and discriminatory remarks, hate speech, threats of violence or harm, swearing, blasphemy, pornography, incitement to any unlawful action, one-on-one arguments, political comments, religious messages, and chain messages. Be extremely careful with forwarded items. Fact check and provide source.
8. Use school-related groups for complaints against a parent, learner or staff member. The official school reporting channels must be used.
9. Bother other members personally by communicating with them frequently. "Stalking" or "trolling" is not permitted.

6 When things go wrong

1. Improper communication will be deleted immediately.
2. If misinformation has been posted, we will correct it as soon as possible. We may require members to respond indicating that they have noted our correction.
3. 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.

7 Leaving the group

1. The Formal School group is compulsory. We communicate important information pertaining to your child/ren's education here. You may not leave this group (but you can mute if needed).
2. Anyone may leave the Class Chat group at any time (or you can just mute the group). 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.
3. The administrator may remove persons who have been admitted incorrectly.
4. 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.