



Gofal Cymdeithasol **Cymru**
Social Care **Wales**

Using social media responsibly



Noddir gan
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About this guidance

This document provides guidance on using social media for social care professionals registered with Social Care Wales. Social media was identified as an area requiring more guidance during our engagement with the sector.

We are publishing this guidance in accordance with our powers under the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016. The guidance also applies to other social care workers who are not currently required to register with us.

As a registered professional, it is your responsibility to be familiar with and follow the guidance. The guidance does not cover all situations and you are expected to use your professional judgement, applying the general principles and taking advice, where necessary.

In addition to this guidance, you should adhere to your organisation's policy on use of social media.

About social media

Social media is a catch all term for a variety of internet-based applications that allow people to create and exchange information and communicate with each other digitally. In this guidance, we use the term to include blogs, internet forums, content communities and social networking sites. It is the content that you upload to platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, LinkedIn and so on.

Many of us use social media to communicate with others both personally and in our working lives. It helps us connect with people and keep in touch. If used responsibly, social media can offer many benefits, including accessing professional and support networks, learning resources and information.

Using social media can also create risks and challenges. It has the potential to blur the boundaries between our professional and personal lives. Sharing information inappropriately can be very damaging due to the speed at which it can be shared, the size of the potential audience and the problems removing content once it has been posted.

The Code of Professional Practice for Social Care

When using social media, you should apply the same standards as you would when communicating in other ways. This means that you must continue to uphold the *Code of Professional Practice for Social Care*.

We have set out our guidance below referring to parts of the Code that apply to the appropriate use of social media. There may be more.

Respect for rights, privacy and confidential information

The Code emphasises the importance of individuals' rights and interests, and your responsibility to strive to establish trust and confidence in your professional relationships. Respect for an individual's privacy and confidential information is a critical part of this. You should always make sure your behaviour on social media supports this.

You must:

"Work with individuals and carers in ways that respect their dignity, privacy, preferences, culture, language and rights"
(Code 1.4)

"Respect confidential information..."
(Code 2.4)

When using social media, you must not discuss matters relating to the individuals you support in your work. This applies regardless of whether you believe a person could be identified. You must not post pictures of individuals without their informed

consent. Where consent is given, you must still consider whether the sharing of these images is in the individual's best interests. Even if you are just taking pictures of your workplace, be careful not to inadvertently capture anything or anyone that could breach confidentiality.

If you refer to your work on social media, you need to demonstrate respect and professionalism. You should choose your language carefully, avoiding comments that others might reasonably consider to be inappropriate or discriminatory. Remember that comments may be taken out of context and made visible to a wider audience than intended: once you have identified your role or your work on social media, all your comments and posts, even personal ones, may reflect on your role.

Similarly, you must respect the privacy, dignity and rights of colleagues.

You should be aware that postings online are subject to the same laws of copyright and defamation as other written or verbal communications, whether made in a personal or professional capacity.

Sharing information appropriately

The Code emphasises the importance of promoting well-being and supporting individuals and carers to stay safe. Sharing information appropriately and working as a part of a team is essential to achieving this. It is recognised that you may use social media to receive / share general information from / with your employer. This can support good team work.

However, the Code makes it clear that you must work within your organisation's policies and communication systems.

"You must use agreed systems and procedures to share information appropriately with colleagues and other professionals and in a timely manner"
(Code 3.6)

Some organisations use social media to communicate with individuals using the service. This can be an important way to respond to an individual's preferred communication method and to promote well-being and safety.

If your organisation uses social media in this way, you must always communicate with individuals in a professional way. You must use the agreed professional social media account. You should not post content that reflects negatively on you, your employer or the profession.

Integrity, public trust and confidence

Section 5 of the Code is about acting with integrity and upholding public trust and confidence in the profession. How you behave on social media should support this and be of the same high standard as your day-to-day behaviour.

You must not use social media in a way that could be interpreted as bullying, intimidating, threatening, exploiting, harassing or discouraging someone from raising concerns. As well as breaching professional standards, these may be criminal offences¹.

You must not abuse the access you may have to personal information about individuals and colleagues on social media.

If you use social media to advertise or share information related to your professional practice, you must make sure it is fair, true and evidence-based as far as you know. You should declare any conflict of interest around material that you post, including information about financial or commercial dealings. You should not discuss anything that does not fall within your level of competence.

You may choose to include a disclaimer on your profile that these are your views and do not represent the views of your employer or anyone who contracts your services. However, even where such a disclaimer is included, you will remain professionally accountable for your use of social media.

You must maintain professional boundaries on social media. This includes thinking carefully before accepting 'friends' using your personal social media accounts: if you only know someone because they use the service, you shouldn't become 'friends' with them. If an individual who uses the service, their family or carer contacts you about their care or other professional matter through your private profile, politely tell them you can't mix social and professional relationships, and direct them to the appropriate communication channel.

Some organisations will have social media accounts/ pages, with appropriate safeguards, which people using services will be friends with or linked into them.

1. Cyberbullying in itself is not a crime and is not covered by a specific law in the UK. However, by committing an act of cyberbullying, a person may be committing a criminal offence under a number of different Acts. For example, the Malicious Communication Act 1988 and the Protection from Harassment Act 1997

Additional tips

Here are some additional tips for using social media responsibly and meeting professional standards:

- Know how individual social media applications work – the advantages and disadvantages
- Understand your privacy settings – update them regularly and know the limitations. Remember everything you post online is potentially public as it can be shared by others. It is best to assume that everything you post online will be visible to everyone
- Be mindful that once you publish information on social media, you lose control over it. You may find it difficult to remove as others may have commented on it
- Remember, posting anonymously does not mean you are protected as often information can be traced back to you²
- Social care can be a stressful profession. While it may be tempting to let off steam, social media is not the place to do it. A good rule is don't post when angry or emotional and don't say or reveal anything on social media that you wouldn't be happy to see printed in a newspaper
- Consider carefully who and what you associate with on social media, for example, acknowledging someone else's post can imply that you support or endorse their point of view
- Understand that your work might mean others have professional curiosity or even a grievance about you. They may search for you and could use any information they find about you, including maliciously. Photographs could be copied and used maliciously
- Keep safe by ensuring that your location is not traceable – be mindful that in photographs and other applications your physical location may be public
- When in doubt, get advice. Appropriate sources might include experienced colleagues, trade unions and professional bodies. If you think something could be inappropriate or offensive, don't post it
- Social Care Wales practice guidance relevant to your role includes related guidance on raising and acting on concerns. This includes any concerns you may have about what you see on social media. You should be familiar with relevant policies and procedures in your work place for reporting concerns, for example, bullying and harassment, safeguarding, whistleblowing, equality and diversity
- Keep on using social media responsibly. Most professionals using social media find it beneficial and do so in-line with professional standards and without any problems.

2. In some circumstances, setting up a false social networking account / website, or creating a false or offensive profile / alias may amount to a criminal offence.