

71 - Safe use of digital technologies and online environments policy

Distribution

Policy version 3

The Service will encourage children to engage with media and technology for fun and to enhance learning to assist in the development of social, physical, emotional, cognitive, language and creative potential of each child. This policy is developed in consultation both Educator and Children's technology.



Safe use of digital technologies and online environments policy

Aim

The safety and wellbeing of children and young people is paramount at our services, including the safe use of digital technologies and online environments for the purposes of children's learning and development and maintaining records. This policy aims to outline TheirCare's approach to managing the access to and use of digital technologies and online environments at service by all parties, including children and young people, staff, and visitors.

Definitions

Digital technologies	Digital technologies encompass screens and communication devices including, but not limited to, smart phones, computers, laptops, iPads, smart watches, tablets, smart boards, televisions (including smart TVs) and DVD players.
Visitors	A visitor is any person who enters the service premises temporarily and is not engaged in direct provision of education or care for children and young people. Visitors include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Parents and guardians visiting for situations beyond drop-off, pick-up, or meetings (i.e. to attend an event)• Contractors (i.e. incursion providers)• Other visiting professionals (i.e. Allied Health professionals)• Community members• School staff

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TheirCare employees not engaged on rosters in direct care provision (i.e. Area Managers, Head Office Staff).
Staff	Any person rostered at the service who is providing direct care, support or education.
Exemption	An exemption is an approved release from the general obligations under the policy with regard to the use of personal devices due to medical necessity, disability or other grounds.
Exception	An exception is a specific case or situation that is allowed to deviate from the general rule regarding the use of personal devices which is extremely time limited (i.e. a single session) and may or may not have been approved in advance depending on the circumstances.
Phone Use Exemptions and Exceptions Register	The Phone Use Exemptions and Exceptions Register is a register that holds information related to personal phone use exemptions and exceptions. All approved and declined exemptions and exceptions will be captured in the register.
Service-owned device	A service-owned device is any device owned by TheirCare and provided to the service for use (i.e. service phone, service computer, and service tablet). All service-owned devices will be identified by a TheirCare sticker.
Personal device	A personal device is any device (i.e. list of digital technologies outlined above) owned by any individual person attending the service, including children and young people, staff, parents/guardians, and visitors.
Site Service Condition of Entry Declaration	The Site Service Condition of Entry Declaration outlines the conditions of entry for all service visitors, including their obligations related to photography and videography, child safety, health and hygiene, confidentiality, emergency procedures and reporting, and compliance, and must be sited and acknowledged by all service visitors prior to their entrance into the service.
Designated Area	All personal device use must only occur in designated areas as determined by the Responsible Person. These areas are selected to allow active supervision by staff and to ensure that device use does not occur in private or inappropriate locations (e.g., toilets, bathrooms or change areas).
Smartwatches	<p>For the purpose of this policy, a smartwatch refers to a wearable device worn on the wrist that has one or more of the following features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cameras and/or video recording capability • Internet connectivity (e.g. WI-FI, mobile data, Bluetooth) • Messaging notification or call functions

- Messaging, notification, or call functions
- Apps that allow games, media, or social networking

Principles

In managing the access to and use of digital technologies in service, TheirCare will ensure that:

- All children and young people attending service are provided with a safe environment through the creation and maintenance of a child safe culture, and this extends to the use of digital technologies and online environments.
- Children and young people's wellbeing is paramount, and they will be actively involved in decision-making about the safe use of digital technologies and online environments at the service, including taking, using and sharing an image or video of them on a digital device, whether by an adult or another child or young person.
- Management, staff, and all visitors to the service are aware of their roles and responsibilities regarding the use of digital technologies and access to online environments, including abuse or maltreatment that may result from their misuse.
- All parties take reasonable precautions and provide adequate supervision to ensure that children and young people are protected from harm that may occur through digital technologies and online environments.
- Procedures to effectively manage incidents and disclosures are in place and are regularly rehearsed, with a focus on ensuring that children and young people understand their rights and can identify and report maltreatment.
- The purpose and use of electronic and digital devices is considered, and clear expectations are communicated to all staff and visitors to ensure that child safe practices are implemented for the use of these technologies within our service environments.

Implementation

Use of Technology for Educational Purposes

Staff will support children and young people to use digital technology safely and purposefully when required for learning, creativity, or accessing information. Use of technology will be limited, intentional, and integrated thoughtfully into play and leisure activities.

Music or videos may be streamed if it is relevant to the children's learning or professional development undertaken by staff and must be reflected on the program planner and linked to the educational program or planned activities for that session of care. This may include mediation music or children's yoga as part of a wellbeing program. Content streaming will be done in accordance with the 'IT Acceptable Use Policy', and only from platforms that can be fully vetted to ensure appropriate content prior to showing to the children/young people (i.e. YouTube Kids).

Our service will discuss the protocols we have in place for accessing digital technologies with children/young people and parents. TheirCare will install software on TheirCare owned devices that blocks inappropriate websites and ensure children/young people are actively supervised when accessing the internet and utilising digital technologies.

Educational visuals e.g., You Tube learning educational hub may be used where

relevant to enhance curriculum activities or research projects to enhance children's learning and development. However, technology will never be used as a substitution for interactions and collaborative learning between educators and children/young people, or to manage children's behaviour. Children/young people will also be allowed to access devices for the purposes of completing schoolwork if required.

All screen content viewed by children and young people at the service must, for example:

- assist in expanding the content of the curriculum
- be suitable to the needs, ages and development levels of each child/young person watching
- hold the interests of the children/young people watching
- be carefully selected with suitable content e.g. content depicting violence like graphic news reports will not be shown
- be rated 'G' or 'PG' if relevant (e.g. videos) (PG movies as per TheirCare approval process).

The time children/young people spend watching content on devices at the service will be consistent with the Federal Government's 'Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines' i.e. no more than two hours per day. Staff will take into consideration the time children/young people may also spend watching screen content or using electronic media for entertainment at home.

Staff will actively supervise children and young people who are using devices to ensure content is appropriate and suitable for sharing with other children/young people at the service. Staff may withhold devices for the duration of the session if they believe they are being used to access or display inappropriate content. Any such incidents will be reported to parents upon pick up.

Who the restrictions do not apply to

The restrictions do not apply to people who are not providing education and care and not working directly with children.

This includes:

- parents and carers attending the service to drop off or pick up their child
- Regulatory Authority Authorised Officers
- police
- officers of other regulators, such as environmental health officers
- third parties who are attending the service but are not working with children or providing education or care (for example, maintenance contractors).

Service - Owned Devices

Service-owned digital technology devices are provided for use by staff and children/young people within the service under the following guidelines:

Staff Use

- Staff may use service-owned devices only for activities relevant to service operations, including administration, programming, research, professional development and risk management.
- During service delivery, devices should be used sparingly and only for purposes directly related to care (e.g., signing children in and out, completing headcounts, accessing enrolment or medical information).
- All staff must comply with the 'IT Acceptable Use Policy' when using service-owned devices.

Children and Young People Use

- Children may access service-managed devices for education purposes such as

homework support, research or structured activities.

- All service-managed devices will have content filtering, monitoring and security controls to restrict access to inappropriate websites, application or communication platforms.
- Devices may only be used in designated areas under direct supervision of staff.
- Use of service-managed devices must always align with educational program, supporting children learning, development and wellbeing, and will never be used as a substitute for an engaging program of activities or in place of active supervision.

All company-supplied equipment, including devices and digital tools, must be clearly labelled with the provided identification label. This label must remain visible at all times to ensure the equipment is easily recognisable as company property. Staff and visitors must not remove, obscure, or alter the label, and any damaged or missing labels should be reported immediately to the Responsible Person.

Use of personal digital technology devices

In any case of approved use of personal digital technology (including smart watches) devices individuals must comply with at least one of the following requirements:

- Deactivate the camera on the device
- Place a camera blocker over the device's camera (i.e. built in case camera blocker)
- And or place a TheirCare provided sticker over the camera

The Responsible Person must ensure that any personal device that is being utilised within the service complies with the above prior to the commencement of the provision of education and care.

Children and Young People Personal Devices

Children/young people may use their own personal devices (e.g. tablets, laptops, smart phones) for educational purposes such as homework or research projects, subject to approval from staff.

Use of personal devices will be supervised by staff to ensure that all content accessed is appropriate, safe and relevant to the intended purpose. Devices may only be used within designated areas. Devices will be confiscated for the duration of the session if staff observe any misuse or inappropriate content.

Excessive use of personal devices, or device use that disrupts the service environment, will be reviewed with the child/young person and their family. Staff may redirect children to program activities where device use is not aligned with educational or wellbeing purposes.

Confiscation of Devices

Where a child or young person uses a personal device inappropriately (e.g. to access unsafe content, to take photos or video, or refuse to follow staff direction), staff may confiscate the device until the child is collected by their parent or guardian.

- An incident report must be completed and filed in accordance with service reporting procedures.
- Parent/guardians must be informed at collection and provided with details of the incident, including how the device was managed.
- Confiscation must always be handled respectfully and with consideration of the child dignity and safety.

Smartwatches

Children may wear smartwatches at the service under the conditions:

- The camera function must be turned off and covered with a TheirCare provided sticker.
- Smartwatches may only be used in designated devices areas under staff supervision.
- If a smartwatch is used inappropriately (e.g., in toilets, to take photos/videos, or to disrupt program activities), it will be treated as a breach of this policy and may be confiscated.

Visitors Devices

Any person who is not a rostered employee at the site is considered a visitor as outlined in the definitions above. Parents and guardians performing routine drop-off and pick-up of their child or young person are not considered visitors. If they remain onsite beyond this (e.g., attending a meeting or observing a program), they are considered visitors and must follow visitor requirements.

All visitors to the service must sign the visitors register and review the Site Service Condition of Entry Declaration. By signing the register, visitors acknowledge and agree to the terms outlined in the declaration, which include not taking photos or videos of children/young people or staff.

When not in active use, visitors' devices must be:

- Stored in a secure location away from children (e.g. office space) or
- Kept in the visitor's pocket or bag.

The Responsible Person will monitor compliance with these requirements throughout the visit.

Employee Personal Devices

TheirCare has a zero-tolerance stance for staff accessing or using personal digital technology devices while interacting with children and young people or working in ratio during a session of care.

Upon arrival to the service each employee will report to the Responsible Person with their personal device/s. The Responsible Person will use the Sign in Register to log the employee's personal device.

Once logged, the personal device will be securely stored in a designated locked area specifically allocated for this purpose. This area is designed to protect the devices from theft or unauthorised access, ensuring that the focus remains on the educational environment without distractions from personal technology. The secure storage will remain in place for the entire duration of the employees' shift, allowing them to concentrate fully on their responsibilities without the temptation or interruption of personal device usage.

At the conclusion of the shift, the Responsible Person will sign out the employee's personal device and return it to them. Staff may also check their personal devices out at the commencement of a break, as long as they will be in a private area separate from the program (i.e. a staff room or break room) whilst utilising the phone. The device must be checked back in at the conclusion of the break.

Any staff member found to be using IT, screens or communication devices inappropriately will face a workplace investigation by the Operations and Employee Relations teams in line with the 'Managing Misconduct Policy'. If it is substantiated that a staff member was utilising their personal device in contravention of this policy, it may be considered serious misconduct, and may lead to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of their employment. Illegal conduct will be reported to the Police or appropriate authority.

Recognising that emergencies can arise, each service has provisions for staff who may be expecting important personal phone calls during their shift (i.e. awaiting urgent medical

news for a loved one). Employees are encouraged to provide the service contact number to individuals who may need to reach them. The service will make every effort to facilitate a brief phone call to the employee.

Smartwatches

Staff may wear smartwatches at the service under the following conditions:

- Notification and call functions: Staff must disable all incoming/outgoing call, text, and notification functions while on shift. (airplane mode)
- Camera function: Any smartwatch with a camera must have the camera disabled and covered with a TheirCare provided sticker while on site.
- Use during service time: Smartwatches must not be accessed for personal use during program hours, including checking messages, calls, or notifications.
- Medical exemptions: If a staff member requires a smartwatch for medical monitoring.
- Fitness/ wellbeing use: Purely fitness-based watches without connectivity (i.e., pedometers or watches without camera/call/notification featured) are not restricted.
- Register of smartwatch: Staff must register the wearing of the device on the personal device register when signing in other personal devices and in doing so are confirming they have complied with all of the above conditions.

Exemptions

In some special circumstances, exemptions to the above will be granted. In line with part 3 of the National Model Code, these include:

- Communication in an emergency situation involving a lost child or young person, injury to a child/young person or staff member, or other serious incident, or in the case of a lockdown or evacuation of the service premises
- Personal health requirements (e.g. heart or blood sugar level monitoring)
- Disability (e.g. where a personal digital device is an essential means of communication for an educator or other staff member)
- Family necessity (e.g. a worker with an ill or dying family member) or ongoing caring responsibilities (e.g. acting as the primary caretaking for a seriously ill family member or person with disability)
- Technology failure (e.g. when a temporary outage of service-issued electronic devices has occurred)
- Local emergency event occurring, to receive emergency notifications through government warning systems (e.g. bushfire evacuation text notifications).

Where personal devices are utilised in the event of an emergency (i.e. not predictable prior to the event), the Area Manager must be notified as soon as reasonably practicable by the Responsible Person.

Requesting Exemptions for Personal Health Requirements, Disability, or Other Reasons

Approval: All exemptions must be approved in writing by the Employee Relations Department.

Duration: Exemptions will be granted for either a set period (i.e. 6 months) or indefinitely depending on the nature of the evidence provided (i.e. a staff member with a chronic illness may be granted a permanent exemption).

Documentation: Approved exemptions will be documented using the **Personal Phone Use Exemption Letter** which will be completed by Employee Relations and sent to the staff member's TheirCare email for their review and signature. A copy of this exemption letter must be retained by the staff member, by the service as part of their physical employee records, and by the organisation as part of the digital staff record. Exemption requests which are declined will be documented via email to the staff member.

Register: Each approved exemption must be entered into the **Phone Use Exemptions and Exceptions Register**, which will be maintained for monitoring and auditing purposes. Exemption requests that are declined must also be captured in the register.

Monitoring: Staff will be subject to monitoring and spot checks during the exemption period.

Review: The organisation will review each approved exemption at the conclusion of the approved period to ensure that there are sufficient rationale and evidence for an extension of the exemption.

Temporary Exceptions

Temporary exceptions to the policies may only be granted under extenuating circumstances and must meet the following conditions:

Approval: All exceptions must be approved in writing by the Area Manager.

Duration: Exceptions will be granted for no more than two consecutive working days and will not be extended without a new approval process.

Documentation: Each exception must record the individual's name, reason for exemption, scope of permitted use, and timeframe of approval.

Register: All temporary exceptions must be entered into the **Phone Use Exceptions and Exceptions Register**, which will be maintained for monitoring and auditing purposes. Declined exception requests that are declined must also be captured in the register.

Monitoring: Staff approved under an exception will be subject to monitoring and spot checks during the exception period.

Review: The organisation will regularly review the number and type of exceptions granted to ensure they remain minimal, justified, and compliant with safeguarding requirements.

Emergency use of personal phones

In exceptional circumstances, personal phones may be used by staff for urgent or emergency situations only (i.e. lockdowns, natural disaster, absconding of child). Services are required to notify the Area Manager of such event as soon as practical in writing. Such use must be approved and documented by the Area Manager and recorded on the **Phone use Expectations and Exemptions Register**.

Spot Checks and Monitoring

To safeguard children/young people, participants, and the integrity of the service, the organisation will conduct regular and unannounced spot checks. These checks will focus on:

- Staff and visitor adherence to approved device use and digital safety practices.
- Verifying no unauthorised photos, videos, or online content are being created, shared, or stored.
- Reviewing compliance with restrictions on personal device use within the service

environment.

Breaches

Non-compliance with these requirements by staff, contractors, or visitors may result in disciplinary action, withdrawal of access, or removal from the service, in line with organisational procedures.

For services delivered in Western Australia, this policy also serves the procedural and policy guidance for the Providing a Safe Environment Policy.

Related Policies

Enrolment Policy
Education, Curriculum and Learning Policy
Social Networking Usage Policy
Photography and Videography Policy
IT Acceptable Use Policy
Employee Code of Conduct
Managing Misconduct Policy

NQS

QA1	1.1.1	1.1.1 Approved Learning Framework - Curriculum decision making contributes to each child's learning and development outcomes as communicators
	1.1.3	Program learning opportunities - All aspects of the program, including routines, are organised in ways that maximise opportunities for each child's learning.
	1.2.1	Intentional teaching -Educators are deliberate, purposeful, and thoughtful in their decisions and actions.
QA4	4.2.2	Professional Standards - Professional standards guide practice, interactions and relationships.

Regs	73	Educational programs
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Source

National Quality Standard
My Time Our Place Framework for School Age Care
Education and Care Services National Law and Regulations
Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines - Federal Government
National Model Code for Early Childhood Education and Care
Guidelines for the National Model Code

Resources

The eSafety Commissioner's free resources can be found at <https://www.esafety.gov.au/>

Some forms of online abuse of children and young people can be reported to the eSafety Commissioner, who may be able to help and assist in getting online content removed. For more information, go to: <https://www.esafety.gov.au/report>

The Alannah and Madeline Foundation's [eSmart](#) program supports schools to address cyber risks, bullying and cyber-bullying and helps schools to meet their duty of care.

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