Social media policy

Cafcass policies are designed to safeguard children, families, employees, and the reputation of Cafcass. They derive from legislation and from what we learn from practice quality audits, significant incidents and learning reviews, feedback, and complaints. They set out what must be done. They are public documents against which we can be held accountable. If they are not adhered to, we can be subject to challenge through complaints, the Parliamentary & Health Services Ombudsman, Social Work England, or even a Judicial Review. A decision not to adhere to a policy must be supported by a compelling rationale and endorsed by a manager. Policies are, therefore, subject to monitoring for compliance – with fair and reasonable consequences for non-compliance. Key policies that are new or updated are subject to attestation by all employees or groups of employees where appropriate.

What is this policy for?

This policy sets out the standards relating to the personal use of social media, of how practitioners should assess social media information within court proceedings, and how Cafcass will support colleagues when issues arise relating to social media. Social media can be a positive platform for exchanging ideas and knowledge and promoting the profession and Cafcass. The aim of this policy is to assist colleagues to understand their professional responsibilities when using social media.

In this policy 'social media' is defined as online communities in which users share information, ideas, personal messages and other content. Cafcass expects colleagues to have, at a minimum, a base competence in using and understanding social media. The 'Cafcass social media and online communication' eLearning provides further information on the use of social media.

Who does it apply to?

This policy applies to all Cafcass colleagues, Associate FCAs, Board Members and contractors who use social media.

Why is this important for children?

Children and families have a right to know what to expect from Cafcass. If we are using social media to communicate with families or looking at their social media presence where this is ordered by the court, we have a duty to do this ethically and responsibly.

Children and families have a right to expect that all Cafcass employees who have involvement with them, will conduct themselves at all times in a professional manner which does not undermine or damage their credibility or objectivity. This can extend beyond the workplace and can include online activity including social media.

2.0 Use of social media in social work practice

2.1 Cafcass employees must not use their own personal social media account(s) to actively monitor, seek out or access the information of families or their associates such as friends or relatives, or to make public contact with parties or other relevant individuals.

2.2 However, during the course of proceedings practitioners may be made aware of content posted online that may have a bearing on the matter before the court and the work that Cafcass has been asked to carry out. The sections below outline what action Cafcass employees can undertake in this instance.

Comments or posts about court proceedings

2.3 There are restrictions on publicly posting information about family court proceedings as set out in the Family Procedure Rules 2010. If colleagues have concerns about a post on social media that relates to court proceedings – for example, something relating to open proceedings or that could identify a child – they should:

- Seek advice from Cafcass legal and/ or their manager in order to consider if it is necessary to inform the court, and parties of a potential breach of the court Rules.
- If the author of the post is a party to the court proceedings, consider asking the party to remove the post.

Comments or posts about a Cafcass employee

2.4 Cafcass supports colleagues to deal with any concerns about social media relevant to their work or role. This extends to harassment related to their work with a family. If any colleague believes they have been subject to harassment or a specific threat on a social media platform they should inform their line manager and their local HR business partner. Cafcass will not tolerate violent, abusive, or threatening behaviour towards a colleague or any other person carrying out work on behalf of Cafcass. Guidance is contained within the Health and Safety guidance on the management of unacceptable behaviour. This includes guidance on determining what is opinion or criticism, and what is harassment or threatening behaviour; and the steps for managers to follow when an incident is reported.

2.5 Colleagues are encouraged to report any threatening material, or content, which is in breach of the social media sites standards, directly to the social media/website and inform their line manager and their local HR business partner.

Comments or posts about Cafcass as an organisation

2.6 The Communications team may monitor open sites or groups on social media and record relevant posts, where there is a clear business need due to the impact on a colleague or on Cafcass' reputation.

2.7 Requests for information such as Subject Access Requests and/or Freedom of Information requests can be received via Cafcass' social media platform and must be actioned.

Social media information as 'evidence' in court proceedings

2.8 Families may present the practitioner and/or the court with information taken from social media. This could include screenshots or printouts of posts or conversations. Such information may be presented to prove or disprove relationships, whereabouts, behaviours, actions, or knowledge. Or they may allege that such material exists online but not provide any 'evidence'.

2.9 Allegations based on information taken from social media are no different to any other allegation made within proceedings.

2.10 Practitioners will assess whether the information is relevant to the matter in proceedings and/or the child's welfare. Where there is risk, the safeguarding policy must be followed. In the event of any dispute about the authenticity of online information this will need to be resolved by the court.

Contacting families using social media, or accessing social media content, when ordered by a court

2.11 Cafcass will not contact parties via social media unless it is ordered by a court.

2.12 On a small number of occasions the court has considered whether Cafcass or the local authority should use social media to locate a party or other relevant individual. In public law cases, the view is generally that this is the responsibility of the local authority.

2.13 When a court directs Cafcass to access social media content, the practitioner must first inform their line manager. If the manager agrees that accessing social media is necessary, the practitioner should then liaise with the Cafcass communications team to arrange access via an official Cafcass-owned social media account. Under no circumstances should staff use personal social media accounts or their Cafcass email address to access social media content.

Using messaging platforms to communicate with children and families

Messaging platforms

2.14 Cafcass discourages the use of any messaging platform other than text, Teams and Cafcass email. However, the use of online messaging applications, such as WhatsApp, can be used for 'day to day' communication such as arranging meetings, but should not be used to have in-depth case discussions with a child or adult. The exceptions to this are in remote working with children and families, where WhatsApp video calling may be used to facilitate a meeting or interview or if accessibility requirements necessitate the use of extended WhatsApp messaging. In the exceptional circumstances where WhatsApp is used as the preferred method of communication for a child or adult, screenshots should be taken of the communication and uploaded to ChildFirst. Practitioners must not store case related information on WhatsApp or any other messaging or social media platform. The minimum age of use, set by WhatsApp, is 13 years old.

2.15 Cafcass expects the same standards of professionalism for any online communication exchanges with families or professionals as for those used face-to-face.

3.0 Corporate use of social media

3.1 Cafcass manages different social media channels as part of sharing information about the organisation to wider stakeholders and interested members of the public. Content may include information about:

- The organisation, including links to news and blogs.
- Information and news relevant to the sector and Cafcass' partners, including events or projects Cafcass is taking part in.
- Recruitment.

3.2 In the main, social media channels are not avenues for families to seek or exchange information about proceedings.

3.3 All corporate social media channels are monitored and moderated by the Communications Team during regular working hours. In exceptional cases, channels may be used outside of office hours such as during events.

3.4 Social media community guidelines are available to external audiences, setting out the terms of use for Cafcass' social media channels. Abusive or threatening social media content directed at Cafcass will not be engaged with unless there is a safeguarding concern. In these instances, Cafcass' health, safety and security policy and child safeguarding policy will be followed.

3.5 Requests to assist in the promotion of third-party campaigns will be assessed by the Communications Team on a case-by-case basis.

4.0 Personal use of social media

4.1 As a social work organisation, all Cafcass employees, regardless of role, should use social media appropriately and responsibly and should not post, share, like or follow content which is likely to be incompatible with their employment, or to bring Cafcass into disrepute. This includes not posting information relating to court proceedings or the families with whom we work, not sharing internal documents on social media, and ensuring that their online behaviour does not damage the public's confidence in Cafcass.

4.2 If colleagues use social media, they are responsible for understanding how to use it, safely and appropriately, checking personal security settings and the implications of social media being a public and permanent record. Guidance on how to use social media securely is available in the CafcassLearning module 'Social media and online communication'.

4.3 Employees should regularly review and manage their social media privacy settings to protect personal information. If a complaint is made about a staff member's personal use of social media – for example, if a family member has accessed an employee's social media account and has made allegations about its content – this will be considered within Cafcass' usual complaints process.

4.4 Social work employees, as registrants of Social Work England (SWE), must abide by the standards set by SWE and, if they choose to use social media and networking

sites, will not do so 'unlawfully, unethically, or in a way that brings the profession into disrepute'.[1] This also applies to other professional groups who should adhere to their own professional standards.

4.5 If an employee is found to have used social media in a manner which is not in accordance with this policy, then this may be considered as a matter of misconduct and be dealt with under the Employee Relations Policy.

5.0 Online security and social media

5.1 In line with the IT policy and procedures and Health, safety and security policy, employees must only use corporate communication channels such as their Cafcass email and Cafcass phone number, to conduct Cafcass business, not personal emails, numbers or devices. This is so there is no link between your online work identity and your home-life identity and to ensure that all material relating to Cafcass stays with Cafcass – not a personal account.

5.2 Colleagues are reminded to use strong, secure passwords at all times with social media. For guidance on creating and managing safe passwords, please see the National Cyber Security Centre guidance on passwords, this is an important step in reducing the risk of social engineering[2] attacks.

Owned by	Assistant Director (Performance and Quality Assurance)
Approved by	Corporate Management Team
Approved on	4th October 2022, updated version 23 December 2025
First implemented	January 2023
Version	2.2
Reviewed	**January 2026**
Changes	Language has been updated and aligned to other policies and the House Style Guide. Key points amended are below: • Professional conduct: added a clear note that all Cafcass employees must uphold professionalism in all interactions, including online and social media activity, to maintain credibility and objectivity. • Social media misuse: added that any inappropriate use of social media may be considered misconduct and addressed under the Employee Relations Policy. • Messaging platforms: Added that Cafcass discourages the use of messaging platforms other than text, Teams, and Cafcass email. Sets out clearer the circumstances when WhatsApp may

[1] Paragraph 5.6 of the SWE professional standards

[2] Social engineering is a manipulation technique that exploits human psychology to gain access to confidential information, systems, or physical locations. Instead of hacking into systems through technical means, social engineers trick people into giving up sensitive data or performing actions that compromise security.

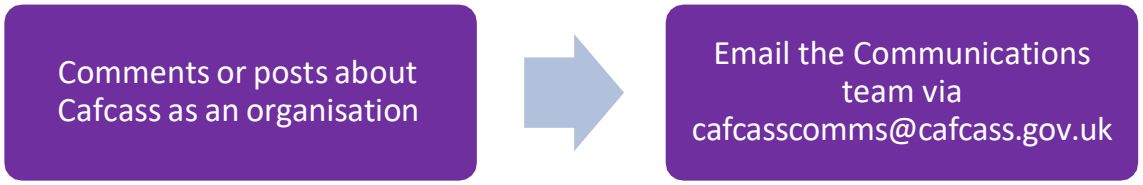
	be used. Changed the legal age of WhatsApp use to 13 (from 16). • Added reference to Family Procedure Rules 2010 • Added reference to IT policy & procedures that requires colleagues to use Cafcass email and phone numbers only for official business. • Social Media Comments: Cafcass has disabled comments on its social media accounts; related wording has been removed. • Added reference to FOIs and subject access requests being made via social media
Next Review	**January 2029**

Appendix 1: a flowchart to show the process for flagging concerns about social media, and the role of the communications team, HR, Health & Safety incident reporting and Cafcass legal

Process for reporting comments about a Cafcass employee on social media:



Process for reporting posts or comments on social media – corporate reputation:



Process for reporting posts or comments on social media – court proceedings:

