

Protecting Youth Online

By Sarah Ross

Scouts and Scouters primarily interact in person and outdoors. However, when this is not possible, we meet and correspond online. Social media is an undeniably valuable tool for communicating but when it is not properly managed and monitored, it has the potential to do more harm than good. Youth Protection procedures must be followed when managing a social media page for Scouting. Scouting Wire has put forth [guidelines to follow on social media](#).

Note: Due to its popularity among Scouters, Facebook will be used as an example. Keep in mind that while social media platforms such as X (formerly Twitter) and YouTube are used for different purposes and follow different formats, the same safety precautions should be taken while using any online platform.

The no one-on-one contact and two-deep leadership rules apply in online settings. This means that any Scouting Facebook page needs to have at least two adult administrators who monitor the page. At least one of these adults must be 21+, at least one must be Youth Protection trained, and (if there are female Scouts on the page) at least one must be a 21+ female. It is the responsibility of these administrators to make sure all posts follow the Scout Oath and Law.

The Boy Scouts of America recommends using a Facebook page. Facebook groups can be used as well if they are public. To ensure that there are no private conversations and to keep people accountable for what they share, all Scouting Facebook groups must be public. *Private communication channels are not appropriate for Scouting.* Public channels, however, come with their own safety concerns. Public channels are visible to anyone, both in and outside of Scouting. As someone sharing to a public Scouting page or group, ask yourself, “what information am I comfortable sharing with the general public?” When posting information regarding other Scouts, consider whether that is something the Scouts’ parents would be comfortable with.

One option that is provided for Facebook groups is to turn on “[post approval](#).” This feature allows group members to post only after their message has been approved by a group administrator. Post approval can be a helpful filter to ensure that everything being publicly shared abides by the Scout Oath and Law. This feature requires active administrators to make sure posts are being approved promptly as some posts may be time sensitive. Post approval is [not a feature that is available for Facebook pages](#). Instead, page administrators can turn on post notifications so that they will be notified anytime a post is made to their page.

In addition to following Scouting guidelines, make sure Facebook guidelines are being followed. For example, Facebook users must be at least 13 years old. Be sure there are no Scouts younger than 13 on your Facebook page. Facebook pages also allow administrators to set age restrictions for those that are allowed to post. The page should remain active or else it may become a target for spam or hacking. Making a Facebook page (or any other form of social media) for Scouting is a responsibility.

Like a pocket knife, social media is a useful tool that can be dangerous if used improperly. Its use in Scouting should not be taken lightly or overlooked. By following guidelines and posting intentionally, Scouting can remain a safe place online.