



Communications Policy 2022

1 Introduction

This policy covers general communications conduct, including face-to face, Email, WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and the school website.

Current e-communication platforms are incredibly powerful tools and need to be used with integrity. The school appreciates the simplicity and ease of electronic messaging online. We acknowledge that keeping in contact on social groups not only facilitates general communication, but can also benefit the school by building community. We encourage parents to share their and their children's school experiences on social media in a positive way.

The points listed below are put into place to ensure efficient, polite, kind and effective communication, and we ask that all members of the school support us in this regard.

2 Expectations for general school two-way communication

1. All parents/guardians will ensure they maintain an updated telephone contact number and email address on the schools Transparent Classroom administration system. It is the parent's responsibility to logon and change any relevant information on this system, when it changes. Please note, this is critical in the case of an emergency.
2. The school will provide parents/guardians with contact information for each teacher, principal and administrators, including their email address and telephone numbers for professional use.
3. Phone calls and WhatsApp are to be used **ONLY DURING WORKING HOURS** (7:00 am - 5 pm, Monday to Friday). Please **DO NOT** call or WhatsApp staff after hours, unless in an emergency. Email can be sent at any time and will be responded to during work hours.
4. Teaching staff will only respond to messages when they are not teaching; up until 5 pm during week days. Please do respect teacher's personal time at home with their families and do not WhatsApp after 5 pm. If you want to send a message about something that is on your mind, please use email in the evenings that is not as intrusive in teacher's personal time.
5. School staff and parents/guardians will respond to phone messages and emails promptly according to the urgency of the message.
6. Telephone and email communication will be used for extended discussion related to student performance and/or well-being.
7. Meeting requests with any school staff need to be arranged by email to ensure all relevant parties can be included in the request. In the case of a meeting about a child's progress in class, please include both teachers, Head of Department and Head of Education in your meeting request.

8. Lateness of pupils will be communicated by the parents to the teacher by WhatsApp messaging before the start of your child's program. Transparent Classroom will send automated messages to parents about lateness/tardiness.
9. Absence of pupils due to illness should be communicated via email to illness@steppingstones.org.za. This message will be sent to the Health Working Group as well as the child's teachers. Failure to do so will result in a message being sent by Transparent Classroom.
10. Absence of pupils due to vacation or weekends away to be communicated to the class teachers via email. Failure to do so will result in a message being sent by Transparent Classroom.
11. Complaints or grievances of any nature must be communicated directly to the school's principal by email or telephone. If your complaint is not addressed satisfactorily, you may bring it to the attention of the Trustees at trustees@steppingstones.org.za

3 Expectations for communication from the school staff

1. Greet visitors to the school in a positive and professional manner.
2. Provide appropriate and regular information to the family.
3. School administration will provide a quality, current external (www.steppingstones.org.za) and internal (Transparent Classroom) website that includes the necessary information on the school.

4 School communication channels

1. **Email** for general school communication.
2. **WhatsApp for communication with staff during school working hours:** 7:00 am - 5 pm, Monday to Friday.
3. A **Compulsory Formal School WhatsApp Group** split by phase (Toddler, Pre-School and Elementary) – This is for official school business, class announcements, daily updates, etc. It will be broadcast only. If you have a question about a message PM (reply privately) to the sender or contact the school secretary. (Please see WhatsApp Group Policy document)
4. A **Voluntary Class Chat WhatsApp 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. (Please see WhatsApp Group Policy document)
5. **Mailchimp:** A weekly Mailchimp with the official school logo and from the principal/secretary's email address. This contains a note from the principal, admin updates, class news and updates from the Trustees and working groups when necessary.
6. **Transparent Classroom:** The school's calendar and internal communications can be found here; the latter also include:
 - a. **Accident or Incident report forms** informing of either, that require an electronic signature by return.
 - b. Parent-Teacher **Conference Reports** and **School Reports**.

7. **School website:** *www.steppingstones.org.za*. This is our official website which lists all the school policies, provides a wealth of information about the school's programs and the Montessori Method.
8. School **Facebook** page: *Stepping Stones Montessori School*. Photographs of school events, information about upcoming events and educational articles etc. are posted on this page. This page is managed and monitored by a staff member.
9. School **Instagram** account: *Stepping Stones Montessori*. This platform is used to post photographs of school events etc. This account is private and managed by a staff member; access needs to be requested.
10. **Images of children:** The school may post images of children whose parents/guardians have given consent, on our social media platforms, which include: What's App, Facebook, Instagram, Mailchimp and the school website. Names and addresses will never be tagged.
11. **Indemnity forms:** for outings/camps that require a hard copy signature by return.

5 Communication via WhatsApp Groups:

Please read the WhatsApp Group Policy document.

6 Communication via Class Representatives:

We would like to thank the parents who have made themselves available to be Class Representatives. Please take note of the following information regarding their function:

1. The Class Representatives are in place to act as a communication channel between the school/teacher and the parents.
2. The Class Representatives will elect a member to attend Trustee Meetings and act as a communication channel between the Trustees, Class Representatives and parents in general.
3. Class Representatives should meet termly to discuss various school issues.
4. Class Representatives will help with the organisation of class functions and outings.
5. Class Representatives will assist with general questions and discussions.
6. Child/staff member specific issues or complaints/grievances of any nature must be communicated directly to the school's principal by email or telephone and not via the Class Representative.

7 Non-compliance of the school's Communications Code of Conduct

The school encourages dialogue if there are any complaints and discourages criticism about the school's methods and values on social media. All school communication, where possible, will be monitored by a staff member. The school will not tolerate any member of the school:

1. Starting a group discussion on topics inappropriate for the general school community on the school's WhatsApp groups (e.g. advertising your new business that has nothing to do with children's interests).
2. Posting defamatory 'statuses' about fellow parents, pupils, the school or its employees on social media.

3. Sending abusive messages about members of staff, children or parents or the school;
4. Sending abusive messages to fellow parents.
5. Sending abusive messages to members of staff.
6. Sending or posting any form of hate speech or incitement of violence on social media.

8 Consequences of non-compliance

1. Should any problems arise from contact over messaging apps and social media, the school will act quickly by contacting participants directly.
2. The school can request a meeting with parents if any misconduct, such as sending abusive messages or posting defamatory statuses, occurs online.
3. The principal/group chat administrator may remove abusive participant/s from a school group chat, or close a school group chat, if deemed necessary.
4. The school retains the right to request any damaging material to be removed from social media websites.
5. The principal can, with the permission of the parent/staff member, view messages sent between members of the staff or parent body to deal with problems quickly and effectively.
6. Breaches of this code of conduct will be taken seriously by the school and in the event of illegal, defamatory, or discriminatory content, breaches could lead to prosecution.

9 Monitoring and review

1. The principal will review this code of conduct on an annual basis or as necessary and will communicate any changes to all staff and parents.
2. All parents and school staff are required to read this Communications Policy and abide by it.