



## Guidelines for using video conferencing for youth groups

Most youth organisations have avoided the use of video conferencing –but in these exceptional circumstances, it is a helpful way of keeping in touch with and supporting young people through these difficult times. These are guidelines and do not replace the church's/group's safeguarding policies and procedures which must be adhered to

- Always have at least two DBS checked adults present in any video chat.
- If a young person wants to communicate privately, then tell them that to protect both of you, there will be another person online with you, but that they will not be joining in the conversation, unless the young person wants them to. If you believe that the young person is at risk and they refuse to have another adult present, then tell them that you are going to record the conversation. Never promise confidentiality, but say that you may have to share the content of the conversation with somebody who can help.
- Only use platforms that are appropriate, and stick rigidly to their age restrictions – most require participants to be 13+.
- Keep records of contact. Logging when chats happen, who was part of them, and the content covered. If you have a text conversation<sup>1</sup> or 'chat' with a young person, screen shot the contents (some platforms allow you to save directly). If you are concerned about a young person's well-being then share this with your safeguarding officer or line manager.
- Don't make assumptions about access. Be sensitive to the fact that some households have strict rules about screen time whilst others may be using pay as you go devices with limited streaming capacity.
- Remember that many young people will have a completely different framework of what is appropriate online from their parents and your agency<sup>2</sup>. Set clear boundaries before and during engagement.
- Be absolutely transparent about the changes in the ways that you are engaging with young people putting information on your website, and contact details etc. Contact parents/carers and ask for permission to communicate with their young people in this way (see template form on Diocesan webpages).
- Use church or agency accounts – even if you have to set up new ones. Do not use personal accounts.
- Use group conversations wherever possible. Remember that some platforms only show someone's image if they have been detected as talking. This means that someone can easily get overlooked and become an observer rather than a participant. Come up with a visual system whereby you can curtail the input of the big talkers and sensitively ensure that the shyer members of the group feel included.
- Ensure that there is no recording of online group chats by participants.
- Make sure that language and images used can not be misinterpreted. For instance LOL - you might mean Laugh Out Loud, but a needy young person might read it as Lots Of Love. Do not put kisses at the end of messages, even if you normally do this with friends and colleagues!
- Try to ensure that at least one member of your team is trained in digital awareness <https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/professionals/training/kcso/> £35 per worker.
- Make sure that children and young people have links to CEOP (Child Exploitation Online Protection Centre or Childline, NSPCC and know what to do if they are concerned about a worker's online behaviour towards them.
- Take a look at the [Diocese's Social Media Guidelines](#)

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<sup>1</sup> A conversation is more than 'this is the time there is an online chat tonight' 'Ok, thanks. See you then' 'Yeah, see you then. Stay safe in the mean time'

<sup>2</sup> See Dannah Boyd's book – It's Complicated – The Social Lives of Networked Teens for more information on this