

Diocesan Best Practice Guidelines **Advice for Youth Workers on virtual youthwork:**

This is a new way of doing youth work for most of us and we are putting together a code of practice for safe working. However, these are minimal guidelines and please add additional precautions as you feel needed in your setting.

Please use the following guidance in accordance and conjunction with the National Church of England's on guidance: [Advice for using video conferencing for youth work during Covid-19](#)

Please insist any leader involved in remote contact reads the [NSPCC Protecting children from online abuse](#) guidance.

The NSPCC also offer Online Safety Training courses for £35 which you will find helpful. Email them on: learning.nspcc.org.uk

A good principle to apply is to use the same protocols for your normal group meeting in this online environment.

It's important to remember that communicating with young people one to one online, whether via messaging or video, is the equivalent of meeting a young person in a room on your own with no one around.

1. You must have PCC approval – speak to your vicar, churchwarden, standing committee to discuss and minute this, evidence of approval and guidance being followed is essential. PCC must have a list of specific named (safely recruited) individuals who are authorised to offer online contact.
2. Parental permission for a child to be part of these groups must be sought – this way of working was never envisioned when initial permission was given. A reply to an email permission request is sufficient – save the reply in a separate Password protected folder. You should ensure that all parties (parents, safeguarding officer, PCC) are aware of who your Parish Safeguarding Officer is in order to discuss any concerns. This should include an understanding that recording is **NOT** permissible.
3. Young people over 13 should **ALSO** be asked for their permission to take part in on-line communication once parental permission has been sought and received. This can occur on the same correspondence from the parent.
4. Provide details of your Parish Safeguarding Officer and the Diocesan Safeguarding Team to all parents and participants, the latter is important as some PSOs will not be contactable as their contact details are via the parish office which may be closed for a period of time.
5. When selecting the platform for these conversations ensure as a leader you are very familiar with the ways in which you're able to manage participants as host for example Zoom includes the ability to mute individuals, locking meetings, and a 'Waiting Room' feature. If using Microsoft Teams be wary of sending a voice message to an absent member as the voice message is turned into an email and can be wrongly converted e.g. Mabel became babe in one instance Ensure the

invitation/link to the meeting is never shared publicly and use password protection wherever possible - as there have been instances of Zoom Bombing!
Also consider the minimum age the platform allows and the age of your youngest group member. Also consider how the contact information is shared – is it available to all members or 3rd parties?

6. A church or organisation account must be used to contact young people. Aim to set up an official account as soon as possible.
7. Aim for group communication to be the norm with **at least** 2 safely recruited leaders in each conversation. One of whom should be the church youth leader (volunteer or paid).
8. If it is necessary for a youth leader to have a one-to-one conversation with a young person have an extra leader be present as part of the chat – they do not take part but ensure accountability.
9. In communications avoid using emojis or icons or abbreviations to prevent misunderstanding.
10. Ensure the call organiser has the ability to mute/block participants in the event they are displaying/sharing anything unsuitable or illegal.
11. Make sure both leaders are live before young people arrive. Ideally use the same time slot as your normal youth group meeting and take a written recording of time, date, length and a register of who was present in the group. (Point 19)
12. Have a Code of Conduct for young people and leaders to agree to before they join the on-line group. Base it on your current meeting 'rules' for example respectful modes of behaviour and speech, appropriate physical presentation such as clothing, venue, environment and times. Also include a specific ban on screen sharing and recording conversations.
13. If a new young person wishes to join the group parental & personal permission should be obtained prior to them joining the group. Consider the risks before giving access to your virtual environment to those who you do not know. Therefore, consider allowing only on a personal recommendation of a current member.
14. Make sure young people are kept informed. This includes having a link to CEOP (Child Exploitation Online Protection Centre) or agencies such as Childline or NSPCC on permission forms. This ensures that young people can report anything they are concerned about.
15. Make sure parents stay informed about what you are doing with their child online – regularly update a parent's group either on Facebook, WhatsApp or update the church website to reflect what is currently available to young people.
16. As always, be inclusive – are there any young people from your group who would struggle to participate in this way, what extra support can be put in place for them?

17. As well as the video interface, there is usually space to write comments and participants can screen share too – consider use of this facility for example to write one-word answers to questions to share, be creative!
18. Be aware of and sensitive to technical difficulties! There can be issues with speakers and microphones! This technology will not necessarily be available to all young people. Use the software with leaders first to try and sort out any difficulties.
19. When forming the group give links to the parents/carers of online tutorials for the platform that will be being used and an online safety fact sheet for education and awareness.
20. For accountability, it will be important for all workers and volunteers to record contact they are having. Logging when chats happen, who was part of them, and the content covered. Ensure this is passed to a line manager as a regular part of supervision.
21. Do not record sessions or allow young people to – this is data capture and has detailed GDPR implications.

Additional sources of support:

Church of England [An update from the National Safeguarding Team regarding Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)

Government Guidance: [How to help safely](#)

[Kidscape](#) is a national charity providing a wide range of resources and support for those working with young people.

[YoungMinds](#) is a national charity supporting the mental health of young people.

[ChildNet International](#) is a non-profit organisation working to help make the internet a safe place for children.

[Click CEOP](#) is a resource for children and young people worried about online abuse to report concerns.

[ChildLine](#) is the national helpline for children and young people to talk about concerns (part of the NSPCC).

Sample forms for the following are available:

- Parental permission for on-line communication - (See [The Safer Environment Activies Guidance](#))
- Young person permission form – once parental permission given. (See [The Safer Environment Activies Guidance](#))
- Risk Assessment for use with on-line communication (See [The Safer Environment Activies Guidance](#))
- Digital Communication log (available direct from the Children and Young People Team)

For any further guidance or advice please contact:

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