

Advice for using video conferencing for youth work during Covid-19

This advice note is for churches seeking to continue their work amongst young people during Covid-19 via the use of video calling. Whilst this is an exciting opportunity that would not have been available ten years ago, there are potential safeguarding challenges that must be managed.

Existing Church of England safeguarding guidance should be followed in this new situation. [Safer Environment and Activities](#) contains practical advice on how to maintain high standards of safeguarding in day-to-day church activities. Whilst Covid-19 presents us with new challenges, the principles in this guidance can be straightforwardly adapted. In particular, we recommend that all churches observe the following four principles in relation to video calling with young people:

1. **Risk Assessment:** as with any activity in church with children or young people, video conferencing should be properly risk assessed. Risks should be identified as should ways to manage those risks.
2. **PCC Approval:** video conferencing should be approved by the PCC, who should see the risk assessments as described above and ensure these risks have been identified and are being managed appropriately.
3. **Observe the Code of Safer Working Practice:** The Code of Safer Working Practice is available [here](#). As with all other work with children and young people, we should ensure that the behaviour of those representing the church meets these standards during online communication and video calling.
4. **Observe the Lone Working rule:** This rule is set out in paragraph 2.1.2 of Safer Environment and Activities and applied to the online world in Section 4 of the same guidance. We strongly recommend reserving video calling for group chats rather than making one-to-one video calls.

In addition, this is a good time to remind ourselves of some resources that are available to help us learn about online safety. Churches are encouraged to make young people and their parents aware of these excellent resources, particularly because all of us are likely to be using the online world more during this period:

- [Thinkuknow](#) is a superb resource which has advice for children, parents and workers about keeping safe in the online world;
- [Parents Protect](#) provides resources for families who want to go online safely;

- [Childnet International](#) has, amongst other things, has a toolkit for parents and carers;
- The Diocese of Worcester have produced some helpful guidance about video calling with young people which shows how a local diocesan policy might be formed. It is available [here](#);
- ThirtyOne:Eight (formerly the Churches Child Protection Advisory Service) have produced some guidance regarding the use of online streaming technology, which is available [here](#);
- The South West Grid for Learning also have guidance available [here](#) about the use of online tools with children. Whilst it is focused on the school environment much of what is written here can also assist us in church settings.

Lastly, we have provided some further advice to key questions that have arisen regarding video conferencing over the past few days:

Question 1: What about consent?

Consent to participate in the video chat means that young people will be sharing their personal data online. You should obtain consent prior to engaging a young person in video calling. If the young person is under 13 consent should be obtained from their parents. If they are over 13 they can be asked for consent in their own right. For children over 13 there is no requirement in data protection law to obtain parental consent, but it is advisable to let parents know that their children are engaging in video calling within church.

Question 2: Which platform should we use?

The Church of England cannot endorse one particular platform. We would advise against the use of social media platforms that potentially share a lot of data, such as Facebook. Many churches have found that more business-focused applications such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams can be used to facilitate group video calls. These do not require each participant to have an account, for instance a Microsoft Office 365 account, in order to access them.

Question 3: What about GDPR?

You should be aware of the personal data that is gathered by the platform you use. When seeking consent as per Question 1 for video conferencing, you should be clear with parents and/or with young people that they are consenting not only to being part of a video call, but to this data being gathered. It is recommended that you don't record these calls. Please be aware that each of these platforms has their own privacy policy/notice. You should read these yourself and make parents/carers or young people aware of them – in particular, ensure that you review what cookies are active and change these settings to necessary cookies only.

Question 4: How do we make contact?

Many video conferencing platforms require the email address of participants. Best practice is to use parents' email addresses to invite a young person to a video call during church youth work.

Question 5: How do we protect workers and volunteers?

The rule about lone working is key here: at least two adult leaders should be involved in any video call, just as with all other work with children and young people in church. Additionally, leaders should use a church-only email address or profile when engaging in video calls, avoiding their personal contact details.

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