

# E-mentoring: Supporting young people on digital platforms

## A practical guide for remote mentoring relationships

The purpose of this guide is to support adults conducting 1-2-1 and group activities with young people on digital platforms. It is intended to complement existing safeguarding policies and procedures and not to replace.

Practitioners should always be operating under best practice guidelines, ensuring that the safety and wellbeing of young people is held as paramount at all times.

While adapting our programmes to a virtual environment can come with challenges, technology can have huge benefits in supporting young people during these uncertain times.

Feeling connected to others, maintaining some sense of normality and being able to access support when needed can have a hugely positive effect on young people's mental health.

There are some key points to consider when communication in the virtual environment:

1. Your policies
2. Connectivity and digital skills

3. Data and privacy
4. Platform
5. 1-2-1 conversations
6. Involving parents and carers
7. Reporting and recording incidents
8. Support for children and young
9. Support for staff and volunteers

Should you have any questions or require further support please speak to your local safeguarding team.



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## 1. Safeguarding

- All safeguarding and/or well-being concerns should be raised in line with the safeguarding policies and procedures of your organisation.
- Provide a separate email address for young people to raise their concerns, one where more than one adult has access to the inbox e.g. the safeguarding and/or well-being responsible person.
- Check your safeguarding policy and code of conduct before undertaking any virtual meetings.
- Complete a risk assessment for all activities, including virtual meetings.
- Ensure you have appropriate sign posting resources available and to hand prior to your virtual meeting.

## 2. Pre-virtual meeting

### 2.1 Preparing your space

- Where possible, set up the meeting against a neutral backdrop with no personal items on display. Make sure there are no features in the background that might enable your home or address to be identifiable (including turning off your location ID). If this isn't possible, blur your background or use a virtual background, depending on the platform functionality.
- Ensure you're dressed appropriately for the meeting.
- Alert any members of the household that your meeting is taking place and ensure they use appropriate language and behaviour if nearby.



## 2.2 Platform setting checklist

### Your chosen platform:

- Familiarise yourself with the platform you are using e.g. Zoom, Google Meets, Microsoft Teams. Each platform has different functions and settings, so do your research. If you have technical questions, it's best to contact customer services for the platform you're using.
- Conduct some test calls with colleagues to make sure you're comfortable and knowledgeable using your chosen platform.
- Conduct a risk assessment as you would with any other event with a young person/people.
- Always make sure the platform you are using is suitable for the age group. Check the age restrictions of the platform you are operating on, which will influence the consent form the young person may be required to complete.
- Ensure your platform software is up to date, as hackers can exploit these flaws to access personal information.

### Meeting settings:

- Practitioners should not use personal devices and should set up the virtual meeting using a professional business account.
- Password protect your virtual meeting to ensure only participants you have invited to the call are able to join.
- Customise your meeting so that participants know they have joined the right virtual meeting e.g. create a meeting topic title, add a meeting description or upload your organisation's logo.
- Most platforms also allow a waiting room function so you can control who can enter the meeting and allows you to let them join when you're ready. You can also disable the join before host function so participants cannot join the virtual meeting before you have started it.
- Make sure that only you as the host has the ability to share your screen, to prevent unwanted attendees from interrupting the meeting with intrusive sharing.
- Disable private conversations happening in your virtual meetings. Make sure that participants can contact the host and everyone in the group, but not individually to other participants on the call.
- Some platforms automatically record virtual meetings, so think about if this is right for your meeting, where you will store the files and for how long in compliance with data protection regulations. Make sure you have checked the settings so you don't unknowingly share data to the cloud.

### Platform settings check list:

- Host video is on
- Participant video is on
- Passwords are on
- Participants are muted upon entry
- Disable join before host
- Disable private conversations
- Share screen functions
- Whiteboard tools

## 2.3 Preparing young people for the virtual meeting

### Check list

- Ensure all parents/carers and young people participating in the virtual meeting have completed a consent form, agreeing to the code of conduct outlined by your organisation and consenting to participating in the virtual meeting. Make sure parents/carers and young people all understand the benefits and risks of virtual meetings.
- Send an agenda ahead of the virtual meeting so participants have an idea of what to expect and how long the meeting will last. Do they need to prepare anything? Will the virtual meeting be interactive?
- Communicate with participants the purpose of the meeting, as this will guide people in ensuring impactful engagements.
- Make sure you share the URL for the virtual meeting privately with participants and that it is not shared on social media.
- Encourage young people to keep their camera lens physically covered when not in use either with the lens cover for webcams or taping something over the lens for mobile/laptop. Some apps may be susceptible to hacking.

### Inclusivity

- Be mindful of internet access and inclusivity and remember not everyone has the same access to the internet. If young people are using mobile data rather than wifi connection, video can use up a lot of data and result in extra costs. Consider alternatives like calling without video or using landlines.
- Especially for issues such as not having an appropriate space or device to participate in a virtual meeting, limited data for video if broadband is unavailable, etc.
- The adult volunteer must encourage a young person to speak up on these issues and giving all an information sheet would better empower them to raise any concerns in advance and avoid an embarrassing situation.

### Send clear instructions

- Information technology, including what kind of equipment is required e.g. laptop, microphone, webcam.
- Recommended set up preparation e.g. a quiet space, neutral background.
- Resources that might be useful to read ahead of the virtual meeting.
- Ask participants to troubleshoot and check their audio and video is working in advance of the virtual meeting.

### Code of conduct may include

- Access to the platform being made through parent/ carers account if under the age of 18.
- An appropriate adult remaining in the room during the virtual meeting to support anyone under the age of 18.
- Young people under the age of 18 being 'dropped off' by their parent/guardian so staff know there is an appropriate adult nearby if required.
- Young people participating must be appropriately dressed and in a suitable, communal environment (not their bedroom).

- All members of the young person's household must be aware that the virtual meeting is taking place and ensure they use appropriate language and behaviour if nearby.
- Asking if the young person needs any additional support to enable them to feel safe and included in the virtual meeting.

## 3. During the virtual meeting

### 3.1 At the start of the call

- Members of staff (meeting hosts and co hosts) should join the call at least 5 minutes before the meeting is due to start to check they are happy with the settings.
- Check hosts and co-hosts understand each other's responsibilities during the call (e.g. who is in charge of admitting participants, muting/unmuting participants, locking the room). This is important as co-hosts will be able to help control the situation in case anyone bypasses your efforts and gets into the meeting uninvited.
- Ensure there is a minimum of two members of staff present throughout the virtual meeting who remain on the call until the young person/people have logged off.
- Ensure hosts/co-hosts have their name and pronouns correctly displayed, for example 'Jo Smith – she/her/hers' rather than 'Galaxy A2 phone'.
- When you are ready, admit people on to the call from the waiting room.

### 3.2 Create a safe space

- Invite everyone to introduce themselves and the pronouns they use.
- Run through basic housekeeping rules and ensure all young people know that the host/s are in charge of muting/unmuting participants, locking rooms, disabling videos or removing participants from the meeting if necessary.
- Let participants know that if they are worried about anything they can privately message the host/s using the chat function.
- Point out non verbal methods of communication (e.g. raising your hand if you want to speak, using the chat or reactions function).

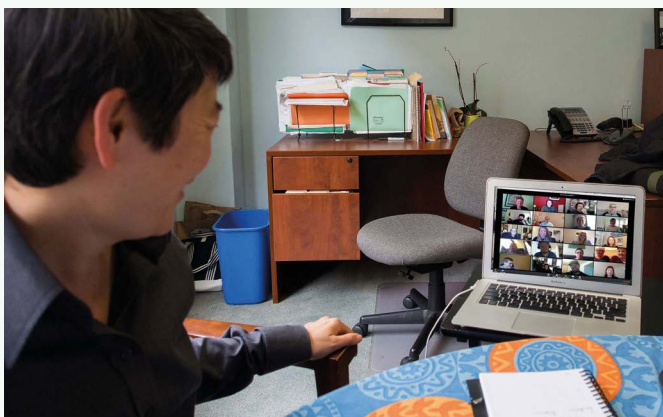


## Group agreement

- If you are meeting with an already established group, you may already have a group agreement. If not, now is a good time to create one. Ask participants to take it in turns to share their ideas and to add in any they think are particularly relevant to using video chat.
- Participants can share their ideas either vocally, using a chat or whiteboard function or private messaging the host/s.
- Alternatively host/s can have a pre-prepared group agreement ready to share with participants. Group agreements could include:
  - Confidentiality – agreeing to not share anything confidential outside of the group, using a private room or headphones so other members of the household cannot hear (including when confidentiality might need to be broken).
  - Being respectful of others.
  - Using appropriate language / behaviour throughout the call - any form of abuse or bullying will not be tolerated and participants will be removed immediately from the call.
  - Limiting distractions (e.g. try not to use mobile phones during the meeting).
  - No pressure to say or do anything you do not want to.
  - Participants agree not to take screenshots, pictures or recordings of the meeting.
  - Participants will message the host/s if they feel uncomfortable or need support during the meeting.

## Suggested introductory activities

- As well as a group agreement you could start your meeting by asking participants to take it in turns to say how they are feeling on a scale of 1-5 and sharing their reason, if they feel comfortable. Hosts should begin and set the example, e.g. 'I am feeling a 3 today, I am finding it hard not being able to see my friends in person and I'm getting bored easily. However, being on this call has cheered me up.' If participants do not want to share with the group, they can message the host privately. This activity will encourage participants to think about their mental health and wellbeing and normalise the practice of talking about feelings and emotions. If it is a recurring meeting, you can repeat this at the start of each session.
- Please refer to the resources section of the document to find further advice and ideas on how to look after the mental health and wellbeing of your young person/people.



## 4. After the virtual meeting

- Send a survey after your virtual call so young people can feedback anonymously on how they felt it went and what could have been better.
- Ensure there are minutes from the meeting or a log of the call.
- Debrief with your cohost(s).
- Follow up with the actions from your virtual meeting to make it clear what the next steps are. This could include the date and time of your next virtual meeting or useful links/resources spoken about.
- Continue to contact all young people using normal procedures e.g. emailing, making it clear that practitioners and young people should not try to contact one another using virtual calls outside of these pre-arranged meetings.

## 5. Resources

See below for some helpful resources and links to further reading:

- [Google drive](#) folders or [Dropbox](#) can be created to share resources while on the virtual meeting. [Trello](#) boards can also be set up for specific projects and used interactively.
- [Houseparty: How to have fun and stay safe](#)
- [Ten ways to stay mentally healthy while physically distancing](#)
- [How to stay safe online](#)
- [Anti-Bullying Pro Support Centre](#)
- [Young Minds: What to do if you're anxious about coronavirus](#)
- [Mind: Coronavirus and your wellbeing](#)
- [Unicef: How teenagers can protect their mental health during coronavirus](#)
- [Anna Freud: On My Mind - Self Care](#)
- [Happiful: How to help children manage anxious thoughts](#)

There are a lot of free options for connecting with young people remotely. It's vital to do your research and figure out which is the best one for your organisation and young people, along with the software settings, terms and conditions and age restrictions. These are the most commonly used platforms:

- [Zoom](#)
- [Google Meet](#)
- [Microsoft Teams](#)
- [Google Hangouts](#)
- [Skype](#)
- [Whatsapp Business](#)



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