

Engaging with Children Online

It is great to see so many parishes finding creative ways to keep building their relationships with children and young people.

As many are looking at doing this online, you'll find below some advice and safe practice that we have pulled together with Steph Haynes and information kindly provided by our friends and colleagues in Worcester Diocese.

1. Consider carefully which online platform to use. Be aware that Skype, FaceTime and WhatsApp all share contact details without permission so should be avoided or only used in groups where everyone has consented to sharing. Don't use these for 'open' groups with children as you may inadvertently connect children with people they don't know.
2. Consider a video conferencing platform such as Zoom (<https://zoom.us>). Zoom is free to use for a 40 minute chat, or you can have a 'paid for' account that allows you to host longer sessions. All you need is an email account to get set up. Be aware no online platform is completely secure.
3. Any new online group should be treated as 'new ministry' and so please obtain the following permissions:
 - a. PCC: please make sure there is a record of permission in the minutes.
 - b. Parental consent: please make sure you have a completed consent form from parents/carers.

They must be aware of the date and time of the online meetings, and which leaders will be present (you'll need at least 2 with a current DBS). For children, you will need to make clear to parents/carers that they must be present at each session - they must make themselves known at the start and can then be in the background, but must stay in the room. Send these details out in advance and make sure they reply confirming consent and compliance. Keep a copy of these replies. For details of consent required, see the appendix,

4. Do not make the meetings ID public - in Zoom use a password or use the waiting room feature so you are in control of who joins the meeting.
5. Manage screen sharing carefully. In Zoom, change the screen sharing option to 'host only' so that participants cannot share their screens. As the meeting host, you are also in control of 'mute' and can put participants back in the waiting room if necessary.
6. Build good relationships with parents: if online engagement is new to parents, it would be a good idea to have a 'practice session' with just parents so they know what will happen. This is also a great way to connect with parents you don't know very well.

7. Manage leader ratios: the same good practice applies online as face to face. If you break into small groups, the convener must stay in the main room. There must be 2 leaders in each small group. If one leader has to leave the small group room for some reason, the children must be 'returned' with a leader to the main leader room. Make sure both leaders are present online before the children arrive. Children must never be online with only one leader.
8. Recruit leaders in exactly the same way you would for a face to face group – all recruitment and safeguarding good practice still applies.
9. Leaders should only be online from family rooms – no bedrooms.
10. Everyone should be fully dressed in day clothes – no nightwear.
11. If a child arrives in nightwear or is not in a family room, please ask them to change/move.
12. Meeting invites should only be sent to named individuals. If you receive a request to attend from someone you don't know, use your usual registration process before you admit them to the online session.
13. Always be inclusive. Be aware of the needs of all children who might struggle to participate. If a child is unusually quiet during a session or never participates, do follow this up with their supervising adult – don't always assume it's a problem, some children are quiet.
14. If you use the comments function, then monitor it at all times and do not use any form of private messaging.
15. DO NOT RECORD. If you were to do this, you must have permission for data capture and make arrangements for secure storage etc.
16. Make sure all your leaders are aware of the usual safeguarding protocols. If anyone is ever concerned about the welfare or safety of a child, young person or vulnerable adult, they MUST follow the safeguarding procedure.

If you need help or advice about any of this, please join our Thursday 2.00pm drop-in which focusses on mission and ministry with children & families, young people & young adults, or contact:

Liz Dumain: Director of Parish Mission Support lizd@cofebirmingham.com

Emma Sargeant: Growing Younger Advisor emmas@cofebirmingham.com

Steph Haynes: Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor stephh@cofebirmingham.com

If you ever believe there is immediate danger to a child, young person or vulnerable adult – dial 999.

Appendix

Parent Carers must send you confirmation that they agree to the following:

- An adult will be present in the room at all times, available to help with the technology.
- The adult will make themselves known to the leaders at the beginning of the session.
- The child(ren) will be fully dressed in day clothes.
- The child(ren) will be in a family room, not a bedroom or roaming with a mobile device.
- You can turn the video off if you prefer and participate by audio.
- We will not be recording the session.
- Please keep the microphone muted as much as possible during the session so that all children can be heard in their turn.