



Video Conferencing with Young People

As the church adapts to these extraordinary times, when we can no longer gather in person, we are navigating and exploring new ways of connecting. Even though your youth group may not be meeting in person, our young people still need opportunities to stay connect with one another, and receive input and discipleship. As we look for ways in which they can be nurtured, you may want to consider connecting with your young people online. Here is some advice on how to do this safely.

Please adhere to the following points:

Video conferencing software

- Avoid the use of Skype / Facebook – these are social media tools and as such share contact details with all users, you may inadvertently connect young people up with other people as an unintended consequence.
- Do not live-stream a youth group session on an open platform. Ensure that it is an invite only group, where you know who will be attending, particularly if there is youth group interaction.
- Instead use a video conferencing platform such as Zoom: <https://zoom.us/>
This is free to use (will give you a 40 min chat) or a paid for account allows you to host longer sessions. Users only need to have an email address for account setup.

Additional permission is required

The use of this of this technology is beyond the normal running of your group and therefore needs explicit permission before use. Please consider seeking approval in the following ways:

1. **You must have Parish/Diocesan approval** – speak to your Diocesan Youth Enablers, Vicar, churchwarden, Vestry to discuss and notify them of these changes.
2. **You need parental consent** – set up an email which explains what you are doing, the date and time of the video conferencing sessions, which youth leaders are participating and what you roughly will be doing. Ask for a reply as a form of consent and keep these emails in a separate folder. Ensure your Diocesan Youth Enablers are informed of what you are doing.
3. **Use parents/carers email address** to send the meeting invite to, as young people may not check their emails as regularly as their parents. This will ensure parents/carers are aware that it is happening and can set up the young people to access the session appropriately with any oversight if they want.

Safeguarding practices

- 'Normal' youth group rules would apply including with regards to recruitment and safeguarding process i.e. you need at least 2 safely recruited youth leaders present who would normally have 'real time' contact with this group. Make sure both leaders are online before young people arrive.
- Ideally use the same time slot as your normal youth group meeting. If new youth members want to join the group, they should have 'normal' group consent forms filled in as well, so they can attend the youth group when it re-forms in person.

- If you are recruiting new leaders for this group, then a safe recruitment process must be followed before they can participate. When using new leaders, if possible, team them up with an experienced youth leader on any Zoom meetings.
- Codes of conduct – appropriate behaviour for leaders should be followed as you would expect in the usual youth group setting, it might be worth a discussion with your leaders around this before the meeting happens.
- 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?

Before you gather online

- Trial the use of the video conferencing software with other youth leaders before using it with your young people. This will allow you to trouble shoot any problems that may arise when you run your online session.
- Review the default settings of your video conferencing software. Zoom default settings allow participant screen sharing – please disable this setting, to reduce the risk of young people sharing unintended content with the whole group.
- If you are sharing your screen, ensure that you are only sharing the part of the screen you wish them to see (e.g. presentations, video), not your whole screen. Remove anything from your desktop and close documents that may be unsuitable for others to see, including documents that may contain private data.
- Carefully consider which Zoom functions you want to use, and test them out before beginning your session. Screen sharing, messaging board for comments, fun backgrounds, etc. What will enrich the experience, and what will be a distraction?
- Be aware of, and sensitive to, technical difficulties! There can be issues with speakers and microphones. Chances are your young people will have this sorted, and the leaders may have issues!
- If you have any issues with background noise, you can encourage participants to mute their microphone when they are listening, and unmute it when they would like to speak.

During your online session

- **DO NOT RECORD YOUR ONLINE SESSION.** Most video conferencing software allows for the session to be recorded – this is an option for the host of the meeting only. Avoid doing this, as you would need separate permission for data capture and there are all sorts of issues around storing this safely.
- Creative ideas include:
 - Using the message board to writing one-word answers to questions shared, be creative!
 - Encouraging young people to take photos using their phones around a particular Bible verse or theme. They could share the image and verse with the group in the Zoom sessions (You could use creative apps like <https://www.youversion.com/bible-lens/> or Canva to make your own graphics)

While we may not be able to be together physically, we still worship, encourage and support one another. Do please be in touch with any further questions or issues, and we will endeavour to help or point you to someone who can.

“So let’s do it—full of belief, confident that we’re presentable inside and out. Let’s keep a firm grip on the promises that keep us going. He always keeps his word. Let’s see how inventive we can be in encouraging love and helping out, not avoiding worshipping together but spurring each other on, especially as we see the big Day approaching.”
 - Hebrews 10: 22-25 (The Message)

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