

Coronavirus - Children and Youth Events Online – Guidelines from Salvation Army Safeguarding Unit

<https://ourhub.salvationarmy.org.uk/Safeguarding/Encyclopedia%20Safeguardia/Coronavirus%20-%20Children%20and%20Youth%20Events%20Online.aspx>

In view of the [coronavirus pandemic](#) and the implementation of social distancing, you could consider engaging with [children](#) (under 16) and [young people](#) (16/17) online through video conferencing platforms. This article focuses on working online with under 18s, but if you are delivering sessions for young adults (18-25), the considerations below on conduct, dress, backdrop, conduct etc. will still apply.

This can be done, but of course there are some safeguarding considerations which need to be taken into account.

Working online in this way is much like [working in a closed room with children and young people](#). In many ways it is much like teaching. As such, the principles of openness and transparency should underpin your work with under 18s on any online video conferencing platform.

Things to consider:

The Platform

Consider which platform you plan to use and how you plan to deliver your sessions. How many people will be able to participate, and how will you engage participants? Are there team rooms? Is there a comments section? If so how will these be monitored?

Ideally, the platform should be able to record online sessions. This would enhance openness and transparency, and in the event of an allegation or complaint would allow the session to be viewed again. This will also allow for random monitoring to ensure online safeguarding guidelines are being followed.

Sessions should be 'logged'. This can be done using standard [session logs](#) or, preferably, by recording the session and saving the file.

Profiles

The platform you use should be [one which can be controlled or monitored / checked by The Salvation Army](#), so that even if you are using your own device you should log on using a Salvation Army profile which a TSA colleague has access to. This is about openness and transparency, and managing risk to children and young people and also about reducing the threat of false or malicious allegations.

If you do not have a Salvation Army email address/profile - ask a TSA employee/Officer to set up a profile. This could be a corps profile which multiple people have access to in order to enhance transparency.

Monitoring

Delivering sessions which are not monitored is not safe for online sessions with under 18s from a leader's home; it puts both the leader and participant in a very personal and even intimate position, which would not happen offline. There is the potential for infatuations to develop, the potential for false allegations, and of course, the potential for [grooming](#). One-to-one sessions (eg. discipleship) should not be done online. Deliver group sessions only.

As such a programme of monitoring should be implemented. Monitoring is both a quality control measure and a safeguarding check. Having a monitor observing whole or part sessions can enhance openness and transparency.

- It should be determined in advance who will do any monitoring. This may be your line manager. It should not be a close friend as there is the potential here for conflict of interest
- It should also be determined how monitoring will be done, whether this takes the form of an observation of a full session / part of a session, whether it is announced to the host in advance, what the participants will be told about the observation, how often checking will be done, when it is done - at the beginning, middle or end of a session etc.
- Monitoring should certainly be done early in the programme (within the first three sessions).
- If there is a Mediator/Facilitator they may be able to fulfil the role of Monitor (see below).
- Any notable incidents should be logged, and where necessary, a [Notice of Concern](#) may need to be submitted to the [Safeguarding Department](#).

Leaders should stick to session content. Participants may feel their relationship with you is more 'personal' because the session is happening in the homes of both leader and participant, so better not to lead participants further down that road eg. through discussing your home or personal life (beyond the cursory).

Mediating

It can be quite tricky to manage a group online through an unfamiliar programme, so there should be a main host and a mediator/facilitator. The mediator should monitor any comments sections and filter out comments that bully, harass, intimidate, incite violence, comments that are racist, homophobic, etc.

The mediator should also be able to isolate participants into a 'room' when there is a breach of [acceptable conduct](#) so the issue can be discussed (however, bearing in mind the points above on openness and transparency).

It should be clear to the participants what the rules are for the session. You should start your session with clear rules on what is and isn't acceptable. These are almost the same as would be expected face to face. Some additional rules could be around taking screenshots - ie. do not take screenshots of participants. Participants should also keep hands in view on the table/desk.

Appropriate online behaviours should be similar to one-to-one working, and apply to both leaders and participants, e.g. switch off mobile phones (unless they are accessing the session through a phone!)

Where participants begin to display inappropriate behaviour, mediators should consider ending sessions quickly and inform line-manager what has happened and why.

Location and Backdrop

Sessions should not be held in your bedroom, and ideally also not in the home of participants (although this may have some practical difficulties where there is no other quiet space, but this is to protect the leader from the child/young person feeling the leader has entered their personal and intimate space)

Be careful with the backdrop. Ensure that everything participants will see in the background is appropriate, e.g. no dirty underwear, nude pictures/sculptures.

Think of the space for online work as a classroom or meeting room - consider it to be a TSA / public area.

Clothing

Be dressed for work - and be fully dressed. Always have a professional appearance - the same as in a classroom or meeting room, so no dressing gowns or pyjamas if you are delivering the sessions at home! Wear clothes on your bottom half, even if this is below screen level - remember you may have to stand up at some point (eg. toilet break).

Background Checking

Anyone leading a session should have undergone the same level of recruitment and [training](#) as a person working face to face with children. ie. two references, [DBS/PVG/Access NI/Garda checks](#), [Safe and Sound](#) training etc.

No-one who is on the Children's [Barred List](#) should lead or participate in online sessions involving children and young people.

Involving parents

Parents should know the schedule of online sessions, and should be sent online safeguarding guidelines (this resource will be provided by end of 19/03/2020). Ideally, invite parents to 'meet the leader' in first / early online session. Parents should be told who to contact (eg. line manager) and how to contact them if they have any concerns about online sessions