

Invitation

It is important that only the people who plan to attend the group are given access to the joining details of the online platform (e.g. Zoom). One way of doing this is by sending personal emails to each of the people who have agreed to join with a link to the online platform, including asking participants not to share the link with anyone else.

Chat

If the meeting is online it is recommended to turn the chat function off. Its use is liable to be distracting and could be abused. This means that group members will need to be able to contact the leader independently, by email, WhatsApp or text. The chat function must always be disabled if children or young people are attending.

Visibility

In an online situation, it is advisable to invite participants to be in video mode throughout the meeting. Group leaders should use 'gallery view' to see all participants at all times. Nevertheless, all participants should be free to control their camera and mute functionalities.

Breakout rooms

Group leaders need to be able to create a breakout room in case someone in the group needs to take time out. If the person concerned takes time out, an appropriately experienced and empathetic person should be offered to accompany them.

If the group is large and needs to break out into small groups (of 5, for example), then it is a good idea to plan ahead whether the groups will be formed randomly or selected ahead of time.

Recording

Recordings of the session should not be made, and group participants should be explicitly reassured about this.

Participants' location

Before the group session begins, group participants should be reminded not to allow children to be within earshot or able to watch the filmed material.

Enabling good conversations

Just as for physical meetings, the facilitator should ensure that participants are able to contribute as freely as possible. Even if the group is relatively small, it may be helpful to invite participants to raise their hand when wishing to speak, to avoid speaking over each other. It is also important to allow space for people to reflect and think, and not be worried about silences.

Prayer and worship

When using prayers or liturgy that invites the whole group to join in, it is probably best to ask one person to respond on behalf of everyone, while the rest of the group joins in, but 'on mute'. Silent prayer even on 'zoom' can be very helpful and powerfully communal.