



The Fostering Communities Programme

Briefing paper: Keeping in contact and connected via Microsoft Teams (Teams)

Contents

1. Background	03
1.1 About The Fostering Network	03
1.2 The Fostering Communities programme	03
1.3 About this briefing paper	03
2. Introduction to Teams	05
2.1 What is Teams?	05
2.2 What is it used for?	06
2.3 Devices	06
2.4 Features	06
2.5 How to join a Teams call	07
3. Using Teams	06
3.1 What you need	06
3.2 Tips for the best experience	06
3.3 Joining a meeting with the Teams App	06
3.4 Joining a meeting without the Teams App	06
3.5 Viewing and interacting with the speakers/participants	06
3.6 Raise hand feature	07
3.7 Mute and unmute	07
3.8 Headphones	07
3.9 Putting attendees on hold	07
3.10 Private chat	07
3.11 The Lobby	07
3.12 Leaving the meeting	07
3.12 Recordings	07
4. Further information on using Teams	08
4.1 Problems with low bandwidth	08
4.2 Security and safeguarding adults and children	08
4.3 Joining a webinar	08
4.4 Education	09
4.5 Children's wellbeing	09
5. Resources from The Fostering Network	10
6. Best security and safeguarding practice, to keep children safe	10
7. Contact details	12

1. Background

1.1 About The Fostering Network

[The Fostering Network](#) is the UK's leading fostering charity. We are the essential network for fostering, bringing together everyone who is involved in the lives of fostered children. We support foster carers to transform children's lives and we work with fostering services and the wider sector to develop and share best practice. We work to ensure all fostered children and young people experience stable family life and we are passionate about the difference foster care makes. We champion fostering and seek to create vital change, so that foster care is the very best it can be.

We have been leading the fostering agenda for more than 40 years, influencing and shaping policy and practice at every level. As a membership organisation we bring together individuals and services involved in providing foster care across the UK. We have approximately 60,000 individual members and nearly 400 organisational members, both local authorities and independent fostering providers, which cover 75 per cent of foster carers in the UK. Our views are informed by our members, as well as through research; in this way we aim to be the voice of foster care.

1.2 The Fostering Communities programme

[Fostering Communities](#) is a national programme of improvement and support led by The Fostering Network in Wales and funded by the Welsh Government from 2020 – 2023.

The programme will support looked after children and their foster families throughout Wales, by improving wellbeing outcomes for children and increasing the competence, confidence and motivation of the fostering workforce.

The programme is underpinned by a fostering community shared power model, built around workstreams and interventions, which will aim to improve wellbeing in line with the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.

Through our bespoke programme of work, we will improve the experience of looked after children in Wales, support foster carers to provide permanent, stable and aspiring homes, and ensure that children in foster care are able to make a positive and valued contribution to their own wellbeing. Briefing papers for all the programme workstreams/projects are available upon request.

1.3 About this briefing paper

As part of our [Fostering Communities programme](#) we will be producing a series of briefing papers for the fostering community in Wales which will cover a range of relevant and useful topics.

This briefing paper will provide a short overview of Microsoft Teams. It will explain how to use it, the benefits of being able to keep in touch in this way, the

safeguarding issues that need to be addressed, along with all the security measures that can be utilised to ensure safety is paramount.

Please note - we cannot guarantee the safety or security of any online video conferencing platforms. This paper focuses specifically on Teams as it has become a platform of choice for many foster carers, fostering services and schools.

2. Introduction to Teams

With everyone having to stay home, meeting up with friends, family, school or work colleagues is having to be done very differently. This is where online video services are becoming so important to people. Teams, along with other live video chat services, are proving hugely significant in allowing users to continue to have contact and connect with people outside their immediate family or those they are in lockdown with. This has proved essential to allow people to connect with others.

Both social workers and teachers are on the frontlines of enabling services to make a sudden shift to remote contact, supervision and learning. It has proved to be very useful for teachers in schools, as it allows them to allocate tasks and communicate with their pupils. Within a matter of weeks, they have had to quickly adapt their engaging, aligned, in-person contact into online contact. This incredible change has shed light on the inspiring ingenuity, passion and commitment of those who support our communities but also raises issues of digital access and safeguarding.

It is important to recognise the significant positives that digital services like Teams have afforded us whilst we are all meant to be staying at home – the ability to connect for work and social life has been invaluable for both adults and children.

It's very clear that enabling remote working, contact and school access is more important than ever, and that it will continue to have lasting value beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.1 What is Teams?

Teams is a video conferencing platform that allows users to chat both 1-2-1, or to hold live meetings and webinars (sometimes with large numbers of other users). It enables people to work together and share information via a common space. One of the most important features of Teams is that it is free to use. It is very user friendly and can be accessed on a number of devices. It also has useful features like document collaboration, 1-2-1 chat, team chat and more.

2.2 What is it used for?

Microsoft Teams is used to allow participants to engage in live video chat and file sharing with one or many other users. Currently, it is being used by millions of people for both professional and social purposes. It is being used for work - allowing organisations, businesses and schools to keep running (whilst their people are based at home), by allowing individuals to join meetings with colleagues remotely. It

is also being used extensively during the COVID19 lockdown to allow people to connect with each other and stay in touch with friends and loved ones that they cannot currently see in real life. Schools have found it particularly beneficial and teachers are able to keep in contact with pupils.

2.3 Devices

You can use Microsoft Teams on a laptop or PC, a tablet (e.g. iPad) or a phone (android or iPhone). On a laptop or PC, you can access Microsoft Teams through your web browser or download the app.

2.4 Features

There are some useful features on Microsoft Teams and it is worth familiarising yourself with all of the settings to look at the range of different things you can do. Key to Teams' appeal is its integration with Office 365 and software such as Word, Excel and PowerPoint. For example, it is possible to invite large numbers of people onto the same Teams call and it has a breakout room function which allows the host to assign users to different rooms for a set period of time to allow them to talk to each other in smaller groups. This makes it highly suitable for conferences, seminars or classes where it is useful to engage larger numbers of people. It is also very easy to use for social reasons, keeping in touch with family and friends. You can either just 'meet up' for a chat or have an online quiz or even play bingo. It doesn't really matter what you do, it is keeping in touch that matters.

2.5 How to join a Teams call

To join a Teams meeting you just need to click on the link you will have been sent as an invite. This will take you to a page where you can choose to either join on the web or download the desktop app. If you already have the Teams app, the meeting will open there automatically.

If you don't have a Teams account and the organiser of the meeting has allowed it, you may have to option to enter your name to join the meeting as a guest. If you have a Teams account, select 'sign in' to join with access to the meeting. Depending on the organiser's settings, you may either join the meeting right away or go to the 'lobby' where people in the meeting can 'admit you'.

An extra security feature on Teams is you can make simple changes to lock down who you allow into the meetings. In the Teams Admin Centre you can change 'automatically admit people' to 'everyone in your organisation'. You can also turn off the feature that allows dial-in users to bypass the lobby.

If someone is in the meeting who shouldn't be or a person who is being disruptive, it is possible for the host of the meeting to remove them. They just need to open the participant list and click the X next to the name of the person you want to remove.

3. Using Teams

3.1 What you need

- A video camera, either built into your device or a separate webcam (most modern computers, smartphones and tablets have this built in).
- A microphone, either built into your device or in the webcam (most modern computers, smartphones and tablets have this built in), or a phone.
- An internet connection.
- The Teams App – this is available to download for free on laptops [here](#) and for tablets and mobile devices through the app stores.

3.2 Tips for the best experience

- Use a laptop/desktop computer rather than phone or iPad.
- Join a meeting with your microphone off then turn your microphone on and off when you are ready to contribute.
- Set the camera so it is at eye level and not with the light source (window) behind you

3.3 Joining a meeting via the Teams App

- In the app or web browser, select **Calendar** on the left side of the app to see your meetings. Find the meeting you want, and then select **Join**.
- This can also be done in Outlook by opening the calendar, finding the meeting and selecting **Join Teams Meeting**.

3.4 Joining a meeting without the Teams App

Anyone with a business or an email account can participate as a guest in Teams, with full access to team chats, meetings, and files. Only people who are outside of your organisation, can be added as guests. People from within your organisation can join as regular team members.

- Go to the meeting invite and select **Join Microsoft Teams Meeting**.
- That will open a webpage, where you'll see two choices: **Download the Windows app** and **Join on the web instead**. If you join on the web, you can use either Microsoft Edge or Google Chrome. Your browser may ask if it's OK for Teams to use your microphone and camera. Be sure to allow it so you'll be seen and heard in your meeting.
- Enter your name and choose your audio and video settings. Select **Phone audio** if you want to listen to the meeting on your mobile phone.
- When you're ready, press **Join now**.
- This will bring you into the lobby. Teams will notify the meeting organiser that you are there, and someone in the meeting can then admit you.

3.5 Viewing and interacting with the speaker/participants

As previously mentioned, it is important to note that originally only nine people will be visible to you on your screen at any one time, even if there are more than that in the 'meeting'. Unfortunately, you have no choice on the nine you can see, Microsoft chooses for you.

3.6 Raise hand feature

The raise hand feature is a new addition to Microsoft Teams that allows you to notify the host and other participants that you have something to add to the on-going conversation. The feature is quite useful for companies that hold webinars with multiple participants and schools that remotely conduct classes.

3.7 Mute and unmute

Unless you are speaking, it is a good practice to keep yourself on mute. Apart from anything else it helps others to hear the person who is speaking as it removes background noise and chat.

If you need to mute all the other participants that are already in the meeting as well as new participants joining the meeting, select 'Manage Participants' and click on 'Mute All'.

3.8 Headphones

Using headphones or ear buds will reduce feedback and echoing when people are speaking. It also keeps your conversation more private at your end.

3.9 Putting attendees on hold

The Hold feature within Teams pauses the current call for all participants on that call. Teams will notify all parties that the call has been put on hold and for that duration no one will be able to hear one another.

3.10 Private chat

From within the Admin Centre, on the left side, click Settings and then click Services & Add-ins and click on Microsoft Teams. This will bring up the settings for Teams. Expand messaging and Allow users to chat privately, click the switch on or off to whatever is preferred at the time.

3.11 The Lobby

The lobby is a layer of security that helps you ensure only invited users attend the meetings you create. When you invite users by email, they're directed to a virtual lobby. Once there, someone from within your organisation then admits the guest to the meeting.

3.12 Leaving the meeting

When the session is finished, you simply click on the red Leave/Hang Up button on the options panel. If you are the organiser of the meeting, you can choose to end the meeting for all by clicking on the More Options icon and selecting End Meeting.

3.13 Recordings

Meetings may be recorded, for participants to review and for those unable to attend. Anyone who has recording enabled can record a meeting. It is saved in Microsoft

Stream and the person who started the recording will receive an email from Stream when the recording is available.

4. Further information on using Teams

4.1 Problems with low bandwidth

Low bandwidth¹ capacity can hamper the connection in Teams and it can be very frustrating to manage/attend meetings as it will keep freezing or cutting out. There are things you can do to minimise the bandwidth used. [Click here for more information.](#)

4.2 Security and safeguarding

Please visit the Teams website for detailed information about security settings and terms of service. Click [here](#)

It's worth keeping track of who children are spending time with friends on Team calls and for younger or more vulnerable children they should be more clearly supervised and supported.

As explained above, security features on Teams mean the person who has set up the call will screen users before they join a call and the person will be held in a virtual lobby until allowed into the meeting

There are also functions for the host to stop or prevent screen sharing unless this is authorised. Although your child will not always be the host on such calls, it is important that they are aware of the privacy and security settings available to them on Teams and for older children, as with any chat over webcam, others can screen shot and capture what they are saying and doing.

It's important to remain vigilant to the fact that, unfortunately, Teams could be used for negative purposes - it can be used for grooming, it could be used to share abusive or indecent images or videos and it can be used to bully and embarrass others.

Please also familiarise yourself with the safeguarding policies of your fostering service and child's school especially around digital safety including virtual meetings.

4.3 Joining a webinar

The Fostering Network's Fostering Potential programme has produced a useful guide on to how to join a webinar using Microsoft Teams. Please click here for [details](#).

¹ The term *bandwidth* refers to the amount of data that can be transferred over an Internet connection per second.

4.4 Education

During the pandemic parents and carers are learning what it's like to home school their children. Trained teachers are working with parents, carers and students remotely and the software of choice for this is usually Microsoft Teams.

Because Teams is a group chat and collaboration application, it makes it easy for people to share information, chat online and work together remotely. All these benefits mean it can be ideal for schools and students.

It works with other Microsoft applications, such as Outlook, OneNote, OneDrive and the rest of Microsoft's suite of programs, which makes it ideal for teachers to allocate tasks and keep in touch with students. Students can also submit work that can be assessed by the teacher and passed back to students, all without having to deal with actual pieces of paper.

Teams is free for schools to use as long as they are using Office 365, which most will be in order to have access to Microsoft programs. It is also multi-platform which means teachers and students can use it regardless of what computer, tablet or smartphone they have.

Where there are multiple subjects, schools can create channels for each one, information is kept separate. For example, there could be one channel for maths, one for geography and one for history. Channels are dedicated sections within Teams where conversations can be organised by specific topics, projects or subjects etc. Channels can be open to all team members, or, if you need a more select audience, they can be private. Standard channels are for conversations that everyone in a team can participate in and private channels limit communication to a subset of people in a team.

4.5 Children's wellbeing

The widespread use of apps such as Teams and [Zoom](#) (and the current level of dependency on it) has also raised questions among psychologists and others about how using screens and technology can affect our wider health and wellbeing. This is particularly of concern as we are increasingly expected to manage multiple Teams calls with multiple other callers, and this has been described as creating a kind of 'Teams fatigue', rather like 'Zoom Fatigue'.

Speaking and communicating over screens may mean that we lose some intimacy and easy connection that we relied on previously. It is also the case for children that people can be harder to 'read' over webcam, so that like other forms of social media we can become desensitised to how people react to us and may have to think harder about how we express empathy and kindness in these circumstances. Apps like Zoom and Teams can also be a challenging and confusing medium for younger children, who are used to more varied physical forms of play to communicate and are naturally less verbal than older children. They may miss their friends and may well struggle to replicate their relationships via video link in a way that works well for them.

5. Resources from The Fostering Network

Web based information:

thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/advice-information/looking-after-fostered-child/fostering-in-digital-world

Publications

Safer Caring: a new approach (by Jacky Slade)

This book by The Fostering Network includes a chapter on [Safer Caring in a Digital World](#). It is essential reading for all foster carers.

There is also an updated [supplementary resource](#) on this topic.

Fostering in a digital world: a common-sense guide

Fostered children deserve to live normal lives, but how can we balance this with keeping them as safe as possible in an increasingly digital world? [Fostering in a Digital World](#).

Factsheets

There are also a number of relevant factsheets available on our website. Click [here](#) to access them.

6. Best security and safeguarding practice, to keep children safe

CEOP, the Child Exploitation Online Protection Centre

If you want to report someone who is behaving suspiciously online towards a child, you should immediately speak with your supervising social worker and the child's/young person's social worker. If need be, you and the social worker will then the emergency services, by calling 999, or otherwise make a report to CEOP, the Child Exploitation Online Protection Centre. <http://www.ceop.gov.uk/>

The UK Safer Internet Centre

Have a helpline for professionals who work with children across the UK - support, giving advice and mediation with online safety issues. The helpline can be contacted by:

Email: helpline@saferinternet.org.uk or

Tel: [0844 3814772](tel:08443814772) (calls on this number are charged at local call rate)

Child sexual abuse images

Criminal content online, illegal child abuse images should be reported to the [Internet Watch Foundation](#).

Fearless

National website to access non-judgemental information and advice about crime and criminality. Fearless provides a safe place to give information to about crime - 100% anonymously. Click [here](#) for more information.

Parents.com

There is some very useful information to be found [here](#), which is all about keeping your children safe.

Childline

National free and confidential advice and support for all young people up to 19 years old. Click [here](#). Tel: 0800 1111.

Online terrorism

This can be reported to the police at [report terrorism](#).

Hate speech

Online content which incites hatred on the grounds of race, religion, disability, sexual orientation or gender can be reported to the police or via [True Vision](#).

O2 and NSPCC

Online safety helpline for technical support on safety and privacy settings. Click [here](#). Tel: 0808 800 5002.

Internet Watch Foundation

This is a website where you can report criminal content online. Illegal child abuse images should be report to them [here](#).

Fearless

National website to access non-judgemental information and advice about crime and criminality. Fearless provides a safe place to give information to about crime - 100% anonymously. Click [here](#) for more information.

Parents.com

There is some very useful information to be found [here](#), which is all about keeping your children safe.

Childline

National free and confidential advice and support for all young people up to 19 years old. Click [here](#). Tel: 0800 1111.

Online terrorism

This can be reported to the police at [report terrorism](#).

Hate speech

Online content which incites hatred on the grounds of race, religion, disability, sexual orientation or gender can be reported to the police or via [True Vision](#).

O2 and NSPCC

Online safety helpline for technical support on safety and privacy settings. Click [here](#). Tel: 0808 800 5002

Further resources and information for parents and carers about online safety and other issues

- <https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/>
- <https://parentinfo.org/>

- www.net-aware.org.uk and www.nspcc.org.uk – for checking out specific apps and what children and young people (and parents) say about them. You can also find a wide range of resources and tools on the NSPCC site.
- <https://parentzone.org.uk/home> - for some excellent resources for parents and schools.
- For guidance on safety on specific devices a number of organisations provide social media guides –e.g. CEOP and the Safer Internet Centre
<https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/advice-centre/social-media-guides>
- www.childnet.com
- <https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/research> - useful research summaries on a wide range of online safety topics.
- On cyberbullying <https://www.internetmatters.org/issues/cyberbullying>
<http://digizen.org/resources/cyberbullying/films/uk/lfit-film.aspx>
- Disrespect Nobody www.disrespectnobody.co.uk National campaign to help young people understand what a healthy relationship is and to help re-think their views of controlling behaviour, violence, abuse, sexual abuse and what consent means within their relationships.
- Engaging with children re porn use - You can find resources on here to support engagement on many subjects for examples on talking to children about porn use if this is of concern.
<https://parentinfo.org/article/internet-porn-top-tips-for-how-to-respond>

7. Contact details

For further information on this, please contact Maria Boffey, Head of Operations.
maria.boffey@fostering.net

The Fostering Network in Wales
33 Cathedral Road, Cardiff, CF11 9HB.
t: 029 2044 0940
e: wales@fostering.net
www.fostering.net

Find us on Facebook: facebook.com/thefosteringnetwork
Follow us on Twitter: @fosteringnet
Follow us on Instagram: @fosteringnet



/thefosteringnetwork



@fosteringnet



@thefosteringnetwork

Fostering Network Registered in England and Wales as a limited company no. 1507277. Registered charity no. 280852. VAT Registration no. 231 6335 90 Registered office 87 Blackfriars Road London SE1 8HA