

The Fostering Communities Programme

Briefing paper: Keeping in contact via Zoom

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Introduction

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.

Embedded within Fostering Communities is a [co-production approach](#), which means we will work in equal partnership with foster carers and fostering services to plan and deliver the programme (see appendix 2).

2. Overview of Zoom

This information sheet will provide a short overview of Zoom. 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.

We cannot guarantee the safety or security of any of the other online video conferencing platforms, but this paper is specifically about Zoom as it has become a platform of choice for many foster carers and fostering services.

With everyone having to stay home, meeting up with friends, family or work colleagues is having to be done very differently. This is where online video services are becoming so important to people.

At the present time, Zoom, along with other live video chat services, are proving hugely significant in allowing users to continue to 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. It means children can chat to grandparents and families can talk to those they have been cut off from. It is important to recognise the significant positives that services like Zoom 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.

2.1 What is Zoom?

Zoom 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). One of the most important features of Zoom is that it is free to use. It is very user friendly and can be accessed on a number of devices. It is especially easy to use via the Zoom app, rather than a web browser.

Although there are a number of platforms that offer the same or similar services (e.g. Skype, Microsoft Teams, Google Hangout, to name but a few). Zoom has become very popular, very quickly, as it is easy to use and has intuitive functionality. It also has the capacity to allow large numbers of participants to join the same event, which has seen it emerge as a global frontrunner in providing this service.

This has proved especially beneficial to businesses and families alike during this period since the COVID-19 pandemic. It is currently estimated to be being used globally by in the region of 300 million people a day.

2.2 What is it used for?

Zoom is used to engage in live video chat with one or many other users. Currently, Zoom is being used by millions of people for both professional and social purposes. It is being used for work - allowing organisations and businesses to keep running (whilst their staff are based at home), by allowing individuals to join meetings with colleagues remotely. It is also being used extensively during the COVID-19 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.

2.3 Devices

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

2.4 Features

There are some useful features on Zoom and it is worth familiarising yourself with all of the settings to look at the range of different things you can do. For example, it is possible to invite large numbers of people onto the same Zoom 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 or seminars where it is useful to engage larger numbers.

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.

Other helpful features include a 'raise a hand' feature and chat/comments section to help large groups interact and the 'share your screen' feature to allow speakers to present.

2.5 Security

Zoom have recently enhanced their security settings. This means that the host who sets up a video call, can individually invite and admit callers into their calls. It is now set so that the owner of each call admits participants, who will need a password and will have to wait in a waiting room to be admitted. This is useful if you want to control your guest list and invite only those you want at your online event.

It is also possible for the host to 'lock' your meeting once all participants are on screen. When you lock a Zoom meeting that has already started, it means no new participants can join, even if they have the meeting ID and password. You can do this by clicking on 'participants' at the bottom of the Zoom window and then click on the button that says, 'lock meeting'. Other security features also include a user button to allow the person running the call to report a user directly to Zoom.

3. What happens next

3.1 Joining a call/meeting

You can either join a call through your web browser or using the Zoom app. The host who sets up the meeting will send you through a nine-digit meeting code and also usually a password. You click on 'join a meeting' in the app, then enter the code and password when prompted.

Hosts can enable participants' video to be 'on' as a default, so they can verify who the person is, but you sometimes still may have to enable it at your end depending on your device and settings. Guests should always be asked to join with 'camera on' so that the meeting host can verify their identity. You will then be in a virtual 'waiting room' until the host of the meeting 'admits' you.

3.2 Viewing and interacting with the speaker/participants

Once you are in the meeting, if it is a video and audio call, you will obviously want to see as many people as you can. To do this you need to click on 'gallery view', which is usually a 3x3 dot icon in the top right corner of your app screen. This is not available if you are using the browser. The number of people who are then displayed will depend on the number of participants. Sometimes, it may be beneficial to just see the speaker as a larger view, especially if you are taking part in training. It can help you to focus and not be distracted.

3.3 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.

3.4 Chat feature

Like other video conferencing facilities Zoom also has a chat function to allow general chat between users or directly to the host. There is an icon that looks like a speech bubble. If you click on this it will open 'group chat', which means you can type comments and questions. You can also post messages privately to other participants by selecting their name above the 'type your message here' box. In the mobile app you may well find chat at the bottom of the participants' list.

It also has a function that allows you to share screens for easy presenting and as the host you can mute or unmute other users or turn off their camera, allowing easy control of a call.

3.5 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.

4. Meetings – how to make the best use of Zoom's great features

4.1 Lock the meeting

When you lock a Zoom meeting that's already started, no new participants can join, even if they have the meeting ID and password. In the meeting, click participants at the bottom of your Zoom window. In the participants pop-up, click the button that says Lock Meeting.

4.2 Remove unwanted or disruptive participants

From that participants menu, you can hover the mouse over a participant's name and several options will appear, including Remove. Click that to remove a participant from the meeting. Once removed, they will not be able to re-join the meeting.

4.3 Allow removed participants to re-join the meeting

You can change your settings to allow removed participants to re-join the meeting if, for example, they have been removed accidentally.

4.4 Put them on hold

You can put everyone else on hold, and the attendees' video and audio connections will be disabled momentarily. Click on someone's video thumbnail and select Start Attendee On Hold, to activate this feature. Click Take Off Hold in the participants' list when you're ready to have them back.

4.5 Mute participants

Hosts can mute/unmute individual participants or all of them at once. Hosts can block unwanted, distracting, or inappropriate noise from other participants. You can also enable Mute Upon Entry in your settings to keep the noise at a minimum in large meetings.

4.6 Turn off file transfer

In-meeting file transfer allows people to share files through the in-meeting chat. Toggle this off to keep the chat from getting bombarded with unsolicited pics, GIFs, memes and other content.

4.7 Turn off annotation

You and your attendees can doodle and mark up content together using the annotations function, during screen share. You can disable the annotation feature in your Zoom settings to prevent people from writing all over the screen.

4.8 Disable private chat

Zoom has in-meeting chat for everyone, or participants can message each other privately. Restrict participants' ability to chat amongst one another while your event is going on and this will help to cut back on distractions. This is really to prevent anyone from getting unwanted messages during the meeting.

4.9 The waiting room

One of the best ways to use Zoom for public events is to enable the Waiting Room feature. This is a virtual staging area that stops your guests from joining until you're ready for them.

Meeting hosts can customise Waiting Room settings for additional control, and you can even personalise the message people see when they enter the Waiting Room, so they know they're in the right place. This message is also a really great place to post any rules/guidelines for your event.

4.10 Leaving the meeting

When the session is finished, click on the leave meeting link in the bottom right of your screen. The host also has the ability to end the meeting for all participants, with one click.

4.11 Recordings

Meetings or training sessions may be recorded, for participants to review and for those unable to attend. A pop-up message will let you know that a meeting is being recorded before the recording starts. If a session is due to be recorded, the host should inform the attendees beforehand, to seek their approval.

5. Security and safeguarding adults and children

There have been some concerns raised with regard to privacy and security settings on Zoom. These issues are being addressed by Zoom. The host who schedules the meeting is given a nine-digit meeting code, plus a password. The user then has to enter both of these security settings to join a meeting and, even then, will have to wait for the host of the meeting to actually 'admit' them to the meeting. This ensures that only people who are invited will be visible on screen, or if they are not using video, they will just be able to be heard. All participants will have their names against their video or audio feed on screen. Guests should always be asked to join with 'camera' on so that the meeting host can verify their identity.

It is important that the link, meeting code and password are only shared to the people who are invited to the call. Do not share them on social media as that is public and would mean anyone with the details could join your meeting, though the host would still have to 'admit' them. So, it is important that the host knows exactly who they have invited and who should be allowed into the call. The waiting room is a helpful feature for hosts to control who comes and goes. The host can interact with people in the waiting room too, e.g. if it's a name they don't recognise, there is an option to message them directly and ask them to verify themselves. It is advised that when joining a call that you use your first name and no nicknames/the device name, so that the host can verify it is you.

If there are unwanted participants in your meeting, or if the host feels someone should no longer be part of the meeting, the host has the ability to 'remove' them. Hover your mouse over the participant's name and several options will appear, including 'Remove'.

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

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

As explained above, the newly enhanced security features mean the person who has set up the call will screen users before they join a call – through the use of a nine-digit meeting ID and a password. 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 Zoom and also, for older children, that 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, Zoom can be used for negative purposes - it can be used for grooming, it can 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 especially around digital safety including virtual meetings.

6. Children's wellbeing

The widespread use of 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 Zoom calls with multiple other callers, and this has been described as creating a kind of 'Zoom fatigue'. A recent article in the [National Geographic](#)¹ argues that Zoom calls can be wearing for a number of reasons (leading to 'Zoom Gloom'). This is because it can be harder to establish rapport and intimacy over screens and in larger groups (and we are denied the non-verbal cues that are an essential part of human interaction). There are concerns that trying to replicate our everyday work and social lives over Zoom can be draining and difficult if we feel under pressure to 'perform' on camera, rather than in the easier face to face connections that we have formerly used. This is something to think about, both in terms of our adult relationships as well as the children we care for.

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. Zoom 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.

¹ Sklar, J (2020) 'Zoom fatigue' is taxing the brain. Here's why that happens. *National Geographic (online)*. (Accessed May 2020)

7. 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.

8. 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.

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>

9. Contact details

For further information on this, please contact Maria Boffey, Head of Operations.
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