

Safe Online Environments—Good Practices

A safe environment for children, youth and vulnerable adults is very important in all settings. With the expansion of meetings or gatherings online, best practices in the virtual setting should be part of the preparation for all online events. Here are a few good practices for leaders to keep in mind when organizing online meetings or gatherings.

General

- Maintaining parish and diocesan protocols that are in place for in-person gatherings will help guide online practices. For example, having two adults present when gathering with children can and should be adapted for online meetings.
- Persons, volunteers or employees, who will be involved with vulnerable sectors should complete all the necessary background checks, even if they will only have virtual contact.
- When holding a meeting with minors, it is important to have parental or guardian consent for the minor's participation. Here is [a sample consent form](#) that can be sent to parents and guardians to fill out and send back to the organizer.
- Keep in mind that anything that is said or shared online can be recorded without your knowledge and be seen by anyone and everyone.
- Help parents and guardians to have a conversation about how to be safe online by sharing [tips about online safety](#). The [Canadian Centre for Child Protection](#) offers numerous resources that can be shared.

Pre-Meeting Considerations

- Before launching the meeting on any platform, it is best to take the time to understand the possible security features provided by that platform. Two examples are passwords for meetings and the waiting room feature, which are available on most platforms.
- Be intentional when choosing your physical space. A bathroom or bedroom would not generally be a suitable place to host a group meeting. Would you invite people into this space if they were physically there? If you are only able to use a bedroom area, prepare a business-like setting in a corner. There are many sources online to assist you in creating an appropriate space to host an online meeting.
- Prior to meeting online, share some guiding principles with the participants. Here are a few examples:
 - Arrive on time.
 - Dress in a respectful manner.
 - Be fully present to the meeting. Being respectful and present to the group is important, so please do not multitask.
 - Remind others in your location that you will be in a meeting or gathering so you are not interrupted.
- Appropriate timing should always be considered. If it would not be an appropriate time of the day to have an in-person meeting, it would generally not be an appropriate time to hold an online meeting or gathering.
 - On occasion, an exception may apply such as for events that are online “marathons” or something like a retreat or “Thinkfast.”
- Remember to have a clean desktop if you are planning to share your screen or will be using presentation mode. When you share a screen, your entire screen is visible, so please be mindful of privacy rights

(getting a link from your email may inadvertently expose other emails). File names or shortcuts, open tabs, etc. are visible to participants.

During Meetings

- Have participants identify themselves by name when joining the meeting instead of using generic names like “laptop” or “iPhone.”
- You may want to block the use of personal chat between participants so that all conversations can be monitored.
- You may choose to disable the screen sharing option for participants to prevent anyone from sharing images that are not intended for the group.
- Share general principles to respect during a meeting with participants. Here are a few suggestions:
 - Mute your microphone when not talking.
 - Check your camera, microphone and speakers ahead of time as this will ensure people will see and hear you clearly.
 - Any misconduct or inappropriate behaviour is not permitted, and the moderator may expel you from the meeting.
 - Do not take pictures or videos of the meeting.

Post Meeting

- You might have recorded the meeting to share it with people who were not able to attend. Make sure that you have received participants’ or parents’ and guardians’ consent before sharing or posting it online. This should also be done for any pictures that were taken.
- Any personal information received from participants due to their participation in the meeting should be stored in the same fashion of other personal information given to you.