

SAFEGUARDING YOUNG PEOPLE WHEN WORKING ONLINE

Due to the circumstances we all find ourselves in with regard to COVID-19, working remotely and communicating a lot more online with young people has become the new norm. Here are a few reminders, guidelines and tips on how to do this in accordance with best practice, maintaining safety for all involved.

Safeguarding Policies and Procedures

Act as You Would Offline!

Youth theatres have been showing great innovation in moving activities online, but as we do this it is important to remember that our Child Protection Policies apply equally in the online space as they do in our usual youth theatre activities.

This is a good time for youth theatre leaders to check-in and refresh their knowledge of the youth theatre's existing policies and procedures in particular:

- Communication with Young People including usage of third party sites
- Use of Images Policy
- Data Protection and Confidentiality

Key points

- Youth theatre leaders should only use youth theatre social media and app accounts to communicate with youth theatre members and maintain separation from their personal online presence.
- Cover use of social media sites and apps within the youth theatre's group contract and discuss safe use of those sites/apps that are used within youth theatre projects
- Develop an Acceptable Usage Policy (AUP) for each social media site which members and others may access and post it clearly in the 'About' or 'Group Information' sections.
- Do not require any users of the youth theatre's social media sites to disclose personal information. Do not tag or provide contact details for members on social media sites.
- A named youth theatre leader should moderate the content of all social media sites, monitoring posts, removing inappropriate content and liaising with the Designated Liaison Person on any instances of bullying or harassment.

- Choose the safest and most appropriate settings on each social media site / app to safeguard youth theatre members.

The Rules for Leaders Still Apply

Youth Theatres must continue to observe their policies in relation to staff and volunteers. This includes observing correct procedures as per the youth theatre policy on:

- Recruitment and Selection of Staff/ Volunteers (including the requirement re. Garda Vetting)
- Procedures for Supervision, Provision of Training and Support for Staff/Volunteers
- Policy on Adult/Young People Ratios
- Code of Behaviour for Leaders

In short make sure any staff/ volunteers of the youth theatre who are communicating with or working with young people online have been Garda vetted and are fully briefed on the youth theatre's code of behaviour and child protection policy. Continue to observe correct adult to young person ratios when conducting work online as well as correct procedures for communicating with young people.

The Welfare of The Young Person Is Paramount – Online and Offline!

If you note any Child Protection concerns while online working with young people, adhere to the guidelines and reporting procedures as per your youth theatre policy and/or statutory reporting requirements.

From Children First 2017: You should always inform Tusla if you have **reasonable grounds for concern** that a child may have been, is being, or is at risk of being abused or neglected. You can report your concern in person, by telephone or in writing — including by email — to the local social work duty service in the area where the child lives.

Contact numbers for Tusla offices nationwide are available on the Tusla website (www.tusla.ie) or through the Tusla National Office (Tel. 01-7718500).

Note: *If you are concerned that your youth theatre's Child Protection policy does not cover all of the areas referenced above or needs to be updated, please contact [Louise](#) or [Rhona](#) for a copy of the Youth Theatre Ireland Affiliate Child Protection Policy Template and for further guidance.*

Working With Parents/ Guardians

It is important at this time to connect with parents / guardians and to explain why, how and when you intend to organise online youth theatre activities for their child to participate in. It is important to acknowledge that different families will have different rules and approaches to screen-time and so clarity on the purpose and value of online youth theatre activities is important. Other matters to consider include:

- Review the parental permissions in place in respect of your members. Even if the existing permissions cover online communications and working, it is worth reviewing if this covers the downloading and use of apps that you may be using for online working.
- The digital age of consent is 16 so if working with anyone online under that age permission will especially need to be sought from a parent/ guardian for use of each individual app / social media site. However, it is best practice to have relevant parental permissions in place for all members aged 18 and younger. For information on the digital age of consent see: <https://www.webwise.ie/news/gdpr-digital-age-consent/>

Safeguarding and Video Conferencing Apps

Popular video-conferencing apps such as Zoom, Skype, Houseparty and Google Hangouts have various pros and cons in terms of their suitability for working with groups online, including the number of people who can participate at once etc.

When choosing the App(s) that work best for your youth theatre, it is important to also consider the appropriateness of each platform from a safeguarding point of view.

Check the Small Print!

In particular, it is important to consider whether use of these apps comply with the youth theatre's Data Protection Policy and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). As images and video of people is considered personal data, any app used by the youth theatre to host activities is processing data on the youth theatre's behalf and is therefore a Third Party Data Processor. The youth theatre therefore should carefully consider the Terms and Conditions when opening an account and exercise reasonable care to ensure that the Third Party Data Processor carries out the processing in compliance with the GDPR.

By Invitation Only - Tips for Managing Video Meetings

Whatever App you decide to use, here are some handy pointers for managing video meetings in a way that considers the wellbeing of all involved:

- Do not require young people to have an account to participate, instead invite participants by email with a link to the meeting.

- Meetings should be hosted from an account held and managed by the youth theatre and not from a leader's personal account. More than one youth theatre staff member or volunteer should have access to the account details.
- Ensure that meetings are password protected and can only be joined by invitees.
- Never invite anyone to join a meeting unless they are a member or leader with the youth theatre.
- It is not advisable to record the meeting. If you do record the meeting, store the recording securely on youth theatre equipment for a specified period of time. It is essential that you inform participants and their parents and guardians that you will be recording the meeting, and get their permission to do so in line with the youth theatre data protection policy, as this is classified as data processing.
- Make yourself familiar with the features of the chosen app in advance, and provide clear guidance for young people on safe use of the app prior to working online.
- Time-limit meetings. As you would with a drama workshop be clear on the planned duration of the online interaction in advance. It is likely that the concentration span possible will be less than that in a regular workshop. Consider sessions of between 30 minutes and a maximum of one hour.
- Be clear on the code of conduct for participants. Set expectations for dressing appropriately, participating fully and working together etc. Work with members to adapt the group contract to cover working online.
- Check with members that they are comfortable with using the app and whether they are experiencing any barriers to participation (e.g. no broadband access or access to equipment; a disability that impacts their ability to interact via screen such as visual impairment etc.) Make accommodations as appropriate.
- Reconsider working online if it leads to the significant exclusion of members.

Case Study: Zoom

It is important to get familiar with the functions of the application you are using and set appropriate controls as host. The popular app, Zoom, provides the following functions that can help you to manage meetings safely:

In Meeting Security and Controls

The meeting host has a variety of controls they can use to secure their meeting. For more information, visit <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/201362603-Host-and-Co-Host-Controls-in-a-Meeting>

Managing Participants in a Meeting

The meeting host can manage the participants. For more information, visit https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/115005759423-Managing-participants-in-a-meeting#h_135deff0-a391-4162-861b-204c020febb3

Disable Private Chat

To ensure a spirit of openness and group transparency, the host can disable private chat between participants. For instructions, please see: <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/115004809306-Controlling-and-Disabling-In-Meeting-Chat>

Other Ways to Support Young People During COVID-19 Outbreak

While moving to online working makes sense for some. It may not be appropriate/ practical for every group for a whole host of reasons from access to interest, and that's okay!

Reach Out

- Outside of online youth theatre activities, you can make young people aware that specific youth theatre leaders are available to get in touch with should they have any issues during this period and they can talk to you as they would at a regular youth theatre workshop. This communication should be through the youth theatre phone/email where possible. Include times/ days where appropriate so that you are not 'on call' all the time and ensure that all communications are in-line with the youth theatre's policy.
- As this can be a difficult time for young people cut off from their usual activities and routines, it's useful to become familiar with websites such as Jigsaw, SpunOut, BeLong To, Bodywhys, Childline which you can direct young people or their parents towards for extra support. The youth theatre is often a safe haven for young people, you may be a trusted person in their world and they could come to you for advice.

But Apply Your Own Mask First!

While for some youth theatres the resources and time will be in place to offer some continuity of programming to young people, it won't be possible for every youth theatre. This is an anxious time for everyone and many volunteer leaders will be balancing childcare and other caring responsibilities alongside trying to work from home and simply won't have the capacity to deliver their usual volunteer commitment. In addition, paid freelance youth theatre leaders may be facing loss of earnings and other challenges. If you are in a position to continue to work with your members at this time – wonderful. However, we can't support others if we don't first take care of ourselves. Do your best, and if lack of resources means taking a break from youth theatre activities while we wait for this pandemic to play out, then that is an appropriate response.

Resources

Online Safety

- **Webwise.ie** offers a lot of good advice and information for workers, parents and young people alike on internet and social media usage and best practice for online safety
<https://www.webwise.ie/category/parents/explainers/>
<https://www.webwise.ie/parents/explained-image-sharing-app-instagram/>
- <https://www.youth.ie/programmes/projects-initiatives/web-safety-in-youth-work/>
- [Be Safe Online: Ireland's Official Online Safety Hub \[Government of Ireland\]](#)

Child Protection

www.tusla.ie

- Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children [DCYA 2017]
- Guidance on Developing a Child Safeguarding Statement [Tusla 2017]
- Child Safeguarding: A Guide for Policy, Procedure and Practice [Tusla 2017]
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Other Useful Websites

<https://www.digitalyouthwork.eu/tips-for-online-youth-work-when-youth-centres-are-closed/>

www.hotline.ie

www.watchyourspace.ie

www.mentalhealthireland.ie

www.jigsaw.ie

<https://jigsawonline.ie>

www.belongto.org

www.bodywhys.ie

www.hse.ie/CAMHS/HSE