

# **Pan Bedfordshire Using technology to provide help and support to children and families**

*Toolkit*

## Introduction

This toolkit is aimed at multi-agency practitioners and focuses on using technology to support children and families.

We recognise that during the Covid-19 pandemic, professionals have increased the use of remote technologies (such as video-conferencing) to communicate with, safeguard and support children, young people, families and carers.

This toolkit is for multi-agency professionals supporting vulnerable children and young people, about using technology safely and effectively. The information is intended to supplement guidance provided by your own agency.

## How can video conferencing be used more securely when communicating with children, young people and families?

The National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) has produced [Video Conferencing systems: using them securely](#) for individuals. This contains practical advice that may help increase security when using any video conferencing platform.

NCSC has also produced [Video conferencing services: security guidance for organisations](#). This guidance offers recommendations that may help local authorities when choosing video conferencing services, configuring features and accounts, and help staff use platforms securely.

The Local Government Association has identified and commented on a list of video conferencing applications at [Remote Council Meetings: Video conferencing and audio platforms](#).

When selecting a video-conference platform to use, you should follow the guidance of your employer. You should also consider the preference of the family, child, or young person you are communicating with, and try to accommodate them, provided their preference does not conflict with your employer's policies.

Ensure that you adhere to your agency's Information Governance Principals and consider what type of information you are sharing and with whom. As much as possible limit the use of people's personal/confidential information.

## What should I consider prior to starting a video conference with children, young people and families?

Practitioners should consider the unique case factors and record a decision as to why technology would be safe and appropriate.

If you are using video applications with children under the age of 16 years it is essential that you record parental consent on a case note or within the child's plan. If consent is overridden, record clearly the reasons why.

Consider seeking situational supervision with your manager or supervisor if you are unsure about the suitability of using video technology.

Using technology can save valuable travelling time, therefore you are encouraged to invest additional time in planning, preparing and setting up your session. It is advised to evidence your planning to demonstrate how you have prepared the child for the session.

If the parents and/or child are resistant or concerned about a virtual session, this is unlikely to be the best option and an alternative arrangement should be considered.

Some children may not feel comfortable using video with someone they have not met, therefore ensure the child is fully included in the decision-making process. Consider speaking to the child by phone in the first instance to introduce yourself and build rapport. This may also inform your views on the child's capacity to engage in a video-based session.

Consider the age of the child and the likelihood of them being able to engage effectively in a virtual meeting. Younger children may still be able to engage in a session if they have the appropriate support from a safe parent, family member or school teacher.

If there are significant concerns regarding the child being influenced or manipulated by one or both parents, consider how a virtual session may impact on obtaining their ascertainable wishes and feelings.

Are there known safeguarding risks or is the child likely to recall traumatic memories in any way? If so, then it may not be appropriate to proceed with a remote interview. If you do proceed, familiarise yourself with trauma-informed practice and seek supervision with your manager to agree how you will mitigate any distress that might arise during the session.

Children with communication difficulties may struggle to use technology, therefore this should be checked with a parent before considering using video or voice conferencing.

Allow some time at the end of the session for a quick debrief with the adult supporting the child to make sure the child is settled and happy for the session to close.

If possible, inform the family via text prior to your virtual session as calls may display as anonymous.

Create a neutral space/background and avoid having pets or other people present during the call.

Check that the young person can hear and see you. Check a few basic details with the young person first to ensure you can understand each other.

Confirm with the young person that they feel comfortable where they are. Ask if anyone else is present and confirm with them that they feel able to talk openly and honestly about what they want to happen.

You can still offer the young person the opportunity to complete direct work sheets however explain that you will input the information due to the session being virtual. Remember to share any completed direct work with the young person before ending the session to make sure they agree with what you have written.

To complete direct work virtually, you can use the share screen facility. If you do share your desktop, make sure all other screens/documents are closed as you may inadvertently share sensitive data.

Always be mindful of the child's non-verbal communication whilst you are on a video call. For example, does the child appear to be distracted by someone else in the room? Is the child's body language congruent with their responses?

If at any time during the session you are concerned about the effectiveness of the virtual session, or the child's ability to engage, consider ending the session and exploring an alternative option.

In some cases, it might be appropriate to send the child some direct work sheets ahead of the direct work session for them to look at and complete at home or whilst you are online. If this is the case, make sure there is a safe and appropriate parent to assist in returning the direct work sheets to you.

When interviewing parents, if you cannot access a verified email address, you may be able to use the parent's phone number to access mobile video conferencing

Generally, a telephone interview will be suitable for parents. However, you should offer and accommodate video conferencing if preferred.

It is a good idea to ask the parent to join your interview a few minutes early for the first session. This will ensure any connection issues are resolved ahead of the interview start time.

### How can I help the children and families I work with stay safe online?

The internet is a great way of communicating, getting information and keeping in touch, but it is important to make sure children and young people get the best out of it and keep themselves safe.

The following lists a number of resources and sources of advice and guidance to help keep children and families safe online that you can use or signpost to:

The [CEOP Thinkuknow website](#) provides information and advice on keeping children safe. There is advice on how to help your child and how to start the conversation if you are concerned.

[The National Online Safety website](#) has a number of online safety guides which provide advice on popular apps and websites including TikTok, Snapchat and Zoom.

[The NSPCC website](#) provides information around how to set up parental controls, advice around online gaming and the use of live streaming and video apps.

The government document [support for parents and carers to keep children safe from online harms](#) includes advice about specific harms such as online child sexual abuse, sexting and cyberbullying.

The [UK Safer Internet Centre's professional online safety helpline](#) provides support for the children's workforce with any online safety issues they face. They can be contacted by email at [helpline@saferinternet.org.uk](mailto:helpline@saferinternet.org.uk) or by telephone at 0344 381 4772.

### The Department for Education's 'Get Help with Technology' initiative

The [Get Help with Technology](#) programme is providing a laptop or tablet to care leavers, and children and families with a social worker (babies as well as older children) if they do not already have one. This will help professionals working with children and families to maintain virtual contact with them, during a period when social distancing has reduced the number of face-to-face visits.

It will help families and care leavers access the practical and emotional support and services

they need online to maintain their wellbeing. It will help care leavers keep in touch with their personal adviser online. It will also enable children and young people to access remote education. Wider support is also available, including access to 4G wireless routers for some young people. We are currently delivering laptops, tablets and 4G wireless routers to local authorities daily. Once delivered, it is the responsibility of the local authority to distribute devices to families, children and young people.

## **Further guidance and resources for professionals to help improve their digital capabilities**

The British Association of Social Workers and the Social Care Institute for Excellence, as part of their [Digital Capabilities for Social Workers](#) project, have produced resources to help identify the knowledge, skills and values social workers need to develop their use of digital technology in practice.

The article [COVID-19: Using digital technology in relationship-based practice to bridge the gap in social distancing](#) by Dr Godfred Boahen considers how you maintain relationships with people who use services if you cannot visit people regularly, how you keep people safe and well if you cannot access their living spaces, how we model good behaviours and encourage people to maintain change when we cannot see to ascertain their physical and emotional demeanour.

In the video [‘How digital technology can improve social work—a young person’s perspective’](#) care-experienced young person, Jordan Wosik talks about the importance of his social worker’s digital capabilities and how it has enabled and built a stronger relationship with her. It has created a more comfortable style of working and freed him up to get on with his life and to spend more quality face-to-face time with her.

The Principle Children and Families Social Worker Network (PCFSW), working with Social Work England, have produced Best Practice Guide for Video-Call/Contact and Virtual Online Home Visit. This includes guidance on topics like planning and managing calls, establishing rapport, and recording information. This can be found in Section 3.8 in the [Pan Bedfordshire Procedures](#).

[Releasing the potential of technology in education](#) outlines a strategy for education providers to help improve and increase the effective use of technology in education.

**With thanks and acknowledgement to North Lincolnshire Multi-Agency Resilience and Safeguarding Board as the originators of this document.**