

**Guidance for using Digital Platforms and on line working for staff members and volunteers**

**Introduction**

This guidance has been produced in recognition that a significant amount of engagement with children, young people and families is now occurring on line and the importance of staff and volunteers being clear about the parameters in which the engagement will take place.

It is recognized that services will differ in the nature and frequency of on line engagement so this guidance is intended to be used pragmatically and amended to meet local circumstances as applicable

**Before commencing on line engagement:**

Explicit permission/consent must be gained for all individuals who are accessing the service regarding the use of digital platforms.

During initial assessment families will be asked to confirm their current use of digital platforms; email, WhatsApp, Google, Skype, Facetime etc. Their preferences will be noted. Barnardo’s staff members or volunteers would not encourage the use of certain platforms but would share the current offer and explore future communications.

Please refer to the guidance on Inside Barnardo’s - [Using Technology and ensuring Data Protection during the COVID 19 Pandemic](https://inside.barnardos.org.uk/resources-and-guidance/our-it/getting-connected/guidance-using-technology-and-ensuring-information)

An individual risk assessment should be completed to ensure safety and wellbeing of staff members/volunteers and service users before proceeding with any digital platforms

The following communication should be used and amended where appropriate prior to sessions being confirmed:

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| Hi    I’m ***(enter name)*** your Barnardo’s worker. It’s great that you’ve come for support and that you have been able to log on to your session today.  Before we can start your sessions I need to make sure that you are aware of the adjustments we have made to make sure your sessions can take place.  As you will be aware there are currently no face to face session to help minimise the impact of COVID – 19.  You agree that you feel physically well to continue with the session digitally or via the audio call.  I am here to support you and listen to you. This is a confidential space where you can explore your thoughts and feelings, and we can work through any issues that might be affecting you. At the moment I am working from home, but I am in a private room where we won’t be interrupted, can you make sure you are in the quietest place available to you.  We need to agree today that the venue/area we are both meeting in is secure and confidential with no interruptions for the time of the session. Once the session has ended you have access to a responsible adult whom you can contact/speak to following the session should you need further support.  The remaining number of your sessions will be conducted as agreed today. If you can’t make a session and need to cancel then you can email us or you can call or text my mobile. If you would like a reminder text on the morning of the session, let me know and I will arrange this for you.  What you talk about during the session is confidential; however I have a duty of care to protect you from harm. This means that if I feel that you or someone else is at risk from harm, or that I am told something I consider to be a crime, then I can’t keep that a secret. I would discuss this with you first but then I may need to pass that information on to another professional who would help to keep you safe. If you have any questions regarding this please talk to your Barnardo’s worker.  Before we get started I just need to check your location today and agree a telephone number that I can call should this connection fail  Address:  Alternative number: |

**Introductory online session:**

* Staff members and volunteers should introduce themselves at the beginning of the session and ID badges must be worn
* Staff members and volunteers must check the identity of the service user by asking them to confirm their full name and date of birth before proceeding with the initial session
* Staff members and volunteers will be taking notes during the session and this should be explained at the onset as this might not be visible to the service user and could be distracting. Staff members and volunteers need to ensure that any notes taken during the session are recorded into the service user file after the session in accordance to Barnardo’s recording policy/protocol with clear actions agreed after each contact.
* Staff members and volunteers will obtain specific consent for undertaking work and agree in which format that takes place with the parent or guardian/child. This will be noted on the case file.
* It would be good practice to establish a safe word or gesture at the outset of the session which the service user can use to convey a need to stop the discussion immediately. This could be used if there were to be a disruption of privacy for the service user that the worker cannot see or if the service user perceives there to be a risk to continuing the discussion.

**Introductory and follow up sessions:**

* Staff members and volunteers must ask whether there are any other individuals present in the room with the service user and they must be identified and details recorded.
* Staff members and volunteers should ask the service user their current location (full address where the session is taking place) as this might be required in the event of a crisis or emergency situation.
* Staff members and volunteers must ask for service user contact number and also provide them with a contact number that the service user can get hold of them on in the event there is a technical difficulty and connection cannot be re-established. Staff members and volunteers should contact the service user within 5 minutes on the contact number provided. Staff members and volunteers should only use their work mobile. The member of staff and service user will need to agree whether the session can continue via telephone or whether reconnection should be attempted. If reconnection fails, then the session should be rearranged.
* All mobile phones must be on silent during sessions to avoid interruptions. All workers must be in a private room which cannot be overheard by a third party. This ensures the session is confidential. Staff members and volunteers will need to access the impact of having any children in their house whilst conducting sessions, it is imperative that children of staff are safeguarded when staff are working from home.
* Staff members and volunteers need to ensure they have no personal or service user information visible or anything identifiable such as case notes. No personal pictures etc. should be visible during the call.
* Ensure you are comfortable and ready to give your full attention to your client prior to the session starting. Go to the toilet, have a glass of water at the ready, inform others in the building or that may be around that you wish not to be disturbed and for them to be quiet. You may want to close the curtains in the room you are in to enable you to be more focused and to block out distractions. Ensure the room is also at a comfortable temperature.
* Staff members and volunteers to ensure the equipment is appropriate for the task and has been tested and is fully charged. The use of ear phones can be very useful as they offer clarity when listening.
* Staff members and volunteers may feel the need to check out more with the service user to understand better on how they are feeling. With no visual clues you will be focusing more on what is said or not said, the tone of voice, the breaks between words, the silences and the speed at which the client talks etc.
* Staff members and volunteers must set boundaries prior to the session, decide who will call who and at what time. Arrange what to do if contact cannot be made or it fails within the session.
* Staff members and volunteers should complete a follow up text or email where appropriate with the session content and task lists.

**Risk management**

**Emergency/crisis procedures:**

* In the event of an emergency or crisis situation, professional judgment must be used and contact made with line manager to support in accordance with our safeguarding policy.
* Staff members and volunteers will need to monitor the wellbeing of service users as the session progresses. Service users will have far less access to tools and resources to manage their mental health and wellbeing at this time and therefore more attention will be required to ending sessions to ensure service users are not left in a state of unrest or distress. Staff may choose to use mindfulness activities or relaxation to close and re-focus service users for example and goal setting may support progression or next steps.

* Staff members and volunteers are responsible for managing appropriate behaviour during the session, and if the staff member becomes uncomfortable with the service user’s behaviour or actions during the session, they will need to address this directly with the service user or make a decision to end the session. This must be recorded and discussed with their line manager.

* Where there is a risk of service users feeling unsafe then the ‘safe word or gesture’ established at the start of the session could be used to halt discussions. This could be used to indicate times when the service user is unable to talk freely or when another person is present in the room but the information cannot be disclosed. The member of staff will steer the session to an appropriate end and make alternative arrangements to speak to the service user. A follow up welfare call must be agreed with that service user to ensure their safety; this will be of paramount importance when working with families who are/have experience domestic abuse or violence within their communities.
* Service users should be risk assessed prior to any online services being offered; those who present with moderate-high risk behaviors may not be suitable for this service. All service users will present some level of risk, and will need to have a risk assessment and clear actions agreed as part of the referral process.

**Staff Safety and Self Care Strategies**

* Keep to working boundaries-let service users know where to seek help out of hours and unless there are critical safety issues do not check work devices for messages out of work
* Take breaks away from the screen and manage contacts to give space for reflection etc.
* Ensure you regularly keep in touch with colleagues and service management
* Let service users know if you are on a call or text conversation with another service user-don’t try and manage multiple contacts at the same time

**David Beard**

**Head of Corporate Safeguarding and Quality**

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