



## Child & Family Friendly Virtual Meetings

The option to hold virtual meetings brings many opportunities. They can however feel different to face to face meetings. It is important to identify what can be done to ensure the experience is as positive and equitable as possible for children, young people and their families.

The majority of communication is non-verbal (7% verbal, 38% tone of voice, 55% non-verbal). This means that it can be more challenging to read context, gauge reaction, and identify emotion over a virtual platform.

This briefing draws together a summary of good practice for colleagues to consider when holding a virtual meeting. It complements the [GIRFEC Multi-Agency Operational Guidance](#) on holding Child & Family Centred Meetings, and the [Guide to Meetings](#) developed by The Young People's Organising & Campaigning Group (YPOC).

## Good Practice Considerations

### Preparation

#### Technology: Platform

- The meeting needs to be as accessible as possible, so use the platform that the child/family feels most comfortable with. If a family is unfamiliar with the software, offer support with downloading/ a trial run prior to the meeting.
- The most commonly used platforms in Aberdeenshire are **Skype & MS Teams (Aberdeenshire Council)** and **Attend Anywhere/Near Me (NHSG)**.
- If Health professionals are involved in supporting the child/family, be aware that NHS staff can attend meetings with service users via MS Teams, but are not permitted to arrange meetings via this platform. Skype meetings can be attended by telephone only. Where Health is the Lead Professional, the meeting will be convened using a platform as approved by NHS Grampian.
- The cost of data usage for the family should be considered when deciding the most appropriate platform. Some families may prefer Skype as this is a cost neutral option which allows professionals to phone them into the meeting.

#### Technology: Functions

- Consider asking attendees to avoid using the 'chat' function during the meeting, unless there is something pertinent that they require to make the chair aware of. The chat function can distract from the flow of the meeting and those who are not using video will not have access to this.
- Consider how best to use the 'hands up' function (if available). If the nature of the meeting makes it challenging for the chair to facilitate this, consider identifying another attendee to monitor.
- It is recognised that some children/families prefer not to use the video function. If the child/family is not on video, it is good practice for all other attendees to switch their video off, and to let the child/family know this so that they know everyone is in the same position. If using video, professionals should adhere to good practice around confidentiality as below.

## **Confidentiality**

- If working from home, ensure you have the required level of confidentiality. If not, do not conduct the meeting using the video function. If using video, find a blank background or use a blur option if available.
- Check with the family - do they have the level of confidentiality they require at their side.
- If some attendees are calling in from the same space, be clear with the child/family about who is in the room and why.
- Meetings are **not** routinely recorded. Should a situation arise where audio/video meeting will be recorded, all attendees must be made aware of this and their agreement sought.
- Virtual meetings require trust that all parties are adhering to the above. The child/family may need additional reassurance about the safety of their information.

## **Meeting participation**

### **Introductions**

- The chair should ensure that everyone has opportunity to introduce themselves and their role at the start of the meeting. If using audio only, children/families will need additional time to tune in to each voice. Extra preparation may be required here if there is no prior relationship with the child/family.
- State the expected format of the meeting explicitly. As virtual meetings lose much of the non-verbal cues that can signal this to attendees, everyone can benefit from clarity around format and when they will be asked to contribute.
- Agree with attendees what will happen should the technology fail e.g. attempt to reconnect or continue by telephone.
- Ask attendees to mute microphones unless speaking.

### **During the Meeting**

- The chair should check in with the child/family regularly in order to ensure they understand what has been said and have opportunity to ask any questions. Being more explicit about this in virtual meetings enables attendees to gauge emotion/responses and to check the child/family are okay.
- Use people's names and give reminders as to who is speaking. It can be challenging to keep track of which professional is speaking. Ideally virtual meetings should be as small as possible – some people may not need to attend and could submit a report instead.
- In order to facilitate inclusion, the chair may need to be more explicit about how attendees are 'invited' in to speak. It is more challenging for people to read this within a virtual meeting compared to a face-to-face meeting. Depending on the format, the chair could consider asking each person directly in turn for feedback, using deliberate pauses/silences throughout the meeting or use of statements such as "does anyone have anything they would like to come in on at the point?"
- For similar reasons it can be more challenging to 'chip in' during virtual meetings. This can make facilitating certain aspects (such as jointly creating the child's plan) trickier in real time. In some situations, it may be helpful to agree the points within the meeting and update the plan afterwards following feedback from the family.
- Virtual meetings can be tiring for all attendees. Try to keep the meeting as succinct as possible.

## **After the Meeting**

- It may be appropriate to check in with the child/family after the meeting. Remember, if the meeting was conducted face to face, there would have opportunity to 'read the room' and to speak with the child/family if required. Consider who may be best placed to give the family a call after the meeting or arrange a time to speak with them later.