



Best Practices for Virtual Youth Programming

Virtual Interactions

Virtual interactions can allow youth programs to reach to wider audiences and engage participants in creative and effective ways. However, online interactions pose new and different risks to youth which must be considered in program design and implementation. Additional considerations are, but not limited to:

- Ensuring youth protection in a virtual setting.
- Incorporating technology risk management controls.
- Implementing virtual behavioral controls or a code of conduct.
- Addressing any technical issues.
- Ensuring consistent program delivery.
- Educating parent/guardian and program participants of online safety practices.
- Designing programs to eliminate any 1:1 unmonitored or private interactions.
- Ensuring virtual program is ADA accessible.

Recording Virtual Youth Programming

Recording virtual interactions can be helpful in preserving the proceedings and facilitating evaluations of participants. However, recording any online interaction requires careful consideration of the privacy of youth participants and is strongly discouraged.

Before recording, consider:

- What purpose does recording achieve? Is it necessary in order to achieve the program goal?
- Can you accomplish that purpose through other methods? For example, if you want to make your educational content available to a broader audience or for those who can't join in real-time, can you record lecture components (presented by staff or another adult) but stop the recording when transiting to a participant-driven Q&A? Maybe you can request questions ahead of time or through a non-recorded real-time method, and posed to the speaker by staff or another adult, without youth's identifying information being shared?
- Does your program have capacity to safely store and destroy recordings?

If you decide to allow recording:

- Clarify the (ideally narrow) circumstances when recording is allowed, and who is allowed to initiate recordings.
- Understand and adhere to the retention schedule for recordings. Ensure they are stored in a centralized, safe, secure place. Consider who needs to have access to recordings and for how long.
- Develop consent materials to communicate the collection and use of data recordings to parents and youth as applicable. Include the rationale for recording, how youth will be notified before recording begins, who will have access to recordings, and your retention practices. Allow youth or parents to opt out of attending a live recording.

- Train staff to understand circumstances where recording is allowable under program guidelines. Prohibit recording of any kind outside of the allowable program recording guidelines.

Electronic Communications

- Communicate with youth through designated or authorized organizational “group pages” or “group profiles” on social media platforms (Facebook, What’s App, etc.).
- Ensure that staff designate their personal social media profiles to “private” so youth cannot befriend or access staff’s personal information.
- When using video conferencing apps, ensure both staff and youth are aware of their background surroundings and personal appearance or attire in order to maintain professionalism and personal privacy.
- Use electronic communication strategically to communicate with youth by keeping conversations focused on curriculum or projects, goal attainment, and safety tips, rather than personal details of one’s life.
- When providing general encouragement or support to youth at this challenging time, keep in mind the necessity to maintain consistent and professional boundaries to protect oneself from false allegations.
- Ensure any conversation that may be misinterpreted as inappropriate is immediately brought to a supervisor’s attention.
- Do not engage in any derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating on-line conversations with youth.
- Do not engage with youth in sexually oriented online conversations, memes or posts.
- Do not post inappropriate or suggestive comments on pictures/videos on youths’ profile.

Youth Privacy and Security (Zoom)

- Require registration
- Allow only authenticated users
- Use a random meeting ID number
- Require a password
- Prevent attendees from joining before a host
- Enable a virtual waiting room
- Restrict chat capabilities
- Lock the session once all participants join
- Control or disable screen sharing capabilities by non-hosts
- Disable file sharing features
- Disable video
- Manage annotations
- Mute program participants
- Use attendee on-hold option as an alternative to removing a user
- Do not post links to sessions on public websites
- Do not post pictures of virtual program online

Personal Conduct of Adults

- Minors must be treated respectfully and fairly at all times, regardless of their actions, behavior, race, ethnicity, sex, gender identity, age, disability, sexual orientation, religion, or any other basis in accordance with university policy.
- Adults should refrain from conduct that negatively influences the minor’s behavior such as use of profanity, off-color jokes, suggestive banter, discussing inappropriate personal problems or sexual experiences, viewing sexually suggestive materials or making such materials available, any

suggestive comments, use of alcohol or drugs or making them available, use of tobacco or e-cigarettes or making them available.

- Adults should refrain from all private social media exchanges such as messaging, friending or accepting friend requests from minor program participants.
- Adults should refrain from any type of private messaging, personal text messaging, personal calls and email.

Program staff should follow the recommended adult to child ratios when supervising minors, even when conducting a virtual program:

- 5 years and younger: 1:5 staff to minor ratio (1:6 for day camps or programs)
- 6-8 years: 1:6 staff to minor ratio (1:8 for day camps or programs)
- 9-14 years: 1:8 staff to minor ratio (1:10 for day camps or programs)
- 15-17 years: 1:10 staff to minor ratio (1:12 for day camps or programs)

Additionally, at least 80 percent of program staff should be 18 years of age. All staff should be a minimum four years older than the minors with whom they are working. No one under the age of 18 should be in direct charge of minors at any time during the duration of the program.

Program staff should be made aware of emergency procedures and attend Recognition, Reporting and Prevention of Child Abuse annually.

Other Considerations

- Have you considered the implications of [Children's Online Privacy Protection Act \(COPPA\)](#) regulations? Determine if your program is covered by COPPA and if so, abide by COPPA rules set by the Federal Trade Commission. [Visit FTC website for Children's Online Privacy Protection Rule guidance.](#)

Resources

- [Darkness to light- Safe online learning for teachers](#)
- [Cyberbullying Prevention](#)
- [Federal Trade Commission- Protecting kids online](#)
- [Common sense education- Resources for educators](#)
- [Connect Safely](#)
- [20 Tips for teaching an accessible online course](#)

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