

# Digital Discipleship/Online Meetings Best Practice

When conducting online discipleship groups and/or engaging in pastoral care via digital platforms (e.g. Zoom, FaceTime, Messenger, Skype, etc.) we need to be diligent to ensure the safety of minors and vulnerable persons, just as we would when not practicing physical distancing. Please remember that we should treat the digital arena the same as the physical—the same expectations and guidance outlined in The Salvation Army’s Abuse Prevention Policy apply.

We must ask ourselves: Are we being transparent and accountable in all our ministry relationships? Are others aware of the context and intention of our digital interactions? We have the same responsibility to those we serve in the digital realm as we do in the physical. We still have a duty to protect young people, and to report abuse and mistreatment.<sup>1</sup> We also have the responsibility to maintain the right focus in our relationships. Our duty is to ensure our digital interactions have the sole purpose of encouraging our young people and building them up in their faith.

The following are guidelines to protect both the people you minister to and yourself as you engage in digital interaction:

**1. Digital interaction with minors, outside of family and personal social networks, must be for ministry purposes and not personal in nature.**

These interactions are not meant to meet the social needs of us as leaders. Digital discipleship groups, and the like, are meant for discipleship and faith development of our young people.

**2. When possible have a second adult online with you for all meetings or conversations.**

**3. Do not meet with a young person online by themselves.**

Plan to meet with more than one young person on each call. If the conversation needs to be private, arrange a mutually agreed upon third party to be involved in the conversation. Feel free to explain to the young person why this is necessary.

**4. Do not accept unsolicited video calls from minors when alone.**

If you must answer an unsolicited call, bring a third party on the screen with you. If you cannot include a third party, decline the call and respond to the young person via another means (chat, DM, phone call), including or informing a third party, to determine the need and set up a safe and suitable meeting environment. *Please exercise caution in all cases of unsolicited communication, working to ensure that there are appropriate accountability and transparency measures in place.*

**5. Plan and hold digital meetings during normal hours for social or business interaction.**

Do not conduct meetings or conversations with any young people at a time of day that you wouldn’t hold a meeting or programming at your church or home under normal circumstances.

**6. Consider where you are in your home before you turn on your camera.**

Ask yourself: Is this a space I would invite someone into if they were physically in my home?

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<sup>1</sup> If you have any concerns about the wellbeing of a young person please feel to contact Nancy Turley (Territorial Abuse Advisor), at [Nancy\\_Turley@can.salvationarmy.org](mailto:Nancy_Turley@can.salvationarmy.org) or 705-764-0692.

**7. Consider how you are dressed before you turn on your camera.**

Ask yourself: Would I go out in public to meet with people dressed this way? Would I conduct a Bible study at church dressed this way?

**8. Keep a record of your online interactions and meetings.**

Record the date, who was present, purpose of meeting and key topics, and concerns that may need to be followed up. (If participants are comfortable with it, you could record Zoom meetings.)

**9. Report any concerns you have from online interactions to your supervisor.**

**10. Keep parents informed of planned digital discipleship efforts.**

Just as you would with regular corps programming, keep parents aware of meeting times, scope and sequence of teaching, expectations, etc.