



Resources

Confidentiality and Privacy in Online Programming

The transition to online programming presents unique considerations to protect participating youth's confidentiality and privacy in the virtual space. We consulted evidence-informed and community-engaged resources to offer recommendations to support the development of youth-focused confidentiality and privacy guidelines for online programs. These recommendations are grounded in the principles of trauma-informed care. For more information, click here.

1. Consult and Create Organizational Policies to Protect Online Confidentiality and Privacy

- Depending on the platform selected for online programming, consider adhering to the guidelines below for online safety:
 - Password protect all online meetings, and send meeting links and passwords in separate emails/texts
 - Create a waiting room so that program host(s) (i.e., facilitators) can see who has joined the session before inviting them to the main space
 - Lock the online meeting after all participants have joined to prevent uninvited others from joining
 - Ask youth to send private message to the facilitator if they notice someone in meeting who doesn't belong.
 - It may not always possible to lock a meeting, as youth may not be able to join. Using the waiting room option allows youth can join if late, and still keep youth in meeting safe.

2. Create a Safe Space for Youth to Participate Virtually

- Meet with each youth individually before the program begins to support them in creating a safe and private space to participate in the online program. Support the youth to:
 - Identify a private space to join the online program sessions
 - If a youth does not have access to a safe and private space, consider alternative formats of communication to connect (e.g., emails)
- Talk with youth about the possibility that sometimes family members may be visible during online session. This may lead the youth feeling less safe to participate as well as the other youth in the group. Privacy and safety for all youth in the group is a concern if family members are present. So talk with youth to see where can they participate to have more privacy and how much privacy do they have in that setting?



2. Create a Safe Space for Youth to Participate Virtually (continued)

- Navigate access to reliable and regular Internet and a trusted electronic device
 - Offer alternative ways (e.g., via telephone) to connect in case a youth loses Internet connection during the session, and make sure all participants know the alternate plan before the session starts
- Provide youth with access to headphones for the sessions to help increase privacy
- Consider that not all youth will be able to access the program online. For example, not all youth will have access to a tablet or reliable internet, and not all schools provide internet access. Some youth may need to share the home computer.
- Provide youth with care package such as work sheets, colouring sheets, markers, silly putty, or fidget toys. Using our hands can increase alertness and help youth be more engaged.
- Develop a safety communication plan in case youth have to leave sessions without informing facilitators
 - For example, how would facilitators reach the youth? Is there another trusted adult in the youth's life that the facilitator can contact?
 - If youth leave early, check in/follow-up to make sure they are okay and were not triggered.
- Co-establish non-verbal communication cues in case youth need to inform facilitators and peers that their physical space is not private anymore and they are not comfortable sharing or reflecting about certain topics (e.g., relationship violence, power, personal mental health)
- Offer non-verbal mediums of communication during sessions: chats, interactive whiteboards, etc.
- Ask all participants to include their pronouns in their screen name if they are willing

3. Review Confidentiality and Privacy Protocols with Youth (and also their Limitations)

- Facilitators will not video/audio record sessions or save/download chats from sessions
- Youth may create an alternative email address that only they have access to in order to receive links to join online sessions
- Youth may choose to use pseudo names for sessions
- Co-develop steps for facilitators to verify the identity of youth for online correspondence (especially if youth choose to keep their video off during sessions)
- Provide youth-focused education for safe Internet space
 - Opening websites in "incognito mode"
 - Deleting browser history
- Co-create guidelines about virtual and individual privacy and confidentiality (e.g., respect the privacy of other peers and not repeat what is said in the group)
- Limitation: Like any other group programming format, remind youth that facilitators cannot guarantee what peers in the group may share with others. It is important that youth are well-informed and use their agency to choose what they would like to discuss and share in sessions.



4. Offer Additional “Drop-in” Hours or Individual Check-ins

- Drop-in hours or individual check-ins with youth could support youth in having discussions on topics that they might not feel comfortable sharing with program peers or during the session
- During the drop-ins or check-ins, work with youth to determine:
 - If youth need additional resources or individualized mental health supports

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