ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE VIRTUALLY

Virtual Engagement 101: Getting Started

Know your options

- Video calls (e.g. Zoom, Google Hangout, Skype)
- Email
- Text messaging (youth often prefer over calls)
- Phone (Facetime or audio only)
- Live events on social media (e.g. Instagram, Facebook)
- Social media private groups
- Individual social media communication (create policy to ensure boundaries and safety)
- Combine virtual and non-virtual engagement methods (e.g. sending activity packets, self-care items, or other items that can be used during a "virtual" session - or sending letters/cards or dropping off basic needs supplies)
- App-based communication (such as a virtual mentoring portal, WhatsApp, or Marco Polo)

Remember the basics

- Ask the young person how they would prefer to communicate (e.g. format, frequency)
  - "Is there anything you want me to know about communicating online?"
  - Adjust to ensure the young person is comfortable
- Support youth in getting online access
- Connect and post consistently over time = impact
- Prioritize predictability and developing trust
- Practice confidentiality (share limitations)
- Time of day for virtual events is important
- Use different resources such as short video clips
- Capture your audience with your message within the first minute
- Pay attention to what young people are frequently commenting about. Follow up on that topic and provide a platform for discussion
- During group contacts, make space for hearing from everyone-when possible
- Add variety to online activities

Virtual Engagement 201: Next Steps

Seek youth input, preference, and leadership

- Prioritize youth preferences and ease of access in communication platforms over your own
- Provide an opportunity for youth to develop a virtual engagement strategy for individuals and groups
- Utilize youth expertise in training others to navigate online platforms
- Create opportunities/platforms for young people to connect with each other (e.g. small group support on Zoom, private-invitation only social media groups)

Get creative

- Individual and group meetings with youth via Zoom, Skype, Facetime, or Google Hangout (consider breakout room options)
- Couch concerts
- Virtual summer camp
- Themed meetings (e.g. holidays, graduation)
- Virtual field trips
- Virtual cooking class or cooking with mentor
- Virtual pizza party or other meal delivery option
- Virtual scavenger hunt
- Virtual self-care activities (drop off or send self-care items to use during the virtual session)
- Paint nails (deliver polish or use what they have available, discuss questions or self-care ideas as you paint)
- Training for youth (social skills, technology tips, job training, etc.)
- Virtual tours of colleges
- Virtual tour or walk together and share each other's view

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Virtual Engagement 301: Specialized Engagement	
CSEC and trauma specific • Maximize choice and autonomy (counters powerlessness and control of exploitation) • Be intentional, insert conversation that is calming (co-regulation through interaction) • Be transparent, and keep boundaries clear • Promote staff/mentor consistency across the program (helps build predictability and trust) • Understand that virtual platforms may have been used in sexual exploitation/trafficking (ask how they may want to proceed)	**COVID-19 specific or other community crisis** • Regularly communicate reliable, unbiased information and resources in a rapidly changing landscape • Share neighborhood/community events online, share positive highlights in community • If you have a Youth Advisory Board, ensure that members can meet virtually (remember to be consistent with payments or stipends)

Virtual Safety Considerations for Adults Engaging Young People

Any means of engagement has its own set of safety challenges. Identify and consider how safety challenges that are specific to virtual engagement might be addressed. Develop and maintain "community agreements" with young people that address holistic safety.

- **Physical**
  - Is there a history of abuse or exploitation in the home? Is there an unsafe person present?
  - Are valuables or personal identifying information displayed when the camera is on?
  - Is the young person aware of privacy options? (camera, audio, etc.)
  - Identify a code or safe word so a young person can discreetly seek help in a crisis.
- **Emotional**
  - What can and cannot be discussed in a virtual format?
  - What is the goal and purpose of the meeting? (planning and predictability build trust)
  - Be mindful of possible triggers in a virtual format.
  - Begin with a check in question that builds self-acceptance and self-compassion.
- **Social**
  - Set clear boundaries. (e.g. acceptable times for calls, preferences on leaving messages, boundaries regarding commenting on social media posts)
  - When is it best to have a third party involved?
  - Be transparent around recording & information-sharing.
  - Be mindful of what you are wearing and what items can be viewed by participants.
  - Identify when to use full name vs. preferred name. (what do youth need/prefer in different situations)
  - Be aware of language barriers and social norms around virtual communication.

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What Increases Risk?	What Increases Safety?
Lack of awareness to online grooming methods	Understanding of how to avoid and manage danger/risks online
Posting personal or vulnerable information online	Increase social connections and caring community
Disclosing vulnerable information in a group that could be used to harm you	Build self-compassion (value self and have grace for personal imperfections)
Lack of understanding and use of privacy settings	Support creating and maintaining clear boundaries
Feeling unworthy, insecure, unsure of self (often demonstrated through needing "likes" online)	Identification of strengths/talents and learning problem solving techniques