**Virtual engagement**

**Lessons learnt**

The Making Participation Team have been working with young people to deliver training for over four years and during this time we have learnt a number of things about engaging young people online. Most recently during the global pandemic KIDS has moved many of our youth groups online and we have learnt a number of things which have helped successful engagement. Here we share what we have learnt.

* Before you start a new online group send round a “how to guide” on the platform you are using, popular online platforms include Zoom, TEAMs and Skype. Ensure this covers young people joining via computer, tablet and android and iPhone.
* Compile and send to all young people a set of guidelines about how to take part and expectations e.g. taking it in turns to speak, staying in one place, finding a private space.
* Before the group meets online - perhaps a week before, give young people a phone call - have they managed to download or access the platform - any issues?
* Before you actually meet with the group - test that all the young people can access the platform - do a test run with individual young people and do a test with the whole group.
* Give extra time before the meeting to allow those young people who are less confident going online to access the meeting first. You have the opportunity to help them before the group starts.
* Make sure you write a new risk assessment, working online is different to meeting in person be sure to remember safeguarding and welfare of the young people.
* Do create a safe, inclusive and confidential space for young people. Ask young people how will we know this is happening?
* Agree some common courtesies online. Ask the group to discuss how they will take it in turns and not speak over each other.
* Think about how online can be used when you return to face to face contact. What were the benefits of staying connected?
* Some young people gain confidence over the weeks of a group, starting with joining audio only, then video and then hopefully taking part. Agree with young people what they feel comfortable with when they start.
* Have virtual meetings with each other - at KIDS young people’s staff from across the country have shared resources, tips and activities with each other to help share the load.