



Safeguarding at Online Workshops and Programmes

Fighting Words has shown great innovation in moving activities online, but as we do this it is important to remember that our Child Protection Policies apply equally in the online space as they do in our usual activities.

Booking Workshops

Fighting Words coordinators should only use Fighting Words email addresses and social media accounts to communicate with teachers and parents and maintain separation from their personal online presence.

Our preferred approach is to communicate with teachers and parents – and not children and young people – when confirming online workshop details. For Write Club and similar programmes, coordinators may be in direct contact with young people providing all relevant parent permissions are in place.

Schools – Online Workshops with Primary and Post-Primary Schools School Workshops – Students in School

If a school has booked an online workshop and **all the participants will be in the classroom**, the workshop may be hosted by Fighting Words under the following circumstances:

- The workshop is set up using a registered Fighting Words web hosting account (e.g., on Google Meet) and a registered Fighting Words email address.
- School staff will receive the login link within 24 hours of the workshop. School staff must be advised that the login link for the workshop is used **ONLY** by the participant for whom it is intended, most typically the class teacher.
- The Fighting Words volunteer team should receive the link within 24 hours of the workshop date from a registered Fighting Words email address.
- Volunteer mentors will be advised that the login link for the workshop should not be forwarded to anyone else.

- Volunteer mentors should contact a member of Fighting Words staff for login links, not other mentors.

School Workshops – Students at Home

The policy below applies when school buildings are closed and all students are joining individually from separate locations.

All school workshops will be hosted by the school on their preferred platform, e.g., Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, Zoom. In this way, school staff will monitor attendance of their students.

Under no circumstances will Fighting Words or a Fighting Words partner organisation host an online workshop with a Fighting Words web hosting account. **There are no exceptions to this policy.**

- Teachers should advise parents to take care that the login link for the workshop is used **ONLY** by the participant for whom it is intended, even if the link is available on a family laptop, PC or other digital device.
- The teacher or school representative should be advised that the school should use the most up-to-date version of the platform, e.g. Google Meet.
- Ensure that the Fighting Words volunteer team has the relevant login details from the school as soon as possible.

Parents – For workshops directly with children and young people at weekends, school holiday periods and the summer, Google Meet links should be sent to the same parent email address used for registration.

Parents will be advised that the login link must not be forwarded to anyone else and is for use only by the participant for whom it is intended.

General Guidelines for Online Workshops

- Ensure that all children and young people have permission to participate:
 - o School Groups: School booking with contact details and all relevant information from the school
 - o Individuals: Written permission from parents that each child may participate in online workshops

- The information email to schools/parents should introduce the workshop format and content.
- For school workshops, it is preferable to have an additional staff member at the workshop in addition to the class teacher.
- Each participant is dressed appropriately, i.e., not in pyjamas.
- Each participant is in a classroom or a family room, e.g., kitchen/living room and not obviously a bedroom.
- That there is a neutral/school background behind the participants
- An adult present in the room or the immediate area – either a teacher or member of school staff or a parent/guardian
- In situations where Fighting Words staff members and FW volunteers are invited to join a workshop facilitated by another organisation, confirm that the organisation has their own child protection policy in place.

Child Protection and Online Programmes

The Rules for Coordinators and Volunteer Mentors Still Apply

All Fighting Words teams must continue to observe all policies in relation to staff and /volunteers. This includes observing correct procedures for:

- Recruitment and Selection of Volunteers (including the requirement for Garda vetting)
- Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy – including the Code of Behaviour
- Volunteer Supervision Policy

In short, coordinators must make sure any staff/ volunteers on their teams who are communicating with or working with young people online have been Garda vetted and are fully briefed on the Fighting Words code of behaviour and child protection policy.

The Welfare of The Young Person Is Paramount – Online and Offline!

If you note any child protection concerns while online working with children and young people, adhere to the guidelines and reporting procedures per the Fighting Words Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy.

Remember – Tusla should always be informed when a staff member or volunteer has **reasonable grounds for concern** that a child may have been, is being, or is at risk of being abused or neglected. You can do this

via the Designated Liaison Person at Fighting Words – Sara Bennett- who can provide advice and the relevant forms.

If you ignore what may be symptoms of abuse, it could result in ongoing harm to the child. ***It is not necessary for you to prove that abuse has occurred to report a concern to Tusla.*** All that is required is that you have reasonable grounds for concern.

Safeguarding and Video Conferencing Apps

There are three main platforms that workshops may be delivered on: Google Meet, Google Classroom and Microsoft Teams.

Schools will most likely use Google Classroom or Microsoft Teams. Google Meet seems to be the preferred format for all other community-based organisations. All staff and volunteers delivering workshops should be familiar with the platform to be used and its various features, such as Chat, Reactions and how to turn off video and audio.

Tips for Managing Video Meetings

Here are some handy pointers for managing video meetings in a way that considers the wellbeing of all involved:

- **For programmes with schools**, the school should be the host of the workshop in all cases, NOT Fighting Words or a FW-affiliated organisation in all circumstances. There are no exceptions to this rule.
- **For programmes directly with individuals, i.e., booked via parents:**
 - Do not require participants to have an account to participate, instead invite participants by email with a link to the meeting.
 - Meetings should be hosted from an account held and managed by Fighting Words or a partner organisation, e.g., a library or theatre, and not from a coordinator's personal account.
- More than one staff member or volunteer should have access to the account details.
- Never invite anyone to join a meeting unless they are a volunteer tutor, teacher or parent of a participant

- Ensure that meetings are password protected and can only be joined by invitees.
- Advise parent/guardians in advance that participants will not be let in after the first ten minutes of the workshop. Provide contact details (phone/email) of someone to contact in case of technical/connectivity issues.
- Parents should take care that the login link for the workshop is used ONLY by the participant for whom it is intended, even if the link is available on a family laptop, PC or other digital device.
- DO NOT allow any participant to join without a username, such as the name of a participant or that participant's parents. DO NOT admit any generic names such as "iPhone XR" or "Android User."
- It is not advisable to record the meeting unless it is for a clearly stated and defined purpose. If you do record the meeting, store the recording securely on Fighting Words or a partner organisation's equipment for a specified period of time. It is essential that you **inform participants and their parents and guardians that you will be recording the meeting and confirm their permission to do so** in line with the Fighting Words data protection policy, as this is classified as data processing.
- Make yourself familiar with the features of the chosen app – such as Google Meet - in advance and provide clear guidance for teachers and young people on safe use of the app prior to working online.
- Time-limit meetings. As you would with any workshop, be clear on the planned duration of the online interaction in advance. It is likely that the concentration span possible will be less than that in a regular workshop. Manage expectations by clearly outlining the workshop timeline. Fighting Words has resources available to all location coordinators to facilitate this.
- Be clear on the code of conduct for participants. Set expectations for dressing appropriately, participating fully and working together etc. Work with participants to adapt the group contract to cover

working online. See the Positive Behaviour Policy for more information.

- Check with participants that they are comfortable with using the app and whether they are experiencing any barriers to participation (e.g., no broadband access or access to equipment; a disability that affects their ability to interact via screen such as visual impairment etc.) Make accommodations as appropriate.

Online Safety – Further Resources

[Webwise.ie](https://www.webwise.ie) offers a lot of good advice and information for workers, parents and young people alike on internet and social media usage and best practice for online safety.

- <https://www.webwise.ie/category/parents/explainers/>
- <https://www.webwise.ie/parents/explained-image-sharing-app-instagram/>
- <https://www.youth.ie/programmes/projects-initiatives/web-safety-in-youth-work/>
- [Be Safe Online: Ireland's Official Online Safety Hub \[Government of Ireland\]](#)