# Leading a Small Group Online

**PRACTICAL TIPS**

We encourage you to use the solution that works best for you, the option we recommend is Zoom. These tips are aimed at Small Group leaders but will likely be useful more widely.

Zoom offers high quality video discussion amongst multiple people, as well as a text messaging function. You as the leader must have an account with Zoom to organize a meeting, but participants do not have to have their own account. There are both free and ‘premium’ accounts available – but you can do everything you need on the free version, where you can host as many as 100 participants at any one time. The meetings have a 40-minute limit on free accounts, but when you hit this mark you can easily *start a new meeting* if you need more time.

**Getting started is very easy:**

To create an account, go to [zoom.us/signup](https://zoom.us/signup)

It is a very simple process and there are many helpful tutorials available to help you learn. We’ve listed a few here.

* Tutorial: How to sign up and download the software: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qsy2Ph6kSf8&list=PLKpRxBfeD1kEM_I1lId3N_Xl77fKDzSXe>
* Tutorial: How to schedule a meeting: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XhZW3iyXV9U&list=PLKpRxBfeD1kEM_I1lId3N_Xl77fKDzSXe&index=3>
* For support and instructions (including 1-minute instructional videos): [support.zoom.us](https://support.zoom.us)
* Zoom has their own Youtube Channel with lots of short tutorials: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qsy2Ph6kSf8&list=PLKpRxBfeD1kEM_I1lId3N_Xl77fKDzSXe>

**Which app and device should I use?**

As the group leader, we recommend using a desktop or laptop computer. The larger screen will allow you to see all participants at the same time (very helpful). We also recommend downloading the app for Windows or Apple OS (rather than using a browser extension).

Zoom is available on smart phones and works well but phones are not as good for hosting larger meeings (3+). Some group members may not have a computer though so a phone will still be a good option for them.

**PASTORAL TIPS**

Try to meet at your usual time. In times of uncertainty it is important to provide consistency.

**Make it homely.** When you meet in-person, there’s often 15-20 minutes of getting tea and coffee, chatting about your day, sharing meals together – so try to do that virtually! Move the screen around so you can see each other’s homes, let the cat jump in front of the camera – make it feel nice.

**Make sure everything’s working.** Give a few minutes to check sound and vision and troubleshoot technical issues, especially with audio; people need to be able to hear each other. Get each person to say hi and answer a quick question (e.g. ‘How many toilet rolls do you have left?’) – this allows everyone to check mic, mute button and video is working and to make it clear to the whole group who is actually present. In your second or third session you could introduce them to the ‘Chat’ function, don’t overload them with features all at once. *Headphones are definitely recommended* for everyone, especially if they include an attached microphone. Encourage people to speak clearly and use their microphones well, this will be especially important for groups that have members who are hard of hearing.

**Communicate a clear online etiquette.** Ask people to mute themselves unless they’re speaking, this reduces background noise and makes it easier to listen to the person speaking. Ask people to raise their hand or send a message over Chat if they have something to share. You need to provide clear direction for the meeting, it will be similar but different to doing this in person. You'll probably find that initially you’ll need to be more directive, directing who can speak when, but as the group gets used to meeting online, you’ll find that people will adjust and it will become more natural.

**Consider making the study visible:** On Zoom you can share the study questions on the computer screen, which makes your study outline visible to everyone. Another option is for you to send the study in advance and make sure people have it in front of them. Being able to see the questions is key for people following along and keeping up, particularly if the audio drops out for a moment or their location is distracting. Also, meeting via a screen can be mentally a bit more draining than meeting in person so try and get people to do some preparation before you meet. E.g. Ask people to read the passage before you all login into the meeting or have them think about their answer to your first question during the week so they come ready with their first contribution.

**Make sure you invite everyone to contribute to the discussion**. It can be easy to feel disconnected during a video discussion, so ask people direct questions. Normally we don’t recommend doing this but in this different format it can be valuable if handled well.

**Embrace the silence:** It’s always tempting to fill the silence, but pauses are needed even more in this context! Some members are nervous about talking over someone, so will only jump in after a pause, and people also need time to unmute their mic. Also, there can sometimes be some lag if people have slow or unreliable internet or devices, patience is important.

**Encourage everyone to put away other distractions.** It can be easy to drift and lose connection during a video call, so encourage people to put down their phones and resist flipping between tabs! Ideally, they have only Zoom open on their device and nothing else (same goes for you).

**Make it shorter.** Sitting at your desk staring at a screen is not as relaxing and enjoyable as on a comfy couch.

**Include prayer.** You pray when you share a room, so pray online! To make people more comfortable, you might encourage them to turn off their video and just keep audio.

**Always follow up people who don’t make it online.** They may have had technical issues, or they may be sick, or just struggling with the isolation – so check in with them.

**Embrace the tech!** It might be a bit clunky the first couple of times, but things will improve, and people will get used to it. You can also try new things, like providing links to maps, images or video clips.

**Maintain and increase community outside the online meetings**. Share prayer points, Bible verses, stories, memes, Netflix suggestions, etc. This might be through Facebook, WhatsApp or email – but make sure it’s regular; in a time of social isolation, people will need more contact. Meet outside in groups of 2-3 if safe and responsible to do so and *only if government restrictions at the time allow it*.

**Invite new people!** Moving Small Groups online will actually make them more attractive for some people, whose current schedule makes physical meeting very difficult (e.g. busy parents or shift workers). Beyond that, though, we anticipate that there will be many people in our wider community longing both for spiritual comfort and social connection – and we are ready to provide it! A small online gathering like this might also be less intimidating – so invite them along.

**Keep trusting Jesus.** He loves us, he died for us, he lives for us. In a season of uncertainty, he is certain.