

Virtual Restorative Justice: Good Practice Guide

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September 2020

Why me?



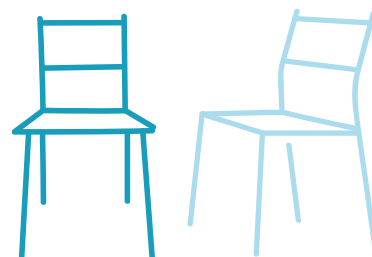
Introduction

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was not widespread use of online technology to carry out restorative interventions across England and Wales. The ensuing lockdown from March 2020 meant that restorative and youth justice services had to adapt quickly to new ways of working to ensure that service users could continue to be supported. Many services had not previously considered using video conferencing due to the importance of face to face communication within a restorative intervention.

In May 2020, Why me? received funding from the London Community Response Fund to develop Restorative Justice resources for people affected by crime and the professionals supporting them within the context of COVID-19. As part of this project, Why me? has developed this good practice guide, and a bank of video clips showing a mock virtual Restorative Justice process.

We recognise that online Restorative Justice is an emerging area of practice and our findings are based on a relatively low number of cases. We consider this guide to be a working document, and would welcome any suggestions and additions to the content.

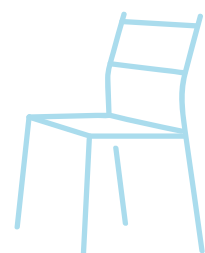
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Methodology

We carried out the following activities:

1. An online mock Restorative Justice process based on a burglary case which was recorded. As part of the process, we tested Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Circl.es as video conferencing platforms. We carried out an initial meeting with a harmed person, a preparation meeting with the harmer and their supporter, a case supervision meeting between the two facilitators and their manager, and a Restorative Justice conference.
2. An analysis of different video conferencing platforms to ascertain their suitability for Restorative Justice processes.
3. Consultation with restorative services and practitioners via our regular online forums which were set up in response to COVID-19 to support the sector.
4. Interviews with restorative services.
5. Consultation with key partners on the suitability of online Restorative Justice for people with protected characteristics.
6. Consultation with our Restorative Justice Ambassadors who have lived experience of taking part in Restorative Justice.



Using online platforms

Restorative services have to be mindful that not all potential participants may be able to access Restorative Justice online, for example, they may only be able to access the internet in public spaces, or not have the resources to pay for the level of broadband access required for online meetings. One solution could be that restorative services may wish to consider paying for additional data so participants can access online Restorative Justice via their mobile phones. Participants may also be able to access online Restorative Justice through probation offices or police buildings. Some online platforms do not require users to download the software onto their devices and can be accessed via the web only. This is something to consider when deciding which online platform to use for a virtual meeting.

Our research found that restorative services and partner agencies use different video conferencing platforms. For example, police forces generally do not use Zoom due to concerns over the platform's security. In order to be able to engage with both participants and partners, restorative services should be able to access a range of online video platforms. Restorative services could use a stand-alone device which is not connected to their organisational network in order to be able to access other online platforms.

Facilitators should be comfortable using the technology and be able to anticipate how any problems, such as loss of internet connection, will be managed. Our research into the various online platforms did not identify one particular system as best for the purposes of conducting Restorative Justice (see section on advantages and disadvantages of using different online platforms).

Facilitators must have a good working knowledge of different online platforms to ensure that they can engage with participants in a Restorative Justice process according to their preferred method of contact. The facilitator should also brief the participants on how the virtual platform works prior to any online meetings, and check that they are comfortable with meeting in this way. Facilitators should also ask how the participants will access the platform (mobile phone, tablet, computer) and ensure they know how the online meeting will work on the preferred method of access, asking for technical guidance if they are unfamiliar with the platform. It is suggested that facilitators send participants instructions on how to use the online platform prior to the first meeting, explaining how to use it verbally or by text. Our facilitators explained to the harmer at his preparation meeting how the online conference would work ([see video offender prep](#)). Facilitators should check that the participants are confident at using the platform throughout preparation meetings and if necessary use one preparation meeting to explain how to use the online platform. At the start of our mock restorative conference the harmer was unclear about how to view other participants, which resulted in the harmer explaining how to use Zoom. This was not an ideal situation ([see video example to show participants have different screen views](#)). Facilitators and participants should ensure that they device has enough battery power for the meeting.



[Watch video – offender prep](#)



[Watch video – example to show participants have different screen views](#)

Feedback from our online forums and through consultation with practitioners found that for some participants, particularly young people, using video conferencing and telephone resulted in better engagement with the participant. In one case example, a restorative conference was held on Zoom between a young person with suspected autism and two harmed people. All participants knew each other and some preparation had been carried out by telephone and social distanced meetings. The young person was already confident in using the platform and the practitioner reported that they were able to take part in a space where they felt comfortable. It was also highlighted that the young person may not have been able to articulate themselves so well if the harmed people were in the same room. The practitioner concluded that, whilst online Restorative Justice may not be suitable for every case, particularly if the participants are strangers, it has opened their mind to new ways of working. Online restorative justice can suit people better in certain circumstances. Our Restorative Justice Ambassadors reported that, whilst they would prefer face to face meetings with their harmer, they would take part online if this was the only option available, including in cases of a complex and sensitive nature.

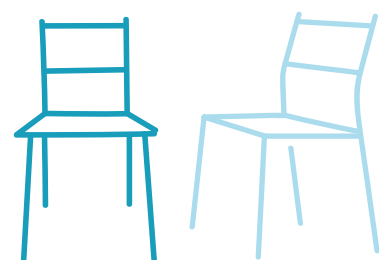


Using an administrator

Consideration should be given to using an administrator to provide the facilitators with IT support during a virtual restorative process. The administrator can keep their audio feed on mute and remove their video from display during any meetings. The type of tasks they would carry out could include:

- Acting as the 'host'.
- Ensuring that all participants, including those taking part by telephone, are named, including pronouns, correctly on screen.
- Managing the muting of participants which can significantly assist audio quality. Platforms with the function to 'mute all' are essential if there is unexpected audio feedback.
- Managing the waiting rooms and entry into meetings.
- 'Locking the meeting' once all participants have entered. The meeting would require 'unlocking' if a participant drops out from the meeting to allow them to re-enter.
- Managing the breakout rooms, if available in the online platform.
- Facilitating discussion between facilitators who may be supporting the harmed and harmer in two different breakout rooms. Our experience of Zoom found that it was not possible for facilitators in different breakout rooms to use the chat function to communicate with each other.
- Spotlighting video of speaker when appropriate.
- Spotlighting video of interpreter (signer) if used.
- Assisting participants with screen sharing and/or chat functionality including setting the participant access prior to meeting. This could include, for example, allowing only chat from host or co-hosts to participants and not from participants to other participants. In our mock restorative conference, we allowed a situation where the harmer directly contacted the harmed via the chat function, which was not well received by the harmed.

Participants should be made aware of the presence of the administrator at the start of any meeting. There is the potential for participants to be nervous knowing that someone is present that they do not know and cannot see and hear. It may be worthwhile asking the participants if they would like to see and hear the administrator prior to them muting their audio, turning off their video or obscuring their presence completely. This applies both at preparation meetings and the conference.



Safety

Prior to, and at the start of each meeting, facilitators should check with the participants that it is safe for the online meeting to go ahead. This may involve asking if anyone else is present in the room/location. It is important that facilitators are aware of hidden influences. Home environments may not be suitable for LGBTI people if they are not 'out' to family members and people affected by domestic abuse may not be able to tell you everything about their circumstances. Checks should be made with participants as to how much of their personal life they are willing to share online. Likewise, facilitators should also be conscious of how much of their own personal life they are sharing via an online meeting. Facilitators could suggest that the chat function is used if people do not feel able to say something out loud, or that they can make an agreed gesture or action to signal if the participant is at risk.

Suggested ground rules for all meetings, including the conference could include:

- Any meeting remains confidential. For example, nothing is posted on social media.
- No meetings are recorded on a computer/phone, and no photos are taken.
- Anyone attending a meeting will be seen, unless this has been agreed beforehand.
- Any potential distractions should be minimised.
- Be respectful at all times, for example, offensive language will not be tolerated.
- Do not share details such as the link and password for the online meeting with anyone who is not taking part.
- One person speaks at a time and everyone will listen to what is being said.
- Mobile phones are switched off or switched to silent if they are used as a back up plan if internet connection is lost.

It is important to explain and repeat these ground rules at the start of every meeting (see [video interview with harmed – ground rules](#)).

Facilitators must have contingency plans in case something goes wrong during the online meeting:

- What happens if someone has an issue with their internet connection?
- What happens if someone unexpectedly walks into the room?
- What happens if a participant unexpectedly leaves the room?

(See [video offender prep – discussion re. access to phone numbers](#)).

Consideration must be given to the location where the meetings take place. For example, in the case of a burglary, is it appropriate for the conference to take place in the same place as the crime took place? How will the harmed person feel about the harmer looking into their home? It is important for participants to feel safe during the meetings and the home environment can provide that safe space. However, there could be risk that something is said during a conference or



[Watch video – interview with harmed – ground rules](#)



[Watch video – offender prep – discussion re. access to phone numbers](#)

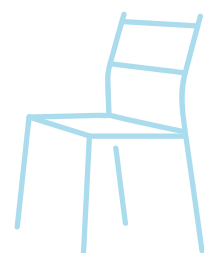
preparation that could impact on the security that the safe space provides. What is the impact of a participant talking in their safe space about a topic that creates a strong emotional reaction? What if a person is 'dead named' (using a trans person's birth-name when this has since changed) by another participant?

At initial meetings, facilitators should clarify how each party wishes to be addressed, including any gender pronouns (both of participants and the facilitators). The method of address may need to be checked with the participants throughout the restorative process. This is especially important when working with trans people. Many of the online platforms display participants' names. The administrator can ensure that everyone's, including the facilitators, names and pronouns are correctly displayed at the start of any meeting. Pronouns can be displayed on screen alongside the person's name. It is important for facilitators to explain how names/pronouns will be displayed and who will see them to participants in advance, to ensure that participants can decide for themselves how they would like to be addressed.

During our mock virtual conference, we tested Zoom's standard backgrounds, as we were conscious that facilitators and participants may want to protect their identities, particularly if they were using the online platform from home. Whilst Zoom provides standard virtual backgrounds, unless the user has a 'green screen', the virtual screen does not work and would lead to a distraction for participants. We tested this during our mock restorative justice process ([see video virtual background example](#)). If a background screen is used, a check must be made to ensure that it is appropriate and this can be carried out during preparation for a conference. The facilitators should discuss with the participants, prior to any conference, the location they will be and that they are comfortable with what can be seen in the background.



[Watch video – virtual background example](#)



Accessibility

All participants, including the facilitators, should pay attention to their visibility to other participants whether that be background lighting, their position on the screen or their background. Our first recording for our mock restorative process shows clearly why it is important to make sure any visibility issues are managed prior to the meeting ([see video first meeting with harmed](#)). Attention should be given to any background noise and interruptions. These can be particularly distracting for people with autism with a high sensitivity to noise. This video clip shows the impact of background noise on an online meeting ([see video offender prep meeting – example of unexpected disruption](#)). Similarly, a participant with a 'busy' background' could also be a distraction and people's attention may be more drawn to the background than to what is being said.

Feedback from one organisation that works with people with learning disabilities and autism noted that it was important for facilitators to speak slowly during meetings and devote time at the start of any meeting to reassure the participant. It is generally suggested that facilitators use people's names more during an online meeting to ensure that it is clear who is being addressed. It is important to find out as much as possible about how a person with learning disabilities or autism would usually take part in a face to face meeting and simulate their experiences online. For some with learning disabilities or autism, the inability to see the whole person on screen could be a distraction; for example, they may be wondering what the other person is wearing. One way to address this is that all participants stand up at the start of the meeting, or that they walk into the meeting and sit down as they would if it was a face to face meeting. If the routine is to offer a cup of tea and biscuit at the start of the meeting, then ask at the start if everyone would like to take a moment to take their refreshments. If they normally fiddle with a pen or stress ball, then remind them that they can do the same during the online meeting.

A visual agenda (using words and pictures) sent prior to all online meetings would support people with learning disabilities and autism to participate in the process. Facilitators should always end a meeting by outlining what will happen at the next meeting.

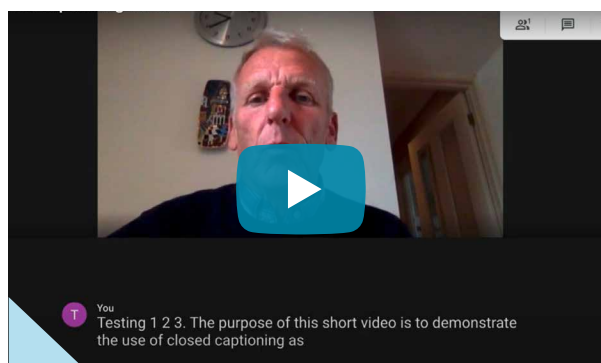
Some online platforms have a closed caption function. This means that spoken words appear as text on the screen. An example of how this works can be seen on this video clip ([see video use of closed captioning](#)). The benefit of this function is that it can be used instead of or alongside a signer making online meetings accessible for those with hearing difficulties.



[Watch video – first meeting with harmed](#)



[Watch video - example of unexpected disruption](#)



[Watch video - use of closed captioning](#)

There are also a number of considerations to take in account when working online with people from Black and Minority Ethnic Communities. These include:

- When working with religious families, ensure that meetings are not scheduled around times for prayers and periods of fasting.
- In some communities, females will not want to meet online alone and their husbands will be present at the meetings. Answers to facilitator questions may be given via the husband.
- The importance of listening to participants about how they wish to engage with Restorative Justice. If they do not want to see the harmer could an online Restorative Justice meeting be carried out without webcams switched on?

Online Restorative Justice provides opportunities for more people to be able to take part in a restorative process. For example, those who cannot leave their homes for any reason can take part in a direct meeting when the only alternative may have been an indirect process. An interesting point was raised during the harmer's preparation in our mock restorative process. The harmer stated that he felt more comfortable taking part in a conference with the harmed online than face to face ([see video offender prep - agreement to take part](#)).

Our research raised the question of whether working online impacts on the time it takes to complete a restorative process. Certainly, there are logistical benefits in that facilitators do not have to travel to and from meetings and it may be quicker to arrange an online virtual conference compared to the time taken to find a suitable venue. One service reported that they have experienced less cancellations/missed visits with online meetings compared to face to face visits. Facilitators should be mindful of the impact on themselves in conducting several online meetings in one day. However, another service reported that in an indirect process carried out by telephone, a letter exchange took longer to facilitate as one participant took longer to write their letter than perhaps would have been the case if the process had been carried out face to face. Some services reported that Restorative Justice can feel rushed if carried out online or by telephone. In one example, the facilitator felt that a case would have had a better outcome if they could have explained the impact of the harm to the harmer over a series of meetings rather than a telephone call.



[Watch video – offender prep – agreement to take part](#)



Managing emotions

As restorative practitioners we value the use of silence as time for people to reflect and to allow the participants to speak, rather than the facilitators filling the gaps. During our mock online conference there were periods when silence appeared to be awkward or there was not sufficient time for a silence to allow a participant to gather their thoughts before continuing. There is a perceived pressure to keep talking or to come in too early with a follow up comment ([see video harmed and harmer talk direct to each other re harm caused](#)). There was an example of this during our mock restorative conference where the harmed has to ask the facilitator to wait whilst she continued to speak.



[Watch video – harmed and harmer talk direct to each other re harm caused](#)

A person not speaking may also be misinterpreted in an online situation as a moment when their internet connection has failed. When working with people with learning disabilities and autism it is important to give them more time to process what is being said and for them to reply. It then may be appropriate to ask them if they need to be reminded of the question or if they need help with the question. It may be harder online to identify when a person is struggling with their response.

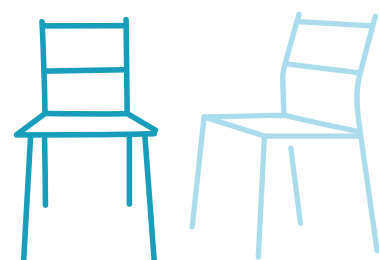
Feedback from our consultation highlighted that there may be a risk with online meetings that a participant could become emotional during a meeting and leave. This obviously makes it difficult for facilitators to check in with the participant. Whilst thorough preparation would assess the risk of this happening during a conference, there is still the question of what to do if a participant leaves a meeting during the preparation. Ways to manage this could be to check if the participant has access to support at the start of every meeting or whether there is a supporter present and an alternative way to make contact. To reduce the risk of this happening during a conference and if social distancing is possible, then one facilitator could be physically present with the harmed and the co-facilitator with the harmer. As a general point, facilitators should check that there are appropriate after care measures in place following any preparation or restorative meeting as is normal practice with face to face contact.

Our research also found that it may be more difficult for body language and emotions to be assessed online as compared to a face to face meeting; for example, it may not be possible to see the whole body via an online process. During our mock restorative conference one participant became emotional and the clip shows how the facilitator managed this ([see video example of dealing with emotions during conference](#)). Poor quality webcams can also mean that faces can be blurred making it difficult to observe emotions through the eyes. One of the consultation respondents asked whether it is possible to see a harmer express remorse through an online platform.



[Watch video – example of dealing with emotions during conference](#)

Restorative practitioners reported that they found it more difficult to build rapport with participants when meeting online and that carrying out Restorative Justice online can feel 'artificial'. It is not possible for facilitators to carry out actions without words such as passing a participant a tissue when they become upset. Practitioners we spoke to recognised that their unfamiliarity with how Restorative Justice works online has impacted on their confidence to work in this way. One of our facilitators, on review of the recording of a mock meeting, considered they were looking down at notes too much and sought feedback from the harmed about if this had been noticed and whether this had been a distraction. The feedback indicated that the harmed had not felt disengaged and indeed had felt the facilitator showed empathy for her situation.



Co-facilitation

In our mock restorative process, the facilitators had not met each other previously. The feedback from the facilitators indicated that, whilst they felt they had 'managed' their relationship well, they would have benefited from knowing each other beforehand, especially as this would have given them confidence to pick up any points the lead facilitator missed during the preparation meetings and conference. We have included an example of a clip for the harmer's preparation meeting in our mock process to show potential difficulties with one facilitator wanting to interject into a conversation (see [video offender prep meeting – example show how difficult to interpret](#)). The clip also demonstrates issues that can happen when a participant moves away from their microphone. This example further highlights the necessity for practitioners to practice together prior to a live online event. It also highlights the role of the supervisor in ensuring the facilitators can work effectively together.



Watch video – offender prep meeting – example show how difficult to interpret

One service recognised the potential effect of co-facilitators working with mainly one participant during a restorative process. In this example, the process was a letter exchange carried out by telephone with one facilitator supporting one party and the other facilitator the second party. The facilitators realised through their communications with each other that they had unconsciously sided with the party that they were working with. This risk could be addressed through case supervision, reflect practice and facilitators engaging with both parties.

Gaining feedback from participants

Feedback should be gained from participants on their thoughts of online restorative justice at the completion of the process. This can be incorporated into the restorative service's usual method/s of gaining participant feedback.

Recording the meetings

Whilst it is important that participants in a restorative process do not record their meetings, we would suggest that recordings could be useful for case supervision and training purposes. With the consent of all participants, recordings could provide case supervisors an opportunity to review meetings at a later date with the facilitators, without the potential added pressure of an observer present. Recording and reviewing a practice online meeting also provides an opportunity for facilitators to resolve any issues such as lighting, backgrounds and sound quality.

Feedback from our Restorative Justice Ambassadors indicated that they would have liked the opportunity for their conferences to be recorded so that they could look back to remind themselves of what was said. Recordings could provide a way to meet this need, although there would have to be a number of caveats to this. For example, the recording could only be reviewed in the presence of a facilitator and the participant would not be given a copy of the recording to keep for themselves.

The virtual restorative conference

Organisation

The use of the Zoom room waiting room was considered to be useful and especially as the Zoom administrator was able to send a message via chat to inform the person in the waiting room that they were “aware they were waiting and would be let into the room shortly”.

We structured our mock conference with a main conference area and two breakout rooms. The breakout rooms were used to:

- Check in with participants prior to entering the main conference.
- Have a ‘time out’ during the conference if needed.
- Debrief participants after the conference and informal time had finished.

On reflection the feedback from the Zoom room administrator suggested that we should have used only one breakout room whilst keeping the other participants in the main conference room - this would have been simpler to administer. We found that we could not move participants from the breakout rooms into the main conference one at a time; the harmed wished to arrive first into the conference room which we could not achieve. An alternative solution would be to use three breakout rooms, using the third as the conference area; it is possible to move participants one breakout room at a time to another room. Again this emphasises the need for facilitators to be fully familiar with the platforms they are using and how to adapt it to different circumstances. It is also about recognising that facilitators may not be able to recreate the exact structure online of a face to face meeting.

During our mock Restorative Justice conference, we tested the idea of using a picture of an ear which participants could use to indicate that they could not hear other participants. The idea worked well but facilitators should be mindful that not all participants may have access to facilities to print out the document for themselves.

One of the disadvantages of the online platforms is that it is not possible to replicate a seating plan in a similar way as to a face to face conference. Our research noted that the Circl.es platform displays participants in a circle with the speaker in the middle of the circle and was the closest to replicating a face to face meeting. We tested different ways of displaying participants on the screen through the mock restorative process. For example, in Zoom we used ‘speaker’ (the person speaking is shown), ‘gallery’ (all participants are shown on the screen) and ‘spotlight’ (one person is shown regardless of whether they are speaking or not). There is no recommended view although we identified a number of factors to take in consideration:

- Gallery view allows participants to gauge the reactions of others taking part in the meeting.
- Participants may not feel comfortable seeing their own face on screen. For example, spotlight view may feel too intense for the person who is spotlighted.
- Participants may feel reassured if they can see the facilitators on screen. Sight of the facilitators has the potential to be a calming influence.
- When using gallery view, participants may see a different layout of the other participants. This could mean that a harmer is shown next to a harmed person.

Conference Introductions

- Remember to introduce everyone as per a face to face conference including an administrator who may not be seen by the participants but is supporting the technical running of the conference.
- Explain what will happen if the online conference fails for any reason.
- Ground rules



[Watch video – explanation of the RJ process during the conference](#)

(See video explanation of the RJ process during the conference).

Running the conference

During a face to face conference, facilitators encourage participants take part in a conversation with each other. Our mock conference shows that this is difficult to achieve through an online platform as it is not possible to make eye contact with the other party ([see video please direct your response to the harmed](#)). This could mean that anything said, such as an apology, may feel disingenuous. It is important that participants are encouraged to look directly into their webcams although some harmers may not feel able to do this because of their sense of shame. Facilitators can encourage participants to direct their answers to the other party by using such phrases as 'if you could direct your answer to ...' and encourage use of other party's name or 'you' rather than pronouns such as 'she', 'they' etc. The 'spotlight' function on Zoom could be used to encourage a participant to direct their comments to a specific person. Another option is that the facilitator who is asking the questions has their camera turned off.

During our mock Restorative Justice process, we asked our harmer and his supporter to wear face masks as there is a potential that participants may access online restorative justice in public buildings. We wanted to understand the impact of the wearing masks during the conference, particularly on the harmed, balanced with the need to keep all participants safe. The harmed explained that it was difficult not seeing the harmer's face in gauging what emotions the harmer was displaying. In feedback on the process, the harmed reported that it was eventually possible to see emotions through the harmer's eyes. The harmer gave feedback that it did feel impersonal to be wearing the mask. It was interesting to note that after the harmer had shown his face, he then spoke directly to the harmed ([see video offender removes mask at request of harmed](#)). The harmed was asked whether the harmer removing his mask was helpful during the conference and she said that it was ([see video harmed is asked if removing the mask has helped](#)).

If masks are required for a face to face meeting, then an obvious advantage is that they do not have to be worn during online meetings. For people with autism, who find reading emotions difficult or people who rely on lip reading, a mask could be an added barrier. Consideration could be given to using transparent face shields instead of face masks. Similarly, some people with autism find it difficult to communicate with people wearing dark glasses.



Watch video – please direct your response to the harmed



Watch video – offender removes mask at request of harmed



Watch video – harmed is asked if removing the mask has helped

Outcome agreements

The facilitators decided for our mock restorative process that they would type up the outcome agreement via Zoom's chat function and then gain everyone's agreement to it via chat. Unfortunately, this did not work and the administrator showed part of the outcome agreement using the shared screen function. This highlights the importance of the facilitators knowing in detail how the online platform works and practice beforehand. Ways to present outcome agreements can include using the whiteboard function in Zoom or one facilitator typing out the agreement in the informal time and then presenting it through a share screen function.

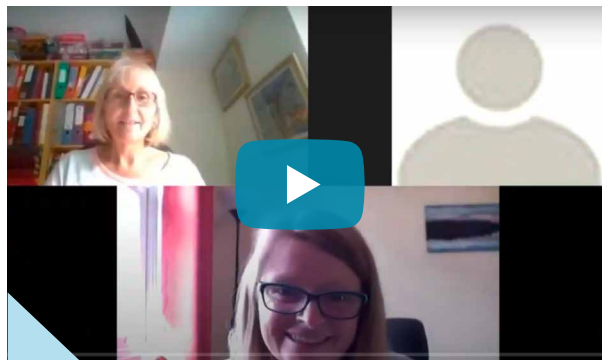
Informal time and ending the conference

As part of the project we attempted to recreate the informal ending of a face to face restorative meeting where experience shows that participants generally use this space to communicate directly with each other. Indeed this is the period where significant rehabilitation can take place. In our project we briefed the participants to 'grab a coffee' and then come back to the virtual room whilst the outcome agreement was typed. In the mock conference the victim found herself left alone in the virtual room and as a result felt very uncomfortable. Further thoughts and discussion around this closure suggested the facilitators at this point could have muted themselves whilst leaving their screen visible so that they could monitor how interactions were taking place whilst still being visible to all parties. Our feedback also identified that any supporter of the harmed should be made aware of the purpose of this session prior to the conference taking place. Both the harmed and the harmer considered the final informal session was beneficial [\(see video informal discussion at closure of formal conference\)](#).

Our suggestion is that after the informal time there is a formal closure of the conference and then participants are moved to break out rooms for immediate debrief [\(see video harmed debrief\)](#).



[Watch video – informal discussion at closure of formal conference](#)

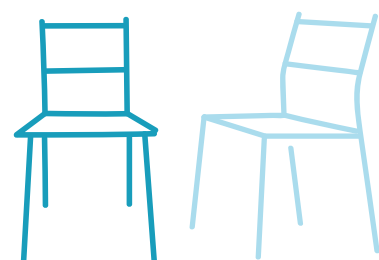


[Watch video – harmed debrief](#)

Indirect Restorative Processes

Several of the restorative services we spoke to have carried out letter exchanges and shuttle mediation by telephone supported by email communication. Generally, letters were used for low level crimes such as criminal damage, shoplifting and public order offences. By carrying out indirect processes by telephone it was possible for participants to take part in Restorative Justice when the lockdown conditions meant it was impossible to carry out face to face meeting. This gave them a way to gain answers to their questions when otherwise a Restorative Justice would not have been possible. Generally, letters were read to participants over the telephone with the same level of risk assessment as if the process had been carried out face to face. It is still important to assess at any initial conversation with a participant whether it would be better for the process to be carried out face to face.

The key advantage of telephone indirect Restorative Justice was the time taken to facilitate a process – it was much faster compared to a process which involved physical face to face meetings. Services that had used this method reported that they would not have considered telephone Restorative Justice if it had not been for the COVID-19 situation. One service reported that more people have engaged with Restorative Justice through telephone letter exchanges.



Advantages and disadvantages of using different online platforms

The following table shows our analysis of the potential for each online platform to be used for Restorative Justice. User feedback is from our five participants in our mock virtual Restorative Justice process.

Platform Name	Description	Advantages	Disadvantages	User Feedback
Circl.es	A Circle is a group of 3-12 people, using a structured meeting in a virtual space.	<p>This is a free product.</p> <p>We identified Circl.es as having potential to replicate a restorative process on screen - participants are arranged in a circle and speaker is displayed from centre of circle.</p> <p>Notes function - We tried to use the structured text as a way of organising the meeting through the Restorative Justice process. Useful for facilitator notes.</p>	<p>We found that the platform crashed during our trial and we could not fully test it. Circl.es requires further development as it is designed for a different process.</p> <p>During our test, not all users received the email notification of how to join the meeting.</p>	<p>"It looked good from the outset."</p> <p>"Well presented "in a circle"."</p> <p>"Based on what I saw I wouldn't use it."</p> <p>"It has the potential as it mirrors a restorative meeting but not enough functionality for a restorative conference. However, would be prepared to try again."</p>
Google Meet	Formerly Google Hangouts, Google Meet is part of the G Suite office platform. Google Meet aims to make it easier to work with external clients.	<p>The platform is excellent value for money, has robust security features and frictionless video conferencing.</p> <p>The platform can be accessed via a web app which means there is no software to download.</p> <p>It also provides a dedicated dial-in number.</p>	Google Meet will only work with the Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox, and Microsoft Edge browsers.	This platform was not tested as part of this project.
Kinley (Pexip)	Magistrates and Crown Courts are using Pexip software for virtual court processes.	The package offers security - first, enterprise-grade video conferencing solutions using industry-standard encryption and security protocols to maintain privacy and security.	We anticipate that there would be expensive development costs to achieve a bespoke product for Restorative Justice interventions.	This platform was not tested as part of this project.

Platform Name	Description	Advantages	Disadvantages	User Feedback
Microsoft Teams	Microsoft Teams enables users to schedule video or audio meetings with a single person or a team.	<p>The platform is fully integrated with Microsoft 365 and has advanced security and data protection functions.</p> <p>Meetings can be recorded and there is the ability to share screens with participants. The platform can be accessed from a web browser and there is no need to download an app.</p> <p>Several police forces use the platform</p>	There is a commitment to Microsoft software. Teams is expensive compared to other platforms.	<p>Half of our testers found Teams difficult to use.</p> <p>“User friendly. Everything was simple to use. As it was my first time, I will need to use it more to learn more. Already have found you can make your background foggy!”</p> <p>“Worst feature? - Have to download the app to get full functionality. So for example, I could only see one person that was speaking. Which actually felt OK - but I imagine if more people were involved in conversation then that might get annoying.”</p>
RingCentral Video	This platform Includes full range of industry-standard features. These include video call scheduling and recording, screen sharing and annotation, and in-built chat functionalities.	<p>It can be fully Integrated with G Suite, Microsoft 365, and Slack.</p> <p>Functions include advanced analytics and account monitoring.</p>	There is no end-to-end encryption and it is more expensive compared to other platforms.	This platform was not tested as part of this project.
Skype	Skype is very much a household name, which will serve as a strong draw for many people. The cross-platform app supports group video calling for up to 50 people.	<p>Skype can be used in a browser, so app download is not needed.</p> <p>Functions include screen sharing, an ability to automatically blur backgrounds, live subtitling of conversations and the ability to record chats.</p>	<p>Skype is a relatively secure service. However, the legacy of a 2013 data leak may make some users wary of using it.</p> <p>In 2018 Skype added an end-to-end encrypted messaging service. This opt-in service means that users can be more confident in sending sensitive personal or business information through Skype. The downside is that users can only maintain one private conversation at a time.</p>	This platform was not tested as part of this project.

Platform Name	Description	Advantages	Disadvantages	User Feedback
Zoom	Zoom offers a video conferencing and messaging solution for desktop and mobile devices.	<p>Zoom is simple to use and setup. It can be used on tablets, phones and PCs.</p> <p>Functions include a waiting room to manage participants arrival, breakout rooms (useful for timeouts in conferences) and a chat facility. Screen sharing is also available. Meetings can be recorded either on a local computer or to cloud storage.</p> <p>Scheduling can be carried out from Gmail, Outlook, and iCal.</p>	<p>Security is built-in, using 256-bit TLS encryption but several police forces have prohibited use of Zoom on police networks.</p> <p>Meetings are limited to 40 minutes if you only use the free Zoom account.</p> <p>It is not possible to use the chat function to message across breakout rooms.</p>	<p>All our testers found Zoom very easy / easy to use.</p> <p>"It would be useful to be able to organise people in the gallery layout.</p> <p>It does take practice to be able to use Zoom properly. We did not test the whiteboard function which might have been useful for outcome agreements."</p> <p>"Works well if you need to do it virtually but is very impersonal."</p>

Conclusion

This project has shown that there is the potential for Restorative Justice to be carried out online. There is a clear role for video conferencing to be used for preparation meetings and conferences. Online Restorative Justice may not be suitable for all cases, particularly complex and sensitive cases, but it is clear that practitioners are starting to see the potential for its use. There are additional risk assessment factors to consider when carrying out Restorative Justice online but it also gives the potential for more people to be involved in a restorative process, particularly when face to face contact may not be possible.

There is a clear need to build on the learning from this project as services and practitioners become more comfortable with working online. In the short term, Why me? intends to continue with the regular youth justice and restorative service forums as a place to share experiences about new ways of working.

Please email info@why-me.org to get in touch.



Resources

European Forum for Restorative Justice 'A restorative transition to the post lock-down world.'

www.euforumj.org/en/restorative-transition-post-lockdown-world

European Forum for Restorative Justice 'Justice and healing during the pandemic.'

www.euforumj.org/en/justice-and-healing-during-pandemic

European Forum for Restorative Justice 'Restorative Justice and Covid-19.

Responding restoratively during/to the crisis'.

www.euforumj.org/en/restorative-justice-and-covid-19-responding-restoratively-during-to-crisis

European Forum for Restorative Justice 'What does justice look like during and after Covid-19?'

www.euforumj.org/en/what-does-justice-look-during-and-after-covid-19

National Cyber Security Centre advice on using video conferencing services securely

www.ncsc.gov.uk/guidance/video-conferencing-services-using-them-securely

National Police Chiefs' Council guidance on using Zoom:

assets.neighbourhoodalert.co.uk/images/site_images/59804_Secure_Zoom_2020_03.pdf

Restorative Teaching Tools: Ice breaker activities for building relationships and includes an activity which can be carried out online – Show, Tell and Ask:

restorativeteachingtools.com/building-relationships/

Walker, L and Blimes Goldstein, L 'Hawai'i's Multicultural Contexts and Victim Participants' Information Shuttled for Restorative Reentry Planning Circles.'

papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3572139

Acknowledgements

This project has been funded by the London Community Response Fund



We would like to thank the following for their support in producing this guidance:

Barnet Mencap

British Transport Police

Candy Thomas

Carla Stevens

Catch22 Nottinghamshire Victim CARE

Essex Restorative Justice and Mediation Service

Galop

Kevin Straughan

Lambeth Youth Offending Service

Lorna Cousins

Metro

Olivia Lyons

Phil Cawley

Positive Steps, Oldham

Resolve West

Restorative Gloucestershire

Shelley Deutsch

Stand Against Racism and Inequality

Trevor Watson

Victim Support