



**Guide to Creating Safe
Online Virtual
Experience and
Supports in Disability
Services**

Guide to Creating Safe Online Virtual Experience and Supports in Disability Services

Online services for adults with intellectual disabilities impact and benefit many people.

Adults with disabilities can get support from their homes or any place with an internet connection.

Support staff: They assist the adults and handle requests for help. They also create a safe environment by setting clear roles and getting feedback.

Professionals like psychologists and social workers work together to ensure safe and supportive online spaces.

Outside trainers or guest speakers: They provide extra knowledge and improve online services.

Tech companies and government agencies: They can partner with service providers to improve the quality and accessibility of online services.

The families of people with disabilities can also use the service and be involved in the support process.

Everyone involved plays a part in keeping online spaces safe. This includes following rules, being respectful, and helping with technical issues. It's essential to check for risks, ensure enough staff, and establish rules for online sessions.

Remember, different people will experience online services differently. For instance, people with long-term health conditions and their families might be particularly affected. But whether you're running the service or using it, we all have a role in making online spaces safe and welcoming.

Standards are rules that must be followed, while principles guide ideas or values that help make decisions and act right. From the list given, these are the standards:

- Making digital content accessible
- Focusing on cyber safety
- Making communication clear
- These are standards because they talk about specific things you can check to see if you're making safe and helpful online experiences.

These principles are essential ideas or values that should guide the choices and actions of participants in the online experiences:

- Encouraging digital know-how
- Creating welcoming and varied spaces
- Encouraging user-focused design
- Using a trauma-aware approach
- Watching and handling online harassment and bullying
- Supporting user wellbeing
- Evaluating and adapting

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When people feel safe online, they become confident. They feel like their strengths are seen, and old ways of doing things don't hold them back. This leads to new chances, personal improvement, and feel part of a group. People are more willing to share ideas, learn from each other, and help each other.

A safe online space allows for better participation, more variety in who takes part, and stronger ties between people. This can lead to better learning, more independence, and a better way of life. The online environment can also provide new experiences and chances for people who might not have been able to take part otherwise.

In a safe online space, people feel free to discuss their needs, discuss problems, and look for solutions together. This can lead to better communication, teamwork, and more understanding and empathy among participants. Overall, a secure online space opens many chances for positive interactions, growth, and development for everyone involved.

- Participants in a safe online space feel noticed and free from old constraints.
- New opportunities and paths become available in such a space.
- Everyone gets equal chances to use the online space.
- It encourages people to speak up and talk about their needs.
- A variety of services like training, assessments, and fun activities can be offered.
- The space encourages open communication and sharing of experiences.
- It creates a calm and supportive atmosphere for interventions.
- Participants can experience improved learning, independent living, and a better quality of life.
- The space helps create deep conversations, shared learning, and a sense of community.
- People feel more relaxed, confident, and willing to participate.
- It allows for genuine conversations and interactions without fear of being judged or left out.
- It fosters sharing, learning, positive therapy results, and relationship building.
- The space includes a diverse mix of participants and viewpoints.
- It provides easier access and more sessions compared to in-person meetings.
- Users can fully immerse themselves and benefit from the environment.
- It provides access to new opportunities, skill-building, and community engagement.
- Safe spaces are created through clear rules, well-resourced leaders, and open communication.

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- The space empowers users, supports peer-to-peer learning, and fosters creativity and collaboration.

What are the steps that we need to follow to support Online Virtual Services?

1. Secure adequate resources and funding for virtual services to work alongside traditional services without competing for limited resources.
2. Coordinate service efforts with a joint staff approach, training, and evaluation.
3. Train and upskill staff to effectively support participants in virtual environments.
4. Assign specific teams or coordinators to manage virtual services for consistency and effectiveness.
5. Develop a website to help people understand virtual services and their impact on participants.
6. Properly assess participants' needs and match them with suitable groups and support.
7. Co-design services with the target group and provide training in technology use and online safety awareness.
8. Involve users in developing virtual services, establish clear expectations, and create action plans.
9. Encourage service users to take on roles in developing and delivering virtual activities.
10. Promote human rights, self-advocacy, and increased opportunities for paid roles for service users.
11. Establish clear communication and trust between participants with safety protocols and guidelines.
12. Ensure well-trained and experienced staff support virtual services, with clinical supervision for continuous improvement.
13. Strengthen connections with external advocacy networks and peer groups.
14. Follow the same procedures as for all services, with good communication and a focus on accessibility.
15. Maintain transparent communication channels and tools, ensuring accessible information for all involved parties.

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What needs to be in place for a successful Online Virtual Experience

- Assign someone the responsibility of overseeing the smooth operation of online services.
- Make sure there are enough computers, software, and tech support.
- Keep all your tech equipment current.
- Use the right tools, like specialised Zoom accounts.
- Use antivirus software and ensure devices are secure.
- Develop safety rules and hold practice sessions to get familiar with them.
- Regularly assess potential risks in the online environment.
- Always have safety information available and monitor service providers.
- Educate staff and users about respectful behaviour and self-protection.
- Help staff and users become comfortable with online technology.
- Train staff in tech use and establish rules for online events.
- Employ trained leaders and robust security systems.
- Have more than one group leader for larger gatherings.
- Create a guide for staff and users that discourages sharing personal information.
- Regularly discuss what's working and what could be improved.
- Learn from other online groups and share useful ideas.
- Maintain continuity with known staff and users.
- Arrange private spaces for online meetings.
- Encourage peer-led sessions when possible.
- Teach users about online safety and privacy.
- Keep up to date with the latest security and privacy regulations.

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Technology is crucial in making virtual spaces safe but it can also cause issues.

- The tech must be easy to use, and everyone should be able to access it to feel safe and sure of themselves.
- You can use tech to make things safer, like adding extra steps to log in or letting people stay anonymous. But it's important to remember different people's customs and languages when doing this.
- Technology can help control who gets access and keep an eye on users, but it can also let people harass others.
- The quality of the tech, like the microphones, cameras, and software, can affect how safe users feel. But having good tech isn't as important as having a good leader.
- If users are trained to use the devices and software, they'll feel more confident, and the virtual space will be safer.
- The tech must be dependable, easy to access and use, and safety features to lessen risks.
- The people who run and use the tech play a big role in making the virtual space safe.

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To make sure online services are safe, we need the following rules and structures:

- Make sure Managers are on board with online services and find money for them.
- Ensure people who provide funds are committed to supporting online services for a long time.
- Change the rules to include things like computer security and handling data.
- Update the way we do things, so it works for online services.
- Treat online spaces as important as physical ones.
- Set safety standards for online spaces.
- Let users have a say in how to stay safe and take risks online.
- Provide enough staff and resources for online services.
- Have clear plans for dealing with problems online.
- Make sure everyone can use the internet and technology.
- Follow rules about privacy and managing data.
- Make guidelines for using technology in a good way.
- Work with users and peers who help run services to keep policies flexible and current.
- Use rules from physical spaces for online spaces and make them better.

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Online services interact with the rest of the organisation in various ways. It depends on how familiar the staff are with online tools. Some staff know a lot about online services and can explain why they're helpful. However, others, including the top Managers, may not be as comfortable with technology. Because disability services don't have many resources, they may not have enough time to train people to use online services.

In some places, online services are seen as crucial as in-person services, and the same people look after both. These services can be used for meetings, training, and assessments. But some places are still trying to figure out the best way to use online services.

Online services can save the organisation money and time on travelling and booking places to meet. Sometimes the same people who give in-person support also run the online services. They can also provide more regular contact without the cost of travel. Even though online services are used a lot in many organisations, meeting in person is still valuable for creating strong relationships and making people feel part of a community.

To improve online services, we need to:

1. Include online services in our current plans and rules.
2. Ensure the top bosses support and provide money for online services.
3. Work with organisations that provide money to ensure they'll continue supporting us in the future.
4. Help everyone feel comfortable using online services by treating them as important as in-person services.

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5. Improve our technology and online platforms to make them secure and reliable.
6. Make sure people in rural areas can use online services too.
7. Provide training for our staff on how to use technology and run online meetings.
8. Create clear rules and the best ways to run online services.
9. Learn from each other and work with tech companies to improve our online tools.
10. Get the people who use our services involved in making them better.

SUPPORT STAFF Guidelines

To make a safe and engaging online experience, Support Staff should:

- Find team members who are good at guiding discussions and know a lot about technology.
- Teach them about new tech and share good presentation skills and upcoming tech trends.
- Give online classes on knowing your rights and self-advocacy.
- Make fair and welcoming rules, and don't judge the online experiences.
- Teach them how to chat online and look after people online.
- Make to-do lists to help with giving services.
- Make sure everyone can use and knows the tech being used.
- Put user safety and data protection first.
- Help users become self-reliant while also giving them support.
- Create a private experience that only invited people can join, with a professional in charge.
- Give Support Staff lessons on how to use technology and share easy-to-understand info with clients.
- Check what people need and what risks there might be before starting.
- Keep the atmosphere chilled, patient, and friendly.
- Encourage people to ask questions and keep improving.

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- Make friends online and in real life.
- Follow rules about privacy, safety, and protection against cyber-attacks.
- Teach Support Staff how to stay safe online and guide discussions.
- Check how comfortable people are with their surroundings.
- Follow guidelines on ethics and data protection (like GDPR)

By following these tips, Support Staff can make a virtual environment that is safe, welcoming, and supportive. This will help everyone learn and work together.

To Ensure safe online experiences, Support Staff should show the following qualities:

- **Being respectful:** Be polite to everyone and value what they think and speak. This helps make a positive and welcoming environment.
- **Being professional:** Act professionally and look the part. Stick to the rules and guidelines of the organisation.
- **Speaking clearly:** Talk clearly and straightforwardly so everyone gets what you're saying and what they need to do.
- **Listening well and showing understanding:** Listen to what others say and show you understand and care. This helps create a supportive environment.
- **Being adaptable:** Be open to new tech and situations. Change with the times in the online world.
- **Being patient and calm:** Stay cool and patient when dealing with tech problems or challenging situations. This helps keep the atmosphere relaxed.
- **Being engaged:** Be involved in online experiences. Join in conversations and help guide discussions.
- **Guiding discussions well:** Handle group talks well. Make sure everyone gets a chance to speak up and be heard.
- **Knowing your tech:** Know the online platform you're using. Sort out any tech issues quickly to keep things running smoothly.
- **Setting boundaries and rules:** Make clear expectations, boundaries, and rules. This helps keep the online experiences safe and respectful.

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By showing these qualities, Support Staff can help make safe and supportive online experiences for everyone involved.

To make safe online experiences, Support Staff should be good at the following:

- **Knowing digital stuff:** Use online platforms, tools, and tech to make, keep up, and fix any issues with online experiences.
- **Communicating well:** Clearly and effectively share information, directions, and what you expect, using the right words and tone.
- **Listening actively:** Focus on what others say, show that you understand and care, and respond correctly.
- **Being adaptable and flexible:** Change with new situations, tech, and problems that might come up in online experiences, keeping a positive and solution-focused attitude.
- **Understanding emotions:** See and respond to how others feel and what they need, creating a supportive and caring environment.
- **Managing time: Plan,** prioritise, and use time well, ensuring the online experiences run smoothly and efficiently.
- **Resolving conflicts:** Handle disagreements or conflicts respectfully and constructively, trying to find common ground and keep a friendly atmosphere.

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- **Working well with others:** To make a united and productive online environment, valuing what everyone contributes and thinks.
- **Guiding discussions:** Lead talks and activities, ensuring everyone gets a chance to join in and be heard while keeping focused on the goals of the online experiences.
- **Respecting privacy and confidentiality:** Understand and follow guidelines on privacy and confidentiality, protecting all participants' personal information and boundaries.

By building these skills, Support Staff can help create and keep safe and supportive online experiences for everyone involved.

Signs that an online space might not be safe:

- Few people are taking part or showing interest.
- Participants are complaining or showing that they're unhappy.
- People are afraid to talk or give their views.
- The group doesn't give support or understanding.
- People are getting distracted, there are long periods of silence, or people are making excuses to leave.
- The group is open, and anyone can join in.
- People aren't listening to each other, and no one controls things.
- Information is hard to understand, and there's no way to give feedback.
- People are slow to respond, show negative body language, or don't turn up.
- People are using language that's not OK, asking for things that seem suspicious, or sharing unsafe content.
- Some people are too quiet or trying to control the conversation.

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- People enter or leave without invitation, or privacy is not respected.
- People seem worried or distracted by what's going on around them.
- There are no staff or leaders present during sessions.
- People are communicating aggressively, bullying others, or conflicts are not resolved.
- People are not showing up, not taking part, or not coming back.
- One person is taking over the conversation, or leaders aren't getting enough help.
- People seem upset or less enthusiastic, or there are gaps in continuity or support from staff.

Signs that virtual space isn't safe:

- Not many people are joining in or showing interest.
- Participants seem unhappy or are making complaints.
- People seem scared to talk or share their thoughts.
- The group isn't supportive or understanding.
- People are often distracted, quiet, or try to avoid joining in.
- Anyone can join group discussions.
- People aren't listening well, and there's no control over the discussion.
- It's hard to get information or give feedback.
- People's body language is negative, they're slow to respond, or they don't show up often.
- People use hurtful language, make strange requests, or share unsafe content.
- Some people are too quiet, while others dominate the conversation.
- Privacy is not respected, and uninvited guests can enter.

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- People seem worried or are distracted by their surroundings.
 - There are no staff members or leaders present.
 - People are acting aggressively, bullying others, or conflicts aren't being resolved.
 - People aren't showing up or taking part, or they stop coming altogether.
 - One person is controlling the conversation, or the leaders aren't getting enough help.
 - People seem upset or less excited, and there's a lack of support or consistency from staff.
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- **How to Help Support staff to Make Online Virtual Services a Success**

Online services need to be funded with dedicated support staff. To ensure this, staff need training on using technology and working online and time to plan and review sessions. It's also essential to keep up with new tech tools, especially those that help users. Sharing resources, learning from others, and offering training and mentoring can help staff improve their jobs. Making sure online services last a long time and hiring people who have used these services to help run them can lead to better programs and be fairer for everyone.
 - Make sure managers understand the importance of online services and are willing to invest in them.
 - Provide more training on how to use technology and different online service methods.
 - Hire people who are good with technology and open to trying new things.
 - Work with technology companies, online training providers, and advocacy groups.
 - Offer training that combines psychology, education, and technology.

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- Focus on making online spaces safe and user-friendly.
- Teach staff how to use technology effectively and conduct themselves online.
- Take time to think about what works and what doesn't in online settings.
- Give staff enough time to plan, prepare, and evaluate online sessions.
- Develop clear guidelines and training programs.
- Hold in-person training sessions.
- Share the best ways to do things and learn from real examples.
- Offer training sessions, workshops, and quizzes to build up skills.
- Have supervisors provide regular feedback and support.
- Educate staff on online safety through courses or modules.
- Teach staff how to lead online sessions and use basic technology.
- Maintain ongoing communication with participants and provide continuous training.
- Pay well and offer benefits to motivate staff.
- Train staff in communication, understanding emotions, and using digital tools.
- Regularly check in with staff and promote shared leadership in online spaces.

To manage unexpected events during and after online sessions, staff should:

1. Get help from managers immediately, who can join the session or offer support afterwards.
2. End sessions if needed and seek extra support like employee assistance programs, mentoring, or counselling.
3. Make time to talk over any issues with participants that come up.
4. Try not to make decisions based on emotions and take some time to think before reacting to unexpected situations.
5. Set clear rules and expectations for staff and participants in online spaces.

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6. Step in during sessions if someone behaves badly and follow up with participants afterwards to fix problems.
7. Make sure information is easy to understand and provide training for participants on how to use the technology.
8. Offer technical help to users and use their feedback to improve the experience.
9. Teach participants to handle suspicious messages, inappropriate content, and other possible online dangers.
10. Provide a chance for staff to talk things over and get support after sessions.
11. Be ready to deal with emergencies and have a plan together with participants' support networks.
12. Handle urgent problems during sessions, like having one-on-one chats in breakout rooms or contacting support staff.
13. Follow safety rules and keep lines of communication open with participants and support teams.
14. Being well-prepared, able to adapt, and ready for unexpected situations can help staff make online spaces safer and more supportive.

As online experiences keep changing, new rules and ideas are becoming more essential to ensure everyone has a safe and helpful experience.

Support staff should think about the following:

Make digital stuff accessible: Make sure people with disabilities can use all tools, platforms, and information. This includes working with technologies that help them, like screen readers and closed captions.

Encourage digital know-how: Help Support Staff and users improve technology use and keep up with the latest tools and the best ways to use them.

Focus on cyber safety: Use strong cybersecurity to protect users' information and privacy, like encryption and secure ways to prove who you are.

Create welcoming and varied spaces: Make an environment open to people from different backgrounds, experiences, and ways of thinking. This includes giving

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information in different languages and formats and being sensitive to different cultures.

Encourage user-focused design: Make virtual services that meet users' wants and needs, and get users involved in designing and testing them whenever possible.

Use a trauma-aware approach: Be aware of how past trauma might affect users, devise ways to avoid triggering it again, and promote resilience.

Watch and handle online harassment and bullying: Set clear rules on what behaviour is okay and give ways to report and deal with incidents.

Support user well-being: Be aware of and handle potential mental health issues and risks in virtual environments, like feeling lonely, spending too much time on screens, and being tired of digital stuff.

Make communication clear: Clearly explain your privacy rules, how to use your services, and how you handle user data.

Evaluate and adapt: Regularly check how well your virtual services work and make improvements based on what users and Support Staff tell you.

By following these new rules and ideas, Support Staff can make a safe, supportive, and engaging online environment that meets their users' needs.

This part discusses managing staff, funding, and other resources to ensure everything runs smoothly. It also covers the necessary processes and rules that should be in place to make everyone feel safe in online spaces. This includes tracking and evaluating what's happening.

To keep everyone safe in online spaces, here's what you should do:

- Teach staff and users about treating each other with dignity and respect, speaking up for themselves, and staying safe.
- Regularly meet and evaluate how to make the service better.
- Learn from other online services and share what you know.
- Put together a guide with easy-to-follow instructions for staff and users, and don't contact users personally.

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- Get staff and users ready to use technology in online spaces.
- Ensure you have enough resources like computers, software, and tech support.
- Make online safety rules and practice sessions.
- Get the necessary technology licenses, like Zoom for Healthcare.
- Have safety information sheets available and supervise providers.
- Use antivirus software and inform users how to stay safe and private online.
- Have trained moderators and robust computer security systems.
- Keep computer facilities up to date.
- Make private spaces for sessions and make sure devices have safety software.
- Assign a specific role to oversee the use of online services.
- Conduct risk evaluations for the online environment.
- Have more than one moderator for larger groups.
- Train staff to use technology and set rules for online events.
- Keep online services consistent and reliable, with the same staff and participants.
- Use sessions led by co-moderators or peers when possible.
- Stay up to date with security and data protection laws.

What needs to happen to help the sustainability of Virtual Online Services

- Budget constraints due to economic downturns.
- Climate change leads to higher demand for remote services, potentially disrupting internet access.
- Better and cheaper technology, making it easier for everyone to use.
- More people need disability services remotely.
- Service providers and staff are becoming more tech-savvy.
- Society expects more online services as technology becomes more ingrained in our lives.

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- Virtual and mixed reality technologies are being used to help people.
- Older people and those with disabilities are becoming more comfortable with digital technology.
- More people want a mix of in-person and online services.
- Voice-assistant technology like Amazon Alexa and Google Home improving and making virtual services easier to use.
- More disabled people are getting internet access and needing online services.
- New technology like wearable devices and virtual reality tools help with orientation and mobility.
- People need more training to keep up with new technology.

The continued effects of the pandemic and less funding for in-person services led to more demand for online services.

People will want more choices in how they get services and support. Even though more people have been using online services because of the pandemic, some are still denied these options and must choose between in-person services or no service.

While more people will likely access digital services, face-to-face services will still be needed. We all need in-person social connections. Even though demand for virtual services will likely increase, there will probably be a limit to how much they can grow.

Factors like changing demographics, increased use of technology in schools, and more remote work could lead to more demand for virtual services. But worries about privatizing human services, misunderstanding human engagement, and the power of big tech companies could slow down the growth of these services.

Convenience, less need for travel, and new opportunities for those who couldn't access in-person services before are reasons why virtual services may become more popular.