



## **Amaze WhatsApp Group Policy**

WhatsApp (or equivalent online messaging service) groups are a convenient and flexible way to stay in touch with a group of people. They are used by Amaze staff, volunteers and users in a variety of ways. We need to apply our usual Amaze values and good practice to these groups including our data protection, confidentiality, equalities and safeguarding policies. We need to be particularly clear about the status of any group and the expectations that apply because WhatsApp groups feel informal, and people may post in or look at WhatsApp outside the working day or a work setting. Also, it is not currently possible for anyone other than the original poster to delete a message from a WhatsApp group. Members can be removed but their posts will remain visible unless the entire chat history of the group is cleared. So it is less easy to moderate a WhatsApp group chat than a Facebook group for example. Furthermore, in WhatsApp personal names and mobile phone numbers are shared, rather than a profile specific to the social media app as with Facebook or a chosen name as on Zoom, so GDPR considerations are different. It is for these reasons we have a specific policy and protocol for WhatsApp.

### **WhatsApp groups that involve Amaze users**

Amaze projects make very effective use of WhatsApp groups to stay in contact with users, to help parent carers and young people to connect with each other and to offer group-based support.

Official Amaze-supported WhatsApp groups must have a name that makes this status clear and a description in the Group Info section that includes the following information:

- This is an Amaze group
- By joining, a member consents to sharing their phone number with all group members
- Members agree to follow a group agreement/code of conduct with a link to this
- Names of the group admins/moderators
- What to do if group agreement breached or otherwise feel unsafe

The description only allows for limited words. A suggested group description is included as an appendix to this protocol. The code of conduct or group agreement that is shared with all members should be more comprehensive and will need to be saved online on the Amaze/PaCC/ESPCF website so it can be linked to from the Group description. It should be drawn up with content and in language that suits the size and character of the group, for example if the participants include young people. The code of conduct or group agreement should include expectations about:

- Confidentiality
- Safety and safeguarding
- Equalities and discrimination or prejudice
- Inclusion
- Bullying
- Use of language
- Mutual respect and care
- Non-judgemental approach



- Sharing and boundaries
- A measured approach to talking about services and professionals

It should mention relevant Amaze policies and link to them. It must make it clear what will happen if people breach the group's code. For example, that depending on the circumstances, a moderator may ask them to remove a message, to change their behaviour in future, or remove them from the group temporarily or permanently. It should also say how a group member can raise a concern about behaviour or attitudes in the group by contacting a moderator or other Amaze member of staff. An example of a group agreement is included in as an appendix to this protocol. The agreement should be sent to new members and circulated to all group participants at least annually.

All groups that involve users must have one or more staff members as moderators depending on the size of the group. Where groups are run in association with another organisation a member of staff from the partner may share the moderation role. Trusted and experienced volunteers can also take responsibility for moderation but cannot be the only moderators. Staff moderators for these groups must have an agreed arrangement for how moderation will work outside their normal work hours, for example by having volunteers who share this responsibility and would contact them or a senior manager in an emergency. For some groups it may be appropriate to suggest that messages are not put on the group outside certain hours. This can be part of the group agreement.

Staff members and volunteers may be part of groups that include users as part of their work or volunteering, but they may also at times want to be part of a group in a personal capacity. They must remember that they will still be seen as representing Amaze and behave accordingly. If they want to express a more personal view in a group, they should state clearly that on this occasion they are doing this in a personal capacity. We recommend that staff join WhatsApp groups with a work rather than a personal mobile number.

Groups that are not run and supported by Amaze should not use the name Amaze or any project or service. Any staff or volunteers who become aware of an unofficial group that is using a name that means it could be confused with a group Amaze runs and moderates should tell their manager so we can approach them and ask them to change this to avoid any misunderstanding.

### **Staff and volunteer Whats App groups**

WhatsApp groups that are **official and work related** should be named in a way that makes this clear. Only current staff and volunteers should be members. Groups that involve volunteers should have a group description that mentions consent to sharing phone numbers and maintaining confidentiality.

Messages and pictures sent in these groups must be work related. This sort of group can be used sharing information, asking colleagues questions and for urgent but not serious messages such as "I am running late" but should not be used as the only way to report more serious or formal matters, for example to call in sick or raise a safeguarding concern. If a staff WhatsApp group is used to pass on work-related information swiftly, this needs to be followed up with email. Managers/colleagues must not assume people check WhatsApp regularly.



The same standards of behaviour are expected as in the office or when carrying out voluntary work. Behaviour that would be seen as misconduct in person or over the phone e.g., using discriminatory language, is also unacceptable on work related WhatsApp groups.

Groups that include Amaze volunteers and that are related to Amaze work must have one or more Amaze staff members who act as moderator for the group. Trusted and experienced volunteers can also take responsibility for moderation but cannot be the only moderator.

Staff-only, work-related groups do not need a moderator as there is an expectation that staff look after each other and challenge each other if necessary, in the same way they would when sharing an office.

Although WhatsApp messages are encrypted, we must apply the same care over confidentiality and data protection we do to work emails. No users should be named. Initials or Charity Log references can be used if necessary. This should only be for brief practical messages such as "I'm contacting x" or "x has left a message for you". WhatsApp groups must not be used for discussion of individual cases. If a longer conversation or exchange of personal information is needed it must move elsewhere. A group can be used to ask colleagues for information or advice to apply to work with a user but this needs to be anonymous or hypothetical.

There is no expectation that staff should look at a work-related WhatsApp group outside their normal work hours. Similarly, volunteers including peer supporters and befrienders are not expected to look at a work-related group other than in the time they normally commit to volunteering. Staff moderators for groups involving volunteers need to consider how this will work for example by having volunteers who share this responsibility and would contact them or a senior manager in an emergency. For some groups it may be appropriate to suggest that messages are not put on the group outside certain hours.

Amaze staff and volunteers may also choose to have **informal social groups** on WhatsApp. Unofficial groups of this kind must be named in a way that makes this clear. They must not use the word Amaze or the name of any service or project in the group name. Membership and behaviour in these groups is for the group members to decide. However, if a member of staff or volunteer experiences bullying or harassment from a colleague in this context, they can raise this with their manager/volunteer coordinator or a senior manager as they could if this occurred with a colleague in any other non-work setting.

It is particularly important that any unofficial and more informal WhatsApp groups involving Amaze volunteers are named in a way that makes their unofficial status clear and that there is no moderator involved.

### **Parent Carer Forum groups**

The same expectations apply to WhatsApp groups involving PCF staff and steering group members as for groups made up of Amaze staff and volunteers. The name of the group must make it clear whether a group is an official one for PCF related business or whether it is a serving less formal purpose. Any official PCF WhatsApp group for staff and steering group members should have a moderator who is an employed member of PCF staff. It can be agreed that other named group members share the moderation role, but they cannot be the only moderator.



Behaviour in official WhatsApp groups for PCF staff and steering group members should be held to the same standard as is agreed for steering group meetings. The group description should say this.

If steering group members form a group that does not include PCF staff such as the chair or the engagement worker, or a group that is not specifically for PCF related business as is more informal or social, it cannot operate as an official group. These groups must be named in a way that makes their unofficial status clear and that there is no moderator involved. The name PaCC or ESPCF should not be attached to these groups.

Groups that include the wider membership of the PCF should operate with the same approach and expectations as for groups that involve Amaze users. They will need a group agreement and moderators.

### **The role of group moderators**

Anyone who agrees to be a group admin or moderator for a group must read this policy and the group agreement or code of conduct for the group. It is the responsibility of the Amaze or PCF staff member involved in the group to support them to do this.

Moderators need to agree with each other arrangements for sharing their responsibility for the group, for example if there are times when they will or will not be available. The lead staff moderator should check with others at intervals that they are able and willing to continue as active group admins.

Moderators need to consider the size of a group. A very large group may be hard to moderate safely. This needs to be discussed and a plan agreed to manage this.

When a group starts or a new member joins the group the moderators must ensure that they are sent a welcome message that draws their attention to the information in the group description, the group agreement and explicitly says that their phone number will be available to everyone in the group, and they are consenting to this by joining.

Moderators are responsible for spotting when something is posted on the group that is contrary to the group agreement and taking action. This involves use of sensitivity and good judgement. Sometimes they will see that a conversation is heading in a tricky direction and will be able to redirect it before it becomes a problem. They may spot a comment that could be misunderstood or seen as hurtful and be able to clarify this in open discussion. At other times they will need to private message the member to ask them to delete a message. Occasionally they will need to remove someone from the group temporarily or permanently. Any decision to remove a member permanently must be made in agreement with a moderator who is an Amaze staff member and be shared with the other moderators for that group, so they are aware of and understand the decision.

Moderators need to be particularly alert to issues around confidentiality, safeguarding and bullying/hate incidents. Moderators who are not Amaze staff need to know who they can contact in the case of an urgent issue, for example a safeguarding disclosure outside office hours.



## Appendix

### Model group descriptions

WhatsApp groups have the option to add a group description. The person setting up the group can do this, or it can be added later. The description appears in “group info”. They must also edit the group settings so that only they and any group admins can edit the description and other group info. The default setting is that all members can do this. Group admins are marked as such in the list of participants/members which appears in group info. This suggested description can be adapted to suit each group but MUST include clear wording about sharing phone numbers as this is consent for GDPR purposes.

*This is an Amaze/ESPCF/PaCC group. We want it to be safe and welcoming. When you join the group, you are agreeing to share your phone number with all other group members and to stick to our group agreement (OR in our chat here we should stick to the way we have agreed to work together as a Steering Group). Please read the agreement here [LINK](#) to exact location on website.*

*Let us know if a member breaks the agreement or makes you feel uncomfortable or unsafe by messaging the group admins. They are marked on the participants list below. Scroll down to see this. Or email [xxx@xxx.org.uk](mailto:xxx@xxx.org.uk)*

For a young people’s WhatsApp group it might look more like this:

*This is an Amazing Futures group.*

*All the group can see each other’s phone numbers. If you join you agree to this.*

*Stick to the Amazing Futures group agreement here the same as at group meetings.*

*No messages after 8pm (people need their beauty sleep)*

*Please do not private message people from the WhatsApp group*

*If you are worried about anyone then please let x or y know.*

### Model group agreements

Group agreements need to be saved on the Amaze or PCF website so a link to the relevant one can be included in the group description and sent to new members.

#### **Group Agreement for XX Amaze Parent WhatsApp Group**

*WhatsApp groups are a great way to connect with other parents but as with any group, it helps to have a shared understanding of how we will work together to keep things welcoming and safe for everyone. When you join the group you are agreeing to follow this agreement. This group has moderators or group admins who have agreed to help make sure the group works well and step in if not. The group admins are currently: X Y and Z. You can see this if you open Group Info in WhatsApp and look at the participants list. The admins are marked on the list. If you are ever concerned about something in the group, feel unsafe or uncomfortable or that someone may have breached this agreement please message the group admins or contact [info@amazesussex.org.uk](mailto:info@amazesussex.org.uk) and ask for your concern to be passed on to a manager.*



#### *Consent to sharing your name and phone number*

*When you join the group all other participants can see your name and mobile phone number. By joining you are giving your consent to sharing this personal information and it being stored on WhatsApp. Only group members will be able to see this on WhatsApp. Amaze will keep a record of your name and phone number and membership of this group on Charity Log, our secure database. By joining the group you are also giving consent for this. You can read our Privacy Statement [LINK](#) to find out more about how we keep your information safe, your right to see what personal data we hold about you and your right to have this deleted at any time.*

#### *What is the group for and who can join?*

*This group is for parents who live in xx/have a child who xx/ belong to xx. The group chat is to make connections/ arrange activities/ share support/XXX*

*Anyone can suggest another parent joins the group but only group admins can add a new member.*

#### *Confidentiality and Safeguarding*

*Please respect the confidentiality of others in the group. It is a great place for sharing and off-loading so everyone needs to know that no one will talk elsewhere about things that are said in the group that are personal. Bear in mind that this is quite an open group. Don't share anything you would not say in a room full of other parents. Don't speak about other families who are not part of the group. We will respect the confidentiality of what you say unless it raises a serious concern about the safety of you or others. The group admins will follow Amaze's Safeguarding Policy in this situation. You can see this policy here [LINK](#).*

#### *Mutual support and kindness*

*Be thoughtful and sensitive towards others in the group. We all have good and bad days so it is important to be non-judgemental and supportive. Differences of opinion are healthy but no one should feel put down or bullied in this group. Take a measured approach in what you say about services and professionals. This should be a safe place to talk about things that you are unhappy about but keep in mind that the teacher or social worker you are talking about may be a friend or relative of another group member or the school you are slating may be the one another child is about to join. Remember that others in the group may be at a different point in their journey as a parent of a child with additional needs. Pause before you hit send and think if what you are saying could be hurtful, scary or just misinterpreted. Look out for each other and let a group admin know if you are worried about someone.*

#### *Language and discrimination*

*We try to be positive and inclusive in the language we use about our children, disability and caring. It is good to share the challenges we and our children face (and fine to have a moan) but avoid using words that are derogatory about being disabled, autistic etc. Remember lots of parents of disabled children are disabled themselves too. We are a neurodiverse set of people. We need to be respectful of all our differences as a group. Language that is discriminatory or prejudiced (racist, sexist, homophobic and similar) is not welcome in our group. If you want to read Amaze's Equalities Policy, it is here [LINK](#).*

### Safety and boundaries

*This is parent group but we do not vet people who join. Use your own judgement about connecting with other group members outside of the group chat. Don't share information like your address in the group chat. Of course you may choose to communicate with friends you make via Amaze in your own messaging conversations or group chats but Amaze takes no responsibility for chats conducted outside of official Amaze messaging groups.*




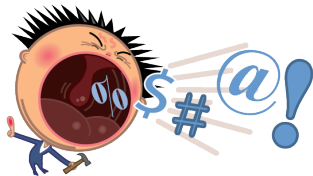

### What if someone breaks this agreement?

*We really want everyone to have a positive experience in this group. If you ever feel unsafe or uncomfortable or someone says something that upsets or offends you please alert the group admins so they can deal with this. The admins might ask a member to delete a message. If this happens to you please don't be offended. Sometimes we don't realise how others may "hear" what we write. We will always try to resolve things amicably. But if this is not possible admins can remove someone from the group temporarily or permanently.*

### Group Agreement for XX Young People's Group

*We do not expect young people to belong to Amaze WhatsApp groups without also being part of the Amazing Futures project in other ways. Ant WhatsApp groups are likely to be an extension of a group that also meets in person. It may therefore be most appropriate to include the agreement for social media including WhatsApp in the overall group agreement which is shared and discussed regularly:*

<p><b>1. Respect</b></p> 	<p><b>Have respect for each other</b></p> <p><b>Listen to each other</b></p> <p><b>Don't touch each other</b></p> <p><b>Respect the place we're in</b></p>
<p><b>2. Confidentiality</b></p> 	<p><b>We should not tell other people personal information that group members have said.</b></p> <p><b>The only time we have to tell someone else is if we are worried about someone's safety.</b></p>

<p><b>3. Everyone is equal</b></p> 	<p><b>We are all different, but everyone is equal.</b></p>
<p><b>4. Differences</b></p> 	<p><b>It's ok to be or think differently to others.</b></p> <p><b>You can be yourself here.</b></p>
<p><b>5. Say what you think</b></p> 	<p><b>Don't be worried about saying what you want to say. As long as it's not disrespectful to others. Please be mindful of sensitive topics.</b></p> <p><b>Your views are important.</b></p> <p><b>Tell someone if you're not happy about something.</b></p>
<p><b>6. Swearing</b></p> 	<p><b>Please try not to swear</b></p>
<p><b>7. Phones</b></p> 	<p><b>Please <b>do not use your phones in the group</b> session. We are all here to be social. If you want to use your phone then please use a private room.</b></p>

## 8. Social media



### **The Amazing Futures social media group agreement**

Think if you are OK with people knowing your phone number

No messages after 8pm (people need their beauty sleep)

Please do not private message people from the WhatsApp group

If you are worried about anyone then please let Claire know.

## 9. Fair competition



**All group members will compete on equal terms in games.**