



Supporting educators at a distance: Steering learning conversations on WhatsApp

Overview

The arrival of measures to prevent the spread of Coronavirus changed the way we communicate with each other. This brought with it both **challenges** and **opportunities**. This tool will support you in effectively engaging and supporting educators as they support learners at a distance.

Practicalities:

- During the first two weeks, educators should contact learners to agree regular communication arrangements.
- Ongoing contact with learners should take place every one to two weeks.
- Contact with your educators will most likely be by phone/WhatsApp.
- More frequent contact will be necessary to maintain motivation and to identify and overcome problems.
- Contact should focus on effective support for learners whilst maintaining safeguarding practices.
- A record of contact and progress will need to be logged.

CASE STUDY:

Use this case study as a basis to think through potential issues facing hub volunteers working with learners at a distance.

During her first week of supporting learners remotely Miss Ncube, an educator in Mutoko has successfully contacted a number of her learners.

Miss Ncube called the number used to contact Tafadzwa but was told by Tafadzwa's husband that she was not able to speak and had work caring for sick relatives and would not be continuing with her studies.

Some principles for promoting effective learning conversations

- **Be learner focused:**
The primary focus of your support should be learner focused. It is easy and understandable that during difficult circumstances to become distracted by a wide range of issues. Placing educators and their concerns at the centre of your contact helps clarify the focus of the conversations.
- **Be solution-focused in your responses:**
It is important to focus on solutions to identify issues or problems rather

than dwell too long on the problem itself. Once the problem is understood, you can move on to identifying actionable solutions.

- **Be realistic:**
Unrealistic expectations can be unhelpful. Work with educators to identify realistic expectations. For example, the number of contacts they will make in a day; the frequency of contact they should have with each learner; and, the number of attempts they should try make to make contact with an individual learner.
- **Maintain regular contact:**
Establish an agreed pattern of contact between you and the educators. Do not leave arrangements open ended. Be clear on how you can be contacted in the event of an emergency or an urgent need for advice. A key priority is to keep in touch with learners to support their safety and wellbeing, when the context may lead to increased vulnerabilities.
- **Ask Questions:**
Rather than assume educators have read documents, facilitate a process of asking questions. Asking key questions that will enable you to gauge proper comprehension of the task at hand. For example: *What did you understand from the reading? What can be done in such cases? Who can do that? What is your opinion? etc.*
- **Keep Safeguarding at the forefront of your mind:**
You are expected to remind educators about your programme's guiding principles written into safeguarding standard operating procedures (SOP). The SOP provides a way to guide educators' practice towards promoting safe engagement with learners.

Top tips to give to educators:

- **Keep a contact record:** Note date and time of contact, successful contact details, agreed next contact time and date, learner progress.
- **Do not leave arrangements open ended.** Agree dates and times to contact learners and keep to them.
- **First and foremost, establish an ongoing working relationship with the learner:** We cannot support learners who we no longer have a relationship with, so it is important for girls to know that the SAGE learning programme cares about them.