



Using WhatsApp

This guide will help you use WhatsApp to communicate with volunteers and members of your group in a safe and lawful way.

What is WhatsApp?

WhatsApp is a free messaging application that allows users to send text and voice messages, make voice and video calls, and share photos, videos and other documents.

You can use it to keep in touch with your contacts using your mobile data or a Wi-Fi connection.

You can also access your account and send messages from your personal computer when your phone is connected to the internet. You can find out how to set this up [by following this link](#). Alternatively, you can download the desktop app onto your computer. [Click here to find out more](#).

If you access your WhatsApp account via a computer, please do not download chat feeds or attachments from your WhatsApp chat unless they're securely stored in a password protected or restricted folder, then deleted as soon as they're no longer needed. This will ensure you are following data protection rules. Be aware of leaving the desktop app open if you're accessing WhatsApp on a shared computer.

How can local groups use WhatsApp?

WhatsApp can be used to enable members of the Co-ordinating Team to stay in touch between meetings, for sending one-way communications to a large group of people via the WhatsApp Broadcast feature, and for one-to-one communications with individuals.

Useful WhatsApp features

As with text messages and phone calls, the recipient will be notified when they receive a communication from you. There are various ways you can communicate on WhatsApp:

Text message – the text message feature enables you to send a quick text, website link, photo, video or document to your contact.

Voice message – recording a voice message can be quicker than typing a long message and can be a useful feature for those who find typing difficult. To send a voice message, just press and hold the green microphone button in the bottom right-hand corner of the screen when you have opened a message to your contact.

Phone call – you can have a conversation with your contact using the call feature.

Video call – you'll appear on screen while speaking to your contact.

Broadcast list – The broadcast feature enables you to send a message or document to up to 256 contacts at once. The feature enables you to create a broadcast list which you should use whenever you want to use WhatsApp to communicate with all of your group volunteers and members. You can also use a broadcast list to communicate with a subgroup (for example, individuals who regularly attend a coffee morning or exercise group).

To use the broadcast feature, the recipients will need to opt in to being communicated with in this way. You can find a link with information on how to invite your contacts to a broadcast list below.

The broadcast message will appear to be an individual message from you, and only you will receive responses. Contacts won't see each other's numbers, so this way of communicating with members respects their privacy in the same way as using 'bcc' when sending an email.

You'll need to make sure that the contacts in your broadcast list have saved your number in their mobile phone's address book. If your contact is not receiving your broadcast messages, check to make sure they've done this.

How to use a broadcast list

[Click this link to find instructions on how to:](#)

- Set up a broadcast list
- Remove people from a broadcast list
- Delete a broadcast list

Before adding members to your local group's broadcast list:

- Be sure they want to take part. You can advertise the WhatsApp broadcast group in newsletters or verbally, but you should only add people to a WhatsApp broadcast list after they've requested this.
- When adding a member to the list, share the text of the privacy statement below with the member by email.

MSS [Group Name] Broadcast WhatsApp Privacy

Thanks for asking to join our WhatsApp broadcast list. MSS [insert group name] uses WhatsApp to communicate important announcements and provide information about our services and activities.

Your messages will only be visible to the group administrator and shared with the Coordinating Team, or event host, as relevant to answer any queries you have.

You may leave the group at any time by responding to the broadcast message and asking the admin to remove you from the broadcast list.

For more information about how we use and manage your personal data and your rights, please visit mssociety.org.uk/privacy

To understand how WhatsApp processes your personal data please visit whatsapp.com/privacy

Group chat – You should **not** set up group chats with your group members, or for group activities such as coffee mornings, yoga classes or social events etc. as this can have serious implications for compliance with the UK GDPR. This is because the group chat function shares all participants' phone numbers and messages with each other. If you're communicating with multiple members of your group outside of the group Coordinating Team, please ensure you do so via the broadcast feature only.

If you're only communicating with the group Coordinating Team, a group chat can be useful to communicate with each other in between meetings. You can share messages, photos, videos, links or attachments in the group. You can name the group chat and mute notifications. However, be mindful that group chats don't respect participants' privacy so always ensure they're happy to join first.

You can find instructions on how to [create a chat group here](#).

We recommend you follow these steps when setting up a WhatsApp group chat:

1. Create a group with two or three contacts that have agreed to join the group chat (e.g., a few members of the Coordinating Team).
2. Name the group – e.g., 'MS Society (insert location) Coordinating Team'.

3. Send a message to let the team members know that you'd like to invite them to the group chat, and that they'll receive an invite link to join the WhatsApp group.
4. Share a group invite link with the contacts that you'd like to invite to the group chat. [See instructions here.](#)

The volunteer setting up a group chat should let other participants know that their mobile phone number, comments and any files or media they share will be visible to other group chat members. This means comments, photos and media posted in a group chat could be stored or shared outside of the group chat by other members.

Things to consider when using WhatsApp:

- Not everyone will have access to a mobile phone or WhatsApp so remember to keep key discussions and messaging via a channel that everyone has, or ensure they are relayed to group members not on WhatsApp.
- Only use the mobile numbers of volunteers and members stored in the Portal.
- Use the group's official mobile phone to store numbers if you have one. All phones must be pin protected.
- Check your WhatsApp list at least every month to ensure that anyone removed from the Portal is also removed from your list and from the contact list in the group's phone. This is important to respect the wishes of people who have told us that they don't want to hear from us. If we keep communicating with these people, we're breaking the law.
- All messages in group chats should be set to automatically delete after seven days – [see the guidance here.](#) As WhatsApp should not be used as the main tool for communication, this should not be an issue for record keeping. Messages in your inbox will be backed up if this feature is turned on so ensure that backup to Google or iCloud setting is turned off.
- Make sure you follow our [code of conduct](#) and that anything you say or write is inclusive and everyone feels welcomed and safe.

- Keep your smartphone and devices safe (password/pin protected and up-to-date with the latest system and security updates, and don't connect to unknown or public WI-FI connections).
- Delete the group if there's no longer a need for it. You can find some [instructions on how to delete a group here](#).
- Be mindful of how often people will want to be contacted and only share necessary information during daytime hours to avoid disturbing your contacts.
- WhatsApp is a useful communication tool but should not be used to share someone else's personal information – health information is particularly sensitive and should never be communicated on WhatsApp.
- Respect others' privacy.
- Be safe - if you receive an abusive or inappropriate message that is threatening, aggressive or rude, don't reply to the person. Report it to the admin of the WhatsApp group/person who set up the WhatsApp chat so that the person can be reminded of the expected conduct and, if necessary, removed from the group. It is at your discretion to leave the group if you feel unsafe.

Finally:

- We understand that members may also choose to set up their own 'friendship chats' with other members, for example if they regularly attend a group exercise class or coffee morning together. Like individual friendship messages sent on WhatsApp, such chat groups are not subject to these guidelines. We don't want to stop members or volunteers joining friendship groups, but this is done on their own accord and the MS Society won't be responsible for managing any potential data issues.
- Personal friendships should be separated from group relationships and every effort should be made to keep the two distinct.
- Treat all messages as you would an email from/to the group account and only use for society messaging. You should only contact people for informal/friendship chats if you already have an established friendship or they give you their number to do so.

- Members' friendship chat groups should not be used by the Co-ordinating Team as a channel to distribute Group information.

Be aware that WhatsApp also has a part in managing the information that you share on it. Take a look at their privacy notice at [whatsapp.com/privacy](https://www.whatsapp.com/privacy) for more information. WhatsApp is now owned by Facebook and you can also have a look at their privacy notice at [facebook.com/about/privacy/](https://www.facebook.com/about/privacy/)