Whether you're excited, nervous or feel out of your depth about meeting as a church online, working through this brief checklist will increase your confidence.

A note on safeguarding: You will need to follow safeguarding policies relevant to your church or organisation, and any other relevant policies and procedures regarding running sessions for children/young people/adults at risk. The suggestions below are not intended to replace your local ongoing safeguarding policy.

Online safety

Consider how you safeguard leaders and those participating. Set up a password to enter the meeting in video conference platforms like Zoom. If you have two leaders, get online five minutes before the advertised start time, meaning when the first people sign in, you are ready. If you lead sessions alone parents/carers must be present with their children. Let parents know that they should be in the same room as the child/children, but don't have to be on camera. The youngest children may need a parent with them all the time to help and support. You may find it's really good to have parents/carers and children interacting together – encourage it if it works well! Email information to the parents/carers in advance including information about safety.

Practise and prepare

Before your session, practise signing in and using the different features on your online platform. For example, on Zoom you can share your screen with other participants, a really simple way to show videos and images, and even simple templates that people can copy. Another useful tool is the mute function. It can be easier to keep everyone on mute to avoid background noise, and ask individuals to unmute themselves when you invite them to say something. Experience has shown that if you mute people who have joined in by phone, they feel doubly disconnected because they can't see people who have joined via a video connection, so you may want to keep them unmuted. A Chat function allows everyone to contribute ideas, or is another way you can share text. Using breakout rooms means you can have pairs or small groups working/talking together. You might find that some people are shyer online, which means you need to speak more. Preparing bullet points or a short script could help you stay on track and keep everything moving.

Get everyone involved

Just because everyone is separate doesn't mean they can't do things together as a group as you normally would. In advance of the meeting, send out a list of items likely to be at hand that you'll use for activities. You might even ask them to do something beforehand, that they can show

everyone during the time online. Send out the Live Your Faith Sheet, Children's Sheet and Colouring Sheet for them to use afterwards. You can also encourage households to have a drink/snack when you normally would in your session, or after church, this provides a familiar routine. Zoom coffee hour has been the highlight of many churches meeting online.

If there are simple items that people are likely to have at home, ask them to be ready with them in advance. Don't assume everyone can print something out at home. While it can be helpful for people to gather items beforehand, try not to make it obligatory. If a household joins in and they don't have the necessary items ready, they shouldn't feel excluded for not doing so. Depending on your context, you may wish to consider preparing a small 'pack' that households can collect from your church building, or you deliver to their homes. This could contain craft materials, any printed items, the text of the Bible story. With permission, you can take pictures of what people have created and use them to help keep others in the community connected through your website or Facebook page.

Encourage voluteers to take parts in drama scripts or to be a leader in other ways. Some people will be more willing to do this online than they would in church.

Some people might feel a bit uncomfortable about praying out loud or as a group online. Creative prayer activities such as drawing/making things and using symbols might help them find a way to pray.

Short and sweet

Don't expect the time you spend online to last as long as you are used to in church. Activities may take less time when done separately and people's attention spans are often shorter. Aim for quality over quantity; somewhere in the range of 20-30 minutes probably works best. Keep active and include activities to get everyone up and moving around, finding something to show, or making something, rather than just sitting and listening and watching.

Go offline

Everyone is spending even more time online than usual. Can you provide ideas for offline engagement? For example, you could everyone to write to each other or set them challenges for each week which you can come back to at the start of the next session. ROOTS 'Live your faith' works perfectly for this. You can also send them the Live Your Faith Sheet, Children's Sheet and Colouring Sheet.

Do your best

It's perfectly natural to feel daunted at the idea of working online. Don't aim for perfection. Anything you do will help people stay connected with their churches and each other.