

Guide to Creating Your Own Carer Group



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- This guide has been developed to assist Carers and facilitators to gain the understanding and knowledge on how to begin, embed and sustain a group for Carers.
- This guide provides people with the opportunity to support other Carers to come together in a safe environment to build friendships and support networks at the start, middle and end of supporting a family member or friend.
- Starting a group provides people with the opportunity to improve support networks and grow friendships with a direct result of **reducing isolation and giving value and purpose to older Carers.**
- This guide will give a step-by-step guide to developing, running and managing a Carers group.
- This guide was developed in co-production with Forward Carers and Carers.

Who is this guide for?

Support groups are peer led and are made up of individuals who share a common condition or circumstance, in this case being family Carers. These types of groups are focused on providing emotional and social support, information, education, activities and practical help to each other.

This guide will support attendees to understand how the group can support each other to reduce isolation. It will provide a step-by-step guide on how to develop your own group, support with communication with others and ways to support the group to continue in the future.

"Loneliness is, like, when you wish someone else was there, and solitude is when you enjoy being alone. I don't always wanna be alone, but I definitely like pockets of solitude to recharge and come back to myself. I think that's so important for everyone."

Jonathan Van Ness

All Carers can be at risk from social isolation, anxiety and stress arising from their ongoing caring responsibilities. Groups can help improve social connections with both fellow Carers and the wider community, to enable people to find purpose and meaning by sharing experience of being a Carer.

The purpose of the group is to enable Carers to recognise that they can have 'a life alongside caring'

Who can attend or benefit from a Carers support group?

Support groups are ideal to support people during key transition periods such as:

- First becoming a Carer.
- During periods of deterioration or additional illness in the person they care for.
- No longer having caring responsibilities.
- Feeling the need for some 'time out' or social time with others.
- Change in circumstance.

How support groups have helped Carers

"My suggestion is get out there and share with other people, you'll realise you're not on your own, they give you support and you give them support."

David, Carer

"I found Carer support meetings helpful. I always thought that the kind of thing you see on American TV programmes where people talk about their feelings wasn't for me, but I gave it a go and I have found it very helpful."

Graham, Carer

"I was a bit isolated I must admit, all these things that I wasn't ready to share, I started talking about it to the group & I started feeling at ease & comfortable about it."

Neelofar, Carer

1. How to find a venue to hold your Carers group

To begin with you will need to find a suitable venue to host your group.

It is always worth asking at your local community centre, place of worship, GP or even at your place of work, you don't need a lot of space depending on how you want to run your group. Just a quiet area where people can come together and have a chat is your first request. As your group grows so may your needs, for example, if you want to invite some guest speakers you will probably need a quieter space where you won't be disturbed.

Some things that you may want to consider when selecting a venue are:

- **Location:** Can people easily get to you? Is there a local bus route or car park?
- **Accessibility:** Is it accessible? Is it wheelchair friendly and are there disabled facilities?
- **Refreshments:** Is there somewhere you can make hot drinks?
- **Environment:** Is it a warm, welcoming and friendly space that is easy to invite people in?
- **Price:** What is the price and can you afford it? You may be able to get funding, however what happens when the funding runs out?
- **Money:** How much money will you need to run a space?
- **Virtual groups:** For virtual/online groups consider the platform you use, many, like Zoom, provide a free limited offer which is easy to navigate and set up.
- **Time:** How long will the group session run for? Does a face-to-face meeting suit the group or would virtual meetings be preferable? Even a blended group with both can work.
- **Technology:** This isn't a must unless you are running an online group. However, if you decide to have a guest speaker come along they may want to use a projector or Wi-Fi. It could be a good idea to ask the venue what they have available for you to use.

Things to remember: You will need to explore what is an ideal time and day to hold your group, this may depend on the venue and their availability, however, you will need to decide on how frequently you wish to meet. You can discuss this with others who may be interested in attending the group.



2. How to promote your group - around your local community and using social media

There are several different ways to promote your group;

- Take advantage of your own social networks and ask them to tell their friends
- Ask your local GP practice/pharmacy/community centre or shop to let you pin a poster in a prominent place.
- Approach your local Carers support service to ask if they will promote your event.
- Asking people to share your group details on text, WhatsApp or email is also a good idea.

Social media is an effective way of letting people know what's happening. If you are uncomfortable about using social media, ask your local Carers support service, friends and family or people in the community about where you can get tips on how to become confident online. As well as promoting your own group, this will also help you to find out what else is happening in your local community. We have developed more in-depth guidance on how best to use this platform in the appendix.

Creating a poster to advertise your group is another way of creating interest. You can use www.canva.com or www.postermymwall.com to design your poster. If you don't have a printer, you will find that most libraries have a printer that members can use for a small cost.

Top tip: Ensure the information you are sharing is accurate and relevant, let people know the day, time and location; if you're holding these sessions weekly or monthly, and most importantly what they can expect. For example, if you are asking for a donation or charge for refreshments, let people know in advance so they can bring cash when they attend. If you are in a room; let them know where to go so they don't get lost. Make this poster as inviting as possible so people want to come along. It is also useful to let people know how they can contact you.

Once you have completed your poster, start advertising, take advantage of relevant free posting websites such as www.eventbrite.co.uk – meaning you will reach more people. Get in touch with your local Neighbourhood Network Scheme (NNS) who will also advertise your group and may also be able to support you with accessing funding.



3. How to ensure you have a strong team to support you (don't try and do everything yourself!)

Group lead

It is recommended that you have a lead volunteer, this is the person running the group, which may be you. The lead person will be doing most of the organising, from ensuring the venue is booked to double checking any requirements, such as agendas, guest speakers and they will work closely with other volunteers to ensure a strong network of support is around them.

Support

The thought of running a group alone can be quite daunting, especially if you have other responsibilities and commitments outside of the group which is why it is a good idea to have a small group of people who can support you in the running and organising of the group. This support could include, friends who wish to be involved, however it is important that you inform them of the purpose of the group.

There are lots of things that you can ask for support with such as:

- Help setting up the venue before, and clear up after your groups, this can help members settle in as quickly as possible.
- If you are running more formal groups you may wish to consider having someone taking notes and turning these into more formal documents that may be sent out to your members.

All the way through this process, you will need to rely on your team of volunteers and members to come together and support your groups aims moving forward.

Do-IT is a great resource to use to promote volunteer roles or www.meetup.com to both ask for members and extra support such as volunteers.



4. How to run the space, create the rules and move the group along

Prepare yourself for the first meeting. Arrive early and have a rough idea or agenda on how you envisage the meeting to run. Ensure you welcome everyone to the group; if you're busy, try to encourage others to get involved, maybe think about having someone on the main door so they can direct people to the correct area. For some people attending, this may be the first group they have attended and may be nervous about walking in alone.

Introduce yourself and if everyone is new, think about a fun icebreaker, (examples in the appendix) this will help others to start talking. Make sure you start with asking people to introduce themselves. In your first meeting, you should discuss boundaries or group rules; use the group to do this, everyone needs to be involved in this process to ensure the group stays fluid and not a rigid rule setting space.

Things to consider:

- Respecting each other – allowing people to share in a safe environment is paramount to ensuring a successful group
- Consider what the focus of the group is with the input of the group
- Think about how you may address any problems within the group
- Ask others for ideas – use post it notes and then stick these on the wall for others to give feedback
- Review your group regularly to ensure you are still fit for purpose and people are still attending.

You will also want to start thinking about how you want to actually run your group, do you want to have an agenda or just come together for a chat? A group could also evolve into more social activities, such as a walking group, trips to the cinema or even planning your next group holiday.

Try and ensure everyone has a voice in how and what they would like the group to develop moving forward which will help build connections and friendship. People need to feel valued and heard, of course some ideas are not always practical, however you just never know what someone can bring to the table.

Keep your focus on the purpose of the group and consider writing Terms of Reference* (TOR) to define the purpose and structure of the group who have agreed to work together to accomplish the shared goal – reducing isolation and giving value and purpose to carers. *See appendix for template of TOR.

One issue that is always difficult to work with, is other responsibilities, such as your caring role, which may prevent you from organising the group or even attending. Therefore, it is important to try and explore who else can come on board to support you and to get the support in place as quickly as possible.



5. How to keep your group running

So that the group can carry on in the future, you will need to think about funding, as well as considering three other areas: social, environmental and economic factors.

Funding

Funding is something to think about prior to starting your own group, how much will it cost to run your group and how will you fund it? Options could include having a standing donation/cost towards refreshments and room hire but then what happens if you want to plan any activities? This added cost should be taken into consideration at the very start of the process and reviewed regularly.

There are lots of different pots of funding and fundraising opportunities available; details of how to apply for these are included in this guide (see page 11) . Don't be afraid to make the costs clear to your members if you get them on board early on when it comes to fundraising, you will have plenty of support.

Social factors

Social factors refers to people, you obviously need people to form a group and for them to benefit in some way by attending. You will need to think about how you will get people to attend the group, how you promote the group/activity? What do you have on offer to gain peoples interest? We mentioned briefly about having guest speakers, fun activities; ensuring the social engagement continues outside the group by meeting for lunch, or using virtual platforms such as Facebook or WhatsApp groups.

Another important area to think about is what are the reasons and/or benefits to someone attending your group? Have a think about taking lots of photos of your time together and even ask someone with a hidden skill to write a fabulous article (case study) on how much everyone enjoys coming along and how they have improved their health and wellbeing, and reduced isolation.

Environment factors

The location, the venue, the day, time and accessibility are all environmental factors that could make or break your group's long term success. Are you getting enquiries from people potentially interested in joining your group but getting no one through your door? You need to consider if your location / venue / virtual platform is easy to access e.g public transport or car (is there a carpark)? You also need to think about the time and what day your group takes place.

If you are struggling with this, speak to those potential members and ask them why they are not attending, use your current members to discover if they are happy if they are likely to move on quickly due to the difficulty in attending. We can support you in locating more suitable venues/spaces, however, you will need to consider any negatives or positives in doing this. If you are running a group online, it is good to highlight the positives of being in the comfort of your own home.

6. How to keep your group running

Economic factors

As we have already mentioned, money and resources are also essential to running your group. One of the main stumbling blocks in ensuring you are able to continue with your group is resources and the costs associated with renting your space, advertising your group and making sure you have enough tea and coffee to entice people in.

Consider using the expertise of your members, someone may have great writing skills and can produce a monthly update you can circulate. Are you providing refreshments? Have a minimum charge in place, even if it's 50p a session, it will help to cover some of your outgoings.

Start thinking about fundraising activities, use your contacts to organise a stall, cake sale or attend a car boot sale. If your group is full of activities, don't be afraid to have a standing charge to cover the costs, you will find most people will be happy to pay, however be respectful of those who may struggle to make any payments due to financial restraints and maybe offer a reduced rate.

The next section explores funding provided by external support that you can apply for.



There are lots of different funding opportunities you may be able to access to help you get started. When applying and writing bids it is useful to do the following:

1. **Read and follow the criteria** – depending on the funding you are applying for, they will have a strict criteria that you need to ensure you demonstrate how the money funded to you will hit those needs. For example, your local area will have a Neighbourhood Network Scheme which may hold small pots of funding you can apply for to help you set up and run your new group. Each criteria will be different, but you should be able to speak to a local advisor to get some support on this. There are lots of different funding opportunities, for example, [Get Grants](#). We also recommend signing up to [BVSC](#)'s weekly newsletters to see what the latest funding offer is.
2. **Don't duplicate** – is there another similar group in your area or even in your venue? Funders will only consider you if you are able to demonstrate the real offer and value you are giving to your local community.
3. **Think outside the box** – don't be afraid to consider something different, if you want your group to be more active and unique, then as long as you can demonstrate the impact then go for it. Funders want to see people offering something different to ensure those directly affected are going to continue to benefit.
4. **Do your research** –What does your funder want to see, what are the outcomes they will fund for and how will you meet this?
5. **Be clear in your vision** – don't get carried away with too much jargon, be clear in what you are hoping to achieve – do bullet points if this is easier to ensure you hit all the points required.



8. Top tips on how to enjoy yourself, be part of the group and encourage friendships

**Our
10 Top Tips
to Ensure
Your Group
is successful
& fun**

- 1 Encourage** members to support each other.
- 2 Respect** - allow everyone to have a voice.
- 3 Remind the members of the ground rules** – These will have been set at the very start of running your group, however it is wise to regularly review them and circulate across your members to ensure they are aware of the rules.
- 4 Encourage contact outside the group** – perhaps set up a buddy system or WhatsApp group. A phone call to remind people that you are due to meet and a phone call if somebody is absent can also help people to feel supported and want to return to the group.
- 5 Keep advertising** – you may find you have enough members, however, this can stagnate the group, members may leave and not be replaced with new members; the group will then be unable to sustain itself.
- 6 Be creative** – think outside the box, invite speakers or have activities.
- 7 Keep it light** - the purpose of meeting is to reduce isolation and loneliness. Although you are all facing difficult situations and having the opportunity to off load and sharing is important, it is as equally important to keep it light and relaxed, enabling friendships and connections rather than a heavy support group.
- 8 Deal with conflict quickly** – if someone attending is constantly causing conflict or upsetting the other members, don't be afraid to speak to the member and establish if there are any issues that are causing problems and signpost them to the relevant support such as their local Carer support group. However, if they continue to unsettle the group – you may have to ask them to leave.
- 9 Ask for feedback and suggestions** – involve your members as they then develop a vested interest in helping ensure the space continues to grow and develop.
- 10 Don't put too much pressure on yourself** – a typical space runs with between 5 – 15 people, any more than that can become unmanageable. Remember again your aims, even having one person will have a huge impact on the connection you and that person has.

Finally, sit back, relax and join in – you have successfully managed to start a group, congratulations! Remember this is just as important for you to make friends and new connections.

9. How to deliver a successful Online Support Group

For some people physically going to a face-to-face group can be difficult and online groups can be much easier. There are several benefits to this such as:

- Not having to think about respite care for the person they care for.
- Not having to worry about transport and travel time to get to groups.
- Being able to switch off the microphone and camera if /when needed.
- Still being able to carry out caring responsibilities whilst joining a group online.
- Meeting people from different locations without needing to find a central location.
- For the group lead, not having to pay for a venue.

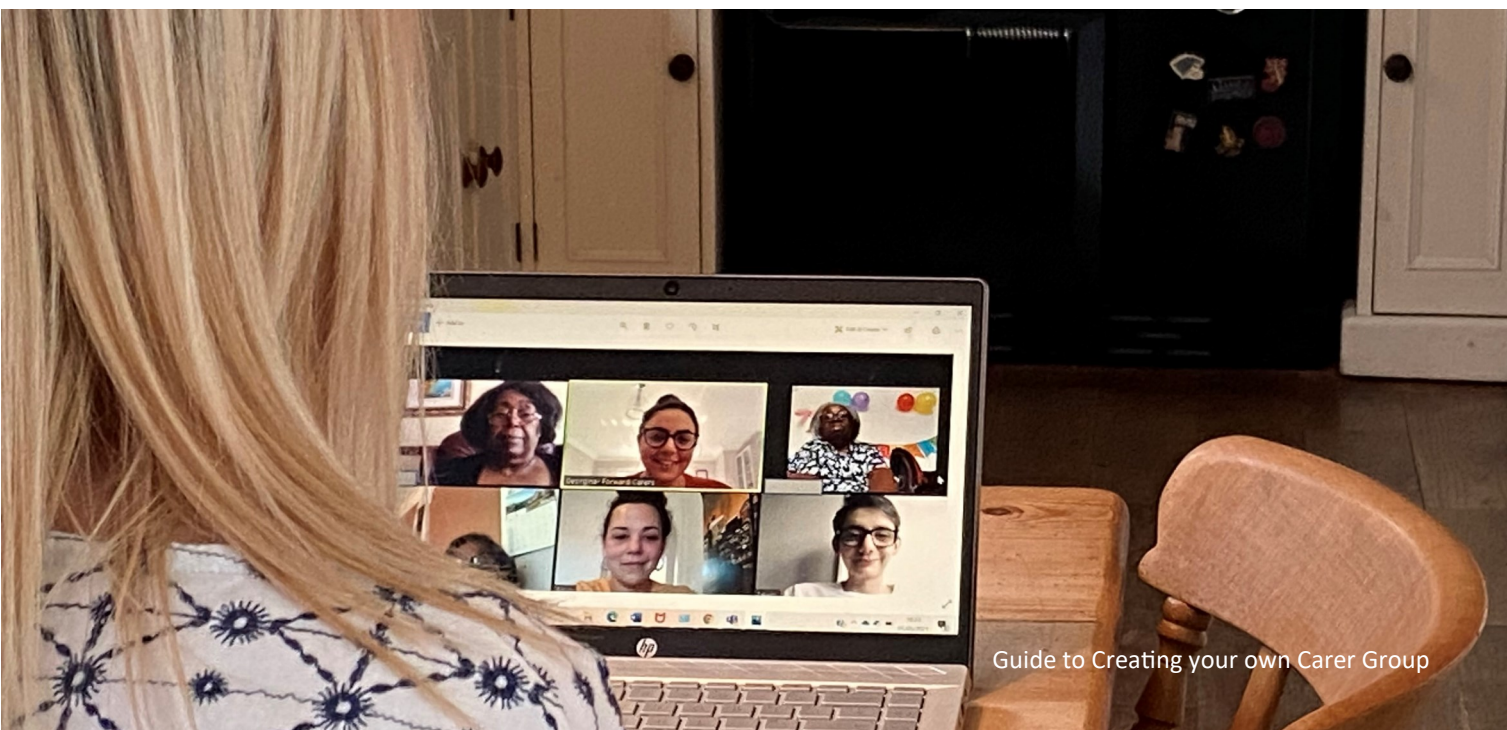
Although there may not be a cost for a venue, sometimes a platform to host a group virtually can cost. Again, you can go to pages 10 and 11 to think about ways to cover this cost.

Video/Call groups: There are different methods you can use to host a group online such as Zoom, Skype, WhatsApp video call or Microsoft Teams. There are also videos and step-by-step guides of how to use each method. You can read our Zoom guide in the appendix. You can also set up automatic confirmation emails to send out invites and share information which can be less admin for the group lead.

Other groups: Facebook and WhatsApp are platforms that can be used to create groups. In these groups, people can chat, share useful information and offer peer to peer support. A blend of activities/groups is also a possibility. This can be face-to-face with a device in the room for people to join online. This will offer more inclusivity to the group.

Virtual group rules: As with other groups, rules are always important to highlight at the start of a group to discuss things like respecting each other's views and also being aware of the camera and the ability to switch off camera and microphone if needed.

Not all people have access to online groups: For people who may be unable to access groups online you can always check in with them via telephone to see how they are. You can sometimes find groups or classes that can help you to gain skills and confidence online. You can find out more on the Forward Carers [Facebook page](#) or by joining the [Carer Friendly Forum for Carers](#) online group.



11. Keeping People Safe - Safeguarding Support

Harm can be unintentional or deliberate. By harm we mean regular or consistent harm, not a single accidental incident. Harm can take many shapes, including physical, emotional, psychological or sexual harm, financial harm or theft, domestic violence, self-neglect, slavery or forced servitude. If you or anyone you know, has any concerns about the physical or emotional safety or wellbeing of themselves or somebody else, please speak to someone.

If you have concerns about a child

If anyone is in immediate danger, phone 999.

If you have any concerns about the safety and/or welfare of a child or young person, telephone the **Children's Advice & Support Service (CASS) on 0121 303 1888** or email cass@birmingham.gov.uk. Outside normal office hours please contact Emergency Duty Team on 0121 675 4806.

If you're worried that a child or young person is at risk or is being abused outside of Birmingham, contact the [children's social care team at their local council](#). Or call the NSPCC on **0808 800 5000**.

If you have concerns about an adult

If anyone is in immediate danger, phone 999.

If you think there has been a crime contact the police straight away. Call West Midlands Police on 0345 113 5000 or 101. From outside the West Midlands phone 0345 113 5000.

If it is not an emergency and you want to report adult abuse of someone with care and support needs, you can do this **via Birmingham City Council or call Adult Social Care on 0121 303 1234**.

Outside of the Birmingham area, speak to professionals such as a GP or social worker about your concerns, or ask to speak to your local council's adult safeguarding team or co-ordinator. [Hourglass](#) is a confidential service providing information and support to an older person or anyone concerned about an older person who is at risk of, experiencing or recovering from any form of abuse or neglect. Call the Hourglass helpline on **0808 808 8141** for advice.



Resources to Help you to Create & Sustain Your Carer Group

-  Terms of Reference Template
-  Action Plan Template
-  Icebreaker examples
-  How to use Zoom



Terms of Reference Template

**YOUR
LOGO**

(Name of Group) _____

Purpose / role of the group: (a few bullet points about what you want to achieve from the group)

Membership:

Membership is available to

Accountability:

Committee members are responsible for

Review:

The group will be reviewed regularly to ensure membership is still relevant

Working methods / ways of working:

E.g. how will you work together? How will you promote the group/activity?

Action Plan Template

**YOUR
LOGO**

Name of group _____

Town/Location of group _____

Venue of group _____

Description of group _____

Purpose of the group _____

Group leads (there should be more than one group lead to assist sustainability of the group)

Target Members e.g. Carers who are: women, men, people who live in the location of your group

Activities of the group _____

Contribution from group members - all groups member should contribute in one or more of the following areas: money/group facilitation/group lead/promotion/group coordination

Short term goals - achievements for the group in the next 3-6 months

Medium term goals - achievements for the group 6-12 months

Long term goals - achievements for the group plus 12 months

Icebreaker Examples

Two truths and a lie

In this activity, every person says three things about themselves, but two of the statements must be true and one must be a lie. The goal of the game is for the rest of the group to guess which statement is false. For example, you might say, "I play the guitar, I've never been on a plane, and I can't swim." The group must then guess which of those statements is a lie. The great thing about Two Truths and a Lie is that everyone gets to learn something new about each other while still having fun and building problem-solving skills.



Most unique

This icebreaker works the same way as Two Truths and a Lie, but it takes less time and can be used to get a meeting started. Go around the room and ask each participant to share something about themselves that they believe makes them different from everyone else in the room. You can provide an example to help get everyone started, such as "I have 9 siblings" or "I have never left my home town." This activity encourages openness and celebrates individuality among the group.

Get-to-know-you questions

Not every icebreaker has to be complex. Simply asking some insightful questions can help everyone in the group get to know each other better. Examples of questions you might ask include:

- What is your dream vacation?
- What is your biggest pet peeve?
- What is the most memorable activity you ever did with your family as a kid?
- What is one characteristic you received from your family that you want to keep, and which one do you wish you could change?
- What do you like to do for fun?
- If you were stranded on a deserted island and could only bring three items, what would they be and why?
- If you could have any famous person over for dinner, who would it be and why?
- What quality do you appreciate most in a friend/boss/co-worker?



Marshmallow challenge

The Marshmallow Challenge is more of a team-building activity, but it works just as well as an icebreaker when you can set aside enough time.

To play, divide participants into groups of three or four and give each group 20 sticks of dry spaghetti, a long piece of string, some tape and a marshmallow. The goal is to see which team can build the tallest structure with the marshmallow on top of the finished product.

This game gets individuals to collaborate and quickly brainstorm potential solutions. The most successful teams work together, do not waste time competing for power and quickly come up with an alternative solution if their original idea fails.

How to use Zoom step-by-step



Why do you need ZOOM?

Zoom is a great way to stay connected with Family, Friends, Support Groups, appointments online, exercise classes, courses, training and people you cannot meet with in person. Zoom allows you to call or video chat a person or a group of people and is also free to use.

What do you need?

A device like a desktop computer, laptop, tablet or mobile phone (smart phone). You will also need to have internet connection.

How does it work?

You can have a 40-minute conversation with someone on your device. You can see and hear each other.

How to join a Zoom meeting-

On a computer:

1. Open your email
2. Open your ZOOM invitation
3. Click on the Zoom link
5. Once you click the link you will be prompted to either download or launch zoom.
6. Once you have clicked to download zoom, you will be taken onto the next screen. Click on 'Join with computer Audio'.



Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89955204676?pwd=b2k5UmJ5V1BldEo5aThlUmE3b1Jldz09>

Meeting ID: 899 5000 4676
Password: 6031670

On a mobile device:

Download the Zoom app on your phone or tablet.

Instructions for an IOS device: (Apple iPhone or iPad)

1. Go to 'Apple store' on your device
2. Type in ZOOM and click on ZOOM cloud meetings
3. Click 'get'- this should download the app

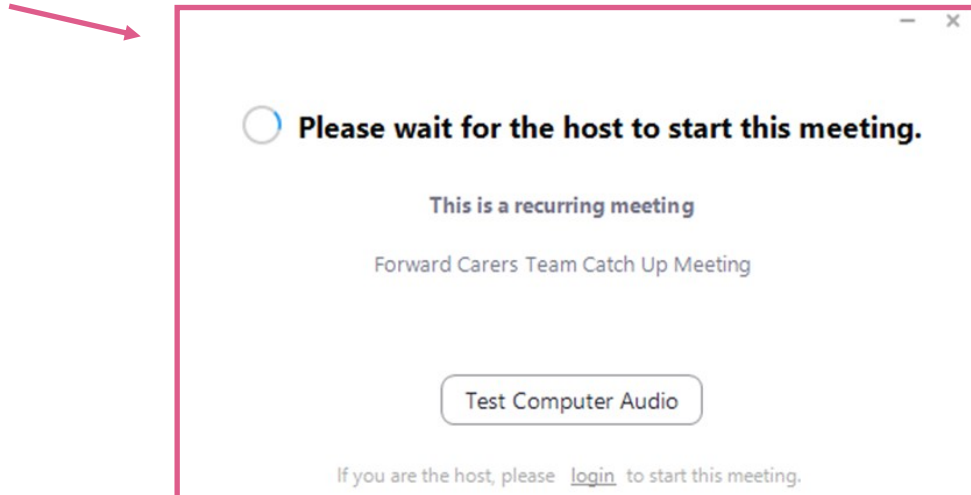


Open the Zoom App on your smartphone or tablet and click on **Join a Meeting**.

5. Type in Meeting ID and Password received in your zoom invite. You can also click the link in the email which can take you to the app.
6. You will be asked to enter your name, this will be the name displayed on the screen in the zoom meeting.

Getting on to Zoom

Once you have clicked the link in the zoom invite and/or typed in the meeting ID and Password you should see this:

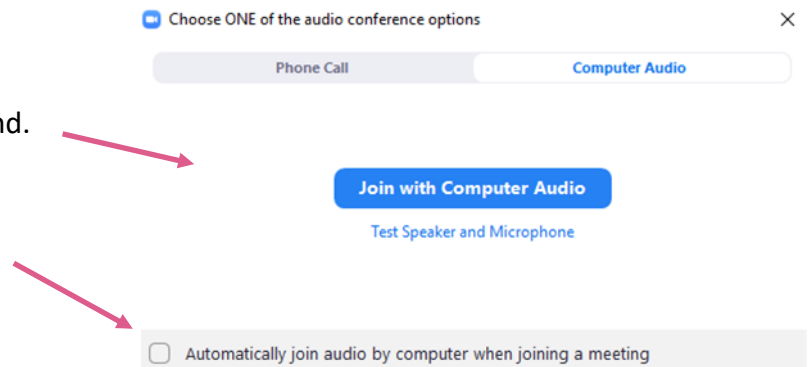


This means that the host of the meeting will accept you when they are ready for the meeting to start. You do not need to do anything at this point, but you may want to test your computer Audio by pressing the 'Test Computer Audio' button.

Once Joining the meeting:

Sound (audio)

1. Click on 'Join Audio' to hear the sound.
2. Click on 'Automatically join audio by computer when joining meeting'



Screen (video)

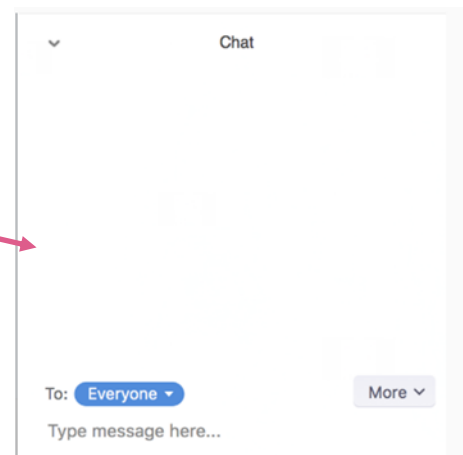
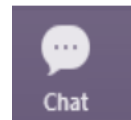
1. Click on 'start video' this will allow people to see you- if there is a red line the video is off and people cannot see you.
2. Click stop video for people to stop seeing you on their screen.

Mute

If you do not want people in the ZOOM to hear you, you may press the mute button. A red line should show which means the people in the ZOOM cannot hear you. Press unmute for people to hear you again.

Chat

1. Click on 'Chat'
2. Type your message. The whole group will be able to see your message unless you press the small arrow and choose the person you would like to message privately.

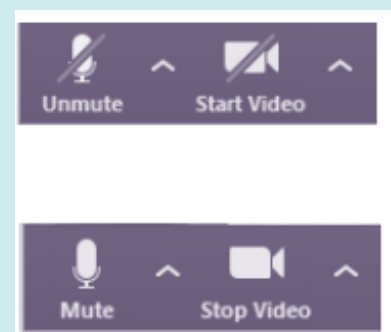


Summary:

You can join ZOOM via a link in your email invite.

If there is a red line the audio and the video is off- people will not be able to hear or see you.

If there is no red line the people in the Zoom will be able to hear and see you.



**Your group could also
focus on an activity**







www.forwardcarers.org.uk



info@forwardcarers.org.uk



[@mycarerscard](https://www.facebook.com/mycarerscard)



[@carerfriendlycommunities](https://www.instagram.com/carerfriendlycommunities)



www.forwardcarers.org.uk