

Dear Connect Youth parents,

As you're aware, COVID-19 continues to make its impact known in our world in varying ways for everyone. As the situation changes almost daily, we may be feeling the pinch of worry for the future (both health-wise and economically), uncertainty about education for our kids, the stress of losing work, the grief of usual activities and connection points closing down, angst for loved ones who may be affected by coronavirus should it reach them. Everyone is affected by this, young and old. Everyone is living a new reality to what life was just 2 weeks ago. While I find myself with similar worries, griefs and uncertainties, we take heart in the promises of our ever faithful loving father who assures of his ongoing presence "...surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt 28:20) and his ongoing peace, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." (John 14:27). We don't have all the answers, but God is with us in the midst of our uncertainties.

Though our world is changing for now and the limitations on gatherings increase, we're looking at ways of keeping our young people connected to explore life and faith going forward. Initially we're looking at 2 key ways of achieving this digitally.

1) Friday Night "Zoom" Chat | 7:30-9pm (Beginning April 5th, 2020)

For many of our young people, Friday night is youth night! Why change that, right? We're suggesting an online video chat that would consist of two main parts.

- **All in Youth Chat** – young people can log on and see the entire youth group on the chat. We'll play games (i.e. who can find the most random food in their cupboard!), share stories and this will be where the main Bible teaching happens.
- **Small Group Youth Chat** – the second part of the night will consist of young people logging into a "small group chat" with their normal small group Friday night small group. The youth will be given the opportunity to continue to share life & faith in this smaller and more accessible setting.

The benefits of "Zoom":

- It's FREE!
- It can be used on any device that has access to the internet by either downloading the Mac/PC App, the iPhone/Android App or simply clicking the invitation link and using a web browser.
- It is not linked to a social media platform
- Only people with the link & password can enter the chat
- An "online waiting room" will be established so the conversation host can either accept or deny entry to the chat to ensure only CONNECT Youth members have access.

Zoom Chat Guidelines

- **Times:** CONNECT Youth Online Zoom chat will take place strictly between the hours of 7:30-9pm on Friday nights.
- **Sign in:** Parents will be required to text Riley (0430 072 147) on the Friday to let me know which of their young people will be on the call (i.e. sign in), to ensure all young people who say they're at "online youth" are actually logged on.

- **Webcam set up:** Young people are to set up their cameras with a wall (where possible) behind them to avoid distractions in background. Young people are to be located in the same spot for the entire session, and refrain from lounging on beds, taking camera to bathrooms, wandering around house etc.
- **Dress Code:** Dress as though you were coming to youth (no pyjamas, inappropriate clothing etc.)

What you need to do:

- Sign & return permission form for Riley & youth leaders to send your young people invite link to “All in Youth Zoom Chat” and “Small Group Zoom Chat”
- Ensure your young people are aware of and follow the above guidelines.
- Download Zoom App for PC/Mac/iPhone/Android as appropriate. (Contact Riley if you need help with tech setup).

2) WhatsApp Text Communication | Ongoing

As youth will be decentralised & communicating to the young people will in a physical space is no longer possible, we’re asking that *everyone* (young people & parents) download and use the app, “WhatsApp” as our key point for communication regarding online youth activities. This is a communication app (similar to Facebook Messenger & other group texting apps) that is *not* linked to social media sites. This will be used for two main purposes.

- **Announcements** – information regarding online youth activities will be sent to a group consisting of all youth *and* parents. This will be the central point for me to communicate with everyone.
- **Small Group Text Chats** – youth leaders will set up chat groups consisting of the young people in their small groups. These will be for ongoing communication, journeying and exploring faith together between online zoom chats.

The benefits of “WhatsApp”:

- We’re able to centralise and simplify our communication to everyone.
- It’s FREE!
- It is not linked to a social media platform
- WhatsApp chats function like text messages so will be pushed straight to your phone/tablet.

Note: We’re encouraging parents to be in the WhatsApp “CONNECT Announcements” group as not all young people have a personal mobile/tablet. That way parents can pass on information sent out.

What you need to do:

- Sign & return permission form for Riley & youth leaders to connect with your young people via WhatsApp on their personal mobile phones/tablets.
- Download and install WhatsApp on your personal mobile device/tablet.
- Encourage your young people to download & install WhatsApp on their personal mobile/tablet.

As this is new territory for all of us, we appreciate your grace and understanding as we explore different ways of connecting online going forward. We’re committed to ensuring the online CONNECT youth environment is a safe space for all, so we welcome your feedback & comments.

Please see over page for consent form, fill in & return via email as soon as possible. We will be unable to have your young person on the youth call without this form returned.

Grace & Peace,
Riley Smith.

Mob: 0430 072 147 | Email: riley_vhbc@internode.on.net

CONNECT YOUTH ZOOM & WHATSAPP PERMISSION FORM

I (parent/care-giver) of:

1)

2)

3)

give the following permissions for my young people:

- Receive invitation links and participate in organised CONNECT Youth **“All In Youth Chat”** Zoom meetings as arranged & communicated by Riley Smith.
- Receive invitation links and participate in organised CONNECT **“Small Group Youth Chat”** Zoom meetings as arranged & communicated by Riley Smith & small group leaders.
- Connect with Riley & CONNECT Youth leaders on **WhatsApp** group messaging App for announcements and small group chat to journey, & explore life & faith together.

I recognise that:

- Connect Youth Leaders will be trained in the use of Zoom so that the “online waiting room” function will be utilised ensuring only CONNECT Youth members can access the chat, as well as with general cyber safety tools such as immediately ending meetings if necessary.
- WhatsApp will become the central point for communication regarding online youth activities between Riley, youth leaders, young people *and* parents.

NOTE: *If it is not possible for you to use WhatsApp, please contact Riley in order to ensure you don't miss out on key information.*

Signed.....

Date.....