**Accessible technology and communications under Covid-19**

With more of us working remotely than ever before, it is so important that our disabled colleagues are not left out and locked out by inaccessible communications.

Fortunately, the digital platforms and technology we use for work is at its most accessible ever, and this is only being developed further as the weeks under lockdown go by.

**Communications resources for disabled people**

There are lots of tools for disabled people themselves to make the most of their tech.

If you’re a Microsoft user, check out their [Microsoft Accessibility](https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/accessibility) homepage; and they also have a dedicated [Twitter feed](https://twitter.com/MSFTEnable/with_replies?lang=en) on accessibility. They even have a [Disability Answer Desk](https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/Accessibility/disability-answer-desk?activetab=contact-pivot%3aprimaryr9) to get in touch with any questions you can’t find the answers to; a dedicated Microsoft staff member will answer you.

If you’re an Apple user, have a look at their [Accessibility resources](https://www.apple.com/uk/accessibility/) – scroll down and choose the device you’re using.

And there are also really helpful accessibility guides for when you’re using the most popular video conferencing and messaging tools, with information on keyboard shortcuts, using with a screen reader, subtitling, and more.

* [Zoom](https://zoom.us/accessibility/faq)
* [Microsoft Teams](https://support.office.com/en-gb/article/accessibility-support-for-microsoft-teams-d12ee53f-d15f-445e-be8d-f0ba2c5ee68f)
* [Google Hangouts](https://www.google.com/accessibility/products-features/) (scroll down or search for ‘Classic Hangouts’)
* [Skype](https://support.skype.com/en/faq/FA12371/what-accessibility-features-are-available-for-skype)
* [Slack – keyboard shortcuts](https://slack.com/intl/en-gb/help/articles/115003340723-Keyboard-accessibility-in-Slack-)
* [Slack – using with a screen reader](https://slack.com/intl/en-gb/help/articles/360000411963-Use-a-screen-reader-with-Slack-on-desktop)

If you’re looking for accessible information about the Coronavirus and the steps we all need to take like social distancing, for yourself, colleagues, service users, or your network, the [Government website](https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus) has this information in different formats, including:

* [Easy Read information](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/874281/COVID-19_easy_read.pdf)
* [Information in large print](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/877756/coronavirus-leaflet-large-print.pdf)
* [Videos in British Sign Language](https://www.nhsinform.scot/translations/languages/british-sign-language-bsl/illnesses-and-conditions/coronavirus-covid-19) (from NHS Inform Scotland)

**Resources for organisations and colleagues**

The impetus is not only on disabled colleagues to use accessible communications; we all have a responsibility to ensure that our meetings and working practices are accessible for disabled people. Here are our eight top tips.

1. The above resources may be useful for your colleagues – be sure to share them around your workplace. If any disabled colleagues struggle to use tech, ensure that they receive the support they need to learn how to use the accessibility features.
2. When arranging a video meeting or phone call, be sure to **ask** those you are meeting if they have any accessibility requirements or things which will make it easier for them to join the meeting. This is especially important for those outside your organisation or those you haven’t called before.
3. When holding a video call, be sure to consider the needs of those with mental health conditions such as anxiety. Don’t push anyone who isn’t comfortable doing so to speak without preparation; encourage those who don’t wish to speak to use the Chat bar instead.
4. Be sure to give plenty of notice of a video call for someone autistic who may struggle with unexpected changes. If you need to have an urgent call, be sure to explain why clearly. If someone prefers to use written communication, you can still use email. You can also use workplace messaging tools such as Slack or Microsoft Teams for quicker conversations.
5. Similarly, you may want to set up hand signs or similar so that those who wish to make a point or need something to change (e.g. someone is speaking too quickly). Keep Safe has developed [cue cards for video meetings](https://www.keepsafe.org.uk/to-do/cue-cards-for-video-meetings).
6. Action on Hearing Loss has produced this [guidance](https://beta.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/coronavirus-response/working-from-home-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak/) on how to ensure you make it easier for Deaf of hearing-impaired colleagues to communicate over video, bearing in mind that they may be lipreading. Many video conferencing services have automatic closed captioning, but it may be helpful to have someone type out captions live, or to have a BSL interpreter. For pre-recorded videos, you can add captions yourself or provide a transcript.
7. Ensure that documents you are producing are as accessible as possible. Of course often we need to produce publications very quickly, so within Microsoft Office tools, the [Microsoft Accessibility Checker](https://support.office.com/en-gb/article/improve-accessibility-with-the-accessibility-checker-a16f6de0-2f39-4a2b-8bd8-5ad801426c7f) can help you with clear guidance. The Royal National Institute of Blind People has also produced [guidance](https://www.rnib.org.uk/campaigning/priority-campaigns/accessible-health-information/coronavirus-and-accessible-online-information) on making your publications and website accessible.
8. It’s also really important to think about accessibility for your social media output, for example including captions on videos and ‘alt text’ for images where possible:
* AbilityNet produced this [guide](https://www.abilitynet.org.uk/news-blogs/5-tips-create-accessible-facebook-posts) on creating accessible content on Facebook.
* [Twitter tells you](https://help.twitter.com/en/using-twitter/picture-descriptions) how to ensure images you tweet are accessible.
* Instagram has introduced [automatic ‘alt text’](https://about.instagram.com/blog/announcements/improved-accessibility-through-alternative-text-support) for images, but you can also add your own custom text.

**About our Reframing Disability programme**

Accessible and inclusive communications and media for disabled people is a key focus here at Media Trust.

If you’d like to find out more about our Reframing Disability in News programme, which aims to increase the representation and visibility of disabled people in broadcast news, have a look at our [dedicated webpage](https://mediatrust.org/communications-support/training-courses/reframing-disability-in-news/).