# WhatsApp Groups Policy

**Policy statement:** WhatsApp provides the opportunity for Sew Positive to give additional support to participants during the running of a course, if it is needed, and importantly, to share and celebrate work and progress, tips and resources. The use of WhatsApp in our charitable services has the potential to create problems so we have put guidelines together to ensure positive use of the messaging service.

## WhatsApp group administrator

An administrator will create a group and invite participants to join for the duration of a course. Our administrators can be Sew Positive team members, tutors and/or volunteers. At the end of the course, the WhatsApp group will be closed by an Administrator.If at this point, participants decide to create a continuation group to keep in touch with fellow participants, it will no longer be part of a Sew Positive group.

## WhatsApp group members

A group's members will consist of participants of a particular Sew Positive course or group. All relevant volunteers will also be invited to join the group in order to support participants.

## Purpose of a Sew Positive WhatsApp group

The purpose of the group will be made clear to all participants. Primarily, groups will be created for the purpose of sharing important information, updates, resources about the course or group, and progress of participants, quickly and securely. In addition, all participants will be able to provide valuable advice and encouragement for each other. However, there may be other stated purposes which will be specific to each group and we will discuss this with all participants on group formation.

## WhatsApp group closure

Once a course has ended, the relevant WhatsApp group will close. If participants choose to set up their own group outside of the community without Sew Positive volunteers or admins, it will be a private group with no involvement from Sew Positive. The Sew Positive social group on the WhatsApp community is for everyone, so participants should ensure they have joined before we close a course group.

## General rules & conduct

We ask everyone to adhere to some general rules in order to minimise the risk of complaints i.e. bullying and harassment or inappropriate content. Joining the group means all participants agree to these rules.

The following list of rules is sent out as a message when a group is first created and each time a new participant joins the group

- Be encouraging and positive to others
- Keep topics to creative sewing, upcycling, mending, repurposing, events  and subjects related to the course/group, and relevant events or resources
- Don't spam the group, but do share useful resources and information
- Use of offensive language will not be tolerated about other members of the group, or in any context, and may result in removal from the group and our services
- Do not raise issues that could be triggering or upsetting for other members of the group about abuse, trauma or experiences
- Avoid 1:1 conversations in the group. Please note, if you wish to DM a member of the group, you should obtain permission from that person beforehand, and we cannot enter into discussion regarding messages not in the group
- Our volunteers may only respond to messages when they can - do not use this platform for any urgent messages or mental health support requests*
- The group is not to be used to berate someone or air grievances, or those connected to other organisations
- Do not share personal information in the group that isn't linked to Sew Positive (including about other charities, groups or services)
- Ask yourself three questions before you post. Is this relevant? Is this necessary? Is this a good time to post?
- Our WhatsApp groups are for active participants in groups and courses only - if you have not actively attended a Sew Positive course or group, admins may remove you at their discretion without consultation, after a period of non-attendance at Sew Positive services, as new participants will not know who is contributing. You will be able to rejoin the group when you re-attend services and request this
- If you can't attend a session due to illness etc, please send a private message to our volunteers/CEO/creative tutor rather than in the group.

**\*If you need urgent mental health or other support please do not use the WhatsApp group, call 111 or text SHOUT to 85258.**

## Confidentiality & data protection

WhatsApp is end to end encrypted. This means that only participants of the group can read or see what has been sent.
Each message has a unique 'lock and key', which means that even the WhatsApp service is unable to see any of the content within the group. As another element of confidentiality, there is a group rule which states that all names are anonymised. This also includes not revealing

identifying features of a person, for instance, a person's address, so please don't share personal information here. Each participant has a responsibility to ensure that the device they use to access the group is secure, i.e. password/pin protected, and the group is not left open for others to see. The rules governing the use of information are similar to paper records, emails and telephone calls. Everyone involved has a responsibility to adhere to the data protection principles.

Sew Positive also has a Data Protection Policy available regarding GDPR and social media use.

## Complaints & grievances

Administrators are unlikely to be able to actively monitor the group and fully minimise the risk of inappropriate or offensive comments being made, and these can escalate quickly. There could be an occasion where a participant is offended by comments made by other participants and wishes to complain to an Administrator. The complainant must not respond or engage in any discussion which they are offended by on the WhatsApp group but instead:

- Approach either a Sew Positive volunteer, or the Sew Positive CEO to ensure they are aware of the situation. They will investigate further and take any action deemed reasonable and proportionate, such as
    - Reiterating the group rules to all participants
    - Informally discussing with relevant participants to ensure there isn't a repeat of any inappropriate discussion
    - Removing relevant participants from the group (depending on the context of the situation)
    - Removing or barring participants from Sew Positive services for serious or repeated instances which will be agreed with trustees.

## Data use

WhatsApp uses data, so participants are advised to ensure they are connected to Wi-Fi before joining the group to minimise use of their data allowance, especially if sending video links or photos.

**Document history**

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