



## Community Connections



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Strengthening social connections and  
improving access to information

**Practical Guides, Hints and Tips**

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## Strengthening Connections and Sharing Information – Practical Guides

The Community Connections project was based in two rural areas in Scotland:

- **Eaglesham and Waterfoot in East Renfrewshire**
- **Brechin, Edzell and the Northern Glens in North Angus**

Community Connections was designed around two key themes: Strengthening social connections and Improving access to information. We worked towards creating opportunities for this to happen in ways that were small-scale and very local - ideas and activities that would enable people to gather together, chat, share information and in doing so feel more connected to their community.

Community Connections has developed these guides to support individuals, groups and communities to keep connected through times of difficulty and change. They bring together the project's learning from the communities it has worked alongside before, during and after the COVID-19 lockdown. The guides, hints and tips can support people to stay in touch with their communities through lots of different challenges they might face in the future such as:

- **COVID-related restrictions or localised lockdowns.**
- **Situations where community groups can't meet up, like hall closures or lack of access to meeting spaces.**

- **During times when it doesn't feel safe to be out and about, like when we have bad winter weather.**
- **To connect with individuals who can't make it out to activities, such as when someone isn't well or can't get access to transport.**

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# Connecting to the Internet – Choices and Options

Connecting to the internet provides lots of new possibilities but it can be daunting to know where to start. We have listed some options that will give you a starting point and a few ideas about your next steps.

## 1. Broadband

Broadband internet can be installed in your home. This means getting a small device called a router put in your house which is connected to the internet network via a phone line.

- There are many broadband providers out there and most require you to take out a contract with a phone line. Here's a website for comparing providers and deals in your area, based on postcode: <https://broadband.moneysavingexpert.com>
- Having broadband at home means you'll have a fairly stable wireless connection; this is usually called Wi-Fi. You can also attach a cable from your router and plug it in to your laptop or pc – that will give you the most stable internet connection, but only for that single device.
- Broadband comes in different speeds, measured in megabits per second (Mbps). This will vary depending on where you live and the provider you choose.
- This is a good option if more than one person wants to access the internet in your home. You can allow other people to use your Wi-Fi when they visit, and you can sometimes find Wi-Fi in shared spaces like libraries and cafes.



## 2. Mobile Internet

You can get a data sim card which will allow you to use mobile internet. These sim cards fit into your mobile phone and some tablets so you can get internet when you're out and about.

- It comes in different speeds, most common being 3G and 4G (and the fastest, 5G which is just being rolled out).
- Most mobile phone sim cards come with data options. Coverage will vary depending on where you are, especially if you live in a rural or remote area. You could ask neighbours what network they use or check the coverage in your area here: <https://checker.ofcom.org.uk/mobilecoverage>
- You pay for the amount of data you will use, which is measured in megabytes (mb) and gigabytes (gb). 1gb of data should last for approximately: 44 hours of internet browsing or streaming 250 songs or watching 2 hours of standard definition video or 2 hours of video calling through Zoom.
- Here is a link to a useful calculator you can use to gauge how much data you will need: <https://www.confused.com/mobile-phones/mobile-data-calculator>



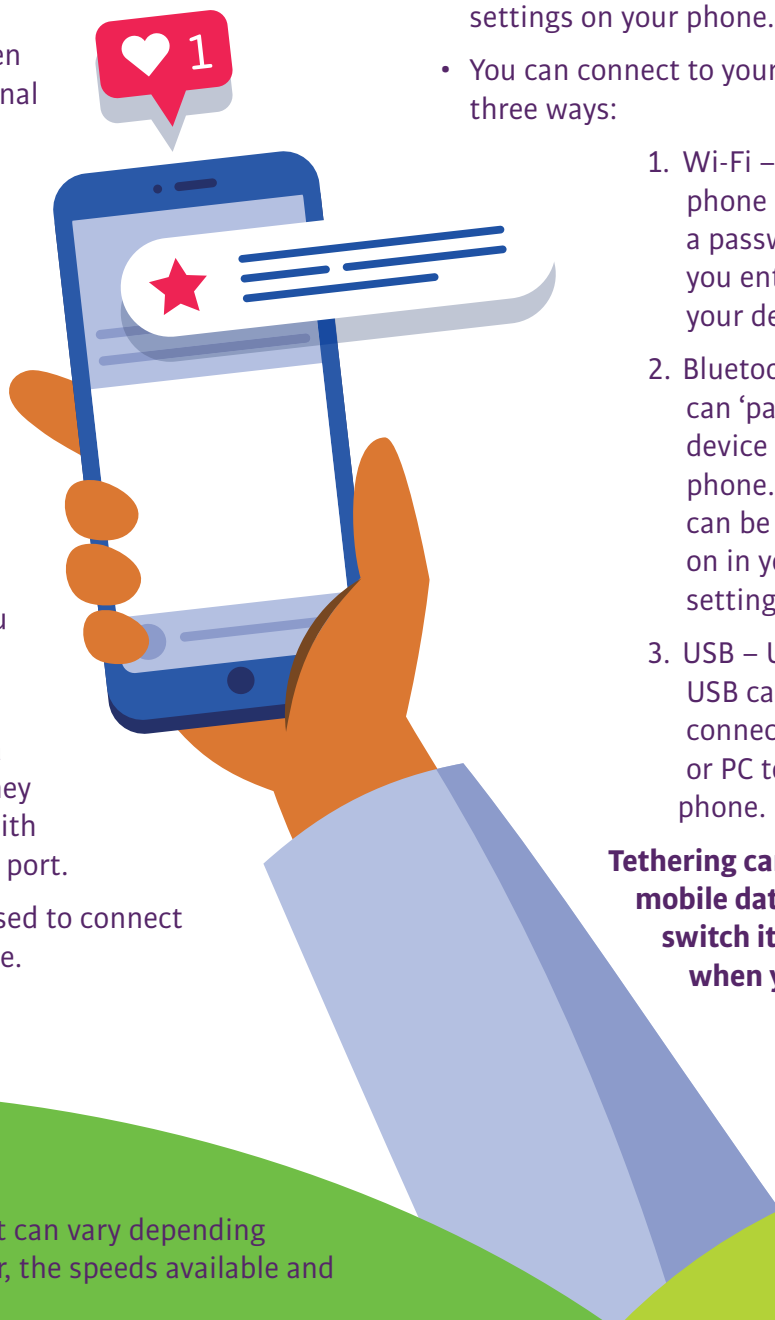
### 3. Mobile Hotspot

You can use a device called a mobile hotspot (also called a mi-fi or portable hotspot) to get internet on a device without a sim card slot, such as a laptop or PC.

- This is a small device which you put the sim card in and then it emits a Wi-Fi signal which you can connect to.
- This is good if you want to connect multiple devices.

### 4. Dongles

- They work in a very similar way to Mobile Portable Hotspots, but they need to be plugged in to the device you want to connect to the internet.
- As they only have a USB connection, they can only be used with devices with a USB port.
- They can only be used to connect one device at a time.



### 5. Tethering your phone

If you have a mobile phone with a sim card which has data included, you can use it as a portable wi-fi hotspot by connecting your device to it.

- ‘Tethering’ can be activated by going into the ‘Personal Hotspot’ or ‘Wireless Networks’ settings on your phone.
- You can connect to your phone’s hotspot in three ways:

1. Wi-Fi – your phone will provide a password that you enter into your device.
2. Bluetooth – you can ‘pair’ your device with your phone. Bluetooth can be switched on in your device settings.
3. USB – Using a USB cable you can connect a laptop or PC to your phone.



**Tethering can use lots of your mobile data so remember to switch it off in your settings when you are finished.**

### Costs

The costs for the internet can vary depending on your network provider, the speeds available and your level of usage.

In general, broadband offers the best value if you will be using the internet frequently. It’s good to remember that it requires installation and a phone line so might be more costly to start with.

Mobile Internet and Hotspots are great because they don’t require any installation and you can use them outside your home. The cost and amount of internet data you get can vary depending on your provider. If you are using lots of data this can be a more expensive way to get access so it’s best for short usage – like emails, social media, websites or for short video calls.

### What Next?

Once you have an internet connection you can explore the different ways you can connect with others and share information, like: Email, social media, video calling, online hobby groups and visiting websites for local groups.

Most libraries will offer information about local courses if you want to know how to make the most of your mobile phone or tablet.

# Zoom Video Calling – 'How To' Guide



Zoom is an online programme that can be used to make video calls using the internet. You can download Zoom and use it on your pc, laptop, tablet and mobile phone. Zoom is one of the most popular ways of making a video call because it is easy to use and the basic package is free. Lots of groups are now doing their activities on Zoom and it's a great way to keep in touch if you can't meet with people in person. You can find out more at [www.zoom.us](http://www.zoom.us)

There are other platforms you might have heard of such as Skype and Teams – you can find a helpful comparison between the different video-calling options at [www.otbds.org/resources](http://www.otbds.org/resources)



## Joining a Zoom Call/Meeting.

People can invite you to a Zoom call in two ways:

- **Calendar Invite** – this will be sent to your email and will include a 'meeting invite' that is linked to your email calendar. It will give you the option to say if you are going – Yes, Maybe or No. If you select Yes, the meeting will go into your email calendar and you would click on this to join the Zoom call.
- **Link Invite** - Many people send out the link to the Zoom call in an email which will include a meeting ID and password. You would click this link to join the call. This won't be saved into your calendar so you'll want to keep the email so you don't lose the link.
- When you click the link in your invite it will automatically open Zoom for you. If you don't already have zoom installed on the device you are using, it will give you a link to download it or it will automatically download for you. It only takes a few minutes but give yourself enough time to do this before the meeting starts.
- It will ask you for your name, this will be visible to others on the call and how you will be known, some people use nicknames etc. but be mindful not to cause offence when choosing your name. You will be asked to agree to the terms and conditions.
- You'll then be taken directly to the call or to a waiting room where you will get a pop-up message saying that the host will let you in soon.
- You can also join a Zoom meeting by calling in on the telephone. Each Zoom meeting will have its own phone number which will be found in your invite. You use this like any other phone number. You won't be able to see people, and they can't see you – but you can chat with them like you would on a normal phone call.



## Hosting a Zoom Call/Meeting

The basic, free Zoom account lets you host meetings of up to 40 minutes. You can pay for a premium account if you would like a longer call or more functions.

- Open up Zoom on your device. It might ask for your log-in details.
- There will be 4 options – New Meeting, Join, Schedule and Share Screen.
- ‘New Meeting’ will let you start a call immediately. It will give you a link, and a ‘Personal Meeting ID’ unique to your account, that you can share with the people you want to meet with.
- ‘Schedule’ will let you plan a Zoom meeting in advance. It will ask you for information like: name of meeting, date, start time, duration. Depending on what device you’re using you can send your invite as a ‘calendar meeting’ or as a ‘link invite’. You can copy and paste this link and send to your contacts in an email, text or through a messaging service like WhatsApp.
- To start your call, you can either click on the link that you sent out to other people or go to the ‘Meetings’ section and hit the ‘start’ option. At the start you will just see yourself, then other people will appear as they join.
- You can have more than one meeting scheduled at once. You will find these stored in the ‘Meetings’ section of your Zoom account. You can edit, delete or ‘copy invitation’ for each scheduled meeting.

## During a Zoom Call/Meeting – Functions, Hints and Tips

- **Switching View** - The best way to see everyone in the meeting is to have gallery view set, otherwise you will only see the person talking. You can set gallery view at the top righthand corner of your screen. This option is not available on mobile phones or tablets. You can also ‘pin’ someone else’s screen – this is good if someone is doing a presentation or leading an activity.
- **Mute** - To turn your microphone on and off click on the microphone icon. To temporarily unmute yourself press and hold the space bar. As soon as you release the space bar your microphone will be muted again.
- **Video Camera** - To turn your camera on or off click the start/stop video camera icon. Sometimes if the internet connection is not great it can help if people turn off their video for a bit.
- **Hide Self-View** – It’s possible to have your camera on so others see you, but you don’t see yourself. To do this move the mouse over your picture and three dots will appear. Click on them, then click the ‘hide self-view’ option – your picture will disappear from your screen, but others will still see you.
- **Chat** - You can type messages to others on a Zoom call. Open the chat box by clicking on the speech bubble. You can choose to write a message to everyone in the call or private message one person. If someone posts a message you will get notification on the chat icon, just click it to read. On some devices you can download and save the chat – this is good if information is shared or you want to write meeting notes.
- **Share Screen** – You can show someone what’s on your device, like pictures, videos or documents.
- **Participants** – This section shows you everyone who is on the call.
- **Record** – The host can record the video call which will be saved on your device or the cloud. Please make sure that you get permission from everyone on the call.
- **Security** – This will give the host different options such as ‘lock room’ or ‘enable waiting room’.



# Connecting with Neighbours – Ideas and Inspiration

**Not everyone wants to be online, so we have brought together some of the great ways people have connected with their neighbours and local groups – building strong, caring communities. These ‘little acts of kindness’ help people feel connected ‘in person’ while remaining safe, and if needed, socially distanced.**

You might find that other people or groups are already doing some of these activities and would love some extra help, or you might be starting something new – either way it will be making a difference to people in your community.

**Remember to share what you’re doing in your community - kindness connects us!**

## Kindness and Support

- Shopping for essentials like food and prescriptions.
- Helping out with physical tasks like dog walking, taking the bins out, mowing the lawn.
- Community gardening projects like weeding and planting shared or communal spaces.
- Dropping off a birthday card, slice of cake, flowers or a balloon – especially if someone can’t be with their friends or family.
- Making a little extra when you’re cooking or baking and leaving it on someone’s doorstep with a little note.
- Offering support to help get community groups and spaces up and running again, like cleaning equipment or adapting spaces so people can socially distance.
- Make someone smile with a nice hand-written letter, note or picture through their letter box.



## Fun and Creativity

- Encouraging people to stay busy by dropping off books, films, games, etc.
- Outdoor sing-alongs and ‘garden karaoke’.
- Get arty with rock painting or chalk pictures – if you start others might join in!
- Creating local Treasure Hunts or Fairy Trails around a park or woodland.
- Bring out your competitive side by creating a village quiz.
- Fun competitions of all shapes and sizes – sunflower growing, best fancy dress or ‘design your own superhero’, the options are endless.

## Information and Communication

- Phoning for a chat to check in and raise spirits.
- Create a telephone tree or circle for your group or street.
- Dropping off helpful information and leaflets.
- Printing off information because you know someone who doesn’t have internet.
- Helping people stay connected by talking them through using Zoom, FaceTime etc.
- Sharing your language skills to translate and interpret information for local groups.
- Offer to deliver local newsletters or leaflets to people on your street or block.





# Creating a Newsletter – Hints and Tips

A newsletter is a great way of sharing what your group is doing, or what's happening across your community. Lots of people don't have access to the internet or want to use social media so a newsletter can help them keep up to date and connected to what's happening.

**Some community newsletters are produced to a really high finish – with graphic design and professional printing, but there are also ways to create a brilliant newsletter for very little cost. The newsletter can start off short and simple – and you can build on it as you get more experience or contact others that want to help out with it. Even if you publish a single-page newsletter once a quarter, a community newsletter can become an important thread in the fabric of your neighbourhood.**

Here are a few things to think about to get you started:

## **What do you want to achieve?**

What kind of newsletter or update do you want to create? Have a look at what's already being produced in your community and speak to the people who are working on them – you might be able to share resources, support each other, and create complementary publications.

## **Who is the audience?**

Who do you want to reach or who is your main audience? This will affect the style and language you use, the font, layout, content and distribution plan.



**“Share responsibilities. Don't try to do too much yourself. Encourage other people to get involved. It can be an enjoyable thing to create so if it becomes stressful ask for help or simplify your idea.”**

## Content

Here are some helpful sections that are common in lots of different newsletters. Depending on what type of newsletter you're creating you might want to include a mix of these:

- Introduction – who is the newsletter for and what's it about?
- What's On – group plans, activity sessions or community events
- Helpful Contacts – numbers/emails for local councillors, shops, doctors, dentist, community groups, advice organisations, etc.
- Pictures or images – this helps to break up the text and make it more eye catching. Local people could supply photos of the area or local activities but make sure you have permission to use them. Lots of people have an interest in photography and would love to use their skills for the newsletter.
- Articles and Stories – personal reflections from community events, good news stories, update from community group chair or committee, guest articles from other groups, local businesses or local people, a quiz or competition, recipes, gardening tips. Try out different combinations and ask for feedback about what people are appreciating.



**“Perhaps add an agreed e-mail address to the newsletter for local people and groups to send in story ideas, news items, or anything else they want to share. A “Community Kudos” section can be a great way to encourage the type of sharing that brings all your neighbours closer together!”**

**“Does anyone in your community have a background or interest in journalism, printing, layout, connecting people etc? Does anyone enjoy writing blogs, word processing, nifty with apps or just generally want to help out in the community?”**

## Gathering Information

- Tell people what you're doing - send out an email or social media post to let them know you're looking for contributions. Remember people who are not online, you might need to phone them or pop over for a chat.
- Some people might have something interesting to share but don't want to write it themselves. You could offer to scribe for them or do a short interview.
- Set a deadline for when you need to have received all the information. (And tell people it's a few days earlier!)



## Layout and Design

- There's lots of different software you can buy to help with the layout but starting simple will make it easier and cheaper. Start with bringing all your information together in a word document and edit it on there – most computers will include a programme like Microsoft Word.
- Once you have all your text, or copy, ready you can start on the design and layout. You could use Microsoft Word, Publisher or similar, but this can be awkward if you want to add different graphics or pictures.
- There are some free programmes you can use that offer a selection of templates, graphics, illustrations and icons. One of the most popular is 'Canva' – it's great for designing professional looking layouts and images for documents like newsletters, posters, leaflets or social media posts. Visit [www.canva.com](http://www.canva.com)
- If you don't have a computer and use a tablet don't worry – you can also get Microsoft Word, Canva and other similar programmes as tablet apps.
- Try to make sure that your design works well for printed and digital versions.

## Proofreading

- Ask a few of your friends or group members to proofread and offer any constructive feedback. Fresh eyes are always helpful and can spot things that the writer can easily miss.
- These people might come up with ideas on new features or how to make it even better, and they might be willing to help out to make them happen.



**“It doesn't take any special skills to get started — just a willingness to bring your community together.”**



## Printing

- How many copies do you want printed? It's worth thinking about how long your newsletter will remain up to date and relevant.
- There are lots of printers who will give you a quote online. Prices vary so it's worth getting a few quotes.
- To reduce costs, you can always ask people to print one at home and pop it through a neighbour's door. To make this easier for people to do make sure your design works well in black and white and doesn't include blocks of colour that use lots of ink.
- Are there any local businesses which may want to sponsor the newsletter in exchange for an advert? This may help cover the cost of the printing.

## Distribution

- Ask to place copies in key areas of the community such as the local shop, library, community halls, GP surgery, dentists, community noticeboards. “I asked the local pharmacy to pop a folded newsletter in with every prescription – they were happy to help”.
- To upload to social media, you might have to save your digital version as an image like a PNG or JPEG.

## Connect with us!

Community Connections was an Outside the Box project. If you would like to connect with us or find out about our Rural Wisdom project, please get in touch.

You can contact us at:  
[admin@otbds.org](mailto:admin@otbds.org)

[www.otbds.org](http://www.otbds.org)

[www.ruralwisdom.org](http://www.ruralwisdom.org)

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