Managing Sensitive Conversations in Teams

Teams is a very powerful medium that facilitates group collaboration, especially when you are using the conversation tool ("chat").

If you plan to discuss sensitive topics with a group of people using Teams, particularly for a limited time period, there are some important steps to follow.

The most important step is to USE EXTREME DISCRETION; make sure you **don't type anything you don't later want read** by someone else, just in case. This applies not only to Teams, but to email and even text messaging. Pick up the phone.

However, there may be topics for which typing is an appropriate medium but still requires a degree of sensitivity (for example, topics that have a limited life expectancy or do not need to be retained).

In those cases, the next most important step is **NEVER use the Private Chat tool**.

The private chat tool is a great tool for impromptu conversations between two or more people. Think of it as a virtual water cooler conversation. It is meant to be more ephemeral and lacks the functionality to be used as a continuing, managed conversation.

If your conversation is more than a casual immediate exchange, then **we always recommend setting up a proper Team.** A Team, unlike a Private Chat, has more management functionality, including the role of the Team Owner, who can add or remove participants, create sub-conversations ("channels") including private channels available to a sub-set of participants, and can curate and delete entire channel conversations (also sometimes called "channel chats") as appropriate. This also applies to managing files that have been shared within a Team.

Simply put, Teams, unlike private chats, are built to make it easier to manage proper group work and activities.

As a final comment, we draw your attention to the use of textual chats during live Video Meetings. This functionality is extremely useful, however, for sensitive live video conversations, **we do not recommend setting up ad hoc video calls**, as the accompanying chat will be created as a private chat, available to all participants even after the call.

Instead, for sensitive live conversations, **video calls should be scheduled or initiated from within a structured Team**, so that the accompanying chat becomes part of the Team record, and can then be managed more easily afterwards.

Some fine print on managing sensitive conversations in Teams

- Privacy considerations that exist in day to day operations apply to any communications within a Team.
- Privacy considerations that exist for day to day electronic communications regarding safety, confidential information, employee records and or personal health information also apply to the use of Teams (and where possible, avoided).
- Expectations regarding professional conduct and communications must be upheld in the Team.
- Any concerns about another user's communications or content should be reported to the Team owner.
- Individuals invited to participate in a Team should use a University of Toronto issued computer or cell phone wherever possible.
- Individuals leaving their unit or leaving the University should be immediately removed from the Team by the Owner.
- For sensitive Teams, Owners should establish a set of protocols and terms of use that should be shared with participants. Participants should understand that access to that sensitive Team means:
  o Adhering to those protocols and terms of use.
  o Maintaining confidentiality of all channels and messages. Users will not share, copy, or save outside of the Team communications produced within the workspace.

- If there is an operational or legal requirement to reproduce any content from the Team, users will submit a written request to the Team Owner.
- If a user suspects that their phone, computer or any content of the Team has been compromised, they will immediately notify the Team Owner.
- A retention plan may be put in place, including deletion of channels, and Team participants must adhere to that plan.

For more on best practices using Teams, please see our support site:
https://easi.its.utoronto.ca/shared-services/office365/teams/