Messaging Apps: Administrating & Moderating Chats

- Keeping group chats as secure as possible
- Moderating a group chat
- Closing down chats
- Template Group Agreement
- Telegram: How to remove spammers

Keeping group chats as secure as possible

Larger chats such as Local Group chats cannot practically be kept completely secure, because you need to be able to welcome new people into them. It is therefore important to make it clear that these chats are not secure, and no 'spicy' information should ever be shared in them. You may want to allow people to add their friends etc to the chat, so it might not always be appropriate to follow all of the advice below. Use your judgement to follow relevant recommendations.

Standard security measures

1. Don't publish invite links to chats on websites or social media unless they are for 'broadcast' type channels on Telegram or Whatsapp.
2. Always have multiple 'admins' for a chat group, to help to remove posts or spammers.
3. Read the page on moderating a chat.
4. Make sure you close a chat after it's use is over.
5. If you use WhatsApp for either 1-1 messages or group chatsm then please read this advice on best security and privacy settings.

Higher security suggestions

1. Ideally only add people that you know well or are verified by others (trusted rebels).
2. Make sure only admins can add new members to the chat.
3. For Signal remember if you add someone by mistake and remove them, they can still see the info in the header of the chat.
4. If you are doing spicy actions make sure people use pseudonyms and burner phones if possible, and that those are added to the correct chats with their normal names and numbers removed.
5. Make sure there are separate secure chats for action days or spicy actions so that you can delete them afterwards.
6. Make sure you set up disappearing messages. If actions are happening soon, make sure you set disappearing messages to a day or a week. Otherwise 4 weeks should be fine. Only Signal can do this automatically, however Admins in Mattermost, WhatsApp and Telegram can delete others' messages.
7. Make sure you keep the group 'invite links' off.
8. Remember that many chat platforms attach media and files and links separately, so admins should regularly check that old media files and links are deleted.

9. After the chat is done, and everyone has agreed that the group chat is done with, leave the group and delete the chat off your phone.
10. Some members may not do this, so once the chat is done with, admins can remove members individually and then delete the chat off phones by deleting the group chat altogether - in this way people are not on lots of different chats that have ended which may cause security issues should someone’s phone be seized.
11. Use the XR Cloud or CryptPad instead of Google Docs. See Document Management.
12. If you are using chats for actions read more about 'air-gapping' here.

Moderating a group chat

Hopefully, you'll never be in a tricky situation; but sometimes people can troll, spam or act against XR's Principles and Values on group chats. In general, this is less likely to happen on closed, secure chats, but it is a good idea to have 'agreed in advance' rules for this type of behaviour. It is important to make sure difficult or contentious situations don't escalate.

1. Always make sure there are at least three trusted admins to moderate the chat. Create a separate, private chat for these moderators, so there's a space for people to support each other in response to questions or queries. Take turns to do the moderation.

2. Name the chat and use the header/description to make it clear what the chat is and why people have been added. Make sure that only admins can add members or access the invite link by turning off the group link in settings (there is no group link in WhatsApp). Be aware of where the invite links are posted, e.g. don't add private invite links to websites or social media as spammers will find these and join your group chats.

3. Create a group agreement. It is up to your group what rules you agree to, but it is best to ensure these rules are agreed to in advance. It also helps for rules to be the same on all platforms that you are using to communicate. Ensure that when people sign up to the group they are pointed to the group agreement so they know what they are agreeing to, or that they are shown it before joining the group. Link the group agreement from the chat header/description.

4. Welcome newcomers. Answer questions and make sure people feel heard. Regularly remind everybody of chat etiquette. Chatting informally to build momentum in the public chat is best done from personal accounts, rather than anonymous admins.

5. Block and report spammers. See here for how to manage spammers in Telegram.

6. Avoid posting sensitive action info, naming organisers or any info which can later be used as evidence. Also be aware that infiltration is common on open chats, so don't share anything that can be used against people as evidence.

7. If a member of the group keeps posting off-topic messages or dominating the space then respectfully ask them to stay on track, or switch to a more suitable channel. Create another space for them to be heard. If they continue, follow up with a direct message, or ultimately consider blocking them from the chat with an explanation. Make sure that moderators follow the policy and are ready to be challenged and justify removals.

8. If people leave the chat in response to a post, this is a sign of overheating - slow down, pause and reflect.

9. Follow a ‘two strikes and you’re out’ policy. On the first occasion of ‘misbehaviour’ an admin should remove the person/people from the group, private message them to explain they have been removed, and calmly explain why (citing the rules you have agreed to). On the group chat itself that they have been removed from, explain that you have removed them from the group and why. If you have a group agreement in place most people will know the policy and know what will happen if there is bad behaviour on a group chat. You may decide in your group on a zero-tolerance policy for some misbehaviour.

10. Give the removed person a cooling-off period and discuss re-adding them to the group provided they are willing to follow the group agreement. Ideally, if the person is happy to apologise, and wants to be added back into the group then you can add them back in, on the basis that there is only one more chance. As we said, if this is covered in the group agreement policy in advance, and everyone knows what happens in a bad behaviour situation, then nobody should be upset about this. Once that person has been let back into the group, admins should ensure that ongoing conversations are monitored and enforce the ‘two strikes and you are out policy’. If necessary, you may need to remove them from the group conversations permanently, and you may also want to assess whether or not you want them involved in the XR Local Group, Community Group, or Working Group at all.

11. Remember to close unused chats securely after their use is over.

Here are the Mattermost Moderation Guidelines used on public XRUK channels.

Closing down chats

For security and to make sure chats don't get abandonded and become un-moderated spaces, it is best to close a chat down once its use is over.

Signal

Very important to close down chats, as soon as they aren't required. This is because Signal is often the preferred platform for more 'spicy' actions.

1. Turn group link off on day of action
2. Send a warning that group will be closed on a certain day
3. Change group name to something random
4. Delete info in group header
5. Remove all members
6. Check group link is off
7. Leave Group yourself

Telegram

Follow the instructions as above. To remove any admins, you must first take away their 'admin' status and then you can remove them from the chat. Then once everyone is removed, only the 'owner' of the chat can completely delete the chat.

WhatsApp

Similar to Telegram, but messages remain on people's phones even after they've left and chat is closed. Hence why it's not recommended for situations requiring higher level of security.

Please contact the Rebel Toolkit team if the info about can be improved or updated (as software changes all the time)

Template Group Agreement

‘Chat burn out’ is a very real thing, something well studied, and ensuring discussion is kept out of chat, and chat is kept out of discussion takes work.

This is important work, as it keeps our communication and knowledge synthesis environments healthy, enjoyable and productive.

The basics

- Adhere to XR's Principles & Values
- No spamming
- No racism, sexism, hate speech
- No pornography or violent imagery
- Don’t randomly add people to the channel without consent
- Don't post the first names or contact details of anyone without their consent
- Be excellent to each other!

Moderation Policies

Two Strikes policy

Posts that are harmful/destructive in nature (for instance, advocating violence) and posts that breach the Principles & Values will fall under a Two Strikes policy. This involves a warning and explanation, with a further overstep resulting in the person being removed from the chat.

Examples:

- Racist, sexist or posts of a harassing nature
- Ad hominem attacks- posts that breach the Principles & Values (for instance advocating violence)

Three Strikes policy

Posts that are considered spam, trolling, or aim to co-opt support, will fall under a Three Strikes policy. This includes posts that use the @all or @channel or @here notifications, as is posting the same message across many channels (cross posting). Adding rebels to groups or channels without their permission is also considered spamming.

Posters that advertise personal projects or call for rebels to join movements outside of XR also apply. As will apparent trolls.

Examples:

- Posts calling for XR rebels to join other movements
- Posts espousing denial of climate and environmental sciences
- Posts to multiple channels that do not fit the purpose of the chat

Off topic Policy

Off topic posts are reasonably inevitable. However should chatter start around such an off topic post, it can quickly add noise to a channel, and so stress our communication streams. Authors of such posts need to be gently encouraged to take their topic to a more appropriate channel.

Telegram: How to remove spammers

Spamming can be an issue with Telegram chats.

If the invite link to a Telegram group chat is public, then anyone can join!

If members can share the group's invite link, it can end up anywhere!

If you receive direct messages [DM] from random people on Telegram saying things such as, 'Hello' or 'Hello, what are the XR groups doing?' or similar, simply report, block and delete immediately. If you engage with a random DM then you'll find yourself in a conversation, the spammer will try to engage you for as long as possible resulting in either asking for money, help with transferring funds or something along those lines.

If you have a spammer in your chat you will want to:

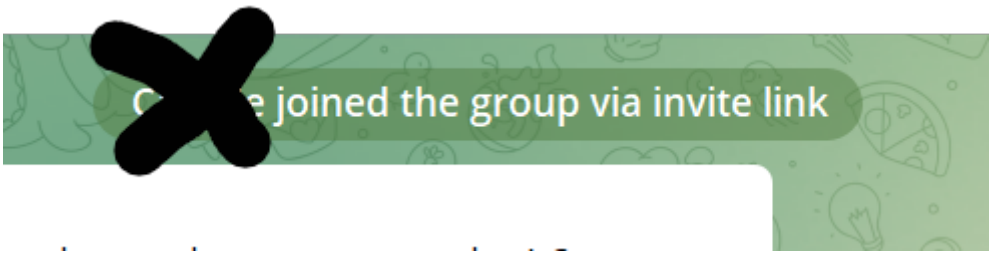
1. Remove them from the group chat
2. Delete all of their messages
3. Report them to Telegram (although it's not known if this has an impact)

Some spammers will join the group and quickly change their name to stop you from finding and removing them, so try to complete this process quickly. You can follow the steps below either on a phone or on your laptop/desktop:

1. You need to be an admin

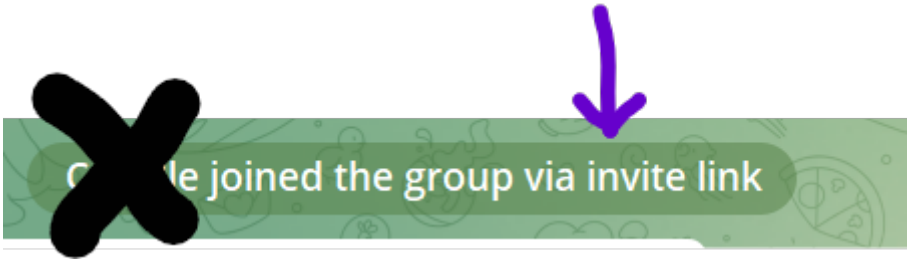
Please share the workload by making other trusted rebels admins.

2. Find where the spammer joined the chat via the invite link

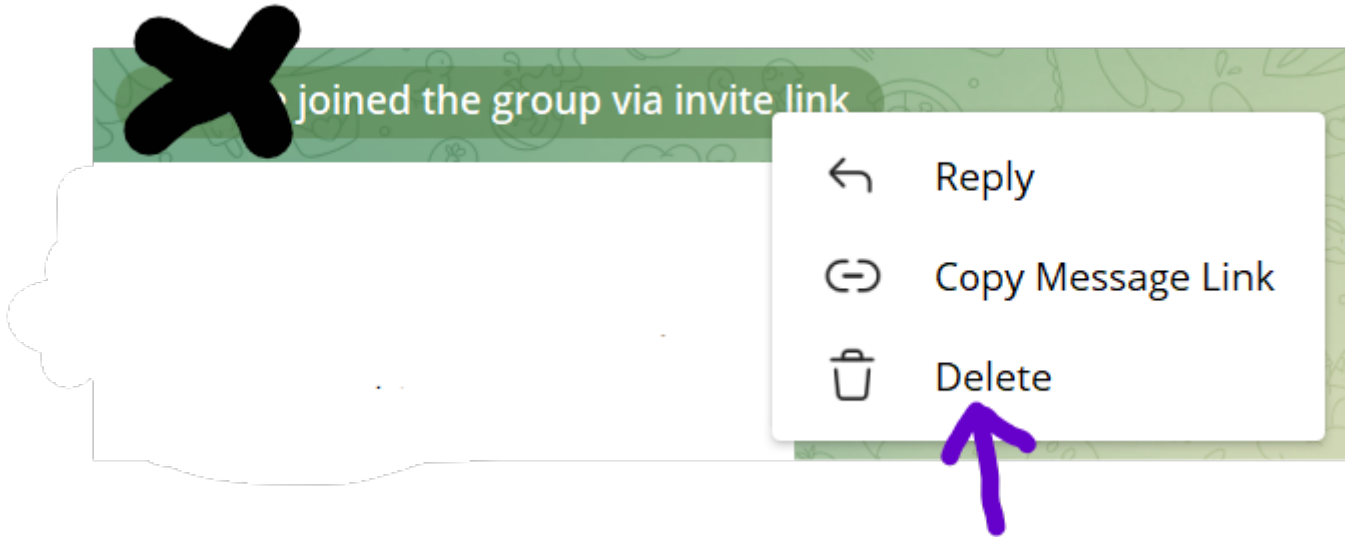


3. Right click

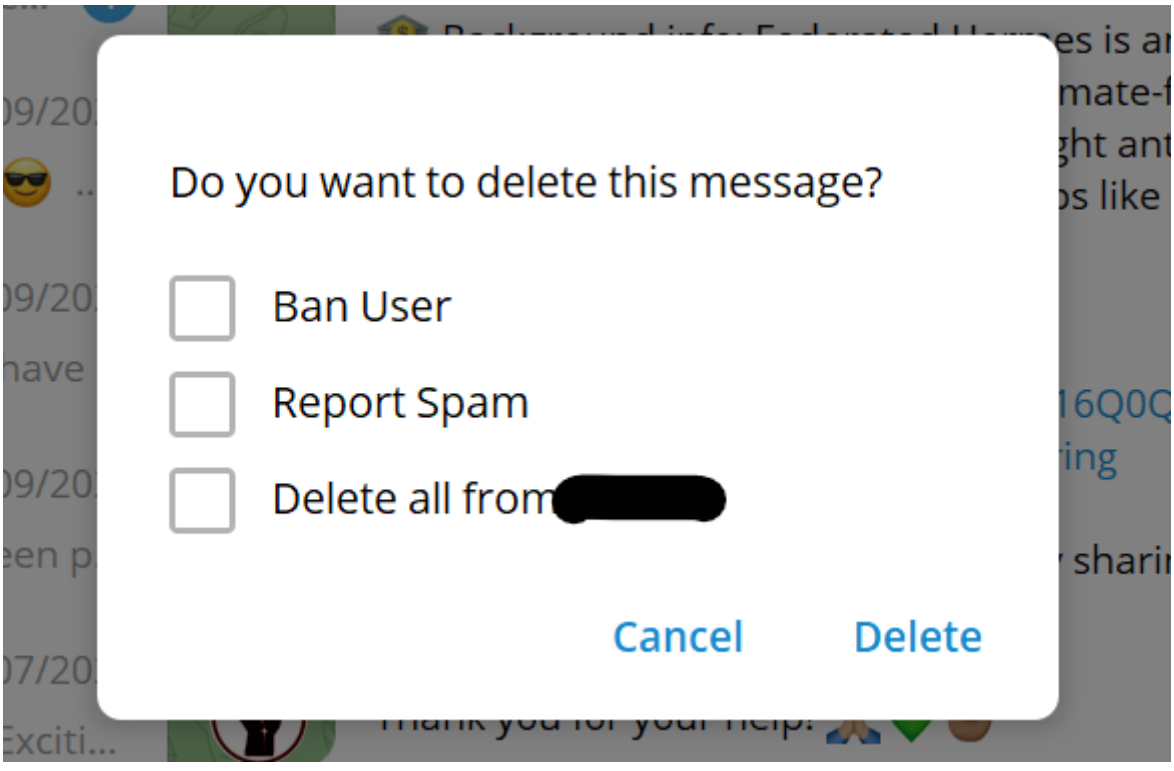
- **On a phone** - tap to the right of their name on the words 'X joined the group via invite link'.
- **On a computer** - right click on the words 'X joined the group via invite link'.



4. Select "delete"



5. Select the 3 tickboxes: Ban user, Report spam and Delete all



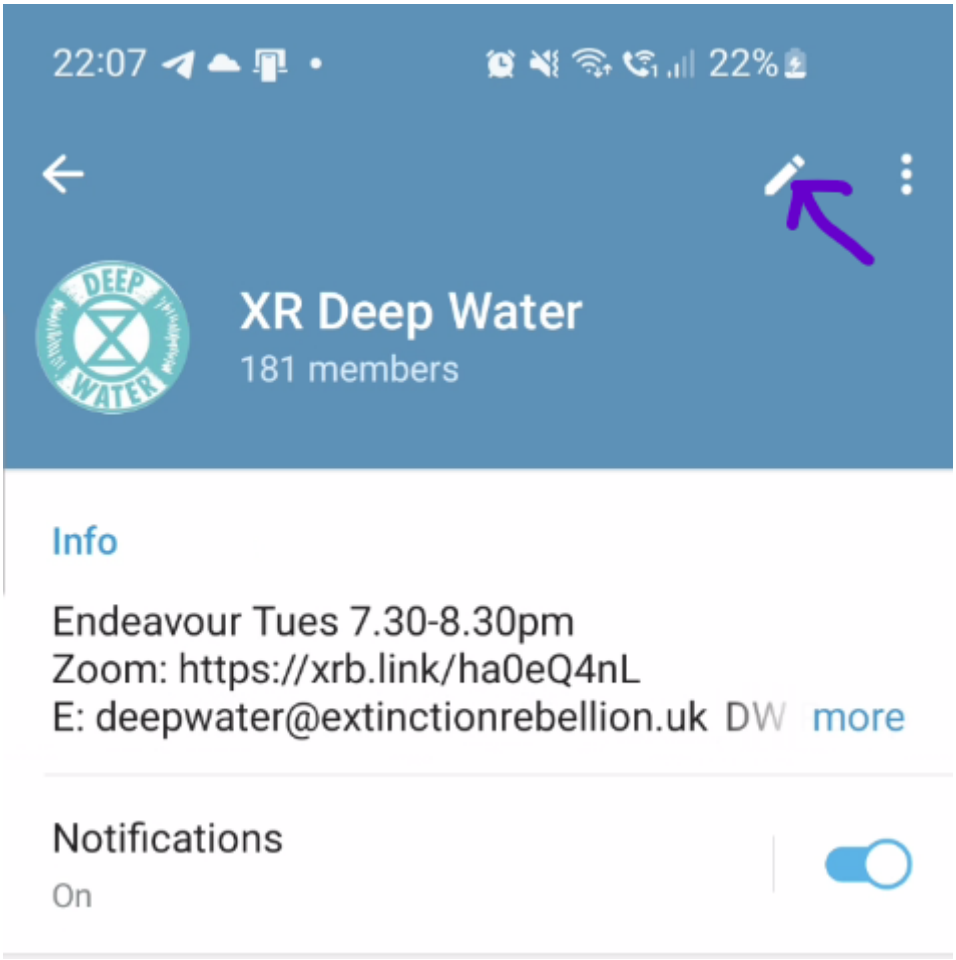
If you simply search for a spammer from the member's list and block and report them from there, that only blocks / reports the spammer for yourself rather than the whole group and it also doesn't delete any spam messages they may have posted.

6. Revoke the current invite link

You can revoke the current invite link so more spammers can't use it and create a new invite link to be shared with only trusted rebels

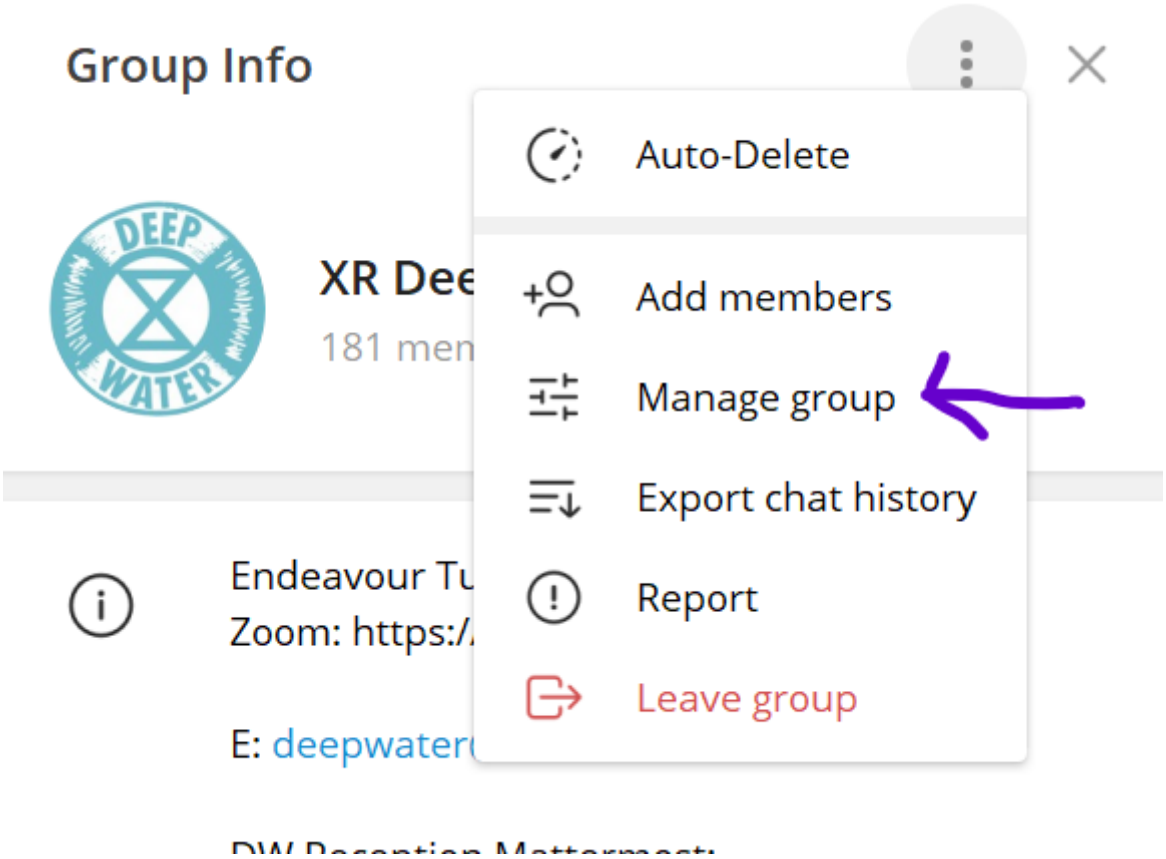
On a phone:

- Tap the name of the group and then select the pencil icon



On a computer:

- Select the 3 dots and then 'Manage Group'



- Select 'Invite Links'
- Go to the 3 dots to the right of the current Invite Link (it will be called Primary Link on a computer) and choose 'Revoke Link'
- Create a 'New Link' then share that with trusted rebels

7. To change permissions to prevent more spammers adding more spammers

So spammers can't add more spammers/bad agents to your group, select 'Permissions' and switch off 'Add Users'.