

Messaging Apps: Administering & Moderating Chats

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Keeping group chats as secure as possible

When setting up the group chat make sure you follow these rules to keep it as secure as possible

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. 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).
4. Make sure there are separate secure chats for action days or spicy actions so that you can delete them afterwards.
5. Make sure you set 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.)
6. Make sure you keep the group links off.
7. 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
8. 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
9. 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.

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 - turn 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 the Rebel Toolkit - 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 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 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.

Chat Etiquette for XR Group Chats

Here are a few Chat Etiquette Guidelines that are being used in XR Group Chats whether on Mattermost, Signal, Telegram or WhatsApp:

Mattermost Moderation Guidelines

You could copy and paste this as the basis of a group agreement on your chat - edit it to your requirements.

XR Chats Guidelines

☐ Be clear about the purpose of the chat and how people join (private invite only or by public link). Add this info to the chat description. Be aware of where the invite links are posted, e.g. don't add private invite links to the Rebel Toolkit - spammers will find these and join your group chats.

☐ If using Telegram, pin key messages and keep them updated. Or for other platforms put an info link in the header.

☐ Make sure you have several admins and moderators; preferably a small group who can support each other and make sure the chat is well moderated and kept up to date.

☐☐☐ Welcome newcomers. Answer questions and make sure people feel heard.

☐ 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.

☐☐ Keep messages short and link out for more info (unless it's a discussion thread). Take forward any issues via direct message or temporary small group chats.

☐☐☐♂ Block and report **spammers**.

☐ If a member of the group keeps posting off-topic messages or dominating the space 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. Mattermost **Off-Topic channels** are ideal.

□ Answer questions and make sure people feel heard.

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

♻️ Remind each other of chat etiquette, especially newcomers.

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:

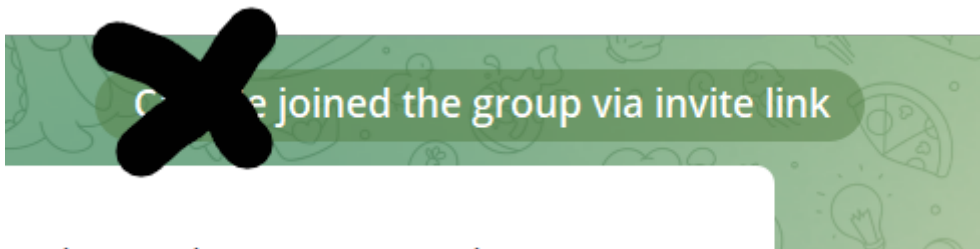
1. remove them from the group chat
2. delete all of their messages
3. report them to Telegram (although it's not known if this has an impact).

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

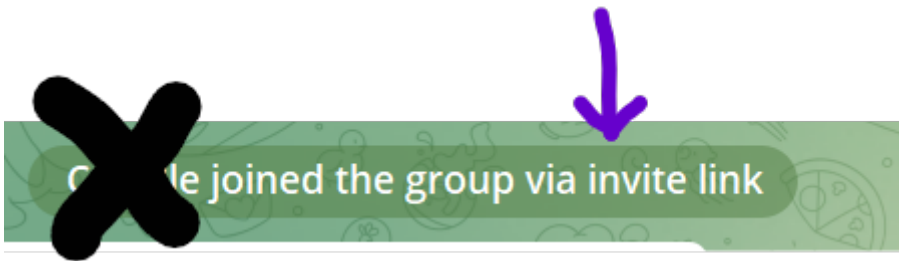
Please share the workload by making other trusted rebels admins.

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

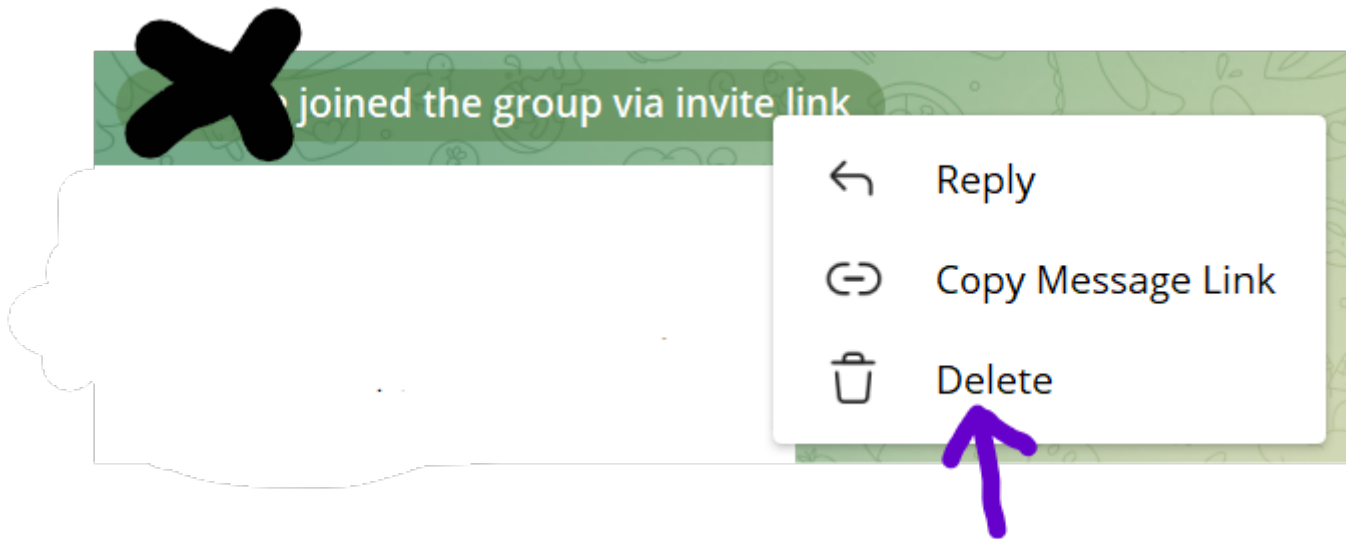


3. Right click

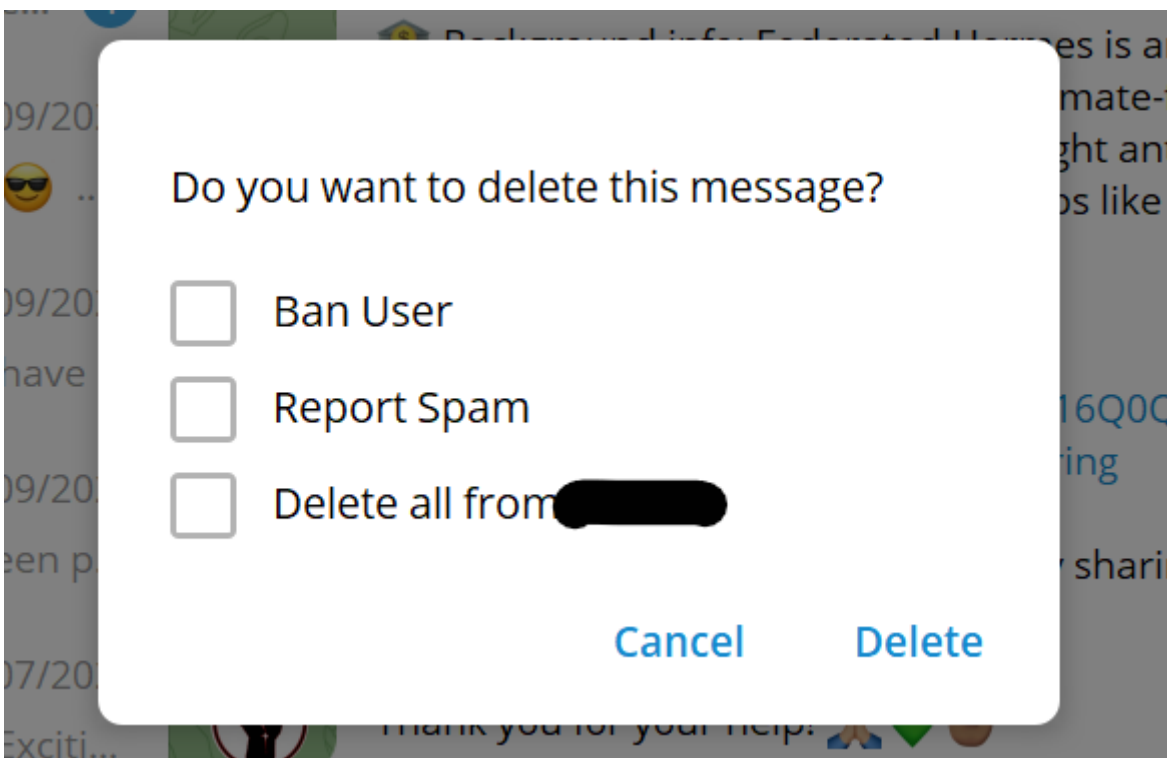
- **On a phone** - tap to the right of their name on the words 'X joined the group via invite link'.
- **On a computer** - right click on the words 'X joined the group via invite link'.



4. Select "delete"



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



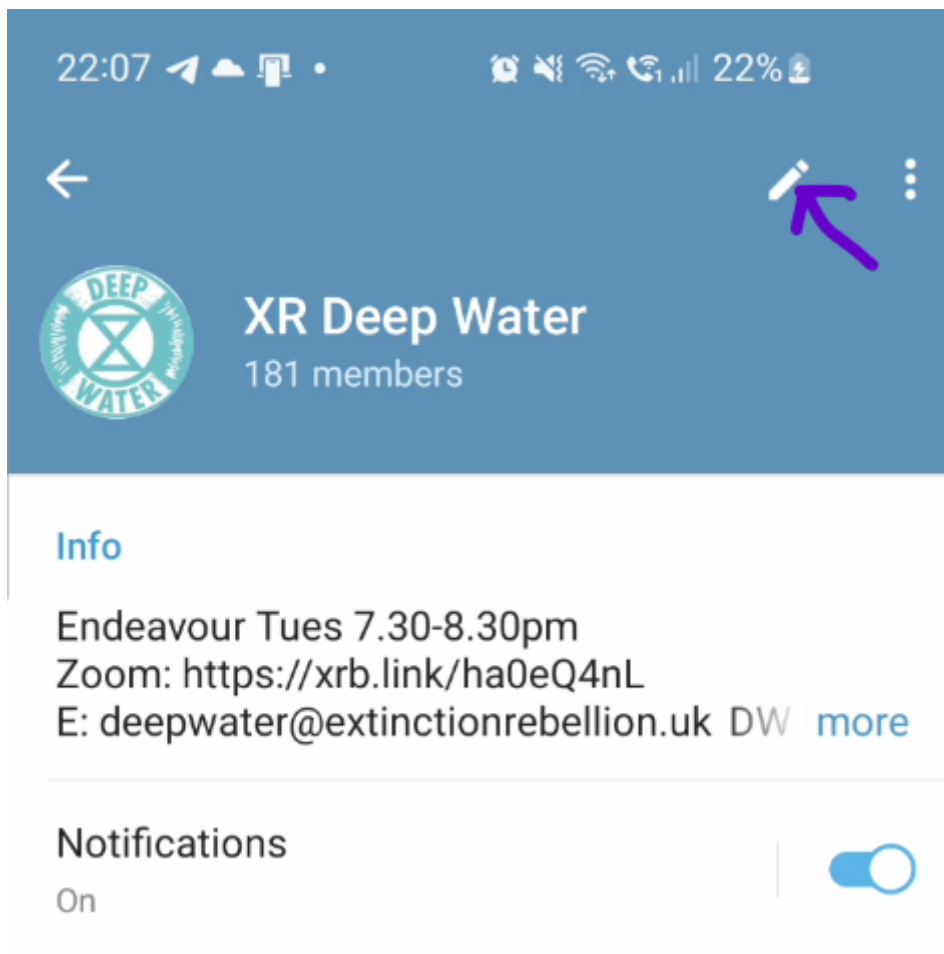
If you simply search for a spammer from the member's list and block and report them from there, that only blocks / reports the spammer for yourself rather than the whole group and it also doesn't delete any spam messages they may have posted.

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

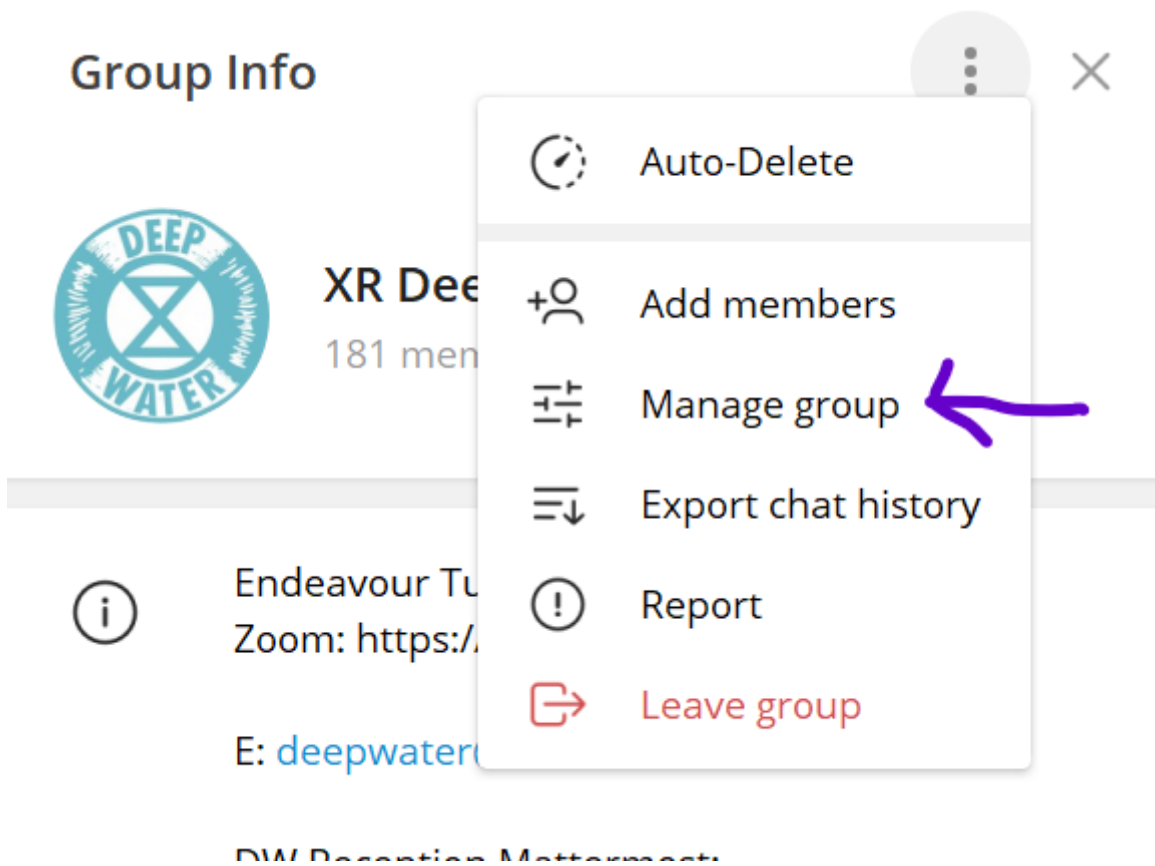
On a phone:

- 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
- select 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'

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 stressing our communication streams. Authors of such posts need to be gently encouraged to take their topic to a more appropriate channel.