



The Lab Online - FAQ

How does The Lab Online work? What will my child experience?

The Lab Online has been running since 2016 and has evolved into an engaging social environment well beyond what we traditionally associate with video conferencing. The enthusiasm of participants and the mentors skills make it much more than video conferencing.

The Lab Online currently uses the video conferencing technology Zoom to engage Lab participants in tech mentoring and social sessions. Zoom provides the ability for participants to chat with one another in a video environment where everyone can see and hear everyone else as they speak in turn. Individual user's screens can be shared so that everyone can see at once what an individual is working on or a game they are playing. Zoom provides breakout rooms so that participants who want to play a game can gather in one room while others who might want to learn a tech skill remain in another room. Zoom provides the option for a participant to turn off their video or audio but still see and hear others' video and audio. We recommend the camera be left on, though many participants switch between video and audio only. Having audio off when not speaking is recommended to keep ambient sounds low.

What are the security and safety considerations for The Lab Online?

We require that everyone accessing The Lab Online uses their real name so that people joining the session can be checked against the registrations for each session. Sessions are continuously monitored by mentors with no more than eight participants to each mentor to ensure everyone gets the attention they need. Each session is video recorded to provide a record of video activity and text chat. Recordings will never be shared, distributed or accessed by anyone other than Lab Network directors or staff without the written permission of the parents or guardians of all session participants.

Does The Lab Online provide a structured learning experience?

In the same way as The Lab's face to face sessions, the primary aim of The Lab Online is to foster a positive and supportive social experience for young people with autism through sharing technology-based interests. We do this through engagement with tech and gaming activities that are enjoyed by participants. While some local Labs provide tech training activities in face to face sessions, these are initiated by participants and are not prescribed activities. The Lab is about participants doing what they want and in their own time. We've found that this approach has provided the most positive experience for ongoing engagement and improved self-esteem. We plan to introduce some specialised online sessions which will offer training in specific tech skills and/or focus on specific games or technology interests. We hope to provide the opportunity to register for these sessions in the near future.

Does The Lab Online require specialised equipment?

No. Any computer that you can connect to the internet with a camera and microphone that will run popular games and video will work. Zoom does not require specialised software. When joining the first session you will be prompted to install the Zoom app which will allow you to join sessions and control the audio and video. There are limitations with some tablets in terms of their suitability for playing some games that are accessible online, mainly due to the visibility of controls on their small screens, but many participants do use tablets and still enjoy the sessions.



Minecraft at The Lab Online

This is one of the most popular games for young participants in Lab Online sessions. There are two different versions of Minecraft; Bedrock and Java. Bedrock is the console/ipad edition while Java is for laptop and desktop computers - they both use different operating systems. This means that users that have Bedrock can only play with other users with Bedrock, and Java users can only play with other Java users. Since most Lab Online participants play the Java version, we recommend that this is installed. The current one off cost of the Minecraft Java Edition is AU\$38.

What is the cost of The Lab Online and can I use NDIS funds?

This year The Lab introduced a new fee structure in response to the increasing number of participants being funded by the NDIS in order to keep the cost of our service affordable and equitable for everyone. These fees apply equally to The Lab Online, with the one exception that all Lab Online sessions will be charged at the weekday rate (weekend sessions will not attract a higher fee).

For participants without NDIS funding:

The cost of any Lab session (face to face or online; weekday or weekend) is \$35.

For NDIS-funded Participants:

The cost of any Lab Online session is \$44.15

Lab Online fees reflect the current rates set by the NDIS for the line item:

“Provision of support to enable a participant to engage in community, social and/or recreational activities”, and a support ratio of mentors to participants of 1:5 or above. Where a participant is Self-Managed or Plan Managed, The Lab is able to invoice directly to the participant or a plan manager. Please discuss payment options for agency managed NDIS plans with your NDIS support person. At the time of registration, you will be asked to provide your billing details, who manages your plan and the name and contact details of the plan manager.

How do I pay and what if we choose to stop attending?

You can decide whether you will be invoiced for Lab Online sessions on a Monthly or Term basis. Invoices will be sent prior to or at the start of each term and will be due within 14 days. Invoices for NDIS-funded participants will attract a \$10 administration fee. Please note that if invoices remain outstanding after the due date, participants may not be sent the login details to their next sessions until a payment is made. Please also note that unless prior arrangements have been made, The Lab is unable to refund weekly fees/ term payments for non-attendance because we rely on having a confirmed minimum number of participants each week to fund the Lab's operations.

How can I register for The Lab Online?

Go to <https://register.thelab.org.au> and select The Lab Online as the venue.