

## What is Skype & Why Use It for Pro Bono Legal Advice?

Skype is a piece of software whose purpose is to break down barriers to communication. With an Internet-connected device, anyone can communicate for free with messaging, voice and video. At low cost, they can also call landlines or mobiles virtually anywhere in the world. Founded in 2003 and based in Luxembourg, Skype Communications S.à r.l is a wholly owned subsidiary of Microsoft Corp. (NASDAQ: MSFT). Skype can be downloaded onto PCs, tablets, mobile phones and other connected devices for free at <http://www.skype.com> and is also available in all major app stores.

Using Skype video calling in a pro bono legal context saves both the legal advisor and client time traveling to a legal advice centre/clinic/other organisation for an in-person appointment. This in turn increases the amount of time a lawyer can spend giving pro bono legal advice, allows an advice session to be scheduled in-between other commitments and increases accessibility to legal advice for clients who may be constrained from travelling.

## Free Skype Functionality Relevant to a Pro Bono Legal Advice Session.

Functionality	Description
Skype-to-Skype calling	Hold a Skype voice call with up to 25 people.
Skype-to-Skype video	Hold a video call, with up to 10 participants.
Screen sharing	Share your computer screen with the other person you are calling. Useful if you are working on a document together.
File sharing	Send through files (word documents, PDFs, photos) to any other Skype contacts.

## Getting Started

Before you can hold a Skype video call each participant will need to have the following:

1. A **Skype account**. This can be set up in a few minutes by visiting <https://www.skype.com/en/>. It is up to you whether to use one generic Skype account for each law centre/organisation or multiple accounts for different legal clinics, or by subject matter.
2. A **computer** with a **microphone** and **speakers** (or headset/speakerphone—see below) and a webcam.
3. A **broadband internet connection**.

Once set-up the participants will need to “**accept**” each other as a Skype contact. This can be most easily done by clicking on the “**add contact**” button and typing in the other person’s **SkypeID** or **Microsoft Account userID**. This will then send that person a notification which they can accept and then you are ready to begin.

See our **User Guides and video tutorials** to find out more about using all of the features of Skype: <https://support.skype.com/en/skype/t2/>

## Tips for Optimizing the Skype Calling Experience

### 1) **Hardware:**

Using a good quality webcam and a peripheral audio speaker device are probably the two single biggest things that can be done to improve a Skype call experience. Sometimes you can adjust webcam settings like white balance and exposure through the driver settings. If your webcam’s drivers support this feature you can open the **settings** through Skype. To adjust your webcam settings in Skype for Windows Desktop, open Skype and go to **Tools>Options>Video Settings>Webcam Settings**.

Speaker quality in a laptop or desktop, unless state of the art, can vary dramatically. We recommend using a headset or USB speakerphone. Headsets tend to give the best audio quality as there is less interference from other ambient noise and the microphone quality will typically be higher than on a standard PC. Speakerphones work well where there are several people in the room all wanting to participate in the call.

## 2) Internet connection & environment:

- Connecting the computing device you intend to use for the Skype call through an Ethernet Cable will offer a more stable Skype experience than when connecting via Wi-Fi, which is generally better than making a Skype call over a mobile data network.
- A well-lit room can have a big positive impact on the video quality of your calls. If you have a bright light behind you pointing into your webcam then your face will appear dark and featureless to whoever you are calling. If the overall level of light in your room is low then your webcam will try and amplify the light to make the picture brighter and that will reduce the video quality. A well-lit room is one where there is a good amount of ambient light and where you won't have any bright lights right behind you.
- Because of the way Skype works, the quality of a group Skype call is only as good as the network of the person who started the call. If you are going to have a call with a group of people, take a moment to check who has the best connection and get them to start the call.

## Is Skype Secure?

Skype takes the security and protection of customer information very seriously. Skype uses digital certificates to establish and confirm the identity of the person placing and receiving a Skype call. Skype-to-Skype calling is encrypted end-to-end. Skype's Privacy Policy can be found here: [www.skype.com/en/legal/privacy](http://www.skype.com/en/legal/privacy)  
For more information please also visit: [www.skype.com/en/security/](http://www.skype.com/en/security/)

## Can I Record Skype Conversations?

Skype does not offer call recording functionality. Some third party applications offer this functionality (for example "Pamela" and "Vodburner").

## Lync and Skype Connectivity

Skype and Lync customers are now able to connect together. This is useful in the pro bono context in connecting a lawyer at a law firm running Microsoft Lync as part of Microsoft Office in a Corporate IT Environment and a pro bono client using Skype on a computer at a local law centre or other organisation. The two parties can now talk together without the law firm needing to download and install Skype software onto its corporate IT systems, or without the local law centre needing to have Lync.

## Skype Buttons

Skype Buttons can be added to a website to give people an easy way to contact you over Skype. Law centres may want to do this or encourage use of Skype by clients to access legal advice remotely: <https://www.skype.com/en/developer/create-contactme-buttons/>

## Further Information & Support

The Skype website contains support materials and FAQs, which can be found at: <https://support.skype.com/en/>

