

**Updated 20<sup>th</sup> September 2021**

## **GUIDELINES FOR GETTING TOGETHER AGAIN FOR CHILDREN'S AND YOUTH MINISTRY (for congregations in Northern Ireland)**

### **MOVING FORWARD WHILE CHALLENGES REMAIN**

The current phase of the Covid-19 pandemic can seem particularly challenging while we continue to carefully assess a changing and more fluid situation. We find ourselves not quite where we were before, but not fully where we would like to be either. We have reached a point 'in between', where decisions need to be taken if we are to regain some momentum in our congregation's work among children and young people.

### **BALANCING RISK AND RESPONSIBILITY**

Even in normal times there is risk associated with any activity we plan and deliver. We are used to taking every possible step to limit and reduce that risk and ensure the safety of everyone involved. Just now, we need to approach what we do with a heightened alertness to risk and awareness of responsibility due to the particular conditions resulting from Covid-19. However, we need to take and give confidence in what we can do, rather than be paralysed by what we can't. It is good to approach deciding and designing what your congregation will do in children's and youth ministry with creativity so as to craft the best programme possible under your present circumstances. Where you sense something that you used to do will be too difficult or potentially dangerous, also give yourself permission not to do it for now.

### **ESSENTIALS AND EXAMPLES**

The following guidelines for kirk sessions and leaders in children's and youth ministry, offer a summary of the *essentials* involved in balancing risk and responsibility in activities recommencing in the next season of church life or as they continue to expand and develop as circumstances improve. Where appropriate, some practical *examples* of the expression of outworking the essentials suggest what it means to further think through the balance of what you might do and how you might do it as wisely and safely as possible.

#### **1. Children's and youth leaders should keep in close communication with their minister or clerk of session**

The kirk session must give approval for the resumption of any activity. They have been provided with and can supply children's and youth leaders with a simple risk assessment form that must be completed for any activity resuming for the first time. Filling this in will help everyone think through what is planned, any risks involved and how they might be limited and reduced.

#### **2. Consult and comply with the latest guidance issued by the Presbyterian Church in Ireland**

The latest guidance is circulated to ministers from the Clerk's office as circumstances change. This should be shared as appropriate with kirk session and other leaders. Where it differs from advice issued from the headquarters of uniformed organisations, or other bodies with which your children's or youth group is registered, PCI requirements must be observed. This also applies to other non-congregational children's and youth groups using church premises.

- *Where circumstances allow you to do more than required to limit or reduce risk, always take the opportunity to do so. For example, if it is possible to observe more than the minimum social distancing required without negatively impacting on activities, do so.*

#### **3. Communicate well with leaders, children, young people and their parents**

Ensure that there is good preparation for everyone before resuming activities by informing them about arrangements and continuing to remind them of the important health and safety measures in place. It is especially important to remind people that if they, or someone they live with, have coronavirus symptoms:

- fever, particularly a high temperature (i.e. a temperature of 37.8 degrees or over);
- continuous cough; or
- loss of sense of taste or smell;

it is absolutely essential that they must not attend and should follow the Government's guidance at <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-overview-and-advice>.

#### **4. Keep a record of names and contact telephone numbers of those in attendance**

Keep and retain a simple record of names and contact telephone numbers of those who attend activities in case you are asked for them by the Public Health Agency who may require them to fulfil their responsibilities. If you are informed, or become aware, that a child or young person is showing symptoms, awaiting results of a test or has tested positive in the days following your last gathering, you may wonder if you have the responsibility to contact parents of other children or young people, or leaders who were present. That duty is not required of leaders in church and church organisations. It is the responsibility of the Public Health Agency to give advice to anyone who has tested positive for the virus and to follow up any contacts they decide need to be informed. They may contact you if they assess that they need to communicate with the parents of other young people.

- *Give parents an opportunity to register their child's or young person's place online in advance or find a simple way to record names and contact numbers on arrival and frequently remind them of the importance of following arrangements and public health advice.*
- *Not all those attending organisations or participating in activities will be regular members of the congregation. Don't assume that they are aware of the regulations required by PCI or up to date with latest public health guidance.*

#### **5. Emphasise sanitisation**

Provide good means of hand sanitisation and time to wash hands on arrival, during activities as appropriate, and when leaving.

- *Sports equipment such as bats can be shared, but ensure all users have sanitised their hands before taking their turn. In a crèche setting or when working with toddlers where monitoring sanitisation and the sharing of toys becomes more difficult to restrict, it is safer to encourage children to bring their own toys.*
- *Leaders will need to ensure children wash their hands after using the toilet, observing Taking Care protocols at all time. You may also want to provide some single use gloves for use if changing nappies in crèche and toddler groups.*

#### **6. Observe social distancing**

The minimum social distancing required in children's and youth activities has been reduced to one metre. However, this need not be applied where necessary in playing active sports or games. Those leading a lesson or singing from the front should continue to retain the extra distance of four metres from those closest to them. If more than one person is leading singing, they need to stay two metres from each other.

- *Playing of contact sports indoors is now allowed without the necessity to observe 1 metre social distancing between participants during the game, although thought should be given to avoiding prolonged physical contact.*
- *If space is a problem in arranging to lead singing or teaching a lesson from the front while observing social distancing as outlined above, using video or audio material provides a good alternative.*

#### **7. Wear face coverings where required**

(a) For children under the age of 13

- the wearing of face coverings is not mandatory during any activities.

(b) For other ages, including leaders:

- the wearing of face coverings remains a legal mandatory requirement indoors (unless exempted), when arriving, when leaving and when generally moving around
- the wearing of face coverings remains a legal mandatory requirement indoors (unless exempted), during most meetings, even when seated, apart from:
  - when consuming food or drink, with social distancing and ideally seated, face coverings may be removed;
  - when playing active sports or games, face coverings may be removed;
  - in youth ministry activities (defined as informal acts of worship) primarily centred around Bible teaching, Bible study and prayer, with social distancing and ideally seated, face coverings may be removed. However, when singing, face coverings must always be worn.

In youth meetings/activities on church premises which do not have specific ministry content of the nature defined above, face coverings must be worn indoors throughout.

- *Achieving a good atmosphere around the tricky area of face coverings is important. If children or young people choose to wear face coverings when not required, this should be affirmed. In toddler group and crèche settings, it may be especially important to remind parents and other adults that they must wear face coverings at all times even as they spend time around children who aren't wearing face coverings.*

## 8. Ensure good ventilation

As more becomes known about how the virus is transmitted, the emphasis placed on good ventilation has increased. Even as the temperature drops, windows and, where possible, doors, should be left open.

- *When opening doors and windows for ventilation be sure to take steps to avoid accidents, intruders or children or young people being able to leave the building unsupervised.*
- *As we move into winter months it will be important that parents, children and young people are reminded and encouraged to dress with cooler indoor temperatures in mind.*

## 9. Clean touch points

As more becomes known about how the virus is transmitted, government guidance places less of an emphasis on the need for a very strict cleaning regime, compared to the early months of the pandemic. The necessity to clean down all surfaces on a very frequent basis is no longer emphasised in guidance, though regular cleaning of areas that are touched by numbers of people remains important, e.g. equipment, door handles, toilets etc. It is no longer necessary to leave halls or rooms for 72 hours between groups using them. However, if you don't have to use the same space for two different groups on the same night, then avoid doing so.

- *Before you meet, think of all the main surfaces with which a variety of participants will be in contact. Sanitise them in advance of their arrival.*
- *Identify particular surfaces that will be touched by a variety of individuals during activities. Have a leader sanitise them regularly throughout the time in which participants are on the premises.*

## 10. Minimise unnecessary mixing

It is not required to maintain children and young people in household, family or school bubbles. However, it is wise to avoid unnecessary mixing on the side lines of activities taking place, in entrance areas or between groups of different ages in the same space.

- *Because children are in the same class at school it does not mean that they can sit together in groups such as Sunday school classes without social distancing. Only children from the same household can sit side by side without observing one metre social distancing.*
- *Plan to avoid a crossover of children and young people from one age group at the end of their activity sharing a space with another age group arriving to commence their programme.*

### **11. Care when catering**

Having a chat over food and drink is such a vital part of children's and youth ministry. Include any plans for catering in your risk assessment. Individual disposable cups or plates should be used where possible and care taken when disposing of them and generally when cleaning up.

- *When food is shared e.g. slices from a pizza, it is best served on individual plates rather than taken by different people from one box or plate.*
- *Plan to avoid queueing where possible by serving people when seated. Always maintain social distancing.*

### **12. Navigating transport**

Leaders' cars or a church minibus can be used for transporting children or young people assuming all necessary insurance cover is in place.

- *Face coverings need not be worn or social distancing maintained, however passengers might be encouraged to wear masks and good ventilation is strongly advised.*
- *Check with parents that they are agreeable for their child or young person to travel in a leader's cars or church minibus.*

### **FURTHER HELP**

If you have further, more detailed, questions about children's and youth ministry activities in your congregation please contact:

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