

Coronavirus advice: Children’s, youth and families ministry

Version	Changes
09 July 2020	First published
13 August 2020	Extensive changes to the Introduction to clarify what is possible for under-5s; Additions to General Guidance about children under 5, singing, drama, music and face coverings; Expansion of Messy Church section with ideas for a way of meeting.
20 August 2020	Changes throughout to reflect permission for supervised children’s groups in Wales; Expansion of Toddler Group section to include ideas of how to meet outside.
27 August 2020	Changes to Introduction following confirmation that creche and toddler groups can meet; Changes to General Guidance reflecting confirmation that neither children nor young people have to wear face coverings in organised groups.
3 September 2020	Removal from General Guidance of requirement for maximum group size to be six when off premises – NYA guidance, signposted by the Government, says group size may be 15 indoors or outdoors. Addition to General Guidance of permission for singing in children’s and youth groups under certain conditions.
10 September 2020	Minor revisions throughout reflecting UK Government’s changes to social interaction guidance so that no more than 6 people from different households may socially interact whether indoors or outdoors. Note that each person should still remain physically distant from anyone from another household.
17 September 2020	Caveat added under General Guidance about face coverings. More detail included about toddler groups.
24 September 2020	Yet more changes on both face coverings for youth groups, and on toddler groups, as Government update their guidance.

Introduction

The UK Government has guidance on [Protective Measures for Out-of-School Settings](#) and related guidance for [Parents and Carers of Children Attending Out-of-School Settings](#). ‘Out-of-schools settings’ (OOSS) includes extracurricular clubs, uniformed organisations and religious settings offering instruction. We take this to be relevant for organised church groups such as Junior Church, youth clubs, uniformed organisations, holiday clubs and the like, where children are defined as “up to age 18.” However, there is additional guidance, [Actions for Early Years and Childcare Providers](#), for those providing for children under 5 years old. Though this ‘early years’ guidance is aimed at schools and registered childcare providers rather than voluntary settings, some of the principles may prove helpful. In particular, it indicates that toddler groups may meet under certain conditions. Please see the section on toddler groups further down this document.

Please note that we previously believed that groups for under 5s were not able to meet in church settings. We now believe this to be possible where the group is run by church staff of designated volunteers, for example, a Boy's or Girl's Brigade group for four-year olds.

In Wales, the Welsh Government's [Re-Opening Places of Worship](#) guidance has now extended the use of church buildings for supervised activities for children up to 18. Their guidance for [childcare settings](#) includes more detail.

If you are thinking of providing children's, youth and families (CYF) work in church buildings or on church grounds, please first read our [Coronavirus: Guidance on re-opening Baptist church buildings](#). This will enable you to prepare your buildings and procedures, as well as carry out the appropriate risk assessments.

For youth work, we especially recommend that you look at the latest guidance from the [National Youth Agency](#). This is updated as permitted activities change.

Safeguarding

Please pay renewed attention to your safeguarding policy and procedures and work with your designated person for safeguarding to make sure the usual measures are in place. Bear in mind that many children and young people returning may need extra support because of:

- Anxiety regarding the pandemic.
- Bereavement within their family or circle of friends.
- Difficult home circumstances intensified by lockdown.

You might want to give particular attention to enabling children and young people talk through their experiences of the past few months, as well as provide resources to help with mental health and wellbeing. It might also be that you are the first person that the child or young person has seen outside their household for some time. Please familiarise yourself afresh with the signs of harm or risk of harm and address any issues by following your safeguarding policy's procedures and contacting the designated person for safeguarding.

General guidance

Having taken into account all the above:

- In England:
 - for children 5-18 years old, the maximum group size is 15. Ensure at least one adult is present at all times, and more as safeguarding ratios demand.

- for children under 5, the maximum group size is determined only by the number of adults present and the need to maintain the correct ratio of adults to children.
- for groups containing children both under and over 5, the maximum group size is 15.
- In Wales, for all ages of children, the maximum group size is determined only by the number of adults present and the need to maintain the correct ratio of adults to children.
- In all cases, avoid mixing groups, both within any one event, and from week to week. The principle is to keep to 'small consistent groups' wherever possible.
- Whenever children are old enough to understand and practise social distancing, encourage them to do so even within their group.
- Keep a record of all who attend each group on any one date.
- Move groups outside wherever possible as this reduces risk of COVID-19 transmission.
- Singing is now permissible in children's and youth groups, but only when a range of quite strict measures is in place to reduce risk of Covid transmission. These can be found under 'Providers of music, dance and drama or sports provision' in the [Guidance on out-of-schools-settings](#). Generally, it is worth noting that anything that raises voices to a high level should be discouraged.
- Do not include live performances of drama, comedy or music as part of the programme.
- Reiterate with the children and young people the basics of protection and hygiene – no-one who is unwell, shares a house with someone unwell or who is self-isolating may attend; wash hands regularly; 'catch it, bin it, kill it' as a mantra for coughs and sneezes.
- Face coverings are not required for children under 11.
- Face coverings for young people (11 and over) remain a contested subject. NYA guidance says, "The law now requires all those over 11yrs to wear a face covering unless with good reason when attending youth sector activities." NYA have told us that this is on the basis of their conversations with Government. However, Government have told us to refer to their guidance on [out-of-schools clubs for children](#) which says, "Public Health England does not (based on current evidence) recommend the use of face coverings when children are participating in out-of-school settings activities. This evidence will be kept under review. They are not required during out-of-school provision as children and staff are mixing in consistent groups, and because misuse may inadvertently increase the risk of transmission. There may also be negative effects on communication and thus education." Given the contradiction, we recommend a cautious approach is wise which expects those over 11 and over to wear face coverings in youth settings. We suggest that staff and volunteers working with these groups should also therefore wear face coverings, not least out of solidarity with the young people.

- Manage toilet usage by trying to avoid different groups using the toilets at the same time and by encouraging thorough hand-washing.
 - If necessary, stagger drop-off and pick-up times to reduce interaction between families.
 - Clean any rooms after one group has left and before another uses it.
 - Parents are being encouraged to limit the number of settings their children attend, so do not put pressure on any child or young person to attend your particular group.
 - Do not organise any overnight or residential activities.
 - Encourage young people not to use public transport to get to any group where possible. Sharing lifts between children and young people from different households is to be avoided even if they are in the same small group of 15 or fewer. Walking and cycling to get to a group should be encouraged where practical.
 - Communicate all the above clearly to parents and carers as well as the children and young people.
 - Think whether the revised arrangements are going to exclude any children and young people because of disability, their own vulnerability (or that of someone in the household), or transport difficulties. Consider how these might be supported even if attendance at a group is not possible.
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Some thoughts and ideas

Some of our CYF workers in the Baptist family have provided some bigger-picture questions and ideas for all of us to consider. These are offered here to help us think how we might best nurture the well-being, safety, development and faith of our children, young people and families right now.

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We wonder what your experience of lockdown has been? We are hearing stories of some appreciating newly discovered space and others wondering, “What space?” as they have juggled childcare, work, tiredness and expectations. What have you noticed during this time and how might this influence the transition back to meeting face-to-face with our children, young people and families?

As lockdown eases and church buildings can again be used, we unsurprisingly want to meet up with children, young people and families that are part of our church and local community. However, we are not able to meet in the ways we could before lockdown. So we might ask whether this an opportunity for us to re-imagine our engagement and be different.

Faith in families. Families have had a wonderful opportunity to grow in their faith together during this time; to learn from one another and to discover together what it means to follow Jesus. How can we continue to empower and equip families in this way?

Connecting isolated families has been a concern for many churches during lockdown. Are there families connected with your church that do not have a wider support network? Could they now be welcomed into a social bubble with another household? Some families workers have been meeting online with each of their church families in turn – parents are included in the call – and have got to know families much better as a result. Can this continue, even as lockdown eases?

Involving families in worship. It has been a joy to see the intergenerational nature of content and production in many online services. Young people have helped with the tech and children have contributed prayers and thoughts without the pressure of being upfront in a church service. How can we make sure this is not lost when we return to services held in buildings?

Giving children a voice. There have been some wonderfully creative initiatives that have let children know their significance in our church family. How will we continue to let the children know that they matter? How will we enable their voice to be heard when consulting the church about meeting again? Maybe they will want to gather differently, going forward?

Toddler groups continue to give us cause for concern as no Government guidance deals directly with the particular combination of a support group where parents and children remain together.

Though Government guidance for [early years providers](#) is mostly aimed at registered providers rather than community groups, section 5.5 now addresses informal childcare. Parent and child groups may meet. The conditions for such a toddler group are much as we previously suggested. The venue should be Covid-secure. Participants must remain in groups of up to six including children and not mix between groups. The maximum number attending altogether will be determined by the space available to ensure social distancing between each sub-group of up to six.

However, please note that it may be difficult to ensure that groups of six do not mingle when toddlers are involved. We are mindful of [other Government advice](#) that says, “Activities and social groups where there is a significant likelihood of groups mixing and socialising (and where it will be difficult to prevent mingling and therefore breaking the law) should not take place in a community facility.”

Taking all this into account, we suggest that toddler groups may meet where there is a real need for supporting families and especially vulnerable parents. Groups that have a purely social purpose for parents who are already well-supported and connected might be harder

to justify. And no-one should feel under pressure to re-open a toddler group if you feel that it will inevitably lead to an unsafe degree of social mixing or be misunderstood by your community. Please think through your risk assessment carefully.

There is also provision for a facilitated parent and child group to meet outside (which is what we understand is meant by 'in any public place' in Section 5.5 of the guidance mentioned above.) However, as for church worship off church premises, we suggest such a gathering of more than six is likely to be misunderstood and possibly reported by members of the public, even if it is technically permitted. We therefore advise considerable caution in the current climate before running a toddler group in a park, say.

Our suggestions as to how a group might otherwise run remain unchanged, as follows:

- Each small sub-group of up to six sits within marked out squares on the floor, or with the children in each small group contained in a U-shape arrangement of small tables. Smaller groups might fit on a blanket.
- Stories can still be read from the front but any crafts are pre-prepared and provided for each small group.
- Parents bring toys and refreshments for their own children which are not shared.
- Though under-5s cannot be expected to socially distance, parents ensure such interaction is minimised outside their group of up to six.
- Parents are asked not to move around if possible, but to social distance if they need to move around.
- Adults wear face coverings.
- As with all organised activities, details of attendance are recorded and kept for the required period for Test and Trace purposes.
- Families pre-book with their contact details.
- Instructions are sent to families attending about what to expect. These remind families not to attend if they or anyone in their household has Covid-19 symptoms.

If you feel it is not feasible to meet under these conditions, you should decide not to meet.

Messy Church is a significant part of the worship in many churches. Please note it is not a children's group with a group size allowance of 15 as for the groups mentioned earlier in this document. It is an expression of church in which people of all ages mix. Though the more creative approach to church does not lend itself to sitting in orderly rows, socially distanced from others, social distancing rules must be applied. This means up to six people only from different households can be in social contact with each other, whether indoors and outdoors. (Adults and children both count towards the six.) An imaginative approach then would be to place all the required resources and instructions on a table dedicated to each group of up to six. A service leader could still guide the congregation through the mixture of story, prayer and activities, even if shared food or singing cannot be included.

The numbers who can attend would then be determined by room size and distance between each table. The Messy Church website has a useful [guidance sheet](#).

Alternatively, could up to six people meet outside in a park with a picnic to share and activities to do? Could the emerging Forest Church teach us some other ways of gathering and worshipping outside that can happen in smaller groups and where there is ample space? The Messy Church values of creativity, hospitality and celebration can still be present in these smaller gatherings.

Uniformed organisations. Many uniformed organisations have managed to adapt so that their work can continue online. The children might not always turn up to the online gatherings but knowing that there is an opportunity to check in with a safe adult who cares for them is important work. Don't underestimate the value of being a consistent and reliable presence. If we are considering returning to meetings held at the church how can we help the children prepare for the new pattern of meeting? And how can we continue to encourage and support the leaders in this unique ministry?

Youth meetings. Online meetings have met with a mixed response from young people. Some young people have been in their element, others have struggled with the lack of face-to-face relating. Some have not engaged at all. Games and activities have transferred well to online gatherings, but the relational aspect has been more difficult. Peer relationships and gatherings are an important part of adolescence. Groups may meet according to the group size restrictions mentioned in General Guidance above. However, it is good to ask whether this will exclude anyone and if so, how will this be managed? Do consult with the young people to find out what they want and feel is safe for them. If possible, consult also with their families as those with vulnerable adults in their household may be reluctant to allow their young people to meet with others.

Open youth groups are often the way we connect with young people beyond our church families. Consider the culture of the youth group and whether it would work to restart it with group size and social distancing measures in place. Maybe for a season it will need to operate differently. Again, how might you include the voice of the young people in creating what the youth group might be like during this time? If it is better for the youth group to not yet meet at church, how might we maintain links safely with young people in our community? How can we communicate that there is a safe adult that they can talk to should they need to?

Pastoral care for youth. The pastoral care of our young people is important. If you are aware of a young person who is struggling and needs more than a phone call, then arrange to meet them in a public place and where distancing rules are easily kept.

Some websites that may be useful

<https://nya.org.uk/>

<https://parentingforfaith.org/>

<https://www.tath.co.uk/>

<https://www.messychurch.org.uk/covid-19>

<https://www.gloucester.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Forest-Church-booklet.pdf>

<https://www.youthscape.co.uk/services/covid-19-resource-hub>

Ministries Team
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