

NAVIGATING THIS TIME TOGETHER

*Northern Ireland guidelines for
youth and children's activities*

(26th August 2020 update)

01 | INTRODUCTION

Youth and children's ministry has not stopped. We have been so encouraged by the creativity and resilience of youth and children's leaders across the country during this time, thank you for all you have done and continue to do. We hope you got a rest, even for a short time, over the summer, before your head started to turn to the possible resuming of activities.

The guidelines below are to help you think through how and when to **safely continue** to work with the young people and children you serve as the new church year begins. Together it is our responsibility to make churches safe places for all who gather and in all our decision making we will take all necessary action to minimize risk to our volunteers, children and young people.

As we consider what we could do for and with young people and children over the coming months, let us focus on what we **can** do, not what we **can't**. We can continue to walk with children and young people as they process what is going on for them and as they grow in faith.

We are making the recommendation that as much as possible and beneficial in the case of children's and youth activities, we allow our children and young people to settle into the formal setting of education before commencing our regular weekly activities in our church buildings:

1. In this season of returning to school, it is important to remember the added pressure that navigating this time brings for families, young people, children and volunteers. Children and young people are dealing with anxiety and stress, parents may be under additional pressure at home and in work and many volunteer leaders are also navigating home, work, parenting etc themselves.
2. **We have been advised by the Education Authority that the Department of Education has indicated that Youth Work in Northern Ireland would resume from October.** (We hold this lightly bearing in mind how fast this situation can change).

This does not mean that our ministry to and with children and young people cannot continue over these next weeks. See below for the suggested ways in which we can continue to show our children, young people and families that they are a valued part of our church community.

Many youth activities have continued to happen in outdoor spaces over the summer – we would encourage you to continue that for as long as the weather permits. (See updated guidelines for this below).

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WHOLE CHURCH APPROACH:

Consider gathering, your youth and children's council/team or the key leader of each organisation to talk through how you will have a whole church approach to resuming activities without a parent present. This allows you to consider if it is possible or necessary to reopen every organisation or activity. Rather than trying to do everything we have always done; this is a great opportunity to **reimagine** and discern what is necessary to allow the discipleship journey and mission to and with young people and children to continue and develop.

This is a great resource if you wish to examine your youth and children's ministry as a whole in the light of the last number of months to seek God and discern: <https://www.youthscape.co.uk/store/product/now-what>

Before any youth or children's activity should commence, it is crucial to follow the guidelines already produced by the Methodist Church in Ireland along with any updated advice that comes from the office of the Secretary of Conference, for building health and safety, social distancing measures, contact logging and risk assessment.

Below is a summary of the guidelines but it would be important that you read through all the material to fully understand what you need to do. You can find the guidance material here: <https://www.irishmethodist.org/covid-19>

Summary of Methodist Church in Ireland Guidelines:

1. The Methodist Church in Ireland has adopted a 2-metre social distancing policy across all its activities, remembering that those from the same household can sit together.
2. Where activities are led from the front a 4-metre distance should be maintained between those leading and the participants.
3. Shared items and resources are a particular risk. Items such as bibles, books, toys, craft materials, resources for games should not be shared or put away.
4. Face coverings have been formally recommended and their use encouraged by the Methodist Church in Ireland. Current health and safety guidance from both governments states that children under 13 are not required to wear them. Please be aware that there are others who are also exempt (<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-face-coverings>).

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Those leading from the front are exempt from the recommendation and if not wearing a face covering, they should at all times continue to maintain at least 2 metre physical distancing from one another, and four metres physical distancing from the front row of the congregation/group.

5. Singing - The formal recommendation that face-coverings should be worn opens up the possibility of quiet singing. Therefore, if it is the wish of Church Councils, those who are wearing face coverings may sing quietly i.e. at the level of quiet spoken voice.

6. Toilets: Church toilets can be open. Keeping them well ventilated. Paper towels must be used and no hand dryers. You could make wipes available so that hard surfaces can be wiped down after use. Hand sanitiser and soap should be made available.

7. Contact tracing: A record should be kept of those who attend activities.

8. Cleaning: In addition to 'normal' cleaning, you may wish to wipe down surfaces with disinfectant spray after their use, remember this includes pews, chairs, lecterns, pulpit, sound desk, banisters and grab rails, door handles, microphones. The virus lives on hard surfaces for about 72 hours so if there is a gap between use of the building of more than three days cleaning with disinfectant is not necessary. However, if the building is to be used within 72 hours this additional cleaning is required. Those who are cleaning should wear disposable gloves, use disposable cloths, and wash their hands thoroughly when finished.

9. Food cannot be served at activities.

THINGS WE CAN DO NOW:

See below for a gentle approach to resuming children's activities and some alternative methods to carry out children's activities in the church building safely.

Church Services and children's provision during it:

We are aware that churches have been moving at different paces over the summer months, some are already open, some are continuing drive – in services, some are continuing online services and activities, some a mixture of both. We hope the below approach will be helpful to you whatever your circumstances.

For some, online or Zoom Sunday school has been working well, consider continuing this for now – you could choose a time that does not conflict with the Sunday morning service to allow families to do both if they wish.

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We are suggesting a gentle approach to allow children and families to get used to a new environment gradually, recognising for some children they may not want to come to church if there are more rules and they have to stay away from their friends.

1. Children should be the responsibility of the parent/guardian at all times while within the church building or in the church grounds. Consider using an intergenerational worship format to allow the whole family of the church to engage in worship. Plan the intergenerational section of worship bearing in mind that the whole family of the church is being led in worship - often, we hand children worksheets or colouring pages to keep them occupied while the adults are being talked to. **What if we thought through how to engage the children rather than just occupy them? (See helpful resources in the resources section).**
2. If the weather allows, you may find that you can move to a short outdoor activity during the service with a parent/guardian present to ensure social distancing. The intergenerational element of the service could be longer than usual and then a short time for children specific activity. **Use outdoor activities where and when you can, as the risk profile for outdoor activities is lower, while still maintaining social distancing.**
3. Resume indoor activities for the under 12's with a parent present and social distancing maintained. (Children and parents from the same household may sit together, with social distancing maintained between them and other households).
4. For now, preschool children must be the responsibility of a parent/guardian in the creche space and children should not share toys or craft materials.

Youth activities:

It is still possible to meet with your young people outdoors. While religious settings are exempt from the limit of 15, we are strongly recommending that young people meet in groups of no more than 15, including youth leaders. For two reasons:

1. This is one way of ensuring that we are maintaining a controlled environment.
2. For our witness as a church we do not want to encourage large groups of young people to gather.

While uniformed organisations, youth clubs, drop ins and Sunday schools (without a parent present) may not be possible until October, we are suggesting that small groups of young people can meet indoors, for youth fellowship/home

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group/bible class type activities, but only if you are confident that you can provide a controlled environment for young people. The size of the group is determined by the size of the hall or room, but we recommend a maximum of 15 initially, to allow everyone to get used to this new environment. If you have space in your buildings for more than one small group, it is important that groups don't mix, and that you keep them as consistent as possible.

Each uniformed organisation has its own protocol and earliest possible date for resuming activities, so it's important you check with your headquarters organisation, bearing in mind that you must also work within the Methodist Church in Ireland's guidelines. Your minister and circuit steward will be able to guide you if you have any questions.

Mentoring

We are in the process of looking into how one to one mentoring could happen safely online. If you wish to resume the 'Walk with me' mentoring programme, meet the young person in a public space where social distancing is possible and other people are around. It is important to keep in mind the safeguarding guidance on mentoring, such as making sure a parent and the mentoring coordinator knows where and when you are meeting.

Home visits

Home visits are allowed and may be a good way to reconnect with young people you have not seen for some time, as long as you keep within the government's guidelines. Not every household will be content with someone from another household in their home, so be sensitive to that. Consider contacting in advance to see if it appropriate to visit, and then plan for an outdoors visit and only consider an indoors visit if social distancing is possible..

Summary

In summary here are some things we can do now:

1. Focus on intergenerational worship.
2. During the Sunday service a parent/guardian can take their pre-school children to a creche area and stay with them.
3. Children can go to Sunday school if a parent/guardian also attends and social distancing is in place.
4. Young people can meet outdoors with their youth leaders in groups of up to 15
5. Small groups of young people can meet in a 'controlled environment' such as a bible study where there is teaching from the front or sharing

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in small group. The size of the group is determined by the size of the hall or room, but we recommend a max of 15 initially to allow everyone to get used to this new environment.

6. Focus on relationship building by considering mentoring or home visits.

7. Meet with your youth and children's council.

NEXT STEPS:

Some can – dos in preparation for October:

Do consult with volunteers and parents, some may be ready to jump back in, some may not. It is important that each person/family has the freedom to walk the journey at their own pace. It is also important people feel safe, so clear communication with volunteers and parents about the steps that are being taken to ensure a safe environment, is vital.

Do consult with young people and children to get a sense of what they have been missing to allow that to prioritise what you might do and to find out whether they are ready to come back to face to face activities.

Do take into consideration that you may not be able to accommodate all the children/young people who would usually participate in your programmes or all the programmes you would normally run due to the added pressure of cleaning and/or space restrictions.

Do think through what you will provide/do for those who for whatever reason are unable to be in the building. You might want to consider a blended approach where you are online one week, in the building the next.

Do consider the use of your space carefully - your space will dictate the number of young people and children you can accommodate and the type of activities that are possible.

Do minimise the number of people that children and young people come into contact with by keeping groups small – you could have a number of small groups in one large space with one leader per group or lead your activities from the front. It is important that the groups and leaders stay as consistent as possible during the activities and over the coming months.

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Do a walk through with volunteers before resuming activities so that everyone knows their role and the safety measures that are in place.

Do make it fun, children's activities in church are voluntary and with added rules and regulations an extra effort needs to be made to make it fun.

- Each child, (or children from each household) could have their own colourful mat to sit on with their name on it, or a hula hoop.
- Have a visual timetable to help the children know what to expect in this new environment and make your safety signage child friendly.
- Each child could have an activity bag that has their name on it, and they use each week with things they need to carry out the activities. (Great care needs to be taken when preparing these activity bags, one solution could be preparing them and leaving them in the church for 72hrs at least, before the children use them).
- Think through games that can be played from their sitting spot or in a large circle if you have the space. Avoid playing running around games as physical exertion can increase the risk of transmitting the virus and should be minimised where possible.
- Think through other ways to use music that don't involve singing - maybe you could listen to one of their favourite songs and they could do the actions where they are sitting (you will need to choose the songs that have less jumping up and down in them).

Do make reconnecting a priority - provide space in your programmes for relationship building, listening and allowing your young people and children space and time to reconnect with you and each other.

Do adhere to safeguarding ratios at all times. Consider that you may need extra leaders to ensure that all safety guidelines are able to be met. You may want to consider having an extra leader for the entrance to ensure hands are sanitised as they enter, and that social distancing is maintained as they arrive and for contact tracing logs.

Do build in extra time for arrivals, hand sanitising and hand sanitising on departure and think through the areas of your church that could become a 'bottleneck' at these times.

Do consider reducing the time that children are out of the Sunday Service for their own activities - plan the intergenerational section of worship bearing in mind that the whole family of the church is being led in worship.

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Do consider adapting the type of activities you do to ensure a controlled environment can be maintained. The hope would be that young people (teenagers) can adhere to the social distancing required to have a youth work activity in person, but this may depend on the type of activity you are running. For example, a youth club which is very informal may be harder to manage than a small group setting. You know your young people, if you doubt that they can stick to social distancing, keep your activities online or change the nature of your activity to a small group activity that is more manageable.

Do think through how you will keep the 2m distance between young people (you may want to be creative with chalk and tape or ask them to bring their own rug or deck chair).

If in any doubt of the best course of action, please consult your minister or circuit or contact IMYC at office@imycd.org.

SOME USEFUL RESOURCES:

(Check out IMYC's website for a more extensive list of resources www.imycd.org)

Children and Family

Activity packs for children – useful ideas to create packs for use during intergenerational worship. <https://deeperkidmin.com/worship-activity-bags-praise-packs/>

Intergenerational worship

There are some good ideas on this website that would need adapted for our context: <http://theconfidentkidmin.com> – you will find a free guide to leading intergenerational worship – this is an American resource so remember to read it in the context of our guidelines.

<http://www.allageworshipresources.org/>

<https://www.youthandchildrens.work/Resources/All-Age-Service-Plans> - you need to subscribe to access these.

Socially distant games- It is important to make sure that the Methodist church guidelines are used to interpret the games for our context, for example we say no shared resources so any games that are about throwing balls etc to another person should be avoided. <https://youthgroupgames.com.au>

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Premier Youth and children's Work Magazine- This magazine is now digital only and there is new content weekly – useful current thinking and ready to use resources. This requires a subscription. www.youthandchildrens.work

The Big scrumptious Faith-Filled Feast- This is a fun,easy way to tell the next generation about Jesus. You can run a feast with just you and children at home, eat with another family or run a church bring your own picnic. Resources for conversation and an all-age service. <https://kitchentable.org.uk/feast/>

Parenting for faith- resources and ideas to help you as a church to support families and children at this time or if you are a parent some really useful articles on navigating this time with your children and teenagers <https://parentingforfaith.org/topics/responding-coronavirus>

Together with God – Resources and conversations on Faith, Family and Today's Church. <https://www.togetherwithgod.org.uk>

Young people

Games- Some great ideas for socially distant games – remembering it is important to make sure that the Methodist church guidelines are used to interpret the game for our context, for example we say no shared resources so any games that are about throwing balls etc to another person should be avoided. <https://youthgroupgames.com.au/collection/non-contact-small-group-games/>

Shaken – A resource by The Big House Ireland that is designed to help young people make good choices to live well when life shakes them. <http://www.thebighouse.org.uk>

Walk with me – helping young people step closer to Jesus - mentoring material and app that can be used one to one or in a small group. https://www.walkwithmejourneys.org_

YouthScape - We love Youthscape resources – you can find resources around mental health, anxiety, bible study resources and helping young people express their faith through their creativity. <https://www.youthscape.co.uk/store>

Alpha Youth – with some useful material on how to run this online <https://www.alpha.org/youth/>

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NUA film series - NUA is all about exploration: it's a film series that encourages questions, acknowledges doubt, and offers an engaging perspective on the Christian faith. <https://nuafilmseries.org/nua-store/digital>

Autumn Soul goes online – 23rd – 25th of October – keep an eye out on our website and social media for ways to get involved. <https://imycd.org/autumn-soul/>

Young adults

If you have young adults as part of your ministry, encourage them to be part of the Methodist Church in Ireland online worship and teaching community which was launched on the 6th of August and will meet biweekly. Keep an eye on IMYC Facebook for how to sign up for that. Also each Monday at 10.30pm a new devotion is released on YouTube for young adults to access, they can go back and watch these at any time after they have been [released here](#).

NI Education Authority resources

- Useful document produced by the Education Authority Youth Service to help you think through resuming activities. <https://www.eani.org.uk/supporting-children-and-young-people>
- The EA Youth Service providing resources for young people and youth workers enabling them to 'Stay Connected, Stay Safe, Stay Well and Stay Engaged at this time. <https://www.youthonline.org.uk/>

ROI – Department of Children and Youth Affairs documentation-

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/58393-guidance-for-youth-organisations-on-resuming-full-services-after-covid-19/>

The National Youth Council for Ireland website has useful resources and training <https://www.youth.ie>