

NAVIGATING THIS TIME TOGETHER

*Republic of Ireland guidelines for
youth and children's activities*

(30th September 2020 update)

01| INTRODUCTION- ALL WE CAN

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.

The updated guidelines below are to help you think through how and when to safely continue to work with the young people and children you serve. 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**.

Moving forward we will be guided by the 'Guidance for Youth Work Organisations' document produced by the Department for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (link below), alongside the guidance for the Churches given by the Taoiseach's office.

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

In all of our planning we must balance the overarching advice to reduce the number of contacts that each one of us has and to ensure that gatherings are kept to a minimum, with the needs and well-being of young people and children.

SOME IMPORTANT THINGS TO CONSIDER:

- It is important to have a whole church approach to activities resuming. One activity resuming on the premises will impact the possibility of another resuming on the premises. Considering your whole provision for young people and children allows you to discern what is necessary to allow the discipleship journey and mission to and with young people and children to continue and develop.
- We are being told that across the board we are to encourage people to limit their social interactions – so think this through in terms of the number and frequency of activities. You may wish to consider meeting online one week and face to face the next.
- As much as possible limit the number of groups that volunteer leaders would be in contact with in any given week.
- Split night method activities where one age group meets followed by another age group, in the same space, are not possible at the minute. You might want to consider alternating the weeks in which your groups meet.

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- No one should feel under pressure to resume activities on the church premises, but it would be important to think through alternative online methods to support and walk with young people and children through this difficult season.

Levels 2 and 3

There are now some specific guidelines in place for youth work at each level of the Government's Resilience & Recovery 2020-2021: Plan for Living with COVID-19. **It is important that we each take into account local restrictions, as well as National ones. Things will be possible in one area but restricted in another.**

While Level 2 of the plan allows for indoor activities, up to a group size of 50 (including leaders) dependant on the space available, and an outdoor group size of 100, it does emphasise that remote forms of delivery should be utilised as appropriate. It would be worth thinking though your various activities and working out what **needs** to happen face to face and what could continue online, to limit the amount of contacts people are having.

Outdoor numbers – Although the guidance for youth organisations states that at level two an outdoor group size of 100 is possible, 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.

Level 3 of the plan states that 'Remote forms of delivery should be utilised to limit congregation as far as possible.' As much as possible avoid meeting in person. It would be important to assess the need for an activity to meet face to face. Is it absolutely necessary to meet in person and for what reason? (It may be you are working with a vulnerable group of young people and/or children). The group size mentioned here for indoor and outdoor is 15 (including leaders).

Other important points to note:

- 1.Although the document states that 1m physical distancing should be in place, the Methodist Church in Ireland's guidelines state that we must adhere to 2m physical distancing.
- 2.Where possible (if face to face activities are happening), 'to the greatest extent possible, young people and youth workers (leaders) should consistently be in the same groups.'
- 3.Residential – at Level 2 there is further guidance to come and at level 3 these should not take place.

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Creche and Toddler groups

Preschool children must remain the responsibility of a parent/guardian in the creche space and children should not share toys or craft materials.

We are asking that toddler groups do not meet at the moment but are keeping this under review.

Uniformed organisations

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. So, for example, it might be permissible for BB to resume but the Church Council decide that start should be delayed.

Mentoring

Walk With Me is a great tool for these times (see link in resources section). If you wish to resume the 'Walk With Me' mentoring program you have two options:

- Online-If you wish to do it online, you could have two leaders and two young people meet together. You must avoid one to one meetings online.
- In person - 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

At level 2 and 3 there is provision for a visitor from one other household to be in a home, (please check local restrictions). These visits should not be treated as routine, but only be arranged if considered necessary, contact in advance to see if it is appropriate to visit. Not every household will be content with someone from another household in their home, so be sensitive to this. Don't move from house to house in one afternoon. Alternatively consider a doorstep or garden visit.

Offsite trips

We are currently advising against indoor offsite trips e.g bowling, cinema, soft play etc. For outdoor offsite trips please ensure that you are content with the safety measures that the facility has in place and that you have completed your own risk assessment to ensure all Methodist Church guidelines can be adhered to.

Regarding transport, the safest way to transport young people or children to an offsite venue is placing the responsibility on the household to drop off and collect. If this is problematic for the young people you work with use the Guidance for Youth Work Organisations guidelines on transport, to navigate this,

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while maintaining as much physical distancing as possible, but not less than 1 metre. Be aware that if a positive case is identified from that group and your physical distancing is less than 2 metres, it is highly likely that many of the group will have to self-isolate. Maintaining 2 metres physical distancing reduces this likelihood.

Before any youth or children's activity should recommence, it is crucial to follow the guidelines already produced by the Methodist Church in Ireland, alongside the governments advice and 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. Please fill in the checklist provided on the Irish Methodist Website, as well as a risk assessment before resuming an indoor activity. 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.](#)

Summary of Methodist Church in Ireland Guidelines:

1. The Methodist Church in Ireland has adopted a 2-metre physical 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.gov.ie/en/publication/aac74c-guidance-on-safe-use-of-face-coverings>.) 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.
5. 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.**

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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.

TO HELP YOU IN YOUR PLANNING AS YOU THINK AHEAD

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, to consider how to continue to serve children and young people while keeping gatherings to a minimum. 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>

When you are ready to begin limited indoor activities, you might want to start small or consider a mixture of online and face to face activities initially or start some activities and possibly delay the start of others.

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If restrictions in your area allow indoor activities, consider these can-dos:

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. For example, a 'split night method' is not recommended, i.e. Juniors from 6.30pm – 7.30pm and Seniors from 7.30pm – 8.30pm, in the same space. What will you 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 and leaders 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.

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.

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- 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 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.

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 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).

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.

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.

Not ready to begin separated indoor activities? See August 26th guidelines for alternative options.

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

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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.

<https://parentingforfaith.org/post/all-age-live?fbclid=IwAR2AsB7UTb-I8SfrdK4N8jKyhO9dmRW0uym9M3-pKyjUamEQIzWjk1KBKw0>

Messy Church

<https://www.messychurch.org.uk/suggestions-returning-safely-messy-church-together>

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>

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>

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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/>

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/>

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