

Guidelines for gathering for youth ministry



As lockdown requirements ease, congregations may be contemplating an autumn/winter programme of work among young people.

For a variety of reasons, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland has taken the view that it is strongly recommended that the kind of regular, through the week (including Sunday night gatherings) programming of physical meetings for children's and youth activities should not begin until October at the earliest and that planning should be for a gradual phased return thereafter as circumstances allow.

OUR PRESENT CHALLENGING AND CHANGING SITUATION

We continue to live and minister in challenging and rapidly changing circumstances, so it is crucial to follow and implement the most current advice and guidance provided by government, statutory agencies, your insurers and the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

The following guidelines offer a summary of basic requirements necessary at time of writing to ensure good judgement is exercised, the highest standards of hygiene are observed and the requirements of social distancing are maintained so that congregations act responsibly during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

This document should be read in conjunction with the general guidelines *Getting ready to gather again* issued on 12 June 2020 and the *Resumption of congregational activities checklist* which accompanies it. The Taking Care safeguarding policy of the church must also be adhered to and applied to any activities. *The Good Standards of Practice* section can be quickly referenced [here](#):

It should be noted that it is the responsibility of kirk session to decide if and when any activity can commence including youth ministry. The advice issued from headquarters of uniformed organisations should be factored into discussion, but ultimately the decision about restarting activities and arrangements for doing so rests with kirk session. If other providers of youth activities not directly under the authority of kirk session are to use church premises, the same regulations and guidelines apply and care should be taken that they are informed and agree to operate accordingly.

Each congregation's circumstances will be different and they will come to a variety of decisions about what activities to recommence and how quickly. That should be expected and is entirely appropriate.

SOME BASIC QUESTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS IN THINKING ABOUT GATHERING FOR YOUTH MINISTRY INDOORS

- Can you ensure that the number of young people expected can be accommodated in a suitable space available to comply with social distancing requirements and any limitations on group size meeting either indoors (regulations with regards to meeting outdoors must also be observed if this is also an element of any programme)?
- Do you have enough leaders, remembering that the adult to young people ratio may need to be increased to ensure safe practice? It may also be necessary to assign leaders to specific extra tasks such as admitting young people on arrival and ensuring they leave in a safe and orderly way at the end of activities.
- Have you thought about the challenge of how the leader/young person dynamic will present new and significant challenges caused by the need to constantly ensure that the requirements of social distancing between young people themselves and young people and their leaders? It may be wise to offer a shorter programme and to think through which of your usual core activities can be retained, may need to be set aside for now or can be adjusted. For example, care needs to be taken if there is to be singing. This may need to be a reduced part of the programme. Maybe you could listen to a song as a reflection on the theme being taught. Icebreakers and games in which there is contact between participants should be avoided.
- Have you considered that managing a programme will require much more effort, preparation and allowing more time for basic things like drop off, collection and hand washing?
- Uniformed organisations have their own protocols and earliest possible date for resuming activities, so it's important you consult the up to date guidance they issue, but bear in mind that you must also work within the guidelines issued by the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

It may be wise to offer a shorter programme and to think through which of your usual core activities can be retained, may need to be set aside for now or can be adjusted.

If the kirk session decides that a programme of youth ministry is to commence then the following guidance to should be followed.

SETTING UP TO MEET

- You must ensure young people from different households observe appropriate social distancing at all times. At present this is two metres between each young person and between young people and leaders.
- Those who are speaking, leading group work or giving instructions should be spaced at extra distance of four metres from young people taking part to avoid projecting water droplets and potentially spreading the virus.
- As in all other areas of life, the wearing of face coverings are not currently being recommended as a necessary measure for those 13 years of age and under. Those aged 14 and over should wear a face covering during most activities and indoor activities on church premises.



- By ensuring 4 metres social distancing between leaders and young people taking part, those leading activities do not need to wear face coverings, however other leaders in closer proximity to young people and one another during the programme should wear face coverings. This includes those welcoming or registering young people on arrival and generally while they are on the premises.
- Young people should be encouraged to bring their own face covering, but it will be wise to also have a supply available at events and activities.
- Youth leaders should make young people aware that face coverings are recommended and encouraged in all PCI activities including youth work. Those exempted are those under 13 years of age or with an underlying medical condition that means wearing a face covering is not possible.
- All books and equipment should be removed from any area being used.
- Provide a ready supply of hand sanitiser for leaders and young people and a bin for tissues and other waste.
- If meeting indoors, some windows should be safely kept open for ventilation.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

- Ensure social distancing is observed in areas in which young people are gathering on arrival or departure.
- Allow time for all involved to sanitise or wash their hands on arrival and leaving the session.



TOILETS

- If you choose to close toilets or limit the number available, ensure parents and young people are made aware of this in advance.
- If toilets are open, provide an adequate supply of warm water, soap and hand sanitiser.
- It will be advisable to have a process for regularly checking, and if necessary cleaning, toilets during the period activities are ongoing.

PROGRAMME

- You will not be able to do everything the way you usually do it in your normal programme and will need to be creative in managing time and engaging young people.
- You must provide individual copies of workbooks or craft activities for each young person which they will take home and bring with them every time you meet if necessary.
- You cannot pre-prepare craft at home and any activity-based learning set should be able to be completed by young people unaided by a leader.
- Young people must bring their own Bibles or other material for use during sessions.

You will not be able to do everything the way you usually do it in your normal programme and will need to be creative in managing time and engaging young people.

- No activity should infringe on maintaining necessary social distancing or ongoing limitations on group size meeting either indoors or outdoors.
- Nothing should be passed around for group use, including bats, balls, cues or other sports equipment.
- You must not use kitchens or serve food or drink.
- If a young person sneezes or coughs they must immediately safely dispose of tissues and wash their hands.

CLEANING

- If the room you are using will be in use again within 72 hours, you will need to wipe down all chairs, tables, equipment used and surfaces immediately after the session.



TRANSPORT

- The use of a church minibus, or even a leader's car, presents significant issues regarding social distancing and hygiene and should not be your practice at this time.
- It will be advisable for youth activities to take place locally, so avoiding the need for transport to and from events.

COMMUNICATING WITH FAMILIES

- Prepare parents and young people for resuming any activities by informing them of arrangements and that the cooperation of everyone is required so as to ensure a safe environment for young people, parents and leaders.
- It must be made clear that any young person or parent displaying any of the symptoms of COVID-19, or who have been in close contact with anyone who has displayed symptoms, should not attend under any circumstances.