

# Guidelines for gathering for children's ministry



**As Sunday worship returns, congregations may be considering patterns and plans for children's ministry during service time. Similarly, as lockdown requirements ease, they may be contemplating an autumn/winter programme of work among children through the week.**

## **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 children's 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.**

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## SUNDAY CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

Many congregations which have recommenced gathering for worship have found it best to find ways of accommodating children in the service rather than have them leave for age specific activities. This may be the best option for your congregation going forward. However, should you decide to offer a separate children's ministry during church time, the guidance offered below should help you think through arrangements for providing a safe environment in which to gather to do so.

**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.**

## CHILDREN'S MINISTRY THROUGH THE WEEK

**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 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.**

## SOME BASIC QUESTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS IN THINKING ABOUT GATHERING FOR CHILDREN'S MINISTRY INDOORS

### • Sunday ministry

For Sunday children's ministry might it be better for now to make provision to accommodate children staying with their parents in the service of worship? If so, what particular ways will you seek to ensure their inclusion in the service? What activities might you provide to encourage families to continue bringing children to church each week by doing all you can to keep them engaged throughout the time of worship?

### • For both Sunday and through the week activities

- Can you ensure that the number of children 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 child ratio may need to be increased to ensure safe practice? It may also be necessary to assign leaders to specific extra tasks such as meeting children on arrival and helping them to leave in a safe and orderly way at the end of activities.
- Have you thought about the challenge of how the leader/child dynamic will present new and significant challenges caused by the need to constantly ensure that the requirements of social distancing between children and between children and 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 some songs with children



only joining in with the actions where they are sitting. You will need to choose songs that have less jumping up and down in them. You will also need to avoid games in which there is contact or a lot of running around.

- 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.

## **If the kirk session decides that Sunday or any children's ministry programme is to commence then the following guidance should be followed.**

### **SETTING UP TO MEET**

- You must seat children from different households with appropriate social distancing at all times. At present this is two metres between each child and between children and adults.
- Those who are leading a lesson or in song should be spaced at the extra distance of four metres from children 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.
- By ensuring 4 metres social distancing between leaders and children taking part, those leading activities do not need to wear face coverings, however other leaders in closer proximity to children and one another during the programme must wear face coverings. This includes those welcoming families or registering children on arrival and generally while they are on the premises.
- All toys, books and equipment should be removed from any area being used. This also applies to crèche where each child might bring a small toy of their own to play with, but not share with others.
- Provide a ready supply of hand sanitiser for adults and children and a bin for tissues and other waste.
- If meeting indoors, some windows should safely remain open for ventilation.



**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 children.**

### **ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE**

- To ensure safe supervision, children should be accompanied to their meeting area and immediately collected at the end of the session by whoever has brought them to the church building while all maintaining social distancing. To make this more manageable, it may be wise to have children dropped off and picked up at the start and end of Sunday worship, rather than go out part way through.
- Allow time for children 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 are made aware of this in advance.
- If toilets are open, provide an adequate supply of warm water, soap and hand sanitiser.
- Adults will need to ensure children wash their hands after using the toilet, observing Taking Care protocols at all time.

## 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 children.
- You must provide individual copies of workbooks or craft sheets for each child which they will take home and bring with them every time you meet if necessary.
- You cannot pre-prepare craft at home and any activities chosen should be able to be completed by children unaided by an adult.
- Children must bring their own Bibles, colouring pencils etc.
- No activity should infringe on maintaining necessary social distancing or any limitations on group size meeting either indoors or outdoors.
- Nothing should be passed around, including sports equipment or an offering plate.
- You must not use kitchens or serve food or drink.
- If a child sneezes or coughs they must immediately 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 activities to take place locally, so avoiding the need for transport to and from events

## COMMUNICATING WITH FAMILIES

- Prepare families 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 children, parents and leaders.
- It must be made clear that any child 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.