

Promoting effective safeguarding practice as Churches come out of lockdown

This briefing is designed to support District, Circuit and local church safeguarding officers planning for the resumption of church activities from a safeguarding perspective. It should be read in conjunction with the key documents published by the Church at:

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/property/coronavirus-guidance-for-property/>

Here you will find detailed guidance and risk assessment formats that church leadership and property teams must follow. This briefing is therefore designed to enable you to play a key part in the local team making the key decisions to ensure that a safeguarding perspective is included.

Making the decision to re-start

- Be clear about who is making the decision to re-open and on what basis. Remember, church councils are the legally responsible body so any claims made against the church will render council members liable.
- Be clear about the advice your team is following – the Methodist Church, the Government, the NHS or your local council. The church should record in the minutes of the key meeting the agreed basis for restarting any activity – worship, church groups or external lets
- Check how decisions will be clearly communicated to group leaders, members and hirers what you have agreed, giving details of dates and the spaces that can be used

Planning the use of space – as a safeguarding officer

- Think about your building and how it can be used safely following the rules set out by the Government and the advice supplied by the Church
- Who are the key people who have an interest in what's going to happen next? Think about how you will consult with them to get their perspective and an idea of their plans
- Check that a plan is being drawn up that sets out what activities are possible, not possible or can be parked at least for the next few months
- With others, pull together your existing building use and activity risk assessments as a benchmark to start a review of each of the activities
- From a safeguarding point of view, think about entrances and exits, social distancing arrangements and where will people sit in the sanctuary. Will people need to book their seats? How will you accommodate unexpected visitors? How will children and vulnerable adults be accommodated safely
- As the church safeguarding officer think about any fresh safeguarding concerns that the re-starting plan may prompt and share these with your planning team.

Who can come?

- Think about your church demographic – who are the members and who come to take part in activities. Do they fit into the 'shielded' or other at risk groups due to age, underlying health conditions. If many members are over 70, will you still have a physical, regularly worshipping congregation? Will this change as restrictions are eased?
- Churches that have pre-school settings on the premises will be trying to re-open and operate in line with Government policy. As the premises owner, is the Church Council happy with the plans that are being made? Have safeguarding considerations about access been confirmed?
- Think about how children will be supervised at church activities and by whom?

Starting up

- Check your property team have considered sanitiser, social distancing, floor plans and 'flow' routes in or out of the church. Walk through the building with your safeguarding hat on.

Doing church – looking at it from a safeguarding perspective

- Styles of worship may have to change; singing spreads water droplets more than speech. Can we provide music or not?
- Is that cup of coffee after church really necessary? Who will serve, clear up and will they have proper protective equipment?
- No hugging, kissing or shaking hands before and after church and for the peace – this will actually better support those in the congregation who are sensitive to touch because of past experience
- Ministers, local preachers and leaders must be clear about what's allowed or not – people will need to feel safe and be clear what is expected of them and how they in turn should behave
- Distribution of the elements at communion will require adjustment
- Don't pass along collections bags or plates – encourage more direct payments by BACS and provide a basket at the back of the church
- Church leaders actively promote the Church's guidance in respect of providing safe pastoral care
- Conduct a church safeguarding review to plan safe recruitment, training and activity risk assessments based on your new church plan
- Make sure that the local church is aware of and following the Church guidance about online communication with both adults and young people <https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/coronavirus/official-guidance/>

Responding to Trauma

- Be prepared for individual or family stories of trauma, whether it be having been unwell, bereaved, furloughed, made redundant, going out of business or facing financial difficulty
- Be alert to poor emotional wellbeing linked to the effects of isolation, separation and fractured relationships
- Try to spot physical signs of abuse or neglect, including self-neglect. Notice what has changed about your congregation
- Church leaders should prepare for people to be changed and needing to reflect on their experience by identifying and briefing some pastoral visitors as key listeners, available on the phone, or via Zoom etc. via a safe and confidential contact system.
- Church safeguarding officers should collate information about local services offering more specialist support and guidance, and access the websites of their local Children's and Adult Safeguarding Partnerships in order to provide an online resource for listeners and church leaders who may need to signpost individuals to them. This information can also be posted in church buildings.