

## **Guidance for churches on supporting children, young people and families during Covid-19**

This is a time of unprecedented change when we are all learning to live and work in new ways, and it provides both opportunities and challenges for connecting with children, young people & families and encouraging them in their faith.

Here are some ways you could continue to connect with families in your church at this time:

- set up a messaging group for parents to stay in touch with each other
- use online meeting platforms to meet with groups of parents from your church and chat and pray for each other or follow a parenting course together – there are suggestions of some good ones on our website
- pray for one family from your church each day and send them a message to let them know you're praying for them
- on your daily walk, deliver activities to families that they can do at home together eg. colouring sheets, activity sheets, prayer challenges or just notes of encouragement – if you have a small budget for this, you can find excellent low-cost story and activity booklets for children and young people here:
  - Good Book Company - <https://www.thegoodbook.co.uk/children/booklets-and-tracts/>
  - Scripture Union - <https://content.scriptureunion.org.uk/resources?f%5B0%5D=collection%3A390>
  - Bible Society - <https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/landing/story-booklets/>
- film and share content with families online eg. singing and reading a story for your toddler group, delivering a short all-age talk for families or leading a reflection for young people – there are some lists of great books to share on our website
- hold an online Bible quiz for families to join in with together at home
- ask members of your church to create artwork to put in their windows and let families know they can go on a hunt for the pictures when they take their daily walk – you could stick up a Bible verse next to it to share faith with others who pass by! Here are some suggestions:
  - rainbows – 'God made a promise to us and we are waiting for what he promised—a new heaven and a new earth where goodness lives' (2 Peter 3:13 in ICB)
  - palm leaves – 'Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!' (Mark 11:9 in NIV)
  - Easter eggs – 'Because of his mercy he gave us a new life. He gave us a living hope because Jesus Christ rose from death' (1 Peter 1:3 in ICB)
  - crosses – 'I will be with you always' (Matthew 28:20 in ICB)
  - hearts – 'There is no fear in love' (1 John 4:18 in NIV)
- use online meeting platforms to host your youth group (see below for safeguarding guidance on this) – you could send each young person in your group a devotion or reflection and then discuss it when you meet together
- email families with ideas for activities they can do together at home to explore faith together – you could create some of your own or use some of the many resources on our website

Our diocesan website has a page dedicated to **resources for supporting families to worship from home** at this time – you can find it here:

<https://www.portsmouth.anglican.org/coronavirus/children-young-people/>

If you would like **help and support with creating online material or streaming video content**, there is some good advice from our diocesan Communications team here:

<https://www.portsmouth.anglican.org/streaming/>

You can also find **links to content streamed by other churches** here if you don't feel confident to create videos yourself but would like to share something with your church families.

You can see the **national Church of England's guidance on live streaming** here:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/church-resources/digital-labs/labs-learning-blog/beginners-guide-going-live-your-service-or>

If you would you like direct support from our diocesan Communications team, you can contact **Neil Pugmire (Communications Adviser)** at [neil.pugmire@portsmouth.anglican.org](mailto:neil.pugmire@portsmouth.anglican.org).

Our Youth and Children's Work Adviser (Bethan Fogell) is on currently on furlough leave until further notice. If you would like further support or advice about supporting children, young people and families at this time you can contact **Anthony Rustell (Head of Mission, Discipleship and Ministry)** at [anthony.rustell@portsmouth.anglican.org](mailto:anthony.rustell@portsmouth.anglican.org).

You can also contact **Jenni Whymark** who is our regional **Scripture Union Development Worker** at [jenniwh@scriptureunion.org.uk](mailto:jenniwh@scriptureunion.org.uk).

## **Safeguarding**

Using technology in new ways comes with new risks and it is important to be aware of these and take action to keep yourself and those you are communicating with safe.

When **using online platforms to hold virtual meetings with young people**, we recommend that:

- a work-assigned computer rather than a personal one should be used wherever possible
- all sessions should be open to every member of the youth group
- two leaders should be online first before any young people join in and leaders should be the last to sign out of the meeting (these leaders should have been safely recruited and DBS checked)
- if only one young person is available, the session should be cancelled
- PCC approval should be given before the meeting is held – speak to your vicar, churchwarden, standing committee or PCC group to discuss and minute that this is happening
- a risk assessment should be written for this new style of meeting, taking into consideration the different risks it presents and how they will be handled
- the member of staff employed to work with children & young people and a clergy member and/or a church warden should be informed of the timing of every session and should be invited to the meeting so they are able to 'drop in' if required
- invitations to the meeting should be sent out to parent/carer email addresses only – an email reply with their consent should be received before the young person is able to join the meeting and you should keep these replies in a separate folder as a record of consent
- the meeting password should not be published anywhere that anyone outside of your intended group could find it – this can allow uninvited people to join or 'hack' your meeting

- a 'waiting room' function should be enabled if possible so you can see who is trying to join the call and can block anyone you don't know
- young people should take the call in a 'family' area under appropriate supervision and support of parents and not alone in their bedroom
- appropriate behaviour for leaders and young people should be followed as you would expect in the usual youth group setting
- the meeting should not be recorded (most video conferencing platforms offer this function)
- a register of children and leaders in attendance at the meeting should be taken

When **using social media to communicate and interact with young people**, we recommend that:

- you only contact young people through church-affiliated social media accounts and not personal accounts – this may mean you have to refuse requests to be 'friends' with young people on social media if you receive them, and deal with this in a pastorally sensitive way
- you avoid contacting young people on a 1:1 basis on social media through private messages and keep all online conversations in public areas of the site which all group members can view
- you do not post images or video recordings of children and young people on social media unless you have written consent from a parent/carer

For more **safeguarding information and advice** at this time, our website has a page dedicated to safeguarding during Coronavirus here:

<https://www.portsmouth.anglican.org/safeguarding/coronavirus/advice%20and%20guidance/>

If you have any **questions around safeguarding**, you can contact Mary Daisy (Safeguarding Adviser) at [mary.daisy@portsmouth.anglican.org](mailto:mary.daisy@portsmouth.anglican.org).

If you have an **urgent safeguarding concern or need to report a disclosure**, you should contact Ian Berry (Safeguarding Adviser) at [ian.berry@portsmouth.anglican.org](mailto:ian.berry@portsmouth.anglican.org).

### **Finally, some tips for surviving and thriving in this time.....**

Remember that this is a marathon not a sprint!

We are likely to be working and living like this for some time, and once the first flurry of creativity, tech setting up, resource producing and ideas sharing passes, we might find ourselves with enthusiasm fatigue.

- Try to make any new 'routines' you set up sustainable for you and for the families you're working with
- Be realistic about what you can achieve over this period and don't try to tackle everything
- Use other people in your church to help and support you – if you aren't great at coming up with creative ideas for prayer challenges or scavenger hunts, ask someone who is!
- Prioritise maintaining the relationships you've built with children, young people and families in your church – they won't necessarily remember whether your live streamed service was the most well-delivered or your Zoom youth meeting went without any hitches but they will remember that you checked up on them, prayed for them and reached out to them with God's love

**Pause, take a breath and ask God how He wants you to use this time.....**