

Coronavirus – safeguarding considerations for Baptist churches as restrictions start to relax

15 April 2021



This short note looks at safeguarding considerations for churches as we start to see restrictions being relaxed and the return to limited face to face contact in small groups.

As we start to think about the re-opening of our churches and our work within the community we will still need to review our safeguarding approach to make sure that we are in step with the latest government guidelines. Below are some things for you to consider as you take steps forward.

Children, Young People and Families

- Your church may be currently thinking about how to run your youth and children's activities safely and in line with government guidelines as we start to see better weather. This might mean that you are running more activities outdoors, either within the grounds of the church or in a local park. If this is the case it is important that you review your activity risk assessments and if necessary prepare new ones. There is a [template activity risk assessment](#) and actions on the BU website.
- Don't forget to check that any offsite activities are covered by your church Insurance policy.
- When working with children and young people outside it is important to be aware of your surroundings:

If you are within the church grounds, you might have a safe and secure area in which to play games or complete activities (preferably away from any car park!).

However if you are in a park, or another open public space you will need to think about how you respond if children who are not connected to the church approach you and try join in with your activity, or even if a passer by stops to watch what you are doing. It might be that they stop for a moment and then walk on, but what do you do if they stop for a while or appear to be taking pictures. How will you address this?

- Remember that it is important to stick to the right ratio of adults to children, and these will vary depending on whether it is an onsite or offsite activity. Remember that young helpers or leaders (those Under 18) count as children in your ratios.
- If you are going to be using outdoor spaces when you have previously met in the church building, don't forget that you will need to have consent from the parents of each child to take

them off site. Parents also need to know where you will be. Even if you have previous consent from parents for off-site activities we would encourage you to refresh this, including checking emergency contact details and any medical issues you need to be aware of.

- Be clear about the arrangements for collecting children as the end of a service or youth activity. Are you expecting the parents to meet you at the outdoor space or are you taking the children back to the church to meet there?
- It is important to make all of your activities as inclusive as possible so that all children and young people can participate in the groups that they usually do. You should consider how many adults are present for the activity to facilitate any additional support needs. We encourage you to talk to the parents of children who may need additional support and plan together how their needs can be incorporated into the activity.
- We know that some churches will not have any access to outside space but will still be keen to start their children's and youth programme again. It is important to be realistic about what you can achieve. It might be that you need to operate with smaller groups than usual or that you need to spread small groups of children or young people across a wider range of rooms, which will affect your ratios. This should all be considered as part of your church re-opening risk assessment. In turn this may mean that you need additional volunteers, or perhaps that you have to alternate groups on different weeks.
- It is also important to remember that children and young people have their own experiences of living under Covid-19 restrictions for the past 13 months, and it will be healthy for them to be able to talk about these experiences with you and with their peers. Think about how you approach the subject with them. It might be that some have experienced a bereavement from Covid or that they remain anxious about mixing with others because they have been separated from their friends for so long.
- We know that the extended lockdown over the past year has led to an increase in mental ill health, social isolation, relationship breakdown and domestic abuse. Our children and young people may have, or still be experiencing some of these things. Be alert to the signs and symptoms and if you are concerned about the safety or wellbeing of a child or young person in your care then please speak to your church Designated Person for Safeguarding (DPS).
- As you start gathering again, we would encourage you to put aside times within your children's and youth programme to share their experiences, thoughts, and feelings about the past year under Covid restrictions. This might be in group discussion or with appropriate safeguards on an individual basis.
- Whilst all of the above applies to work with children and young people, we also know that many churches provide activities for families, whether it is parent and toddler activities, Messy Church,



or social support in the wider community. Do take time to prepare a risk assessment and thinking about how you will engage with families who might be struggling for many reasons with the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown.

Adults at risk

- The term 'Adult at Risk' covers people under a wide variety of circumstances. As churches open up, there may be people who might be seen as an adult at risk now, even if they weren't before. This could be because they contracted Covid and now have on-going physical health needs. They may have been bereaved during the crisis or experienced domestic abuse or a relationship breakdown. We know that over the past year there has been an increase in social isolation and mental ill health problems across the population.
- As a church leadership team, minister or Designated Person for Safeguarding please reflect on those around you who might now be struggling and need additional support. This might be a good time to remind church members about your safeguarding policy and pastoral care provisions, and to speak in services about who is available to offer support to those who may be finding life difficult. You might even consider showing the [Level 1 Excellence in Safeguarding film](#) to the congregation to remind them to look out for each other and what to do if they are concerned.
- It is important to recognise that for some of the most 'at risk' in our communities have been shielding since the beginning of the pandemic. In some cases the opening up of society will be exactly what they have been looking forward to. However other people will remain anxious about leaving the house and certainly mixing with other people. This might even make coming to church an especially daunting thing.
- It might be that as a pastoral care team, safeguarding team or leadership team you need to commit to checking in on those who have not made it back to church. Consider how you can include those who are not yet ready to come back to a service in your church community and worship activities.



DBS Checks, Safeguarding Policy and Procedures

As churches start to re-open for face-to-face activities you will want to take some time to ensure that everyone who needs a DBS check for their role has had one; the Baptist Union recommends that a new check is carried out every 5 years. For more information on which roles require a DBS check and the level needed please refer to our [DBS Guide](#).

If you haven't done so over the last year, now is a good time to review your safeguarding policy and procedures. You will find a template document to help in the [Policy and Procedure Section](#) of the BUGB website, along with a safeguarding audit tool which will help you to think about how you manage safeguarding within your church in more detail.



Dealing with allegations

Sadly, as society opens up we are anticipating an increase in the number of safeguarding concerns being raised in our churches. Please remind all church workers and volunteers of your reporting processes in case they hear anything that concerns them, and remind them to act promptly to report to their church DPS if concerns arise.

The [association safeguarding lead in your regional area](#) and the National Safeguarding Team are available to advise and support. If you are a church DPS, please do contact your regional safeguarding lead in the first instance if you want to talk about how to work safely or if you have concerns.

Safeguarding training

We are currently working on a plan to return to face to face training towards the end of 2021. We will be working over the next few months to update our trainers on changes to the training materials and expand our trainer numbers. In the meantime, the Safeguarding Update film is available through your Regional Association, and there may be an opportunity to attend a supporting Question and Answer sessions run online. Please refer to your regional association's website for more information.

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