

Toddler groups reopening

Although government restrictions have been lifted, we should still consider the vulnerable and unvaccinated in our communities and act in their best interests to stop transmission of the virus. The following should be considered and put into your action plan for reopening:

- **Risk assessment**
- **Action plan**
- **Hand hygiene**
- **Ventilation**
- **Social distancing**
- **Venue**

- **Considering reopening**

Rather than rushing to re-start at the beginning of September, why not pause and wait – especially if there are older siblings in school.

You could organise meet ups in the park, beach, woods, for a walk or play together, or you could create an adventure exploring trail for the toddlers to explore and discover. Being outside is better for the children and better in terms of the virus.

- **Communication**

Keep parents/carers updated and informed, especially if opting for organised meet ups or outdoor groups. Ensure everyone knows when and where you are meeting, suitable clothing for the activity, how to book etc. Maybe set up a WhatsApp group.

Share information about any changes to routines, layout, signing-in system, refreshments etc. in advance and make sure families know what steps you have taken to minimise risks and protect their safety. This will help reduce anxiety and will ensure everyone knows what to expect upon arrival. Consider using social media, emails/phone calls parish magazines, local noticeboards/Post Office windows, signage at your venue or communicating information as part of the booking process.

If all adults are to wear masks where social distancing isn't possible, it is important that this is shared in advance.

Although there is no longer a legal limit to the number of people who can attend a baby and toddler group, you may still choose to keep a limit on numbers. Remember a smaller group can feel safer and can enable more personal interactions, especially for younger children who may be unused to this environment.

- **Signing in and out**

If your group normally operates a 'drop-in' system, you may need to reconsider if this as it could result in queues at the door (which could impact on social distancing) and parents and children feeling upset or angry if they are unable to come in.

While many groups traditionally sign in independently with a pen and signing-in sheet, consider a different approach to minimise the risk. This could be a group leader signing everyone in as they arrive or explore whether a digital method of signing in could be used.

Create a coronavirus NHS QR code for your venue <https://www.gov.uk/create-coronavirus-qr-poster> Get everyone entering the building to scan the QR code when they arrive, using the NHS COVID-19 app. This is to help trace and stop the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19).

If using your signing-in sheet as your record of visitors for NHS Test and Trace, you must ensure that all the necessary information is recorded.

Government guidance states that you must hold any NHS Test and Trace records that have been created for 21 days. After 21 days, all information collected for NHS Test and Trace must be securely disposed of or deleted in a way that does not risk unintended access. Documents should be shredded, and electronic files should be permanently deleted.

A pre-booking system could help to reduce these risks, ensuring appropriate limits on attendee numbers, and reducing the risk of families being left disappointed at the last minute. Consider booking apps such as Eventbrite or social media 'events' but ensure that whatever you opt for is as widely accessible as possible. You may want to consider how to prevent block-booking to ensure all families have an equal chance to book a space, and whether you implement a waiting list in case of any cancellations. Also consider how to discourage booking but not turning up, particularly if your group does not charge.

- **The team**

Don't use all the team at once. Keep reserves on standby as you may need them if any of your team are unwell or isolating. Match the number of families you welcome to the smaller size of the team. Also encourage parent/carers to step up and help if you can.

- **Refreshments**

Ask families to bring their own or create ready-prepared packs in advance. Be aware that this can get time consuming and expensive.

- **Equipment**

Use wipe down items where possible.

For babies who are not moving much, create zones to limit adults wandering about too much. Create a space for toddlers to play, including wipe down toys or things which will be taken home with them.

- **Music/Singing/story**

Consider the risk posed by singing and risk assess it in light of the venue, the numbers and the level of virus in your community. Singing time may need to be re-considered but making music is still allowed, so get the musical instruments out. There is no reason not to do story time. There is significant benefit in children knowing nursery rhymes so maybe focus on them instead of singing. You could also access ROOTS for Churches for their toddler songs to nursery rhymes.

- **Cleaning**

Any rooms used *must* be cleaned thoroughly after each use. All equipment and any baby changing area should be wiped clean after each group (this is good practice anyway) and individual shared toys can be cleaned when not being used.

- **Hand hygiene**

Group leaders should ensure that everyone maintains good hand hygiene. Where possible, provide hand sanitiser at entrance and exit points and encourage everyone to use it on arrival and on leaving. Bottles of sanitizer could be placed at every station to promote good hand hygiene between activities.

- **Ventilation**

Good ventilation reduces the concentration of Covid-19 in the air, which reduces the risks from airborne transmission. Ensure that your space is well-ventilated with fresh air.

Babies need constant temperature, but you can still ensure that the room is ventilated as long as babies and toddlers are kept wrapped up. This needs to be communicated clearly, well in advance, so that parents/carers can ensure their children are appropriately dressed.

- **Mental health**

There is value in providing emotional support for babies and toddlers around how they feel: happy and sad faces, creating an emotions plate for them to play with and take home etc.

- **First time parents**

Many parents will be anxious, so support for them is important. Maybe create a buddy system where, if a parent is worried about the health of their child for example, they can ask someone who has more experience. Encouraging parents to meet up outside of group for walks, playdates etc, will develop a social network for those who are feeling particularly lonely and isolated. Maybe encourage some people to do the emotional first aid course.

- **Group Leaders**

It is a good idea for the leaders to remain socially distanced. Wearing a face shield or a mask will help reassure parents and enable building of relationships in a safe way. If as a church, you feel you wish all adults to wear face masks, this is at your discretion.