**Guidance on holding physical children’s meetings in Scotland**

**14 October 2020**

*Children and Young people need love and stability. Are we doing all that we can to uphold and sustain parents and others who carry the responsibility for providing their care?*

*Advices and Queries 24*

*In the life of the Quaker meeting there is a tradition of equality and respect for individuals that I have found to be of pure gold in value. It is expressed in love and affection between the generations.*

*Quaker faith & practice 2.75*

This briefing is to help Quakers in Scotland who are uncertain about how to hold children’s meetings.

The government guidance keeps being updated. Some of these changes affect what can be done. Other changes explain the position more clearly. You may also need to consult any local restrictions in your area.

While Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM) cannot provide an authoritative interpretation of the guidance, we can highlight the key paragraphs and documents.

There are as many different scenarios for children’s meetings as there are Quaker Meetings. The advice and guidance available on the BYM website helps Quakers across Britain Yearly Meeting carefully plan and decide when and how to reopen places of worship for communal worship, whilst maintaining the safety and wellbeing of our communities during the Coronavirus pandemic, including opening children’s meetings. You need to interpret it according to the needs and circumstances of your local community and your buildings.

There will need to be a risk assessment undertaken, and agreed, before the children’s meeting can commence. In many area meetings it will be the trustees who need to agree the risk assessment, as they hold responsibility for health and safety. So finding out what your area meeting’s expectations are, is important to understand these at the outset. There is a model risk assessment for reopening children’s meeting which will be part of the risk assessment that you have or will be doing for reopening your place of worship in appendix 1.

Remember if the meeting has paid children’s workers, it will be important to consider their needs and the meeting’s responsibilities towards them.

**General BYM Advice on opening places for worship** BYM’s Coronavirus webpage has all the BYM advice on re-opening meeting houses or other venues for worship, [here](https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/support-for-meetings/coronavirus-advice-for-quaker-meetings).

Details of the [nine steps](https://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/9-steps-to-re-opening-meeting-house) to you need to consider before reopening your meeting houses including meeting for worship for children.

**Questions often asked by Quakers:**

**What does the government say about young people and children attending places of worship?**

From: [Guidance for the safe use of place for worship](https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-phase-3-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship/)

 *Unregulated indoor activity for under 18s, including activity organised by places of worship (such as out-of-school faith-based education that is separate to an act of worship), have been able to resume from 31 August and should follow*[*guidance for unregulated organised activities for children*](https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-organised-activities-for-children/pages/overview/)

*Where a place of worship is providing activities for children they will need to determine which guidance is most relevant for the activity they are organising.*

**Do we need to limit the number of children within a place of worship due to the potential for increased spread of COVID-19?**

Supervised children’s activities (children’s meetings) are limited to the number of people who can safely social distance in the venue in line with COVID-19 Secure guidance.Think whether you need a booking system for children to attend and how this will work. [*Guidance for unregulated organised activities for children*](https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-organised-activities-for-children/pages/overview/)

**What information should we give to parents?**

Consider what parents need to know and share the risk assessment with them, making sure they know the new systems in place and encourage them to share relevant information with their children.

From [Covid-19-guidance-on-reopening-school-age-childcare-services](https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-reopening-school-age-childcare-services/pages/communication/)

*National information for parents and carers is available from*[*Parent Club*](https://www.parentclub.scot/articles/reopening-schools-faqs)*.*

*Settings will need to communicate any new arrangements to families in advance of children returning. This is particularly important where there are new routines and procedures that children, parents and families will need to understand and follow.*

**Do children have to socially distance?**

From [NHS inform](https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-physical-distancing):

* *physical distancing is still essential for everyone except children under 12 and people in the same household or extended household*
* *maintain good hand and respiratory hygiene*
* *face coverings must be worn if you use public transport, use school transport (children aged 5 and over), visit a care home/hospital, when you move around a secondary school or go to a shop, library, museum, bank or church*

Further local measures may apply too.

To help people know how they should be sharing spaces, you could consider allocating chairs, cushions or hoops. These can be quarantined for a period of time after use. Allocating specific places can be done in a way that is fun and makes everyone feel special and welcomed.  Resource sharing should be limited: again providing individual named packs of resources can be done in a way that helps children feel recognised and welcomed. Games and activities can be set up so all are together in what they do, but do not depend on them being physically very close.

Social distancing is not possible in the care of small children. Volunteers need to be comfortable with this and to use other ways to minimise risk: face coverings and everyone to repeat hand washing/use of hand gel.

**How do we keep in touch with children who don’t attend?**

Keeping different members in the meeting is important: phone calls, letter, cards, zoom meetings, meeting face to face (under the guidelines for your region at any given time) will all help people feel connected. The physical receipt of an activity that children know other children will be doing helps the feeling of connection. If they do meet virtually they can show what they have made or done, or items may be kept and combined in the future.

**Our meeting is blended how can children’s meeting do this?**

Children’s meeting could join a blended meeting with adults or other children either for a period of worship / after worship has finished for afterword, notices or sharing. This could be done by simply using a smart phone or tablet from where the children are meeting.

**Can children join with adults in meeting?**

Yes, the risk assessment for opening the place of worship should include this option if it were to be done. Consideration might need to be made to safely moving around the building. All age worship with socially distanced family groups could be easier to manage than children joining or leaving others part way through worship.

**If the parents are the children’s meetings volunteers what changes then?**

The guidance is the same for parents as for other volunteers, provided they have been recruited in the manner specified by their Area Meeting Safeguarding procedures. They are acting as voluntary staff at the children’s meeting.

**Do we have to remove toys?**

Any shared facilities for children, such as play corners, soft furnishings, soft toys and toys that are hard to clean, should be removed and/or put out of use.​

**What cleaning should we do?**

Particular attention should be paid to cleaning frequently touched surfaces by children and those that are at child height.

**What records should we keep?**

All attendees should provide contact details for the purposes of NHS Scotland’s Test and Protect Service.

**Can we worship outdoors?**

See the [BYM guidance](https://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/thoughts-on-outdoor-worship-during-pandemic) on worshipping outdoors and also refer to the [guidance on gatherings and occasions](https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-phase-3-staying-safe-and-protecting-others/pages/gatherings-and-occasions/).