

Tips for churches running gathered congregations and groups in church and other buildings



Staying safe

Social distancing is vital in whatever space you have. Please refer to all government, denominational and local guidelines applicable to your context. Also, please ensure you are following current guidelines with regards to sanitising, face coverings and all other aspects of gathering for worship, e.g. risk assessments, track and trace, use of microphones. Read up to date government guidance here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july/special-religious-services-and-gatherings-covid-19-checklist>

Adapting places and preparation

Some congregations or groups may not have the space in their regular meeting place to ensure social distancing so may need to find alternative venues where appropriate adaptations will need to be made.

However, gathered groups can also meet anywhere that's safe so you could consider an outdoor space if that's available to you and is in line with current guidelines about numbers who can meet outdoors. Please note, risk assessments may also be required for this.

Materials/kit needs to be prepared in advance. The easiest way of doing this to ensure its safe is to prepare everything 72 hours in advance. If your service or session is on a Sunday, a routine of sorting out last week's kit and preparing next week's on a Wednesday would be a good routine. Each person will need their own set of equipment – we cannot share pencils, glue, scissors, craft materials, etc. We suggest providing boxes/kits for each individual child/young person, household/'bubble' or asking households to bring their own basic equipment.

Recognising there is so much we CAN do!

While there are restrictions in place, adapting and being flexible will be even more important than before. However, there are so many things which remain the same and having the confidence to do these well is very important. Much of what you would normally do in leading a gathered group or an act of worship is still possible and can be just as effective.

Some ideas for group activities may have to be done as a demonstration, or using just a single volunteer or a household group/'bubble' to avoid equipment sharing. Visuals can be even more important so sharing the illustration, *Picture pointers* image or any video clips can be a really helpful tool.

Kit will need to be prepared in advance and provided for individuals/household groups for crafts. If you are making something as individuals to contribute to a bigger whole this can be carried out by holding things up or contributing one at a time, at a distance – or individuals can take home what they have done/made.

Activities that involve group discussion can take place, again provided the members of the group, households/'bubbles', keep an appropriate distance apart.

Dramas, mimes and similar can be performed provided the actors keep to the social distancing guidelines or all actors could come from the same household/'bubble'.

Activities that asked people to 'come forward' or 'to gather round' and so on, can be done by allowing people to remain in their places throughout, or by doing things together as a household/'bubble'.

Prayers continue to work well with little adaptation needed and can be a great way to get everyone involved in leading and responding.

Continue to offer the **ROOTS Live your faith Sheet**, **Children's Sheet** and **Colouring Sheet** to individuals/households to use afterwards.

Accepting there are some things we can't do

Some games will be restricted due to lack of space/no physical contact – these can often be adapted, e.g. for households to play together and/or changing forms of physical contact for another means with the same effect. At the current time we are unable to sing together, however it is possible to play and use music in other ways as part of your ministry. You can use recorded music in place of singing at any time. But singing 'from the front' by a cantor or small group of – socially distanced – musicians is also permitted. Just no congregational participation!

Do your best

We are all working out new ways of leading worship and learning in our churches. Try not to be overwhelmed by the restrictions and the guidance but, while working within the safety measures, continue to offer creativity and genuine opportunities for people to engage as part of your worship and through your gathered groups.