

Fact Sheet to support parishes setting up virtual groups and activities during the Coronavirus emergency March 2020

Please read this fact sheet alongside the parish activities fact sheet through this link: Volunteering in Coronavirus times, which is available via www.gloucester.anglican.org/safeguarding

The NSPCC has a great resource for helping think things through <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection/online-safety-for-organisations-and-groups/> (and this includes issues such as live streaming, virtual groups, messages, creating safe spaces).

The BBC and other organisations also offer a wide range of resources that may be helpful at this time.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/grownups/article-internet-use-and-safety>

- ✓ Many churches are now setting up virtual groups and activities to enable people to remain connected and to reach out to communities. This fact sheet is to help set out the duty of care, and responsible actions that PCC's should be aware of when setting up virtual/online groups.
- ✓ There is established guidance on the use of social media with young people in church groups which covers most of the issues that may be raised. This can be found in section 12 of the parish safeguarding handbook which is available online through this [link](#). This factsheet is designed to supplement this guidance.
- ✓ Throughout the Coronavirus emergencies the safeguarding team, (Judith, Becca, Brett and Kate) is operating as business as usual as much as possible, we are busy setting up working remotely, but the email and out of hours safeguarding phone from our website are all working so do get in touch with any concerns – and we will keep information updated as fast as we can!
- ✓ We are also aware that PCCs are no longer able to meet face to face to discuss these issues. The Diocese has guidance at this link of how to hold virtual meetings if you aren't sure: <https://www.gloucester.anglican.org/2020/cancellation-of-pcc-meetings/>
- ✓ Government, National and local church guidance in relation to COVID:19 is changing rapidly. For up to date information please see links at the end of the document.

1. Does the PCC have insurance cover for activities?

A: PCC activities are covered within the normal parish insurance arrangements so long as there is good guidance and oversight in place. In the event of any claim your insurer would expect you to have been diligent in setting things up and having thought through risks, tasks etc. and made appropriate plans. If the group is new it should be approved by the PCC and any appropriate activity/risk assessment completed.

2. We don't know how to hold virtual groups or activities – help!

A. Some churches may be ready to use technology to provide remote services and group activities. Many will not. If you are struggling and want to learn please get in touch with the Diocesan Communications team. They may also be able to link you with other churches in your area that can support you with this.

There is also some helpful advice on line eg with ZOOM which is currently very popular!

3. What consent do we have to get from those who want to join a virtual group?

A. Make sure that you are clear where a group activity may include children and young people is taking place, and ensure that parents and carers know what consents you may require and what you are going to do with the information.

Examples of this maybe verbal, or more ideally email if that is possible so a quick record of consents can be kept.

- I agree for myself and my children to join the morning prayer group but not images to be recorded, stored or shared; or
- I agree for my child/ren to take part in a virtual group with other children and two adult leaders. I do not agree for a recording of this to be shared on the church Facebook account.
- I agree for my child/ren to take part in virtual group with other children and two adult leaders and I agree for recordings of these to be shared on the church Facebook account.

- ✓ If an adult at risk is not able to consent speak with the people who provide care or support for them.
- ✓ Explain to the group that they can choose if they have their microphone/ camera off or on. There may be times when the person leading does this for example if

someone is not dressed appropriately or there is a lot of background noise. This should be explained to the group at the beginning of an activity.

- ✓ It may be that a church has an offender agreement in place so always check an activity first with the incumbent so that appropriate actions can be taken and confirmed with the safeguarding team.

How do we keep our volunteers and people safe in the group?

- A.** Using the same guidance as face to face groups adult leaders would only meet virtually on their own with children where the PCC, the child and their parents/ carers have agreed to this.
- ✓ It is good practice to make some ground rules with the group and explain how the activity will work.
 - ✓ Staff and volunteers and those participating in the group must wear suitable clothing, as should anyone else in the household.
 - ✓ Any computers/ devices used should be in appropriate areas, for example, not in bedrooms; and where possible be against a neutral background.
 - ✓ Live groups should be kept to a reasonable length of time and it should be clear how long a group will last.
 - ✓ Language must be professional and appropriate, including any family members in the background.
 - ✓ Church accounts should be used to set up the group and passwords and log off promptly after use.
 - ✓ Any safeguarding concerns should be dealt with using the same guidance as in a face to face group.

6. If we need new leaders for the groups how do we make sure that people are recruited safely?

A: It is likely many volunteers will come forward because they want to help and we all want to encourage this – but be mindful of basic volunteer good practice and national guidance (these national links may be helpful

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/ParishSafeGuardingHandBookAugust2019Web.pdf>

https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/Safer%20Environment%20and%20Activities%20Oct19_0.pdf

There are some practical and pragmatic emergency measures that can be applied as cogent reasons for following practical emergency steps: For example;

- ✓ If volunteers you do not know well or who have not already been safely recruited by the Church come forward to help don't turn them away but ask them to complete a simple application form:
<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/Application%20form%20template%20%28Appendix%203%29%20-%20Safer%20Recruitment.docx>
- ✓ Take up references – even verbally is better than nothing keep a note of what was said and confirm by email if that is possible. The application form is also useful if you are building up resources and its good to be aware of what skills and experiences someone might be able to offer.
- ✓ Whilst people might want to volunteer immediately we are set to live in challenging times for some months, and people should be genuinely pleased that you are taking responsibility for making sure volunteers and those being supported are kept as safe as possible and taking just a day or two to get things established well is important.
- ✓ Check where a volunteer role requires a DBS check:
<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/Church%20of%20England%20role%20%20%28Appendix%208%29%20-%20Safer%20Recruitment.pdf>) and ensure that people are recruited using normal national safer recruitment processes:
(<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/Safer%20recruiting%20in%20the%20parish%20%28Appendix%201%29%20-%20Safer%20Recruitment.pdf>). All records should be kept just like normal. Most checks at this level can be done on the Online Update service, free to volunteers, and there is new government guidance for how identity documents to confirm things can be shared on this link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/covid-19-changes-to-standard-and-enhanced-id-checking-guidelines> and the parish Safeguarding Officer or activity coordinator should keep records as normal (the online update process is annually rechecked and rechecks are also free for volunteers).
- ✓ For those who would normally be required or recommended to undertake the basic and foundation level safeguarding courses give them the link to the training. Keep a careful record of who they are and when they have completed it. The national safeguarding team are making access to the online training links quicker. If your volunteer is not able to do this before they start make a record of this and encourage them to do it at a later date.
- ✓ For those who would be required to undertake leadership roles – again keep a careful note and as soon as possible ensure they have completed Basic and Foundation on line levels – the leadership level can be completed later when the diocesan events resume.

Useful links

Gloucester Diocese Website <https://www.gloucester.anglican.org/>

Government guidance regarding COVID:19 <https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/coronavirus-covid-19-uk-government-response>

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