

Advice & Guidance for Churches on supporting Children, Young People and their Families during Covid-19

This is a time of unprecedented change when we are all learning to live, work and be church in new ways; this provides both opportunities and challenges for connecting with children, young people & families and encouraging them in their faith.

The Children & Young People Mission & Ministry Team are very aware that we are hearing lots of anecdotal information which we wanted to share so that churches can be as proactive as possible in their support of their children, young people and the families that care for them.

This is very much a team effort so please encourage members of the congregation to get involved in supporting your families in some of the ways suggested below. No one person will be suited to all these tasks, however between a whole congregation & church family of God many of these should be possible.

As this continues into the foreseeable future it is increasingly vital to keep in touch and stay connected with the families you normally engage with week by week as well as nurturing new contacts & relationships.

Some families will be regular members of your congregation, others will connect with you in other ways, maybe Messy Families, your toddler club or after school club. And there has been a large number of people accessing church online, who are not normally part of our worshipping communities so it is important to find ways to help them all feel welcome to what you are able to offer.

The most important advice is to have some contact with as many families as you possibly can and try to make the contact as personable as possible, however we understand this is not always possible but we would encourage a personal outreach when possible.

It doesn't matter whether this is by social media, telephone, email, or by sharing activity ideas; they will really come to value the way you have continued to support them throughout this strange time.

Below are ideas and suggestions for you to continue to connect with the families connected to your parish and church at this time:

- Website – Make sure that your web-site is up to date, either with the online content you are offering or suggesting other places it can be found – the Diocesan website has links you could use. <https://www.rochester.anglican.org/under18s/ministryhome/>
Make it clear that the church family is still accessible – it's just our buildings which are closed. To make the site more family friendly include pictures of the families who make up your congregation throughout as well as on the front page (please obtain permission to comply with our Diocesan Safeguarding Policy) - rather than using stock pictures.
Ensure all activities for children and young people are clear, easy to find and are up to date as before lockdown as well as what is currently able to happen. It will show families what they could expect in normal circumstances.
- Facebook – have an active presence on social media. Update your page regularly with messages on what is being offered by the church. Service times are helpful but an offer of prayer and a sense of community is very important. If your children or young people have

been meeting virtually, share that – pictures are best if possible (permission needed as above) – or share how they have been connecting with the church family and one another.

- On-line Services are a great way of sharing faith with our communities. Consider how accessible the content is for families, the same way you would if you were meeting in person e.g. by explaining difficult words. Be intentional about offering an intergenerational service, where opportunity includes families being able respond to one another and God through the use of interactive learning and questioning. Smile, enjoy what you are doing, and show the faces of those leading different elements of the service as much as possible. Involve families, children, and young people in different aspects such as the reading or prayers (permission needed as above) and in greetings from different church families, filmed and sent across in advance. The sense of community is needed now more than ever.
- Families may find worshipping together as a family unit easier when they can pick the time, so live streaming may not work for all your congregation, especially young people. So posting it to a space where it can be accessed later is ideal.
- Email families with ideas for activities they can do together at home to explore faith together – you could create some of your own or use some of the many resources on our website <https://www.rochester.anglican.org/under18s/ministryhome/keeping-busy/> We have produced a Ministry @Home each week, following the Lectionary, which families may find helpful <https://www.rochester.anglican.org/under18s/ministryhome/family-worship-in-the-home/>
- Set up a messaging group for parents to stay in touch with each other, WhatsApp can be effective. Ensure you have permission before adding people to these groups, as phone numbers are shared. Start with church members and gradually extend as relationships are formed and built. This is an ideal way to share what church is offering generally as well as family specific resources. Make sure it is monitored to avoid it becoming less than Christian in content or for its original purpose.
- Use an online meeting platform to meet with groups of parents from your church and chat and pray for each other. You could offer parenting courses here, possibly monthly. If you need resources please ask. Zoom is popular, free and straightforward to use. Please read the Diocesan guidance <https://www.rochester.anglican.org/diocese/coronavirus-guidance-for-parishes/coronavirus--guidance-for-parishes.php>
- Find a way for your children and young people to gather and worship. Some churches have used online meeting platforms to host youth and children's groups Zoom has been successfully used by several churches. <https://www.rochester.anglican.org/content/pages/documents/1576055865.pdf> others have pre-recorded sessions for their children and young people and uploaded them to the Churches Facebook page, which means they can be watched later. You can use these opportunities for fun as well as prayer and devotion.

- Pray for one family from your church each day and send them a message to let them know you are thinking and praying for them.
- Resources – you could
Send an email to all the families you have contact with include suggestions of things they could do at home together e.g. colouring sheets, activity sheets, prayer challenges or simple craft ideas. There are suggestions on the Keeping Busy page of the website <https://www.rochester.anglican.org/under18s/ministryhome/keeping-busy/> as well as some excellent ideas on Pinterest try these pages for ideas <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/charles1481/easy-crafts-to-make-at-home/>

Another option is to deliver resources on your daily walk. You could include printouts of the above and if you had a small budget there are excellent low-cost story and activity booklets for children and young people here:

Good Book Company - <https://www.thegoodbook.co.uk/children/booklets-and-tracts/tracts>

Scripture Union -

<https://content.scriptureunion.org.uk/resources?f%5B0%5D=collection%3A390>

Bible Society - <https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/landing/story-booklets/>

Pack these resources carefully and leave for a week before delivering them following the social distancing guidance.

Please include an offer to support practically as well as to pray for them regularly.

- Film yourself and share the content with families online e.g. singing and reading a story for your toddler group.
- Ask members of your church to create artwork to put in their windows and let families know they can go on a hunt for the pictures when they take their daily walk. Leaving painted rocks for families to find around your community connects the community with the church family. Ask for pictures of the finds on the social media platforms or group-chats.
- Diocesan resources – There is a collection of children, young people and family resources you can share with your families or you can signpost them to.

If you would like help and support with creating online material or streaming video content, there is some good advice from our diocesan Communications team here: <https://www.rochester.anglican.org/communications/guidance/filming-in-churches/>

You can see the national Church of England's guidance on live streaming here:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/church-resources/digital-labs/labs-learning-blog/beginners-guide-going-live-your-service-or>

As this 'new normal' settles in

- Try to make any new 'routines' you set up sustainable for you and for the families you're ministering with.

- Be realistic about what you can achieve over this period and don't try to tackle everything all at once.
- Use other people in your church family/community to help and support you.
- Be aware that families are currently being swamped with electronic messages. Schools are sending out lots of updates, so do not feel disheartened if you don't receive replies from everybody.
- Prioritise maintaining the relationships you've built with children, young people and families in your church and community – they won't necessarily remember whether your live streamed service was the most well-delivered or your Zoom youth meeting went without any hitches but they will remember that you checked up on them, prayed for them and reached out to them with God's love.

Please bear in mind not every family will have access to Wi-Fi or limited WIFI accessibility so do be more creative and personal such as a physical note or a phone call would be helpful.

Lastly, pause, take a breath and ask God how He wants you to use this time.....