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

 **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 England 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**

1. 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) you need to consider before reopening your meeting houses including meeting for worship for children.

**Frequently Asked Questions**

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

From [Covid-19:-guidance for the safe use of places of worship during the pandemic](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july)

* *Organized children’s activities can take place within a place of worship, and are limited to the number of people who can safely social distance in the venue in line with COVID-19 secure guidance. These can include, but not limited to activities such as mother and baby groups, youth groups and classes.*
* *Specific guidance for out-of-school settings has been published and should be followed when providing tuition, training, instruction or activities outside normal school hours (such as evenings, weekends and school holidays). This includes advice to keep children in consistent groups of 15.*
* *Some running youth groups will also want to refer to the* [*National Youth Agency guidance*](https://nya.org.uk/guidance/) *which also recommends groups of 15, and discusses the use of face coverings for over 11s.*
* *Where adults are supervising young children, they should maintain social distancing from adults from other households.*

**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. See guidance: [Protective measures for holiday or after-school clubs and other out-of-school settings](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/protective-measures-for-holiday-or-after-school-clubs-and-other-out-of-school-settings-for-children-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak/protective-measures-for-out-of-school-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak). Think whether you need a booking system for children to attend and how this will work.

**Does the rule of 6 apply?**

Activities for children and young people, such as youth groups, are allowed more than six attendees. See the guidance here: [Coronavirus (COVID-19): Meeting with others safely (social distancing)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-meeting-with-others-safely-social-distancing/coronavirus-covid-19-meeting-with-others-safely-social-distancing#seeing-friends-and-family)

**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. See also [Guidance for parents and carers of children attending out-of-school settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-parents-and-carers-of-children-attending-out-of-school-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak/guidance-for-parents-and-carers-of-children-attending-out-of-school-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak)

**Do children have to socially distance?**

See: [Coronavirus (COVID-19): Meeting with others safely (social distancing)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-meeting-with-others-safely-social-distancing/coronavirus-covid-19-meeting-with-others-safely-social-distancing#seeing-friends-and-family)

To help children know how they should be sharing spaces, you could consider allocating hoops, chairs, cushions or blankets. 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 children feel special and welcomed.  Children should not be sharing resources: 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 can repeat hand washing/use of hand gel. See [Protective measures for holiday or after-school clubs and other out-of-school settings](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/protective-measures-for-holiday-or-after-school-clubs-and-other-out-of-school-settings-for-children-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak/protective-measures-for-out-of-school-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak).

**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 local area 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 Test and Trace.

**Can we worship outdoors?**

See the [BYM guidance](https://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/thoughts-on-outdoor-worship-during-pandemic) on worshipping outdoors and the [COVID-19: guidance for the safe use of places of worship during the pandemic](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july).

A useful checklist can also be found here: [High Holy Day services and gatherings COVID-19 checklist](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july/high-holy-day-services-and-gatherings-covid-19-checklist)