



The United Church of Canada L'Église Unie du Canada

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Guidelines and Check list for Re-Entry: Sunday Schools and Youth Groups

With many of our Communities of Faith looking at some form of re-entering buildings for worship during the fall months, numerous questions have been asked about programming for children and youth. There is a great deal to consider, and while many might be anxiously awaiting the return of these age groups, as always, cautious attention and consideration must be given to protocols and practice in order to safely welcome children, youth, and their families back into places of worship and the programs that are offered by our faith communities. The following is offered as cautious way forward, for both in person gatherings and online/at home alternatives:

BEFORE any of these activities are started, Communities MUST include plans for Children and Youth in their Re-Entry Plan, as well as communicating that plan with leaders and families. As with any gatherings, if participants are unwell, they should NOT participate.

1. Because so much is unknown about COVID-19 and how it will spread now that schools and other activities have re-opened, it is recommended that communities of faith DO NOT resume in person Sunday school concurrent with Sunday Worship. These activities can happen at other times during the week, preferably in family groupings, outside. Some communities have chosen “family style” worship around tables so that families can worship together. Others may choose to have strictly online Sunday school programs, or to provide at home materials for faith formation. Activities such as Youth Group that happen at times outside of worship can occur if the group is less than the number suggested by provincial health authorities, while maintaining social distancing, wearing masks, and cleaning the space before and after use. Water bottles must be filled at home and not shared, and supplies for activities not shared, unless participants are members of the same family. At this time it is recommended that NO FOOD be served. Please consult your jurisdiction’s guidelines concerning daycares, day camps, and recreation/sports based programs for more localized guidance.
2. It is recommended that in person activities concurrent with worship resume for school-aged children and teens later in autumn (late October-November). As stated above, Communities of Faith can only hold these programs IF these age groups have sections in the community’s re-entry plan, as provincial protocols for safety such as social distancing, wearing of masks, separate supplies for each participant and sanitization must be maintained. For those below school-age, in person activities are not recommended at this time, as social distancing and mask wearing are not possible.
3. As always, these guidelines are subject to change, in alignment with our provincial/national guidelines and protocols.

Should your Community of Faith wish to have online programs, the following are some best practices to ensure safety of all children and youth involved:

1. As with in person programs, all leaders must have a Police Record Check and Vulnerable Sector Check completed and a copy (not the original) held by the Community of Faith.
2. When in an online activity, there must be two leaders present at all times.
3. During a gathering, if a one on one conversation happens, take notes.
4. Consent forms indicating permission for online programming should be signed by guardians if the participants are under the age of consent.
5. Ensure that schedule for being online is shared with parents/guardians.
6. Make sure that all rules are clear, just like in person gatherings.
7. When using Zoom or other online platforms, use accounts that belong to your community of faith. Leaders should NEVER use personal accounts for group gatherings.
8. Never post links for gatherings in public places. Always email participants directly. This is to avoid, as much as possible, unwanted attendees.
9. When using Zoom, always use the waiting room function, only admitting known participants.
10. When using the “chat function,” ensure participants know that even the “private” chat function can be viewed and will be saved.
11. When you save records of chats, make sure they are sent to the office of your community of faith. Never store them on a personal device.
12. In case of an emergency with a participant, ensure that you know where they are physically located so that local authorities (fire, police, etc.) can be contacted if necessary.
13. Know how to mute your participants and how to turn off their camera if you suspect they might be doing something inappropriate, such as going to the bathroom, having another conversation, etc.

Should your Community of Faith choose to have in person programs (see above for suggested start times), the following are some best practices to ensure the safety of children and youth involved:

1. Have designated space apart from the worship space for children and youth to gather which enables social distancing protocols.
2. Upon entry into the building, children and youth should be greeted by a greeter and taken to the designated space.
3. Children and youth are met by their teachers, socially distanced and placed in position following social distance protocols.
4. Individual craft supplies and Sunday school material shall be provided for each participant and sanitized at the end of the session.
5. At the conclusion of your time together, parents/guardians should indicate to the greeters to retrieve their child/youth. They exit as a family grouping/bubble.
6. If a child/youth requires a parent/guardian at any time during the session, they should indicate that need to their leader who will inform the greeter/usher to retrieve the parents/guardians, respecting social distancing guidelines.

7. At this time, no programming for children under school age shall occur. Those children must remain in the worship space with their adults. Children/youth who are school age shall wear masks and follow social distancing rules.
8. Should children/youth require water during the session, they must bring their own containers from home and not share with other participants.

These guidelines are set out, based on many public health documents, and in consultation with The United Church of Canada's emergency response documents. For more information, or if you have any questions, please contact Catherine Stuart, Regional Minister for Children, Youth and Young Adults at cstuart@united-church.ca or at 1-800-268-3781 ext. 6158.