

Sharing Best Practice – A Forum

Forum Six: Safeguarding

Becky will be running 'Brunch with Becky' every Thursday morning at 10am starting from 11th June. It will be a drop in session for anyone with a safeguarding role/interest for Q&A and to share issues/concerns about matters arising, processes, guidance etc. and can act as a way of her feeding back to the Connexion the work and concerns that really happen on the ground.

Becky has also set up a Microsoft Teams group; this is open to anyone who has a safeguarding interest. She has been posting updates in here around guidance, training, both from inside and outside the Methodist Church. If anyone would like to join please email Becky and she will send you an invite to join.

We are able to check DBS documents online, i.e. via Zoom. It is recommended that a list of all those checked in this method is kept and when we are able to return to face to face checking we then re-check the documents. DDC are still working and processing DBS checks so this will help ease any delays in recruitment/DBS checks. Read more here: [DDC response to COVID-19](#).

Zoom worship sessions:

Becky would like to remind everyone not to publicly share zoom links making it a 'free for all'. There are safeguarding issues around 'zoom bombing'.

Online working:

Connexional guidance surrounding online working [can be found here](#).

The District's guidance to working online can be found on the [Safeguarding Policy page](#). It collates much of the Connexional information, but also offers further detail.

Safer recruitment:

The Connexion are in the process of updating the Recruitment guidance, which awaits finalisation and approval. It is anticipated there will be further updates to audits and retention periods for records as well as SO updates.

IICSA:

Hearings took place 11th-21st May. So far the Methodist Church has stayed out of the limelight. There are further dates anticipated 10th-14th August where we may come under heavier scrutiny. Becky thanks every circuit for their hard work last summer in providing all the feedback they supplied.

Training:

The District has offered 'Working Safely Online' and 'Foundation Level Facilitator Training' (Train the Trainer) over the past two months. Connexion have stipulated that, at present, the Foundation and Advanced Level Creating Safer Space modules, cannot be offered

online. They are researching and tailoring training to try to ensure participant engagement and quality assurance.

As a District we are keen to pilot any ideas, and have requested to be involved in any such pilot programmes. We are also keen to begin Foundation and Advanced Module training again; however, this has not currently been agreed.

Connexion have currently granted a 6 month extension for those who are due for renewal. As a District we have requested that this 6 month time frame is extended further, but we await updates.

Question and Answer Session

Some specific questions were raised during the best practice zoom call – here they are in writing with Becky's replies:

- Q - Some churches (without employed cleaners) still have members who before the lockdown would come together on a Saturday for the church cleaning. Considering our restrictions at present time, when lockdown is eased and we are able to access the church building again, what would be the safeguarding guidelines for members who do the church cleaning
- A - Risk assess, follow guidance from government and Connexion, and if possible remove any risks identified. i.e. keeping doors open to prevent people touching door handles (fire safety to be kept in mind) or removing tables in entrance areas to enable greater space for distancing. More info can be found in the Connexional guidance with links to risk assessing, check list for re-opening: <https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/property/coronavirus-guidance-for-property/> or government guidance here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings>
- Q - As churches reopen will face-to-face training continue? If yes, what guidelines will there be for managing this safely in a social-distancing world? If no, what other means of training delivery to applicable church members will be available, keeping in mind that not everyone has access to computers and Zoom.
- A - We are hoping to be given the green light for online (as above). Face to face training will be able to resume when restrictions are lifted but churches and circuits will have to risk assess and ensure all of the guidelines are being met, i.e. distancing, cleaning, record keeping etc. Anticipate guidance will come from Connexion however it is likely to be broad to accommodate all variances in districts/circuits/churches, hence each church/circuit will have to risk assess for their own context (much like the church re-opening assessment & checklist and other activity RAs).
- Q - The issue of mental health being is increasingly being linked to the safeguarding agenda. How can the church help strengthen understanding and response to concerns in a practical and meaningful way when individuals and families are in crises?

- A - We need to open these discussions up, show people it is OK not to be OK and talk about it, and remove the stigma (much like many other presenting issues over recent years). The more we speak and create safe environments for people to open up the more people will be able to access the support they need.

The stats over recent years do not appear to have increased. 1 in 4 people are likely to suffer with mental ill health, however, people's coping methods have changed with increasing numbers turning to self-harm or suicide.

Urged churches and circuits to engage with their local authorities as many will offer training free for our churches. There is a wealth of topics available to raise awareness. By educating ourselves, we can grow confidence in our volunteers and employees to handle delicate situations. [Further guidance can be found on the Methodist Church website.](#)
- Q - Many churches have groups and other churches who regularly use their premise. Some of these groups have more children and young people than the host church (this is very true for London). Should the Methodist church have more responsibility in safeguarding these children than goes beyond the letting agreement and written policy?
- A - As part of any lettings agreement, we need to satisfy ourselves that the group is complying with safeguarding. We need to ensure we are content with the level of their own policy. If we witness safeguarding incidents that gives us cause for concern, we need to feel confident enough in addressing this with the group. Ascertain what action they are taking and again satisfy ourselves with their response. If we were not satisfied then we can raise this further, through their line management or if we are not able to come to a satisfactory outcome, we can still make referrals ourselves (for example). Paperwork and boundaries dictate the responsibility falls to the hiring group, but the church is our building and we have a responsibility to ensure we are content with the safeguarding procedures, policies and actions with these groups in order to allow them to/continue to hire our buildings.

[Please also refer to Schedule 14a from the TMCP website.](#)
- Q around healing – can we offer healing over zoom/online?
- A - Advice is not to as it would be very difficult to support/emotionally 'hold' someone during this in a virtual format.

Becky says: "If anyone has any other questions, please do forward them to me as I am trying to collate FAQs to pop on the District website."