

Re:Starting Back

Ideas for reconnecting with young people in Autumn 2020.

Balancing our passion for placing young people at the heart of our church communities with our responsibility to keep people safe and minimise virus transmission has made planning events particularly difficult this Autumn. However, we can follow the current Government and Church of England guidance carefully while still looking to encourage young people and families to connect with church and strengthen their relationship with God.

Despite the ongoing challenges we are facing, there are opportunities for us to reconnect with those young people who may have not engaged with church activities for many months. This Autumn, let's follow all the safety guidance and think creatively, trying new approaches that enhance the wellbeing and spiritual lives of teenagers. Let's pray for the renewal of our communities and for young people to discover Christ afresh as we continue to navigate this difficult time.

Below are some ideas to reconnect with young people this term. They are headlines to get you thinking and any plans should be made in conjunction with up-to-date national and local safety advice. It may be that none of these ideas is quite right for you, but don't let that stop you! Walking with young people as they discover Jesus is the greatest joy, so let's get together and give it a go.

Where to find the guidance.

You can find the Church of England advice page here:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches>

And specific guidance for youth and children's work here:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-08/Guidance%20for%20church%20based%20children%20youth%20and%20family%20activities%20v%201.2%2024th%20August%202020.pdf>

Check the Diocesan webpage here:

<https://www.stalbans.anglican.org/faith/living-gods-love-at-all-times/>

The UK government page for out-of-school settings can be found here:

<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>

Government FAQs on the updated restrictions on 9/9/20:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do>

Starting from scratch?

We have a pack for that! Get in touch with the Youth Service for support and ideas as now is a great time to begin to build connections with young people in your community.

A church youth service

Many young people have a strong and positive association with their local church. Invite them to a special service marking the start of term. Explore their questions, hosting them in a holy space to process and pray. Ask young people to contribute with short talks and creative worship, sharing their experiences and bringing them before the Lord.

There have been reports that suggest people have been praying and thinking more deeply about life's biggest questions this year. So get the word out about a youth service, ask young people to bring friends, set up a registration method and see who comes! For those new to worship, upload previews of what will happen, so young people are prepared and ready to engage.

Combine with a few churches to share resources and bring young people together and follow up the service with an invitation to the next event (on or offline) where you can build relationship and build some momentum, perhaps with a small group (online or in person).

Other services could include one for school starters or uni starters, praying and commission those who are making transitions.

"If possible, those attending should practise physical distancing in line with the government's current guidance. As the risk of transmission is considerably lower outdoors, providers who normally run sessions indoors should consider whether they are able to do so safely outside on their premises." [Church of England Advice on the Conduct of Public Worship](#)

Outdoor meetings

Before the weather gets any colder, using green spaces is a great way to safely gather young people and inspire them in prayer and worship. Outdoor meetings are safer and for those churches with space, offer more flexible options for gatherings of young people.

Prayer event- Take a look at our 'Prayer and worship in outdoor spaces' sheet and ask young people to come up with and build their own stations based around the challenges they face and the difficulties they are seeing in the community. Invite the group to explain their prayer stations to the congregation and leave instructions for others to take part.

Maximum numbers and format of the meeting will depend on your space, resources, and leaders. To keep participants safe, mark out different zones with blankets/spray/tape and send detailed instructions to parents in advance, gaining written consent.

A temporary shelter (without walls) might help avoid showers, so long as you can stay safe and socially distanced at all times.

Small group meetings outdoors

Form a small group(s) for young people to meet together outdoors while the weather is still ok. Keeping groups small works well for social distancing and young people love to know they have a consistent time and their own space to rest, receive and grow. There is plenty of material online for ideas to guide discussions, engage in worship and have fun. Take a look at the Youth Service's 'Small group outdoor meeting guide' for more details and a sample session outline. Make the space as comfortable as you can, perhaps encourage young people to bring a blanket and flask, keep the meeting short, describing it as an expression of church, supporting each other and exploring faith. In the evening, think about having a focal point for the group, a firepit could be great, if safely planned for, or projector to show film clips off a wall.

Ten things to be aware of, from <https://youthworksupport.co.uk/>:

- 1) Read the NYA Guidance: Managing youth sector activities and spaces during COVID-19
- 2) It is a requirement for all centres, projects and units to develop an action plan with a comprehensive risk assessment
- 3) Keep your plans and risk assessments under constant review
- 4) Be aware of changes to the law or readiness levels (via the NYA website)
- 5) Protect vulnerable individuals at all times and consider your responsibilities to those with protected characteristics
- 6) Ensure social distancing is protected
- 7) Involve your staff, volunteers, and young people in designing your plans
- 8) Ensure you clearly communicate changes to everyone involved
- 9) Do not rush to re-open, only do so when you are confident it is safe
- 10) Stay safe

Young People leading online worship and creating content for social media.

It's been amazing to see young people visible in streamed services and to hear about the invaluable assistance they have brought through technical support and production. In the busyness of the Autumn term, are there opportunities for young people to be given greater roles in preparing and organising online worship? If your church uses social media, are young people able to post, share and create content? Some young people are incredibly creative in producing online content, and it could be a great way to encourage them in their gifts and reach more people online. Perhaps a group of young people could prepare the posts for a particular season or on a theme close to the congregation's heart.

Online group meetings

It's not too late to start a Zoom youth group. Participation to online meetings generally dropped in the summer (we all got sick of them didn't we!) but as young people get to spend more time in school, they may have an increased capacity to sit in front of a screen for an hour, especially if combined with in-person events.

Mixing online with in person events could be a good option, allowing extra time to be spent preparing safe meeting spaces and updating risk assessments, make sure your meetings are consistent and well communicated so young people know how to connect with church each week.

Keep online meetings short, include some silliness and invite guest speakers from the congregation to share their testimonies. Why not get the vicar online to ask them some hard questions or run a series on wellbeing and good mental health? The Youth Service has help-sheets for setting up online youth meetings, including advice for staying safe online. Give time for young people to express how they are feeling and invite the group to pray for each other.

The National Youth Agency Covid Readiness Level is A.

(check website for an up to date assessment)

This Means you can run:

Online and digital youth services.

Detached local youth activities, including pre-planned outdoor activities.

1-2-1 indoor sessions with young people.

Indoor group sessions in bubbles of 15 + multiple bubbles if COVID-19 Secure.

<https://nya.org.uk/>

Organise a challenge event

Friendships are key for young people's wellbeing and spiritual growth but many have been more isolated during lockdown. Safely hosting a fun meeting therefore could be an important opportunity for young people to reconnect and de-stress from school and family pressures.

Within the current guidelines and restrictions, a fun team challenge event could be safely organised if constituting a 'youth group or activity'. Set up various mini games and challenges for a competition between young people, with winning individuals or teams gaining a prize. If you have few young people to get involved, teams could be made up of families or small group bubbles. A referee could write on a big board to give running scores.

While some games are possible indoors, outdoor spaces are advised for this activity, particularly as everyone will need to keep distanced at all times. The sharing of equipment is not advised, along with any form of contact sports. Be creative with your games and challenges.

For reference look at the government advice page for sport and physical activity:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-phased-return-of-sport-and-recreation/guidance-for-the-public-on-the-phased-return-of-outdoor-sport-and-recreation#organising-outdoor-sport-and-physical-activity-events>

Instead of getting one large group together for a one-off event, run the challenges over a few evenings, assigning young people into different smaller groups, posting the scores online.

What you'll need to run a church event for young people:

- Relevant insurance.
- Parental Consent (written).
- Clear guidance for leaders and helpers, including procedures to minimise transmission risks and opportunity for them to help plan events.
- Regularly updated risk assessments (templates can be found at youth <https://youthworksupport.co.uk/>).
- Measures in place to ensure all facilities are 'Covid Secure'.
- An ensuring that all safeguarding procedures and guidelines are in place.
- All relevant steps taken to ensure leaders and helpers are safely recruited and trained in safeguarding, in coordination with your Parish Safeguarding Officer.

Mentoring

Now is a great time to plan a youth mentoring programme in church. In the face of significant well-being challenges, young people and families may value the care, support and encouragement that a mentoring programme will provide. It's hugely valuing to have someone sit down with you just to see how you are doing and chat. Young People have few opportunities to process how they are feeling and few people who will take the time to help them explore faith. You'll need a designated coordinator or team to manage mentors, along with oversight from your Parish Safeguarding Officer. Read the Youth Service's youth mentoring pack for more details and get in touch for support in recruiting and training youth mentors.

Can children's and young people's activities start again?

'Yes, children's activities being organised by the place of worship alongside or within a service or at other times during the week should follow principles in the general guidance from the Department for Education on Out of School Settings.' From Church Of England Covid-19 Guidance for Churches.

Indoor Meetings

(When reading the below, don't feel pressured to simply restart what has stopped, think creatively about the possibilities offered this term, and what is most safe for your community).

Youth groups and meetings can't and won't look like they did last September but sitting somewhere comfortable to wrestle with a Bible passage or just catch up, can now be safely facilitated in some circumstances.

Young people can form a group bubble together and meet indoors (church or hall but not private household) dependant on your facility's ability to become Covid secure. The maximum number in such a group is 15 but I would suggest keeping the numbers well below this for leaders and helpers to manage the space effectively. Be mindful of local restrictions and transmission rates, along with ensuring that a culture of mask use and social distancing can be instituted from the start. To help resist the urge to move around, the more comfortable the seats are the better! Keep the meetings short and with plenty of content. You could also provide simple individual resource packs for each young person with pens, paper and a Bible etc, as a way of safely providing materials. Get in touch with the Youth and Children's Team for support in where to find session plans and ideas for topics.

The bubble system means young people cannot swap groups and the group can't be open for young people to drop-in and out from. This will pose a significant challenge to most groups and require consultation with young people and parents/carers. The discipleship support space young people need for faith formation is possible so carefully consider with youth leaders and helpers if it's right for you. Remember that any space will need to be cleaned after use, particularly important if shared with other groups. Make sure hand hygiene can be maintained and involve leaders and helpers in the planning process, ensuring they are confident that all guidance can be followed. Finally, carefully consider clinically vulnerable young people or if any young person has vulnerable individuals in their households.

Cleaning Guidance: <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/Keeping%20church%20buildings%20clean%20v.2.pdf>

Use the Youth Service 'New Era' pack for some simple ideas to help you review, pray and discern your plans for supporting young people in their faith this term.

Church Zoom Quiz

We've all been getting a lot of trivia practice this year, so ask the young people and/or families connected to your church to organise an online quiz night to raise money for the church or a local charity. Online social events certainly aren't as rewarding as being in person, but they are a good start to bring a church community of all ages together. Ask young people to deliver quiz sheets and other competition resources to the congregation the gather together for an evening of fun together.

Family Support

Finally, parents and carers have been facilitating young people's education this year and supporting teens through the challenges of isolation and strained well-being. For those parents supporting struggling teens, opportunities to share concerns, find encouragement and receive prayer may be greatly valued.

A parent support meeting could take the form of an online meeting or be incorporated into a special service or act of worship, inviting parents to pray for their children or simply join together to share concerns, receive encouragement and be invited onto other services or events. Parents often find it difficult to share the challenges they are facing. If the group are not well known to each other, a webinar style meeting could be considered, with thoughts shared by a few parents who have been asked in advance, and prayers offered from requests taken using a chat function. Mental health and wellbeing resources could be highlighted, particularly if local organisations are offering this. Contact toddler group leaders and other groups that are currently paused, offering to host a gathering.

Adopt a family prayer initiative. Ask congregation members to sign up to pray and encourage one family in your community for the first half of term (or another set time). Invite each family to share prayer points or just receive an encouraging note to say they are being prayed for and are not alone. Use your community connections to offer this prayer initiative to local families.

Sharing faith at home. Most children and young people come to faith through the encouragement of a family member, but many parents and grandparents don't feel equipped to share their faith with their families. Gather parents or grandparents together and share simple ideas for how they might share Christ with family members, pray together and enthuse them for evangelism during these troubled times.

Let's make supporting families a priority in this new season, it's an opportunity to think creatively and try new ideas, providing new openings for young people to come to faith and grow in their relationship with God.



Email yac@stalbans.anglican.org to request any of the other idea packs mentioned and for further advice and support. Or, contact Christian direct at ccole@stalbans.anglican.org