

# Stepping Forward Safely in Love and Trust

New recommendations from the GNW COVID-19 Response Team

## for Ministries with Children

09.01.2021

The Greater Northwest Area's COVID-19 Response Team strongly recommends that all congregations and ministry settings evaluate their ability to offer safer options for ministries with children and implement several prevention strategies to reduce transmission of COVID-19. As the summer comes to an end many ministries are beginning their fall programming, some have asked for guidance as they consider how to offer safer ministries with children. With no vaccine available yet for children under 12 years old, and as part of our commitment as United Methodists to doing no harm, the following are offered to ministry settings.

### Review options from [Stepping forward safely in love and trust](#):

- Option 1: Basic Standard Practices. Childcare, Sunday School, or children's church require commitment to Option 2 Safe Local Practices
- Option 2: Safe Local Practices. Ministries with children are possible following CDC guidelines and the commitments agreed to by local ministry leaders, including:
  - We affirm that as followers of Jesus, we are responsible for living our lives and conducting our ministries with care for the safety, health and well-being of ourselves and others.
  - We will monitor and follow the latest CDC guidance (especially relating to hygiene, masking, and distancing), considering the risk factors they identify and take all reasonable steps to eliminate or mitigate those risks.
  - We will also work within parameters required by local and state governments and those established by our accrediting/licensing bodies.
  - We will not use privileges accorded religious organizations to exempt ourselves from science-based restrictions applied to non-religious civic organizations of similar function.
  - We will follow the more cautious standards in instances where CDC guidelines and local/state governments differ.
  - We will monitor and respond to changes in local risk, regularly tracking data from [CovidActNow](#) and updates from state and local municipalities.

**Talk with families:** What type of engagement opportunities do families want? Do they wish to gather virtually, in-person (outdoors or indoors), or a hybrid model? Do they want to participate as a family or have adults and children doing separate activities? What safety and prevention actions are they expecting and willing to follow?

**Talk with ministry leadership (volunteer or paid):** What type of engagement opportunities do they want to provide. What safety and prevention actions are they expecting and willing to follow? How much time are they willing to commit for preparation and implementation?

**Prayerfully discern the ministry's capacity to offer ministries with children:** The pandemic has created new challenges and opportunities for the church and individuals to responding differently. Some have increased capacity for leadership, volunteering or participating in activities, while others have less or no capacity to do so. For some people this is a time of renewed commitment to community engagement and outreach and so it might be time to start something new. Others are looking for comfort, predictability and want what is familiar.

**Implement layered prevention strategies to reduce transmission of COVID-19:** These strategies are included in the [CDC Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools](#) and the [CDC Guidance for Operating Early Care and Education/Child Care Programs](#). Key takeaways for prevention strategies in ministry settings include:

- Promoting vaccination
- Consistent and correct mask use by all individuals 2 years and older, regardless of vaccination status
- Physical distancing from people not in the same household and cohorting
- Improving ventilation to reduce the number of virus particles in the air
- Practicing handwashing and respiratory etiquette
- Staying home when sick and getting tested
- Cleaning and disinfection

**Consult others for ideas and support:** You are not alone in this. Other churches and colleagues are also discerning and making plans about ministries with children. If you need ideas or support reach out to another church or colleague to see what they are doing or to talk through your ideas. Our camp and retreat ministries just finished a successful and safe summer offering camps for children and so are very skilled in adapting safer COVID practices. Your District Superintendent or Director of Connectional Ministries are also available to discuss ideas.