



# Guidance for Priests and Confirmation Catechists leading Confirmation Groups during the COVID-19 Pandemic 2021



This guidance has been issued to help you provide a preparation program for the Sacrament of Confirmation. Bishop Philip is currently making the necessary arrangements so that Young People throughout the Diocese of Portsmouth can receive the **Sacrament of Confirmation on Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2021 at 3pm in their local Pastoral Area**. For young people to present themselves for the Sacrament of Confirmation it is important that programs are organised that can be delivered which meet the current legal requirements of a lockdown, yet adequately prepare them with regards to knowledge of the teachings of Christ and the Church; as well as ensure that they are ready in their own journey of faith to enter into this solemn promise/covenant with Our Lord through the power of the Holy Spirit.

There is no doubt that operating our catechetical groups in a new way will bring challenges we hope therefore this guidance will help to alleviate some of your initial worries. It would be good if we could share with each other what works well therefore please do send your comments and ideas to [events@portsmouthdiocese.org.uk](mailto:events@portsmouthdiocese.org.uk) and hopefully we will be able to circulate a monthly update.

The pandemic has resulted in some new rules under which we must operate and a whole new way of thinking about how we operate in a group situation to avoid cross infection. **Before any group begins to meet** it is important that you are aware of the COVID-19 regulations that are operating in your area. The Government and the National Youth Agency <https://nya.org.uk/> have provided guidance as to what we must do, some of which is now law, and others good practice. They have also identified what activities are permitted with a traffic light system so that we can easily recognise what we can engage in, with green indicating that we can operate as we would have done pre COVID-19. Currently 8<sup>th</sup> January 2021 we are at readiness stage Red.

**Before any groups can restart during this time of national Lockdown the following must be in place:**

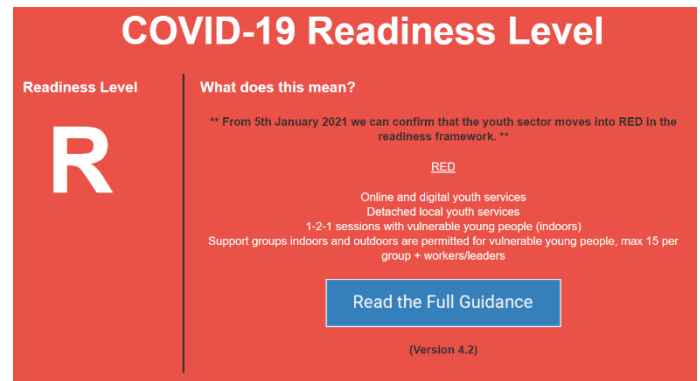
- **A risk Assessment demonstrating that risks to adults, young people and the wider community can be safely managed**
- **An ability to meet core government guidance /law**
- **Effective safeguarding arrangements**
- **An action plan of how the Confirmation program will be delivered**

Should it be possible to meet in person due to relaxed Covid-19 readiness levels or to meet the specific accessibility needs of individuals additional items must be considered before meeting and these are listed on page 5.

As a Diocese we thought it would be helpful to break these requirements down into practical terms to help you get started.

## Getting started...

- Keep up to date with Covid-19 announcements both Local and National level and act according to their advice as to whether your group can meet. The National Youth Advisory Council shows the readiness level on their opening page. It will appear as opposite.
- You must carry out a COVID-19 Risk Assessment, in consultation with your Parish Priest, and decide what appropriate safety measures need to be made to ensure the safety of all. A copy of the risk assessment must be passed to your Parish Administrator and kept by the parish. This is a **legal requirement**.
- Share the risk assessment with the catechetical team, so that everyone knows what is required and why.
- Each meeting a register must be kept as per Diocesan safeguarding guidelines – even if the meeting takes place remotely, the register will contain a record of all adults present, their role, and all young people present.
- *If Covid-19 readiness levels are relaxed, and it is possible for your group to meet in person, see the additional guidance listed on page 4.*



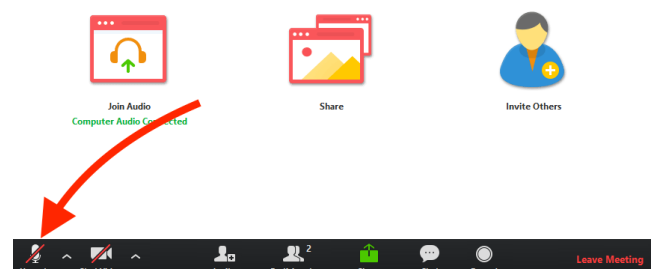
## Some Guidance for holding online meetings for Confirmation Groups

1. It would be good practice to familiarise yourself with the guidance for remote teaching issued by the NSPCC <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/news/2020/march/undertaking-remote-teaching-safely>
2. Consent forms are required which **expressly give permission for the child to communicate with you online and for the exchange of email addresses**. – a sample is attached that you may use. Those under the age of 13 can NOT be included in your online meetings.
3. It is never acceptable for catechists and priests **to share their personal email** addresses to enable online meetings with minors to take place. **This is something you will need to consider how to overcome**. Perhaps the invitations to the group to attend the meeting could be sent from the parish office.
4. Select which online meeting group platform you will use i.e. Zoom, Skype etc. and familiarise yourself with its terms and conditions and how to operate it for group meetings.

You will want to be able to:

- ✓ Mute the group at times.
- ✓ Allow or stop messaging during the meeting.
- ✓ Break into smaller groups during the meeting.

You might want to consider having an independent adult, not a catechist, who can manage your online meeting, co-ordinate the breakout rooms etc. (Perhaps a willing parent volunteer).



5. Decide:

- ✓ Whether you will allow the group to post and comment in the communication 'Stream', or disable this function for them.
- ✓ What confirmands can talk about in posts and comments, if allowed to.  
If you allow confirmands to comment, tell them they should only talk about matters relating to that Confirmation session in the 'Stream' and that you may 'mute' them if not, i.e. stop them from posting or commenting, if they post anything that's inappropriate or bullying in nature.

Remember you will need to give parents the chance to opt out of their child posting in the 'Stream' too. If they opt their child out, mute them.

6. The code of conduct for group leaders and young people will need to be revisited and adjusted to reflect the new way of meeting. Sample codes of conduct that you can update are attached.

For instance

**A. Tell catechists to:**

- Sit against a neutral background.
- Avoid recording in their bedroom (if that is not possible, they MUST use a neutral background).
- Dress like they would for Church– no pyjamas!.
- Double check that any other tabs they have open in their browser would be appropriate for a child to see, in case they are sharing their screen through choice or accident.
- Use professional language.



**B. Ask confirmands**

- ❖ to be in a shared space in their house, rather than in their bedroom.
- ❖ to attend dressed as if they were going to Church - No pyjamas – this is not a fund raiser! Alternatively, you could ask them to turn their cameras off.

**C. Ask parents**

- ❖ Who will also be there to be mindful that other children might see or hear them and anything in the background
- ❖ To also be mindful of what they say and do in the background.

**D. Consider** making a recording so there is something to go back to later if you need to and keep a log of who's doing video calls and when. Check that parents are happy with you making recordings first – tell them it's purpose and for how long it will be retained.

7. Remember that preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation is a journey in faith as well as the acquisition of knowledge and therefore include opportunities in which one's personal relationship with Jesus can develop. As places of Worship (despite the current lockdown) can remain open include opportunities for Confirmands to attend:
- Mass with their parent/god parent/sponsor.
  - Adoration with their parent/god parent/sponsor.
  - Their parish church for a period of private prayer.
  - and receive The Sacrament of Reconciliation.

We appreciate that this is not, **in any way**, how we would like to run preparation for the great Sacrament of Confirmation, but we must do all that we can to provide a welcoming environment and atmosphere for our young people; one in which they can encounter the person of Jesus Christ and experience the love and power of the Holy Spirit.

One of the most amazing things about sacramental preparation is the building of relationships, both between catechists and confirmands, but also between the confirmands themselves. Doing this online is harder, but not impossible, it just requires a little more effort and some creativity.

May we pray for the Holy Spirit to be with us as journey with our confirmands.

*Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful. And kindle in them the fire of your love.*

*Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And you will renew the face of the earth.*

*Lord, by the light of the Holy Spirit You have taught the hearts of your faithful.*

*In the same Spirit help us to relish what is right*

*and always rejoice in your consolation.*

*We ask this through Christ our Lord.*

*Amen.*



In the event that you are able to meet in person these points should all be considered and reflected in your risk assessment BEFORE your group meets.



- Enhanced cleaning arrangements.
- An ability to comply with social distancing requirements which is underpinned by UK law.
- The ability to ensure hygiene levels are maintained, including frequent hand washing/cleansing with alcohol gel.
- Check each meeting that the poster 'HELP KEEP THIS HALL COVID-19 SECURE' is displayed on entrance to the hall, this is a legal requirement and is the responsibility of the Parish Administrator/ Parish Priest. You should also check this poster to see when the hall was last cleaned and if that does not comply with your risk assessment take action to remedy BEFORE your group can meet.
- A thorough clean of the hall should be undertaken before it is used each day. Pinch points and busy areas where social distancing is difficult to enforce such as Door handles, light switches, tables and chairs must be wiped down before the session begins and once it has ended. Ordinary household products can be used.

## Handwashing / Toilets

- Provide hand wash and drying facilities: Hand sanitiser needs to be provided at entrance and exit routes. Tissues, soap, toilet rolls, paper towels or hand driers and cleaning products, including disposable cloths or paper roll, should be provided.

### **Ask:**

*Is a stock of sanitiser, soap and paper towels available for hand washing?*

*Where will you replenish the stock from?*

*How and where are soiled towels disposed of?*

- Toilets must be open for use.
- Consider "Engaged/Vacant" signage at the entrance to male and female toilets to limit the number of people within these areas at any one time and similar signage at other "pinch points".
- Cleaning of toilets is paramount, so be familiar with the procedures for cleaning toilets in your parish.

### **Consider:**

*How this will be monitored during your session.*

*Will a responsible person at least clean the handle sink taps etc. after each use?*

*If so who will do this?*

*Is one of your Catechists prepared to take on this role – if so they must be provided with appropriate PPE.*

- It is essential that toilets are not used as changing rooms. Young people **MUST** not come to group for instance in their school uniform and change in the toilets into casual clothes. **This is deemed to be unlawful...**

## Face Masks

- Since 8<sup>th</sup> August 2020 the law requires all those over 11yrs to wear a face covering unless with good reason when attending a number of venues including places of worship, community facilities, and youth sector activities. Consequently, all members of your group, Confirmants and Catechists will be required to wear a Face Mask throughout the session.

*Consider how communications may be affected and how you will overcome this.*

- Face Coverings DO NOT REPLACE social distancing.



## COVID-19 Symptoms

- Provide signage: that people should not enter if they have COVID-19 symptoms – This should be displayed at entrances. Your Parish Priest / Administrator will most likely have already done this but you must check it is still in place.
- Identify a designated space for someone with suspected COVID-19.

*This would be necessary should someone become ill at your meeting.*

*They would need as for any illness or injury to be comfortable in a place that is safe for both them and other group members until they could be collected and taken home etc.*

*That area would then require cleaning as per the parish risk assessment by persons wearing suitable PPE.*

## Entry and Exit

- Think about social distancing arrangements in corridors and at entrance and exits:

*Consider using tape to mark out a 2m distance outside and inside the entrance, and outside fire exits, to encourage people to wait their turn to enter and exit the hall.*

*They cannot enter and exit all at the same time – how will you manage this.*

- When the session has ended think about how you will dismiss the group and reconnect Confirmants with their parents etc. this will need to be done allowing 2m social distancing.



## Ventilation

- Keep the hall well ventilated, open windows and doors to encourage this.

*Encourage all members of the group to wear warm clothing.*

## Activities & Group Sizes

- The maximum number of people who will be able to attend your group will be determined by the size of the venue (your Parish Priest will have already identified the capacity of your hall) but your young people will not be able to work in a group that is larger than 15 + catechists. Please see guidance from the National Youth Agency. <https://nya.org.uk/>

- You should ensure that your activities are chosen / organised to avoid people needing to unduly raise their voices to each other. This includes – but is not limited to – refraining from playing music or broadcasts that may encourage shouting, including if played at a volume that makes normal conversation difficult. This is because of the potential for increased risk of transmission – particularly from aerosol and droplet transmission.
- Organise the meeting so that individuals are working back-to-back or side-to-side rather than face-to-face whenever possible.
- Reduce the number of people each person has contact with by using ‘fixed teams/group or partnering’ (so each person works with only a few others that session and future sessions as well if possible).
- If sharing equipment (i.e., pens) between individuals, routine cleaning steps should be considered before the next person uses the item(s). e.g., wipe them down with anti-bac wipes
- Keep your session as short as possible.

## Kitchen

- Use of the kitchen to provide even simple refreshments needs careful consideration. Your own food and drink would need to be provided, your own tea towels provided used and taken away to wash. All areas in the kitchen would need to be cleaned before and after use.
- Waste is to be bagged and placed where for disposal?

## Volunteering safely

- See government information on [coronavirus volunteering and how to help safely](#).

## In an Emergency

- In an emergency, for example, an accident, provision of first aid, a fire or a break-in, people do not have to stay socially distanced if it would be unsafe.
- If your first aider or other leader gives assistance to someone suspected of COVID-19, they should be encouraged to contact the NHS test and trace service.
- People involved in the provision of assistance to others should pay particular attention to sanitation measures immediately afterwards, including washing their hands.
- Reviewing your incident and emergency procedures to ensure they reflect the social distancing principles as much as possible.
- As per Diocesan guidelines keep a record of significant incidents and review these regularly to help you improve your practices if relevant.

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**Catholic Diocese of Portsmouth**

