

## Offering Support to those in Isolation

As the situation with the coronavirus unfolds, it is encouraging to see lots of community-minded people offering help in informal ways, but there are potentially significant risks when operating without regulations and systems. This could be through well-meaning help that goes wrong, or people deliberately taking advantage of the situation to abuse others financially, physically etc. Churches (and other organisations) naturally want to offer help, and these guidelines are intended to help us think through ways to keep it as safe as possible for all concerned, especially in terms of safeguarding and data protection. They will need adapting to different contexts.

### Informal Support

#### *Self-help and advice*

The most basic thing we can do is offer advice for ways people can help themselves. There is an excellent and comprehensive guide to wellbeing and coronavirus offered by Mind:

[https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/?fbclid=IwAR1FN215nlz2YsDqIASedYez\\_DWlImaE6FPm5ks2VYZc85kjfdJ9p8XNvOQ#collapsea56d9](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/?fbclid=IwAR1FN215nlz2YsDqIASedYez_DWlImaE6FPm5ks2VYZc85kjfdJ9p8XNvOQ#collapsea56d9)

A self-help checklist:

- Food: Do I have store-cupboard essentials? Is there a local friend who can shop for me? Could a family member (even if far away) place a supermarket order to be delivered to my house?
- Medication: Can my pharmacy deliver prescription medication? Is there a friend who can collect what I need?
- Social contact: Are there friends / family I can phone for a conversation? Do I have technology that could make video calls possible? Do I have all the contact details I need?
- Money: It is unwise to keep large quantities of cash at home. Do I have a cheque book to pay if people shop for me?
- Keeping busy: Do I have some enjoyable / productive things to do? Can I set myself a routine? Are there ways I can exercise at home? If feeling reasonably well, are there ways I can exercise outdoors without being close to other people?

#### *Helping friends*

If friends offer help to one another then that is a personal arrangement, and 'regulations' are not required – this is not done on behalf of the church. However, even if informally helping a friend, it is wise to consider some of the guidance given here.

### **Setting up more formal and co-ordinated support systems**

A small team of people with relevant safeguarding training and checks should be appointed to oversee and co-ordinate the support (e.g. minister, stewards, pastoral secretary). This should be more than one person so that there is no-one handling this alone (This is a sensible safeguarding check. Also reduces the risk of being overwhelmed, and aims to enable work to continue if key people are sick themselves). It is sensible if the team can find ways of working without physically meeting together.

The team can be responsible for receiving all the details of those needing help and those offering it. Further sharing of information should be limited to specific volunteers receiving details of those they are matched with, so that details of vulnerable / isolated people and volunteers are not being widely shared.

### *Practical help*

This is most likely to be shopping for food, collecting medicines etc. Methodist safeguarding guidance is that Pastoral Visitors who 'assist with financial matters' should have an enhanced DBS check (Safer Recruitment Practice Guidance section 6). That may not be possible in these circumstances, but the following measures (whether volunteers have a DBS or not) can help make practical help as safe as possible for all involved.

Are there local shops that volunteers can partner with?

- Are there any local shops that can take orders and payments over the phone or by email? If a list of retailers offering this can be produced, it might be possible for volunteers to simply act as a delivery service without having to handle money etc.
- Is there a local pharmacy who need help with deliveries? They will need to follow their own guidelines for safe working, but may appreciate a list of volunteer deliverers.

Rules for volunteers:

- Do not volunteer to help if / when you are unwell yourself. It is not helpful to pass on any illness, whether covid-19 or anything else! If you become unwell after having agreed to help someone, stop, inform the co-ordinating team, and go home and care for yourself.
- Take good hygiene precautions: Wash or sanitise hands between locations. Leave goods at the door, rather than going into the house. Maintain a safe distance (2 metres / yards) as much as possible. This is particularly important when a volunteer is visiting a number of vulnerable people.
- **Under no circumstances** must a bank card be handed over to someone else to use, whether to get cash or to purchase goods. This contravenes banking Terms & Conditions and makes both parties very vulnerable to fraud or accusations of fraud.

- When shopping for someone, be clear about exactly what is needed – can you get a written list?
- Get a receipt for everything bought.
- Keep a record of everything – write down the name of those involved, the date, how much has been spent, what money has been received. Take photos of receipts if possible. [I will work on a template form for recording things]
- If possible, the recipient of the shopping pays by cheque. This should be written out in full – no one should be given a signed blank cheque. If the volunteer phones ahead to tell the recipient the amount then a cheque can be made out before they arrive in order to limit handover time. If preferred, the cheque could even be left in an envelope on the doorstep to avoid all face to face contact. Alternatively payments could be made by bank transfer if both parties are happy to arrange that.
- Records should be shared with the co-ordinating team soon afterwards.

### *Companionship*

One of the great needs while people are in isolation will be for some sort of human contact to lift people's spirits and help ease loneliness. Friends in isolation can be encouraged to establish a routine of calling each other, but it will be helpful if all those in isolation have contact details for a few people who are not self-isolating, and guidelines for what to do if they are getting no answer from another self-isolating person they are in contact with.

- Self-isolating people can offer to be a phone buddy for others – this may help give a sense of purpose to the time in isolation.
- People without friends able to maintain regular phone contact (or who would appreciate additional contact) can be linked by the co-ordinating team with those offering as buddies.
- For those that have video call technology (skype, whatsapp etc) it might be helpful to try to link with others who use this, as a video call can feel more of a personal contact.
- The coordinating team acts as the point of contact for any difficulties, e.g. someone not getting an answer from their buddy; anything in the conversation that is making them feel uncomfortable, overwhelmed; concerns for the wellbeing or safety of another person.
- All contacts (those requesting a buddy, as well as volunteers) should be given a set of safeguarding guidelines to help them have the confidence to pass on any difficulties or concerns. This should include contact details for emergency services and other front-line services. [need to draft something for this]
- The co-ordinating team needs to keep a list of those not self-isolating in order to be able to ask someone to go in person if needed to follow up a concern. This list needs to be regularly updated to take account of changing circumstances.

### **6.4.3 Visiting adults at home**

- Most visits to adults in their own home will be straightforward as they will be well known to the church. However, when visiting someone new for the first time, visitors should let someone else know whom they are visiting (and when).
- Visiting in twos may be advisable, especially if the adult lacks capacity. It is also advisable to take a mobile phone.
- Do not call unannounced. Call by appointment, telephoning the person just before visiting if appropriate.
- Be clear about what support can be offered to the adult if they ask for help with particular problems and refer back to the church if uncertain.
- Do not make referrals to any agency that could provide help without the adult's permission, and ideally encourage them to set up the contact.
- Never offer 'over the counter' remedies to people on visits or administer prescribed medicines, even if asked to do so (also relates to Section 6.11 Health).
- Do not accept any gifts from adults other than token items, to avoid misunderstandings or subsequent accusations from the person or their family. If someone wants to make a donation to the church, put it in an envelope, mark it on the outside as a donation and obtain a receipt from the treasurer (this also relates to Section 6.10 Financial integrity).
- Pastoral visitors [...] should note the date when they visit people, [...] report [...] their visit to the pastoral secretary and say what is concerning or going well. The pastoral secretary will report safeguarding concerns to the minister and safeguarding officer as appropriate, and agree what action should take place and who should record the incident.