



Engaging Disadvantaged Young People Through #COVID19



The COVID-19 crisis is taking its toll on everyone, especially vulnerable young people. It's magnifying the isolation many already feel, increasing their vulnerability, and leaving students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds even further behind.

The National Youth Agency says more than three million young people will need increased support once lockdown measures are eased.¹

- Only **5% of the 29,000** vulnerable children known to be at risk by social services were in school before Easter.²
- **One million** young people (8–19) have self-reported mental health issues.³
- **Over a million** young people face risks from the 'toxic trio' – living in households with addiction, poor mental health and domestic abuse.⁴
- There are **83,000** young people living in temporary accommodation while 380,000 are homeless or at risk of homelessness.⁵
- Sutton Trust recently reported that, "The closure of schools is likely to have a considerable impact for all pupils, but the **largest impact** is likely to fall on those from the **poorest families**."⁶

This comes at a time when many youth workers have been furloughed by youth charities or redeployed to other jobs from local authority youth services. Within this context, schools, youth workers/groups, churches, parents and other voluntary agencies have a key role in supporting and engaging with disadvantaged young people during this pandemic and beyond.

WHAT YOUR CHURCH CAN DO

1. **Adapt your youth programme**
2. **Online safeguarding**
3. **Supporting mental health**
4. **Supporting parents**
5. **Helping the most vulnerable**

¹ <https://nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Out-of-Sight-COVID-19-report-Web-version.pdf>

² <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/apr/21/just-5-of-vulnerable-children-were-in-school-in-england-last-week>

³ <http://www.tagpalycw.org/newsblog/2020/4/29/out-of-sight-vulnerable-young-people-covid-19-response>

⁴ <https://nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Out-of-Sight-COVID-19-report-Web-version.pdf>

⁵ <https://nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Out-of-Sight-COVID-19-report-Web-version.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.suttontrust.com/>



1. Adapt your youth programme



Table football tournaments, bowling trips and movie nights may seem like another age, but, with advances in technology, there are lots of ways to stay connected with young people.

- **Stay in touch** – Use Zoom, WhatsApp and other tools to keep in touch with young people and their parents. Developing a regular pattern of contact can be helpful.
- **Give young people space to talk** – Don't presume you know what young people are worried about. Make sure you ask them and give them space to respond.
- **Keep praying** – It may seem obvious, but continue to pray for your young people and their families by name.
- **Safeguarding is a priority** -Even though you're no longer meeting face to face, safeguarding has to remain a key priority, so don't cut corners. If you're unsure what best practice to use when communicating with young people remotely, check out the resources below.

Youth Scape - www.youthscape.co.uk/coronavirus

Our friends at **Youth Scape** have developed a whole range of resources to help churches safely engage with young people in their church.

They have an amazing tool called "**Coronavirus: A youth ministry liveblog**" with plenty of tips to help you engage with young people in your church in way that is relevant and helpful at this time.

We also want to extend a **BIG THANK YOU** to Youth Scape for helping to put together the poll questions used in our webinar on Engaging Disadvantaged Youth People.

2. Online safeguarding



During lockdown, young people are spending more time than ever on screens. While this can be helpful in completing schoolwork or keeping in touch with their friends, they are also more vulnerable to negative messages, explicit content and online exploitation.

- **Help parents understand the risks** – It's hard for everyone to get to grips with the sudden explosion in social media and the vast range of online content. Use the resources below to help parents understand the risks their children face.
- **Talk to young people openly** – Don't presume you know what young people in your church are doing online. Take time to chat to them and understand what they like doing and why.
- **Set ground rules** – Encourage your young people to think about how they can use the internet and social media safely. Involve them in the process so they make the right decisions for themselves.

Think U Know - www.thinkuknow.co.uk

The National Crimes Agency Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command (CEOP) have a website which is suitable for children aged 5-16 and a section just for parents/carers with advice and information.

Internet Matters - www.internetmatters.org

Find plenty of information on specific issues such as setting up devices safely, screen time, cyber-bullying, and sexting.

UK Safer Internet Centre - reportharmfulcontent.com

Use this website to report and remove harmful online content.

CEOP - www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre/

Provides information about where you can report online abuse.

ChildLine - www.childline.org.uk

The ChildLine website has a wide range of info and advice on both online and offline safety. There is info about online gaming, grooming which can be shared with children. They also provide a helpline for children: 0800 1111.

3. Supporting mental health



Young people are facing disruption to their routines, disconnection from their friends alongside anxiety about their health and their future. It all takes a toll on their mental health, which needs to be prioritized.

- **Listen without judgement** – Don't presume you know what's worrying young people or think you have the answers. Make sure you listen to their concerns without judgement.
- **Build in therapeutic activities** – Encourage young people to have a designated workspace, develop a routine, and build other activities into their day such as cooking, exercise or arts and crafts.
- **Know where to go for help** – You might not have all the answers your young people need. If you are seriously worried about their mental health, you should put them in touch with professional services.
- **Things won't bounce back to normal** – Even when lockdown ends, life won't return to normal. Young people may go through something akin to a grieving process as they adjust, so bear this in mind when planning your youth activities in the future.

Childline – www.childline.org.uk

The ChildLine website has a wide range of info and advice on both online and offline safety. They also provide a helpline for children: 0800 1111

Kooth – www.kooth.com

Kooth provides free, safe and anonymous support to young people struggling with their mental health. Once your child has created an account, they can read articles for young people about wellbeing, track how they feel each day, and even send a message to the team for additional support.

Young Minds – www.youngminds.org.uk

Young Minds provide plenty of tips and advice on supporting mental health during COVID-19. They also have a helpline for parents who are concerned about their children: 0808 802 5544.

Edusafe – www.educare.co.uk/edusafe-cyp

Here, you'll find here short interactive modules to read on topics such as bereavement, anxiety, substance misuse, low mood, self-harm, and healthy relationships.

Mind – www.mind.org.uk

Has some great advice on practical steps young people can take to safeguard their mental health, and how parents can best support them.



4. Helping the most vulnerable



Students from disadvantaged backgrounds are twice as likely to leave formal education without their GCSE in Maths and English. Due to COVID19, school closures and the resultant online learning, this is likely to widen.⁷

When lockdown ends, churches can play a significant role in supporting and mentoring young people within their communities.

- **Support schools** - Through organisations like TLG churches can build partnerships with schools and provide mentoring support to young people who need additional support.
- **Draw on expertise in your church** - Within your own church, you'll have plenty of expertise to draw upon. Work with teachers, educators and social workers in your congregation to better understand the needs of young people.
- **Work in partnership with others** - Organisations like First Class Legacy can help you to connect with wider civic agencies, like the police, social services and the criminal justice system to see how you can support each other.
- **Start where you are** - Don't be too ambitious. Start by identifying the needs within your own network and drawing on resources you have to meet them. In time, you can extend your support further afield.

First Class Legacy - www.fclegacy.co.uk

First Class Legacy provide training and support for anyone seeking to engage with hard to reach young people and can be contacted on tel: 07462236868 e-mail :info@fclegacy.co.uk

TLG - tlg.org.uk

TLG help the church to engage with young people who are at risk of exclusion or may have already been excluded by setting up an alternative provision school and see them reintegrated, having been given the support that they require.

Youth Scape - www.youthscape.co.uk

Youth Scape provides plenty of advice to help youth workers engage with young people from a variety of backgrounds. They also run regular training days and provide ongoing support for youth teams.

⁷ Suttontrust.com



5. Supporting parents



It's not just young people who are struggling – so are their parents. Many are juggling working from home with educating their children and getting up to speed on the range of risks and vulnerabilities that their young people are now exposed to.

- **Peer support** – Peer support is great for young people and their parents too. Consider providing a forum where parents can openly share their worries and concerns.
- **Bring your truth** – Encourage a sense of openness in your church about the struggles people are going through. Everyone is in a different situation, but when leaders are open about their own challenges, it puts others at ease.
- **Encourage them to take care of themselves** – With so many other commitments, parents often forget to take care of their own wellbeing. Encourage them to schedule time for themselves and to be realistic about what they should be achieving.
- **Signpost other resources** – The resources shared here can also be helpful to parents as they navigate their way through these challenging times. It's worth just reiterating that no one has all the answers, so it's OK to ask for help and parents should be encouraged to reach out if they are struggling.

Kitchen Table Talks – www.sabrinadenis.org

Sabrina provides advice on how to facilitate productive discussions and support for parents within an informal setting.

NSPCC – www.nspcc.org.uk

The NSPCC have some great tools to help parents balance the multiple pressures they face during COVID-19.

*We hope the website links we've shared will be useful to you. It's worth just mentioning that we're not responsible for the information they share.