



9 steps to re-opening Quaker meeting houses and worship spaces safely

17 June 2020 Version 2.0

Introduction	1
Step 1: Plan to Decide.....	3
Step 2: Plan the Space.....	4
Step 3: Plan the Equipment.....	5
Step 4: Plan the People.....	6
Step 5: Prepare your community.....	7
Should I come to meeting for worship in person, or stay at home?.....	7
Step 6: Plan for Before Worship.....	8
Step 7: Plan for During Worship.....	8
Step 8: Plan for After Worship.....	9
Step 9: Plan for Problems	9
Appendix 1 Key decisions for re-opening the meeting house.....	10
Appendix 2 Link to risk assessment	11

Introduction

This guide is to help Quakers across Britain Yearly Meeting carefully plan and decide when and how to reopen places of worship for communal worship, whilst maintaining the safety and wellbeing of our communities during the Coronavirus pandemic.

Restrictions are being eased in different parts of Britain at different stages. You need to consult government guidance about re-opening, and about when you are permitted to re-open for worship, alongside this guide. The UK Government published [guidance for England on 12 June](#). We presume here that guidance for other jurisdictions will be similar.

Where places of worship are permitted to open for individual prayer only (as in the 12 June guidance above) this does not allow Quaker meetings for worship, which are communal. This guide is focused on planning for the later stage: opening for communal worship.

This guide has been prepared by Britain Yearly Meeting staff, with the benefit of insights and ideas shared by Quakers in recent weeks. It borrows heavily from a similar document produced by the Muslim Council of Britain (for which our grateful thanks), adapted for the Quaker context and the 12 June guidance.

The guide is a non-exhaustive list of considerations. You need to interpret it according to the needs and circumstances of your local community and your buildings. It is focused mainly on opening for worship, so meeting houses with multiple users will need to consider their users too. See also our [Advice to Trustees](#). You can also use this guide if you rent your meeting's worship space.

Making decisions about re-opening meeting houses and places may be very challenging. People may have very different perspectives and experiences of the pandemic. Many people cannot visit a meeting place at all at the moment, because of medical concerns. That might affect the value of re-opening, if attendance will be small, or some people feel excluded. It might also affect the number of people who could help with tasks. There is a wealth of new guidance to consider, and some complex issues. Some people will be very uncomfortable with re-opening now, perhaps for reasons of personal health, or out of concern for others. So we must not pressure one another, either to agree a decision or to participate in the work needed to re-open.

Our Quaker structures and relationships have not faced these decisions before. If you do want to go ahead, remember that this is a local decision, but not only a local decision: area meeting trustees hold the legal responsibility for safety. Decisions on re-opening need agreement by area meeting trustees as well.

We need to listen for the guidance of the spirit.

The general advice 'Do not rush' is valuable. We need to pay attention to relationships and people. While we will soon have the opportunity to re-open, this does not necessarily mean that we should, nor that we must do it as soon as possible.

Remember, Quaker worship does not depend on buildings, on sacred spaces, or special times.

"...true significance lies not in the grounds and buildings but in the people: those who tend the flowers, the grass and the allotment; members of the poetry group (some of whom gave pleasure by readings after supper); the study groups; the gathering of younger people; those whose activities lie in other places..."

Quaker faith & practice 10.08 (part) William G Sewell, 1977

Care of our premises is an important and sometimes exacting responsibility, which should be exercised by or on behalf of the meeting to which it belongs.

Quaker faith & practice 14.25 (part)

Step 1: Plan to Decide

<p>Read the government guidance</p> <p>England published here Scotland Wales Other jurisdictions</p>	<p>Liase with Trustees</p> <p>Area meeting trustees hold the legal responsibility for safety. Decisions on opening need agreement by area meeting trustees in addition to the local meeting.</p>	<p>Appoint COVID-19 Safety Co-ordinator and Team</p> <p>Set up a team within the meeting with a clear co-ordinator.</p>
<p>Get Insurance Advice</p> <p>Get in touch with your insurance company regarding liabilities and coverage. This is normally via an area meeting trustee or treasurer.</p>	<p>Undertake Risk Assessment</p> <p>Undertake a risk assessment. Walk through the building and work out all possible points where things can go wrong and what you will do to stop that happening.</p> <p>See 'Model risk assessment' (Word)</p>	<p>Document decisions</p> <p>Your COVID-19 policy could be a minute of area meeting or trustees setting out the principles of your approach being: safe, healthy, effective and sustainable. Minute other decisions and/or record in risk assessment.</p>
	<p>Decide What and How to Open</p> <p>If choosing to open, make decisions on how you plan to open.</p> <p>See the key decisions list in Appendix 1.</p>	<p>Make the Final Decision When To Open</p> <p>Make a decision on when to open or not, based on risk assessment and specialist advice or considerations above - it is okay to say that you do not feel ready yet. The decision needs agreement by the local meeting and by area meeting trustees, and to be permitted by government guidance.</p>

Step 2: Plan the Space

<p>Outdoors or Indoors</p> <p>Consider if public outdoor space is available for worship. Be aware that the whole of a place of worship is subject to the same restrictions on worship, whether inside or outside.</p>	<p>Calculate maximum safe capacity</p> <p>Calculate with social distancing in each room. Typically this is 15-20% of normal maximum.</p>	<p>Seating spaces</p> <p>Re-arrange furniture. Remove surplus seats where possible. Mark spaces with signs – show the open and closed seats.</p>
<p>Close non-essential spaces</p> <p>Close all non-essential spaces eg kitchen, committee rooms.</p>	<p>Open alternative rooms</p> <p>Consider using alternative or extra rooms.</p>	<p>Adjust toilets</p> <p>Close some urinals, basins, and cubicles to enable social distancing. Consider re-allocating toilets. Add cleaning equipment and signs.</p>
<p>Plan for handwashing</p> <p>Plan for multiple people washing hands, or using hand sanitiser, on entry and exit. Plan how long it may take. Put up signs and posters about technique and frequency. Paper towels are preferable for drying.</p>	<p>Remove items</p> <p>Remove books, pamphlets, unnecessary furniture, any communal objects. Consider covering bookshelves. Remove facilities for children (play corners, books, toys) - as specified in government guidance.</p>	<p>Plan and mark entrances, exits and routes</p> <p>If possible have separate entrances and exits in a one-way system to avoid bottlenecks. Open alternative entry/exit points. Have clear signs and floor markings. Consider disabled access.</p>
<p>Ensure good ventilation</p> <p>Keep windows and doors open and ensure good ventilation.</p>	<p>Plan the cleaning</p> <p>Make sure there is a plan for cleaning, including touch points: door handles, light switches, stair rails, microphones, taps and washing facilities, toilet flush and seats, etc using standard cleaning products. See government cleaning guidance and guidance on cleaning historic surfaces.</p>	

Step 3: Plan the Equipment

<p>Building re-configuration</p> <p>Signage - eg one-way arrows, closed rooms, seats for use / non-use. Floor tape - eg for queueing, separate routes. Barrier tape - eg for closed areas / seating. Perspex screens - eg in reception/office workspaces.</p>	<p>Public health information / new rules</p> <p>Printed posters eg for entrance and exit doors, noticeboards. Electronic displays. Leaflet / flyer to hand out, one for each person.</p>	<p>Disposables & PPE (Personal Protective Equipment)</p> <p>Face coverings, gloves, aprons, for volunteers. Hand sanitiser, tissues, at entrances and exits. Black rubbish sacks. Closed-lid pedal bins.</p>
<p>Cleaning products</p> <p>Vacuums, mops, dusters suitable for deep cleaning. Detergent / disinfectant products and sprays. Cloths, commercial blue roll, other consumables for surface wiping etc.</p>	<p>Worshippers bringing own equipment</p> <p>Face coverings. Books: <i>Quaker faith & practice</i>, <i>Advices & queries</i>, Bible - or use mobile phone / tablet Water bottles Rubbish bags – to remove own waste, disposables</p>	<p>Blending online and physical worship</p> <p>This can enable more to worship together. See advice on blended worship.</p>
<p>Donations</p> <p>Use online payments, or contactless payment card machine.</p>	<p>Outdoor play equipment</p> <p>Remains closed (see government guidance)</p>	<p>Building improvements to consider in medium to long term</p> <p>Contactless sensor taps, or taps turned by elbows. Automatic doors. Automatic fire door closers. Automatic light switches.</p>

Step 4: Plan the People

<p>COVID-19 Safety Co-ordinator, Team and Deputies</p> <p>Allocate these roles. Build the teamwork.</p>	<p>Covid-10 safety rota</p> <p>Produce a rota for worship and other times</p>	<p>Consider crowd control</p> <p>If necessary, allocate someone at the entrance to manage crowding and queueing, separate from the person welcoming. Consider exit crowding too.</p>
<p>Brief people welcoming at entrances</p> <p>Brief about having a short conversation with each person arriving at entrances (see below)</p>	<p>Brief people on managing queues</p> <p>For entrances and exits.</p>	<p>Decide about provision for children and young people</p> <p>Consider what activities are reasonable, numbers and social distancing.</p>
<p>Train people on PPE</p> <p>Train in donning and doffing PPE where appropriate.</p>	<p>Train people on briefing the community and building users</p> <p>Train on how to brief about the changes.</p>	<p>Train people on venue cleaning</p> <p>How to clean / disinfect venues</p>

5 steps for a short conversation with each person at the entrance:

1. Smile and welcome.
2. I'm asking everyone whether they have a high temperature, a new continuous cough, or loss or change to your sense of smell or taste?
3. Smile again! Are you at high risk from COVID-19, or is someone at home?
4. Explain arrangements for handwashing / sanitising and toilets.
5. Explain about one-way system and where to exit.

Step 5: Prepare your community

<p>Raise whether to come to worship in person</p> <p>Make it clear who should stay at home, who has higher priority for worship in person, and who has lower priority. (see below).</p>	<p>Ask people to bring their own books for worship</p> <p><i>Quaker faith & practice</i> <i>Advices & queries</i> Bible Others</p>	<p>Ask people to bring their own possessions</p> <p>Face coverings are optional. Water bottle Rubbish bag</p>
<p>Explain about toilets</p> <p>Remind about going to the toilet at home. Explain what toilets will be available and priorities.</p>	<p>Explain about provision for children and young people</p> <p>Include options online and with other meetings.</p>	<p>Communicate</p> <p>Use phone calls, email, social media, website and printed posters.</p>

Should I come to meeting for worship in person, or stay at home?

Situation	Explanation	Advice
<p>Fairness and inclusion:</p> <p>Do you have less need to meet for worship in person than other people?</p> <p>By attending, might you be unintentionally excluding others?</p>	<p>People who are not able to use the internet, or are very isolated, or children, or have a particular need, may have higher priority for the limited seats than you do. Whose experience of worship is most enhanced by worship in person?</p> <p>Can you worship online, or separately, or outdoors?</p> <p>Do your circumstances and social contacts give you less need to attend?</p>	<p>Preferably stay at home, to leave space for others.</p>
<p>Are you at increased risk, or living with anyone who is?</p>	<p>70+ years, certain medical conditions: see NHS guidance</p>	<p>Home</p>
<p>Do you have any COVID-19 symptoms?</p>	<p>Cough, and/or high temperature, and/or loss of, or change in, your normal sense of smell or taste</p>	<p>Home</p>
<p>Are you frontline staff in contact with patients?</p>	<p>Doctors, nurses and other staff working in clinical settings. Evidence shows that many of them may have COVID-19 without realising it due to increased exposure.</p>	<p>Home</p>
<p>Are you unable to socially distance?</p>	<p>Some people may struggle to maintain social distancing, including some young children.</p>	<p>Home</p>

Step 6: Plan for Before Worship

<p>Plan entrances and exits</p> <p>Try to have separate entrances and exits. Keep doors open so people do not need to touch doors (except fire doors).</p>	<p>Plan the queues</p> <p>If possible, put temporary markings on floor outside to separate queues.</p>	<p>Consider basic screening</p> <p>Consider some form of basic screening at entrance. (See 5 steps for screening, above)</p>
<p>Plan for hand-washing</p> <p>Be clear about expectations and provision. Calculate how long it may take. Are there other sinks available?</p>	<p>Plan for toilets</p> <p>Be clear about whether and how toilets are to be used.</p>	<p>Plan on one-way system</p> <p>To reduce contact and avoid bottlenecks.</p>
<p>Consider a pre-booking system</p> <p>Consider having a system of allocating the reduced number of seats, eg by email, online, first come first served.</p>	<p>Consider staggering entrance and departure times</p> <p>Some people arriving early or leaving late reduces the flow.</p>	

Step 7: Plan for During Worship

<p>Allocate seats</p> <p>Mark which seats are to be used and which not.</p>	<p>Allocate routes and order</p> <p>Maximum safe capacity may only be possible if people take seats in a certain order, or use routes which may need marking.</p>	<p>Water</p> <p>Ask everyone to bring a water bottle instead of providing water.</p>
<p>Blended online and physical worship</p> <p>Make arrangements: see advice on blended worship</p>	<p>Books</p> <p>Do not put out books as usual.</p>	

Step 8: Plan for After Worship

<p>No handshakes or hugs</p> <p>Smiles and waves say a lot.</p>	<p>Reminders</p> <p>Give a reminder about safety and leaving after the meeting.</p>	<p>No refreshments</p> <p>These are not currently permitted by government guidance, and unlikely to be feasible for a period.</p>
<p>Alternatives to many conversations</p> <p>Encourage one large group conversation, still seated. Ask for joys and concerns; use Afterword. Give notices. Encourage leaving.</p>	<p>Limit conversations</p> <p>Socialising may present the highest transmission risk. Maintain social distancing. Side by side is better than facing. Short times reduce the risks.</p>	<p>Outdoors rather than indoors</p> <p>Risks are lower outdoors.</p>
<p>Donations</p> <p>Use online / contactless.</p>	<p>Clear disposed PPE etc.</p> <p>Remove rubbish bags.</p>	<p>Cleaning</p> <p>Clean if part of plan.</p>

Step 9: Plan for Problems

<p>How do we support those who do not come to meeting for worship?</p> <p>Consider how to support those who do not attend, for whatever reason.</p>	<p>How do we open in a fair manner?</p> <p>Make sure your re-opening ensures fair access, for example people living alone, people without access to technology, people who are disabled.</p>	<p>What if someone complains?</p> <p>Plan for how to manage complaints from those who disagree with plans.</p>
<p>What if someone does not follow our arrangements?</p> <p>Plan for how to manage this, and who will respond.</p>	<p>What if someone is COVID-19 positive?</p> <p>Plan for what happens if someone tests positive after coming to worship (see section 3 of guidance for England on 12 June)</p>	<p>What about contact tracing?</p> <p>Consider whether to keep a list of those entering for contact tracing, in a GDPR or data governance compliant way.</p>
<p>How do we continue with other activities?</p> <p>Plan on how essential activities and community activities can continue in a safe manner.</p>	<p>Re-assess and review</p> <p>Set up regular reviews, in the light of experience.</p>	

Appendix 1 Key decisions for re-opening the meeting house

Overall

- How far ahead are we planning for?
- Who will be our COVID-19 Safety Co-ordinator, Deputies, and the team to organise arrangements?
- Which activities / users (Quaker and non-Quaker) will open and in what order?
- How will we keep the meeting financially stable?
- What combination will we have for worship: at home separately; online; physically together; blended online and physical worship; outdoors; several in parallel?

Spaces, times, people

- What is the maximum safe capacity of the meeting spaces?
- Shall we have worship in more than one room? Outdoors? Connected?
- Who needs priority for attending worship in person? How to manage this?
- What provision shall we make for children and young people?
- How often and at what times (of day and week) to hold worship?
- Shall we meet for longer, with people coming in/out, so more can worship?
- Shall we provide dedicated times for individual attendance at the meeting house by those particularly vulnerable to COVID-19, if they would find it especially comforting?
- Shall we keep a list of attendees (for contact tracing)?
- How will we provide PPE?

Ready for decisions?

- Is our cleaning plan sufficient and reasonable?
- Is our risk assessment satisfactory?
- Are we confident we will be ready to safely adhere to government guidelines?
- What date to open the building (at all)?
- What date to first open the building for worship?
- How will we communicate with our worshipping community?
- How will we handle complaints or disagreements?
- How will we review our plans?

Appendix 2 Link to risk assessment

A Meeting House / Worship Space COVID-19 Risk Assessment Supplement is available here: [‘Model risk assessment’ \(Word\)](#)

This uses the same format as the risk assessment in the Meeting House Handbook template, which is available on the [‘Property advice’ page of the BYM website](#).