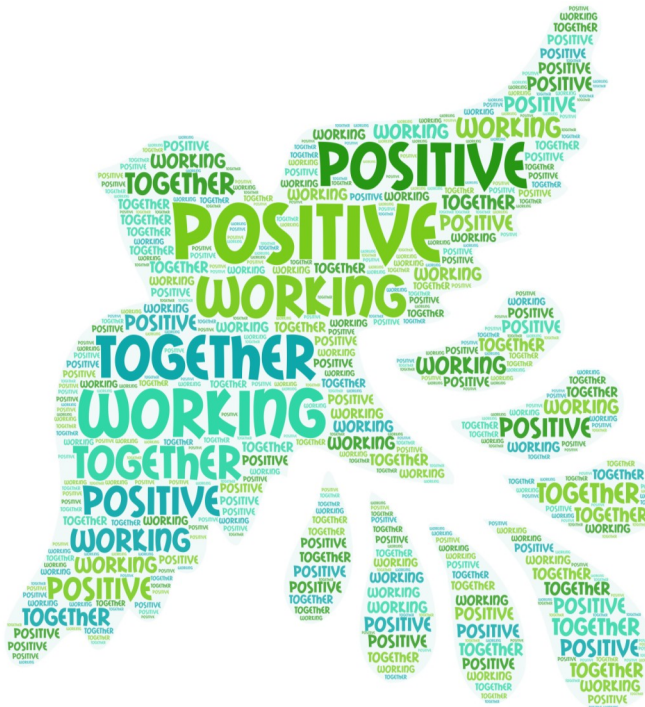


Birmingham Methodist Circuit

Positive Working Together Booklet 2019



Using Positive Working Together



About This Booklet

This booklet is a supplementary guide to the Positive Working Together policy of the Methodist Church and is designed to work alongside their documentation. It is produced by Birmingham Methodist Circuit for use within its organisation and churches and it is shared for the benefit of other churches, circuits and districts around the country.

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1. Introduction

Positive Working Together was adopted by Methodist Conference 2015 and establishes a 'code of conduct' or 'shared commitment' to how we behave together, as Methodists, in the lives of our churches. The intention is not to stifle discussion or disagreements (which approached creatively lead to new ideas) but to make it clear that as people in the Methodist Church, we can agree or disagree and still always be kind, respectful, thoughtful, and gentle in the process. Positive Working Together covers face-to-face behaviours and also our behaviour online and on the phone.



2. What does this mean in practice?

Its adoption in 2015 means that positive working together outlines the expectation for how people should interact in Methodist churches around the country. It explains how we need to consider how we communicate and how we treat one another. The cards we have put together for use sum it up in the following way:

Each person is equally important to God and must be treated with respect. The Methodist Church is an inclusive church that seeks to work collaboratively and recognises the challenges that difference can bring.

OUR COMMITMENT is to:

- listen carefully to each other;*
- speak & act respectfully at all times;*
- be courteous in all communication;*
- encourage openness & confidence in our relationships;*
- never use verbal or physical intimidation in our relationships;*
- deal positively with one another even when we disagree*

This commitment is useful throughout church life, but potentially very useful where conflict needs to be resolved. Birmingham Circuit is therefore keen for every church to get to know this document properly and have it in regular sight and use in the life of their church life. This intention, launched at the Circuit Assembly in September 2019, will be shared in detail with church councils so that they can embrace this as a healthy baseline expectation whether at a Sunday Service, Church Council Meeting, or any other element of part of church life.



3. Ways to help your Church understand and use Positive Working Together:

Introduce it to your church council

Key things to explain might include that:

- This was adopted by the Methodist Church in 2015 – we are all ‘opted in’ and need to act on Positive Working Together
- Everyone needs to be familiar with the whole policy, and particularly with the ‘Shared Commitment’ which explains how we behave with each other day-to-day in church life, including email, social media and all means of communication
- It gives us the framework to create a healthy, inclusive, safe, open space to be able to share, worship, and grow together in God without fear
- We can remind each other of the Shared Commitment when/if necessary and get each other ‘back on track’

Include it with documentation

Make the documentation clearly available

It is helpful to put the Shared Commitment up on your church notice board with the Safeguarding Policy so that everyone can refer to it

Make it central to documentation you create

A key way to make it front and centre in your church would be to include the Shared Commitment sheet in the role descriptions you produce and share in church for all roles.

4. Using Positive Working Together in Study and Worship

The most helpful way to get Positive Working Together talked about through the lives of your church is to encourage people to discuss and study it within the context of their worship and discipleship. Some ideas for how to do this are below.



Bible studies/home-groups

A great way to encourage each other to think through the issues raised in Positive Working Together are by engaging them with bible passages and themes which help us to do this. Suggestions below to get you started:

Passage 1: 1 Kings 19: 11-13

Things to ponder and discuss:

1. How can we ensure that we hear all people – the ‘earthquake’, ‘wind’, ‘fire’ and the ‘still small voice’?
2. Are there people in our community who are always quick to speak and are always heard, and others who are not? How could we change that?
3. How can we ensure that everyone is able to share and be heard? What would it take for someone shy or nervous to feel able to share their ideas?

Passage 2: Colossians 3: 1-17

To ponder and discuss:

1. As you read/listen, are there any parts of this reading you find particularly challenging?
2. What do the behaviours in verses 5-9 have in common?
3. Verses 10-15 seem to describe ‘relationship utopia’ – how can any of this become real in our churches and communities?
4. If we are to live this out, what resources does this passage explain that we have?

Passage 3: Matthew 18: 1-5

To ponder and discuss:

1. What do these verses tell us about Jesus’ ideas of power and importance?
2. What qualities of ‘childlikeness’ would be helpful in church life?

Positive Working Together

Text 1: From the Positive Working Together long report

“Positive working together is viewed through the lens of three key themes: a shared humanity, journeying together in learning and understanding and humanity’s need of God’s grace.” (PWT, long report, page 7).

To ponder and discuss:

1. When is it easy to agree to these key themes? How do we respond when other people make it difficult to believe in a shared humanity or we stop wanting to journey together?
2. How could the Shared Commitment help us to work through this?

Leading worship

Another effective way to cover this topic across the breadth of your church is to cover the theme in a service, perhaps as an Own Arrangement or having asked your Minister to support you with it.

Materials:

In the sections below are provided resources to help you with covering this topic within worship. We suggest you use the passages and study questions in the previous section as a theological starting point.

Hymns

The following hymns may be useful in a Positive Working Together themed service, note they are deliberately not including hymns which bid that ‘we all agree’ because Positive Working Together encourages kind, healthy, sharing, which can include disagreements and different ideas:

From Singing the Faith:

- 242 A New Commandment
- 395 Spirit of the living God
- 471 Lord I come to you
- 478 Thank you, O God, for the time that is now
- 615 Let love be real
- 619 Thanks for friends who keep on loving
- 620 Thou God of truth and love
- 627 Everyone needs compassion
(Mighty to Save)
- 649 God! When human bonds are broken
- 656 When the bonds of love are breaking
- 676 Christ, from whom all blessings flow



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Communion liturgy, prayers and blessings:

We note here that suggestions can be found in 'Positive Working Together, long report', pages 37 to the end (appendix 4, the final pages of the report) on this topic.

Exploring Positive Working Together with Children

Reading stories to individuals or groups of children and then having an age-appropriate discussion may be a good place to start. Here are some suggestions:

The Squirrels who Squabbled:

Greedy squirrels Cyril and Bruce both have their sights on a very special prize: THE VERY LAST NUT OF THE SEASON! As the nut bounces crazily through the forest, the squirrels race after it, between the trees, over boulders, down the river and - ARGH! - right to the edge of a waterfall! Working together might be the only way to save themselves now ...

To ponder and discuss:

1. What did the squirrels do when they both wanted the same thing?
2. What nearly happened because they tried to each be first?
3. What happened when they worked together?

Elmer the Elephant

Elmer is different. Elmer is patchwork. The grey elephants all love him, but he soon starts to wonder what it would be like to be just the same as them...

To ponder and discuss:

1. What was it like for Elmer to be different?
2. How is it for us if we have ideas that are different to other people?
3. Elmer shows us that everyone is important – whether they are the same and have similar ideas to other people, or whether they are different and have different ideas to other people. How can we make sure we value everyone and listen to everyone's ideas?

The Very Hungry Caterpillar

The caterpillar eats and eats his way through pages of food. He seems almost greedy, then we realise that he was eating to gain energy to become a beautiful butterfly.

To ponder and discuss:

1. The caterpillar eats and eats – what might the other insects think of him/her?
2. Sometimes we don't realise or understand what someone else is doing or why. It is easy to think bad things about people (like, 'the caterpillar is very greedy and eats too much') but often there is a reason. What could we do to understand people and help them to understand us?

Positive Working Together

Positive Working Together with young people

Why not use some time in a youth session to introduce the themes and ideas of Positive Working Together, particularly the Shared Commitment. This is a sensitive subject, so please ensure your group is ready for this discussion and that you have a 'safe space' for your young people to go to if they need some time out. Below are some suggestions:



Rainbow arc/continuum:

Adapted from Connexional Positive Working Together Training

Ask the group to make a 'rainbow' arc on how they deal with disagreements. One end of the arc is 'I withdraw, go quiet, hope it will go away', the other end is 'I get angry, shout, and make clear that I am annoyed'. Do this in a light-hearted way.

Discuss our differences and ask how we might need to work out a way to make church life/young people's group a 'safe space' for everyone on this 'rainbow'. (e.g. getting angry and having 'a good shout' will not create a safe space for people who withdraw and hope it will go away). The hope is that they will come up with ideas along the lines of the Shared Commitment – when they have their list of ideas, you could show them that sheet and ask how this would help.

What does and doesn't help:

Ask them to imagine a disagreement (or if you feel it's appropriate, have a drama of a disagreement which is a civil debate but with no resolution) – ask what would help them when there is a disagreement – what do they wish the other person/people would do to help?

It's completely normal that we're all different, and most of us are growing and changing – even adults – and different situations bring different responses.

On a shared sheet/flipchart or in small groups, ask the young people to write 2 lists 'what helps in disagreements' and 'what doesn't help'.

Discuss. Compare to the Shared Commitment and discuss how it can be used.



Positive Working Together

Tweets and follows:

Ask the group where they are most involved in social media (e.g. twitter, Instagram, snapchat, Facebook, emails, blogs, YouTube, websites etc)

What do you like most about these? Have you ever felt picked on or 'got at' online? Have you ever removed a post because someone else commented or posted an emoji about it that upset you or you didn't like? (or has a friend of yours told you about this).



Discuss in small groups: 'It can be easy to say things online that someone wouldn't say face to face.;

To ponder and discuss:

Is this true? Have you any examples (your own or a friends).

If you were writing 5 points to guide Christians using social media, what would they be?

Then introduce Positive Working Together and the Shared Commitment. Show that it covers all activity online as well as in person and in writing. What do your group think of this? How does it fit with the 5 guidance points the groups have written?

Changing views?

Sometimes disagreements mean that we get to hear a different perspective and a different idea. Sometimes those ideas and perspectives can even teach us something. Sometimes we can teach something by sharing too.

In small groups: can you think of a time when you had a disagreement with someone, but then you got talking and one or both of you found out something new that changed your thinking or helped you understand the other person/people better?

Discuss. Introduce Positive Working Together and the Shared Commitment – explain that the hope is that having a commitment to behave well, kindly, respectfully, positively with each other at all times, will mean that everyone feels safe to share perspectives and ideas and where they think God is leading.

Safety:

Ask everyone to think of a place they feel happy and safe. Share in small groups.

On a shared sheet/flipchart list: What would a 'safe space to share ideas' be like?

We all come from different home backgrounds but in church life, for everyone to feel safe, we can't all just 'do what we do at home' or just 'do what we like'. Positive Working Together's Shared Commitment is designed to help church be a safe space for everyone. Not because we all agree, but because we behave in safe ways.

Positive Working Together

Films to explore the theme:

If you have legal means to show a film, these are suggestions of films and questions for discussion afterwards:

12 Angry men:

To ponder and discuss:

1. How was conflict used in the group?
2. How did one person ensure they were heard?
3. How do these methods compare to the Shared Commitment in 'Positive Working Together'?

Shrek:

To ponder and discuss:

1. How is Shrek's behaviour at the start of the film affected by how he thinks other people view him? How does this change in the film?
2. How does Shrek learn to be his true self?
3. How does Fiona learn to be her true self?
4. What can this film teach us about the relationship between feeling unloved/different/outcast and behaviour in social situations?

Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory

To ponder and discuss:

1. How did Willy Wonka behave towards his 'winners' and their parents?
2. How much did conflict play a part in the selection process? How did Willy Wonka respond to that or encourage it?



5. Helpful Case Studies to Discuss

You could use the below case studies in a church council, discussion group or home group to think in practical ways about Positive Working Together. Positive Working Together already makes a difference where Churches are engaging with it. These have been anonymised but are based on real events and outcomes.

Case Study to consider: 1

"Petra got off the phone from Ted. He'd been shouting at her about something to do with church and she was in tears, having felt attacked and intimidated. Petra had been bullied in the past and this felt awful, like it could all happen again. A few days later, Ted's friend, John, contacted her for a chat. She didn't connect the two calls until John mentioned how sorry Ted was for upsetting her and he didn't really know what he'd done, but realised she'd been upset. Petra asked if Ted usually shouted. John laughed and said that Ted and his family tend to shout a lot – 'they 'clear the air' and then it's all forgotten!' Petra reminded John about the Shared Commitment in Positive Working Together, and how it's important to remember that whilst we all handle relating differently in our own family contexts, in Church, we need to handle things so that everyone feels safe and able to contribute. She explained that whilst for Ted, shouting may feel like 'clearing the air', for her it felt scary and intimidating and she felt like she couldn't contribute to the conversation but just wanted it to end, because of the shouting. John was surprised but understood. Next time Petra and Ted met, Ted mentioned that he was sorry he hadn't realised that shouting upset people. Petra reminded him of the Shared Commitment, and he agreed that he did know about that and hadn't really realised the impact of it.



In the coming months and years, Petra and Ted worked well together with no further shouting at all. It was important to realise that Ted wasn't a bully, he just hadn't realised the impact of his 'family dynamic norms' on people in a different context. Once he did realise, he adjusted his behaviour and they discussed and debated in a calmer way."

To ponder and discuss:

1. It was important for the people in this story to understand that they had different backgrounds and ways of relating. Reflect on how your own experiences/life/relationships affect your own behaviour and responses to other people. How can we make a safe place without requiring people to share or explain vulnerable memories/information?
2. How was the Positive Working Together 'Shared Commitment' useful in this story?

Reflect on the difference between bullying, and someone behaving in a way which is difficult for someone, but who stops when asked.

Positive Working Together

Case Study to consider: 2

"Freda and Elaine worked together on the church charity stall. They found each other generally pleasant, but one day, Elaine priced an item too expensively, so Freda said to her, 'you're so stupid! You can't even price things right! What an idiot!'

Elaine was upset and left the stall early. She mentioned it to the stall leader who asked Freda for a chat and Freda started to explain how Elaine had been wrong.

The Leader stopped Freda's story and showed her again the Shared Commitment and asked her to read through it. Freda said she knew maybe she shouldn't have insulted Elaine, but Elaine was wrong! The leader said, 'Everyone knows the 'Shared Commitment', we all agree to it when we volunteer – how do you feel the way you spoke to Elaine fits with that?'

They discussed it and Freda admitted she'd forgotten about the Shared Commitment, but that she realised now that even though she'd been right, she should have handled it in a different way. She said she appreciated that there were rules, because that helped her know what to do, and also to know that other people had to behave that way to her too.

She went back and said to Elaine that she was sorry for having been rude and could they talk about the pricing at another time. "

To ponder and discuss:

1. How could Freda and Elaine have handled their disagreement differently?
2. What do you think about how the leader responded?
3. What is the value of having 'boundaries'? how important is it that everyone shares them and knows them?

6. Other Useful Information

Resources for churches

There are several resources which might be helpful for churches to use to share the good practice that Positive Working Together is championing in our communities. These are:

- The Methodist Church's Positive Working Together Document
- Positive Working Together: the Shared Commitment (one Page Summary from the Positive Working Together connexional policy).
- Printable Birmingham Circuit 'Positive Working Together Posters'.
- Printable Birmingham Circuit 'Our Commitment' cards.

You can find these documents linked on our circuit website on the web address in the green footer at the bottom of the page.

Advice and Guidance

If you'd like advice or guidance on how to implement Positive Working Together in your church or a particular situation, please talk to your Minister for advice, or contact our Positive Working Together Champion via the circuit office on 0121 616 1800 or contact@birminghammethodistcircuit.org.uk

Where can I read more about Positive Working Together Connexionally?

The Methodist Church has plenty of more detailed information about positive working on its website which you can find at

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-ministers-and-office-holders/guidance-for-churches/positive-working-together/>

These resources were written by Deacon Ruth Yorke for the Birmingham Circuit in September 2019