



How to ...

Run a children's holiday club

By its broadest definition, an evangelistic holiday club is an event (hopefully fun and action packed!) held within the school holidays that allows you to share the Gospel of Jesus with children and young people. Beyond this; the size, duration, activities and teaching can be tailored to your individual circumstances.

Organising an event like this for the first time can be time consuming and stressful if a few key factors are left out of the planning. This 'how to' guide will provide some guidance to ensuring that the time before, during and after running your holiday club is enjoyable, stress-free and fun!

First things first...

There is a lot of work to be done even before your Holiday Club starts – some of it long before. Some items on your check list of things to be done before the start of the Holiday Club can take a while to sort out, and with the pressure on diaries, the booking of venues and people needs to be done well in advance. Ideally, planning for summer events, just like the TV adverts for summer holidays, should start when the nights are dark and the weather still wintry!

Aims: A good starting point for your planning is to ask the question, 'Why do we want to do this?' or perhaps it's more a matter of, 'Why does the vicar/PCC/mission group want us to do this?' Wherever the vision for the Holiday club has originated, it is important that those who are going to be involved not only know the aims but feel able to contribute in developing them.

It may be, of course, that the vision is quite vague, and your first planning task will therefore be to 'firm it up' and make sure the aims are clear and acceptable. Remember that your aims should be considered in relation to all those involved – which includes:

- the children
- their families
- your team
- your church
- your community

Timing: Again, this is an important factor to consider. Just because the resource provides five sessions it doesn't mean you have to run them all so here are some useful points worth noting:

- How many sessions do you want to run – how long will they be and how frequent? Availability of your proposed leaders and the venue will be important factors to take into consideration
- Do the proposed dates clash with any other events in the community or your church?
- Do you want to coordinate with any other events - e.g. a special service in church to round the holiday club off?
- Do the length and number of your sessions require you to inform OFSTED of your activities (see 'legalities' below).

Venue: Where will the Club be held? Are there a variety of options in your community which will allow a choice to meet the needs of your planned Club - or is there only one possibility, which will therefore determine the nature of your activities and the numbers you can accommodate? Here are some factors to take into consideration with regard to the venue:

- It must be suitable for the kinds of activities proposed and the number of children you hope to attract.
- Will you be able to have access before and after the sessions to prepare and tidy up, and will you be able to leave things out from one session to the next?
- Is it available for the dates you require? Don't make assumptions! Check availability as soon as you can, and make a booking as soon as you are sure you want to use the venue.
- How much does it cost? Is it within budget?
- Catering facilities, if they are to be used, must meet legal requirements (NB no children should have unsupervised access to the kitchen)

The team: A Holiday Club is a great opportunity for team work, but you need to be sure you have a full team before you kick off! All those who are going to be adult leaders in the Club need to be appointed according to the Child Protection policy of your parish and in accordance with the Diocesan Guidelines. You need sufficient adult leaders for the number of children you intend to have participating in the Club (and remember 'adult' means over 18 – under 18s can assist adults but must be counted as children not adult in calculating the adult/child ratio, and they must not take any leadership responsibilities). You should not admit more children than are recommended under the following adult/child ratios:

- Aged 0 - 2 years = 1 adult to 3 children
- Aged 2 - 3 years = 1 adult to 4 children
- Aged 4 - 8 years = 1 adult to 6 children
- Aged 9 - 12 years = 1 adult to 8 children
- Aged 13 - 18 years = 1 adult to 10 children (ratios from the NSPCC website)

There should always be more than one leader for any group and if possible have at least one male and one female leader if the group is mixed. Have some 'reserves' lined up in case a leader falls ill or is unavoidably prevented from taking part for some other reason.

Before you start...

By now you are thinking about scheduling some initial meetings so that your team can meet together and familiarise themselves with their own role and other people's responsibilities within the team. To help here are some of the most popular topics to take into account that are essentials when running a holiday club:

Meetings: You will need some planning meetings at which you can come to decisions on the issues outlined so far including aims, timings, the venue and team members and roles. You will also have to make decisions on the following:

- Numbers and ages of participants.
- Budget: how much will you spend on the venue, materials, catering, photocopying and printing, equipment and resources, other expenditure specific to your plans? How you will cover your costs – perhaps an entrance fee, a fundraising event or a request to PCC for subsidy.
- Publicity: this should clearly be targeted according to the children you wish to attract. Posters might be displayed in significant places in the community, particularly in schools, and information could be posted on the parish website, distributed at local events, shown on a banner outside the church, or sent to last year's participants if you had a Club last year. (NB if children's details are to be entered on a database, this must be made clear on the registration form, and the option given not to have the details used in this way).
- In addition you may well need one or more resource making evenings for working parties to produce or decide how to acquire the materials needed for the Club.
- You might also schedule some further training sessions or social events for the Team to bond in preparation for the Club.

Registration: No child can be admitted to a holiday club without a consent form signed by a parent or adult with parental responsibility. It is a good idea to have these forms completed and returned before the Club starts so that you can avoid over-subscription.

Remember, the venue, number of leaders, proposed activities and overall aims will have an effect on the numbers and ages of the children you can welcome into the Club.

Prior registration will also help you inform the caterers of any food allergies (watch out for nuts, especially) or dietary requirements and the first aiders of any special medical information. It will also enable you to group the children before the Club starts - you need to decide whether the groups will be divided by age or some other criterion, what to call them, and how to distinguish them. Badges are helpful, and the registration person or team could give these out on the first day.

All adults involved in the Club should have badges, as well as the children – it helps to learn names quickly! Some churches even pay for special tops/hoodies for the leaders – a great way to get noticed in a crowd! General consent forms must be collected on the first day of the Club, and at every subsequent session a register of those present must be taken and any children who are collected early should be noted. A list of who may collect each child can also be useful.

Group leaders and helpers: Each group should have a clear 'leader' who should be assisted by a helper to take care of any practicalities whilst the leader is directing the group's activity. These adults will be the main relationship focus for the children and should provide good role models in terms of joining in activities and having fun!

Specialist roles: Depending on the size and scale of your holiday club it might be useful to delegate special responsibilities to cover the following areas: publicity; administration; first aid; welcoming; cleaning; music; puppets; acting/presentation; craft; catering; props and scenery; sound or AV technician.

Common sense must be used in judging which of these people needs to go through the checks in your Child Protection policy. Obviously those who have no contact with children (e.g. perhaps the publicity or administration people) do not need to be checked; and neither do individuals who have been invited in for a specific purpose – e.g. to act in a sketch – and are not going to have any leadership role or unsupervised contact with children during their visit to the Club.

Coordinator: Someone to 'front' the proceedings, introduce different items of the programme, lead any 'plenary' parts of the sessions, and most importantly to keep an eye on the time and keep things moving on according to schedule. It is good practice to finish on time, as children may need to leave promptly for some other family activity.

Safety and good practice: Preparing for the club is also a good opportunity for the team to remind themselves of general principles of good practice and safeguarding when working with children – experienced leaders amongst your Team can share their insights with those who are just beginning in this ministry.

The programme: If you are using published Holiday Club material, you will need to go through it as a group and work out how you are going to deliver it and whether it needs adapting in any way. If you are developing your own material, you will need to establish a theme and do quite a bit of work planning how to explore it with the children.

Legalities: Check that your church insurance policy covers the Club as a whole and any specific activities that you plan to include. The majority of church-based holiday clubs do not need to register with OFSTED. However, if your club entails all three of the following: it includes under 8s; it runs for more than five days in the year; and the sessions last for 2 hours or more, you should contact the OFSTED helpline on 0300 123 1231 for further details on registering your club.

Outings need separate parental consent, or a separate section on the general consent form. Again, check your parish insurance cover for any outings and the legalities of your transport arrangements.

The PCC: The PCC will have ultimate legal responsibility for your Holiday Club, so they must approve it and will need an outline of the proposal – they might well want to know dates, times, venue, leadership, numbers, aims, material/theme, and of course the financial implications! PCC approval should be sought in principle at the earliest possible point. An enthusiastic but diplomatic advocate who is willing to speak in support of the proposal might be helpful.

Holiday Club has started... don't panic!!

Now that all the hard preparatory work has been done, there's just the little matter of actually running the Club! There will be a whole host of practicalities to check through for every session, but these will vary according to the material you are using. However, the following general points will always apply:

- Make sure the rooms you are going to use are safe and set out as you want them
- Make sure all those with a job to do are there well in advance of the start time and that they have a number they can ring to give good warning if they are going to be late or unable to attend (this should only happen in an absolute emergency!)
- Have the building well sign-posted: toilets, areas for activities, emergency exits, areas which are 'off-limits' to children
- Make sure you have an accident book and access to a telephone, and that all adults know where these are to be found
- Have all materials to hand and make sure everyone knows where everything is. Always have a few extra of any prepared materials
- Have a printed programme for each session, with timings, which is given to all leaders
- Follow your agreed registration procedures carefully

We've finished; we've survived, so can we relax now?

When it's all over, that's not the end of the story. Hopefully your original aims should have placed this Holiday Club in the context of the ongoing work and mission of your church, so the question is: What and where next?

- As a team, you should have been evaluating and reflecting on each day as the Club progressed. Now it is over, you need a de-briefing session to reflect on the club as a whole. Perhaps a report/presentation could be prepared for the PCC or wider church community.
- Plan an event to round off the Holiday Club, involving the parents either immediately after the Club, or some time later (NB always give families plenty of notice so that they can get such events in their diaries).
- Plan some longer term follow up. (NB if this entails the children 'reconvening' as a group, OFSTED may regard this as another meeting of the Holiday Club, which may have implications for registration with them)

And finally: Remember to pray BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER the event! Engage other people in your church to commit themselves to praying for the children, the Club, and you.

You may also find [this 6 minute video](#) from Scripture Union helpful

Why run a Holiday Club? This six minute video gives you an understanding of how a Scripture Union Holiday Club will provide you with a vital tool to connect with children and families in your local community. Featuring CBeebies presenter Gemma Hunt and renowned storyteller Bob Hartman!

If you have found this 'How to' guide useful and would like to follow-up any thoughts and conversations from the above questions, Dan Jones (Youth & Children's Adviser) can provide further advice, support and resources to help you and your church plan and lead a holiday club. Please contact Dan on 0117 906 0100 | daniel.jones@bristoldiocese.org

Written by: Dan Jones, Diocesan Youth and Children's Adviser