



How to ...

Start a children's ministry from scratch

You've noticed that a few families are regularly attending the morning service and have begun to congregate at the back of church during a service. Whether this scenario (or something similar) is happening in your church, perhaps now is a good time to think about providing some kind of provision for the children in your church.

However, beginning to think about starting up a children's ministry from scratch can be a big challenge. Factors like personnel, resource options, budget (and other logistical issues) navigating parental expectations as well as hundreds of little questions about how things should work, will all be on the 'to do' list. This 'How to' guide provides 10 simple steps designed to help you get to a place where you will be more confident launching a kids' program for your church.

1. Start with a prayer

This basic principle shouldn't be glossed over, especially during the foundational period of any ministry. It is a great time to enlist the help of the prayer warriors in your church to pray for you; to recruit the right people and for the work throughout the early stages and the life of its ministry.

2. Gather a core team

Having the right people in place from the beginning is essential. Invite key people who you think have the right personality attributes to lead the program; interested parents and your minister to an informal discussion on children's ministry. Don't finalise anything just yet; instead simply spend time talking and praying through the opportunities, hopes (and expectations) and some of the possible outcomes with those who have a "heart" for the youth in your church/community.

This leadership team is the group that will direct the program and make the major decisions to get the program started.

3. Determine the age group

You need to ask, "What aged-groups of children will participate in this program?" Churches vary widely in this respect. Many churches stretch their age groups too far. Often this is determined by the number of volunteers, but finding relevant material and catering for the wide variety of ages can become a continual challenge. Think about what is best for the children and try to build your ministry around their needs. You may also need to determine where the pre-schoolers will go. Some churches have a class just for them during church, while others include them in children's church.

4. Determine the format

There are several important factors to be decided about the format. Will the children attend a portion of the adult service beforehand? In some churches the children go straight to their groups at the beginning. Whatever you decide will depend on your core team and the church leadership. Just remember that there is something special when children worship with their families and the wider church family.

5. Choosing the right resource

Once the format and age-range is settled, you can begin to choose your resource. Most major Christian Education publishers have a variety of material for Children's Church with Bible-themed activity sheets, crafts and discussions. If your budget is tight you can always look online for free resources. Here are some links to the most popular resources...

[Click](#)

[Tiddlywinks](#)

[Light](#)

[Roots](#)

[Whoosh](#)

6. Establish safeguarding guidelines

To begin, you will need to adopt some basic safeguarding policies. If you are just starting out, the diocese provides some guidance [here](#) (scroll down to No.11) and Leanne Smith and Dan Jones are available to help advise you through this process – their details are at the end of this guide. Once complete, ensure that your leaders and helpers have read the policy and are familiar with any protocols – this will include vital information on recruitment and child protection.

7. Set a launch date

Yes it may sound obvious but set a realistic start date which gives you plenty of time to fit in all the preparation and planning. Most importantly schedule in enough time for you and your leaders/helpers to meet together and bond as a team. Do not be tempted to rush this as experience shows that good, solid teams built on trust, benefits both the short-term and the longevity of any type of pastoral ministry. So, pick a start date and stick to it. plan ahead, advertise and build a sense of excitement for the young people, your team and the wider church.

8. Recruit and train volunteers

Now you're ready to invest in your volunteers so that they are confident and excited. Every time your team meets together, they will get a better understanding of their individual personalities, skills and potential. Discuss and delegate roles, especially non-essential tasks and roles, to give others a chance to contribute and feel a valued part of the team. Some people will naturally be leaders, others will be content just helping which is fine – these faithful people are worth their weight in gold too. Someone needs to take the responsibility of organising the rota. Many churches work out a four-week volunteer rotation schedule for Junior church. You will find out what works best for you - remember that everything won't be done perfectly first time but you will have journeyed through it together.

9. Communicate with the wider Church

Any children's ministry will need the church's full support to get off the ground and grow. With the minister/leadership team's backing, once the ball is rolling you'll have lots of opportunities to involve the church through publishing important updates and prayer requests in the church bulletins, making public announcements and inviting key people to visit the ministry.

10. Re-evaluate and refocus

So you have made it across the line, the children's ministry is going swimmingly, or maybe you have had some teething trouble; that's OK! That's the unpredictable nature of working with children! Do expect obstacles and roadblocks from time to time, be realistic, focus on the task-at-hand but most important, upholding your values and principles will keep you in good stead.

After each session/calendar year meet as a team to reflect on past events. Answering these simple questions will enable you and your team to evaluate the ministry, grow as reflective practitioners and enhance the ministry to young people:

- How was the session?/How has the year been?
- What was good about the session?/What have been the highlights?
- Did anything go wrong? Have there been any lowlights?
- What can we do better next time?/Do we need to change anything next time/year?

II. Persevere and rest

Yes, there is an undisclosed eleventh step...

Children's ministry requires a constant commitment. Invest plenty of time into your team and you will be blessed with a happy, motivated and committed bunch. Finally, besides meeting the spiritual needs of the children, remember that you will need to devote time to love and care for yours too. Please don't neglect your own spiritual needs – when it is your Sunday off, use it for rest and refilling and refreshment. God cares about you, first and foremost and your relationship with Him trumps everything else.

If you would like further advice exploring or setting up a youth ministry in your church, please contact Daniel Jones (Youth & Children's Adviser) to discuss this further on:

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For advice on safeguarding matters contact the Diocesan Safeguarding Team safeguarding@bristoldiocese.org

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