



How to ...

Run a group for dads & children

Why fathers and their children?

In his book *Who Let The Dads Out?* Mark Chester asserts that 'if we want to see faith passed down through the generations of families, as churches we must make a more conscious and determined effort to reach out and support the relationships between fathers and children'.



Biblically, this assertion is founded on verses in Malachi 4:6, Luke 1:17 and Psalm 78:1–7 (NIV 1984), among others, and we at *Who Let The Dads Out?* would argue that there is both social and spiritual significance in the relationship between fathers (and father figures) and the children that they care for. Consequently, in the context of a holistic approach to family ministry, we aim to inspire, resource and support churches to run activities that will specifically appeal to dads and which they can attend with their kids.

In this guide we have focused on running a monthly Saturday morning group aimed at dads with preschool and/or primary school aged children, but we are happy also to share ideas on how to engage dads with older children.

Setting up a Saturday morning dads & kids group

Step 1: Research the need—we would happily argue that every community would benefit from such a group, but we still think it's worth undertaking some analysis of the needs within the community you serve. If there is a parent & toddler group in your church, then talk to the people who come to that (perhaps mostly mums) and see what they think about a group that they could 'send' their partners and children along to. Use any links you have with local primary schools to explore the idea. Speak to your local children's centre, if you have one, and/or other family/community centres. Chat to the other churches in the area. Convinced of the need? Then it's time to move to step 2.

Step 2: Present your proposal—at this early stage, whether you're one person with a vision or the A-team, it's worth setting out your proposal to the church leadership and to the wider congregation. It's important that this ministry is valued by the church as a whole. If it is and has the backing of the church leaders, then the chances of the group being successful and sustainable are much higher than if it isn't.

Step 3: Begin to build your team—so let's assume you're not the A-team, at least not yet. You're going to need a team of volunteers. Many groups are run by just a couple of heroic, multitasking people, but if you can source more volunteers, all the better, especially as the number of attendees grows.

Here are some of the roles you may want to consider:

- The doorman—your group needs someone to sign the dads & kids in, help them step over that scary threshold for the first time, and to make sure no little people escape when they shouldn't. A man is ideal but a good welcome is more important than gender.

- The cook—feed a man and you'll make him happy. So think about what food you want to provide and how. Perhaps a bacon or breakfast bap in a napkin, so that dads (and kids) can 'graze' on the move. Think about food hygiene requirements and specific training needs for your volunteer cook(s).
- The entertainer—depending on the children's age range and how much structure you want to bring to your sessions, you may want to provide an activity (otherwise called a 'craft', but 'activity' sounds more manly!), some organised games (for dads and kids to 'compete' in), and perhaps a story time. There are people, men and women, who have a particular talent for these sort of things.
- Chatty man—a lot of what this group is about is the relationships that can be built. So it's great to have people (ideally men), who enjoy meeting and talking with other men.

Men, women and teenagers all make great team members. Don't forget that all your adult team members need to be DBS checked, and consider training needs.

Step 4: Beg, steal & borrow—you'll need some toys, so why not 'beg' to share the parent & toddler group resources. Others will have gone before you, so we suggest you visit another group in action and 'steal' what works well. Everyone wants a good turn out for the first session, so try and 'borrow' some dads from another group nearby, or from the churches across your locality. Kingdom values to the fore!



Step 5: Pick a date—perhaps start with a one-off to see if the appetite is really there. If it is, then it's important to establish a routine, perhaps quarterly or, as most groups do, go for monthly. Choose your Saturday in the month, and the time that best suits (early morning, mid-morning or perhaps afternoon). So you are two months away from your launch. It's time to...

Step 6: Publicise, publicise, publicise—use every means open to you: flyers, posters, social media, articles in the local newspaper, local shop windows, the local children's centre, the local hospital, the local schools, the parent & toddler groups. Above all, speak to mums, because they will often get their men there, delivering them to the door if need be!

Step 7: Join up—in the rush to get going, don't forget to belong. Who Let The Dads Out? will happily register any church-led dads & children's group, whether using the Who Let The Dads Out? name or their own. Registering will help you access ideas, resources and a worldwide network of groups, sharing experiences and offering prayerful support through social media and the like, and it doesn't cost a penny. Registration may also give the opportunity to apply for a start-up micro-grant through our link with the Cinnamon Network (subject to grant availability at the time).

Step 8: Congratulate yourselves... and breathe!

Further Information

For further information on setting up and running ministries aimed at dads and their children, and on registering a group, visit:

www.wholetthedadsout.org.uk.



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