



Set up children's / children and families ministry in your church

This guide will help you think through a few things, as you prepare to set up your children's / children and families ministry. As with setting up any new ministry in a church, we recommend that you spend a focused period of time in prayer, so that God can speak into your plans.

When setting up children's / children and families ministry there are some important questions to consider:

- Why do you want children's / children and families ministry in your church and what are the expectations?
- Who have you spoken to?
- What permissions might you need?
- What needs to be in place to allow it to run safely?
- What will you do and what resources might you need?
- What team might you need?
- How will you evaluate?
- What additional help is out there for you?

Why do you want children's / children and families ministry in your church and what are the expectations?

You will need to be clear about why you want children's / children and families ministry in your church, as this will inform the aims and objectives. Here are some statements to help:

- You've noticed that a few families are starting to attend the occasional morning service, but you have nothing specific to offer the children.
- Lots of young families have moved into a new housing development in your parish and there is a growing need for a parent and toddler group.
- The church has great links with the local pre-school and primary school, but this rarely connects with the church.
- Your church does lots of baptisms but you rarely see the children again.
- The church feels that it is important to pass on the Christian faith to the next generation.
- Working with children might encourage their parents to come to church.
- You would like to offer a holiday club because a number of families are really struggling in the school holidays.
- You fear children are no longer hearing the stories about Jesus and are growing up not knowing anything about Christianity or faith.
- A neighbouring church has children's ministry and you feel your church is missing out.

- Church numbers are dwindling and young families might keep the church going.

Whatever the reason, be clear and honest about why you want children's / children and families ministry, as this will help to shape what you offer and who you reach. It might also help to manage expectations. Any children's / children and families ministry should complement other ministry in the church and be part of the overall vision and mission strategy.

Who have you spoken to?

- The church leadership and the Parochial Church Council (PCC)
- Parents
- Children
- The congregation and potential helpers / leaders
- Others who may be affected or want to input (schools, other local groups)

When setting up children's / children and families ministry, the PCC will hold overall responsibility. However, speaking with parents, children and other possible stakeholders will help to shape what you do. Be realistic about what the church can offer and be honest about what you can't do.

What permissions might you need?

Before starting anything new in the church, it will need the backing of the PCC and the church leadership. Depending on who else is involved and where the children's / children and families ministry takes place, you may need additional permissions. For example, if the children's ministry is an after school club in a school classroom; you will need permission from the Head and possibly the Governing Body. If you use the village hall for a parent and toddler group or a holiday club; you may require permission from the Village Hall Committee or the Parish Council.

What needs to be in place to allow it to run safely?

This will depend on the type of children's / children and families ministry you set up. It is recommended that you have a budget for things such as:

- Running costs and hire of any premises
- Programme costs and resources
- Refreshments
- Equipment
- Volunteer expenses

You will require some policies and procedures (the Go Team can help by supplying samples):

- Safeguarding and Safe Recruitment (this is all in the diocesan policy)
- Health and Safety (including Risk Assessment, First Aid, photograph/videoing policy)
- Inclusion and diversity
- Code of conduct / behaviour
- Anti-bullying
- Social Media and Electronic Communication

You may also need things like a baby changing area, a baby feeding area and space for buggies.

What will you do and what resources might you need?

This will depend on the type of children's / children and families ministry you set up. Here are some examples:

- Sunday groups linked to worship
- Midweek Bible club
- Before or after school clubs
- Holiday clubs
- Seasonal craft sessions linked to the Christian festivals
- A Messy Church
- A Sunday afternoon tea type service
- Open the Book in local primary schools
- Godly Play
- Family fun days, family picnics, teddy bear gatherings, Easter egg hunts
- Puppet ministry for storytelling
- Special services at the Christian festivals such as a crib service or Christingle
- Opening the church for local schools to visit
- Alternative Halloween parties
- All age worship
- Parent and toddler / preschool groups (with or without Christian content and worship)
- Food banks for families or baby (children's) clothes and equipment bank
- Baptism parties to celebrate all who have been baptised in the past year

The list is endless of what can be done and you may consider more than one approach. Some of the above suggestions above could happen weekly, monthly or even annually. Whatever you decide to do, it should be based on local needs and what the church can realistically provide.

It may sound obvious, but allow plenty of time for preparation, planning and promotion. This will allow you to prepare properly, build a team and take in to account any additional needs / requirements. There are lots of ideas available online by using Pinterest or Google to look for children's ministry resources or by searching more specifically for things such as seasonal craft sessions linked to the Christian festivals or ideas for Bible based holiday clubs. There are also specialist children / children and families ministry organisations that have excellent resources such as Messy Church, Scripture Union, Barnabas, Open the Book, Care for the Family, Roots, Tiddlywinks and Godly Play.

What team might you need?

Here are the recommended staffing ratios for the different age groups you may be working with: **0 -2 years** = 1 adult to 3 children, **2-3 years** = 1 adult to 4 children. **4-8 years** = 1 adult to 6 children, **9-12 years** = 1 adult to 8 children. Ideally a minimum of three adult leaders should be present at each session and some of the ratios may differ if parents / carers are present. Often young helpers assist with children's activities; remember to count these into

your number of children present if they are under the age of 18, as they cannot be officially counted in the staffing ratios. Mixed gender groups should include both male and female adult leaders wherever possible. In certain situations it will be necessary to have a higher number of adults; for instance when children/young people have additional support needs. As important as the staffing ratios, is the scheduling in of enough time for the team to meet together, pray, identify skills, allocate roles, carry out relevant training and bond as a team all of which will benefit the ministry.

For advice on safeguarding matters contact the Diocesan Safeguarding Team

<https://www.bathandwells.org.uk/parish-support/safeguarding/>

How will you evaluate?

After each session/calendar year, evaluate as a team. These simple questions may help:

- How was the session? How has the year been?
- What was good about the session? What were the highlights?
- Did anything go wrong? What has been learnt?
- What can we do better next time? Do we need to change anything for next year?

For any further advice or help, contact your Archdeaconry based Go Team Adviser:

<https://www.bathandwells.org.uk/ministry/children-young-people/>