

Called To Grow.....Younger :

how to be a Family Friendly Church

(suggestions from your CYP
Team based on the PRAY
video)

May 2024



“We believe that children and young people can follow Jesus and be full members of the church, and that discipleship is possible at any age. They are integral to our churches.”

This is taken from the Church of England website and reflects how we all feel towards children and young people.

Even though our churches can look very different from each other we all share this desire to have all ages worshipping Jesus. Growing Younger is a priority for the whole church following the vision set by the House of Bishops and endorsed by General Synod in 2019 but it can seem a daunting task. Some churches seem to have mastered this but others feel like they are starting from a long way back. But please be assured every church in every style can find ways to welcome everyone. We have not met a church which has it all sorted!

There is no ‘one-size fits all’ solution or a quick fix; if you genuinely want to have more families in your church community you will need to consciously plan for it and find ways to make it a reality.

We have spoken to many churches to find ways that have helped engage families, children and young people and have put together this document as a way to help you think proactively about what you can do in your parish.

A church is made up of many parts and so to make this a reality it will need a team. Consider who should be part of this team:

Clergy need to be fully supportive and involved. but they do not need to and cannot lead it all).

Involve young people, children and their families as much as possible – they will have a good idea what will help engage them and their peers. And if you would like some ideas on how to listen to your children and young people contact your CYP team and look at Learn to Listen for more information.

Ask those who are already part of this ministry to be in this group – they already have an understanding and a passion for children and young people.

A church warden or another senior lay person who will have an idea of how this stuff can work practically in your church.

And run your suggestions past your PSO before you start implementing just in case there are implications that have been missed.

Do not try all of this at once, between you make a plan. Prioritise communication, community and the quick fixes.

And please involve your CYP Team – we want to help, suggest solutions and to support you every step of the way.

Pray

The most important thing we can do is pray. Pray as a church for where God wants you to move in relation to children and young people and work towards those goals.

Undertake to pray as a church for the children and families within your congregation as well as those in your community. Include those who may be rejected and isolated. Be careful about GDPR issues; maybe just use first names.

Pray as a congregation for your children, young people and their leaders whenever they leave the main service to meet Jesus elsewhere. They need to know they are not being 'rejected' but are very much fellow believers.

Priority

For this to be a success the whole church needs to consider this a priority. In terms of finance and resourcing, in terms of time and effort and for the church mindset to instinctively place children and their families at the heart of ministry. An essential part of this is to create a vision.

Vision for Children, Young People and Families ministry

"Where there is no vision, the people perish"- Proverbs 29: 18

When it comes to developing youth and children's ministry a clear vision is paramount. This vision must be easy to understand, achievable and link with the overall vision of the church. This may well come out of your group meetings but consider as you move forward formalising it into a longer term vision. And once set share it with the entire church. The whole church needs to be engaged and enthused for ministry to succeed. Making children's and youth ministry an integral part of church life is crucial for building momentum, driving internal funding and growing the volunteer base.

We have a training session we can lead for you to help establish the vision for your parish going forward.

Adapt

To help children, young people and their families feel truly welcome it will be necessary to adapt some of your current way of doing things.

Sunday Worship Services

- Be intentional in your welcome of families. As much as possible from the front and in your communication make it clear that children are welcomed the way they

are – noisy disciples. The vast majority of parents are unfamiliar with churches and so may worry unduly about their children's behaviour. Put them at their ease at every opportunity.

- When you are leading a service think of how you say things – does it help those who are not familiar with your church feel comfortable? Watch 'How to frame' by Rachel Turner for some great thoughts you could adapt to your services.
<https://www.parentingforfaith.brf.org.uk/post/framing-in-a-church-service/>
- Be intentional in supporting parents as they help their children to engage in a positive and empowering way:
<https://www.parentingforfaith.brf.org.uk/post/framing-without-shaming/>
- Have a simple, visual order of service available for children so they know what to expect in your service. This is especially helpful for children with additional needs. It could be incorporated in your pew sheet – ask us for ideas.
- If you have hymn books please make sure everyone is given one – children will like 'singing along' even if they cannot read!
- Encourage children who worship with you to take roles in the services e.g. reading or leading prayers. Ask them to serve as part of teams such as AV, Sunday Club, Welcoming, refreshments. They are part of your congregation and are more likely to stay that way if they are encouraged to serve alongside others. And visitors will recognise the value you place on them.
Talk to us about the permission and checks needed to do this safely.

How does your community see you?

Digitally: Does your website reflect who you are or where you would want to be? People will look at your website and facebook page.

- Ensure the images reflect your congregation in both age and diversity. (Ensure you have permission to use images.)
- Bring it up to date – a church where nothing appears to have happened in 3 years will not be appealing.
- Where you have activities aimed at families use bright images and have them easy to find. Ask a friend who doesn't attend a church to look for something on your site.
- Have a statement that explains how you welcome children.

We have some great examples of good practice; ask us to share.

Noticeboards:

- Make sure family friendly events are shown clearly.

First Impressions

Imagine a parent or child walking through your door for the first time – what impression will they take away?

- Welcome – make sure everyone who walks into your church is greeted no matter how young or old. Get to the eye level of a child and simply say 'hello, how nice to see you.'
- Designate a 'Family Seating' area which has good quality, clean, quiet(ish) toys. This can be simple or more complex but should ideally give a good view of the service so that families know they are welcomed. Ask for our 'How To' guide on connecting with under 5's for more information.
- Have a board or display area where it is clear that children are part of your congregation. Have a sign explaining the group or child that has done the work. Keep the board tidy and up-to-date and in a place it can be easily seen by visitors. It shows visitors you value the contribution of children.

Children's Sunday Ministry

Not every church can or wants to run age-specific ministries. Think about what suits your church family. If you offer groups do please think about the part of the service the children do join you for – is it accessible for them? Be intentional about considering them as you plan.

If you decide not to have separate groups consider making your services intentionally inter-generational. There are many ways that can be used to make that a successful worship service – please don't think about the 'cringe-worthy' all-age services you may have been part of years ago. We have resources and ideas of ways to include everyone.

If you do run separate groups think about the aims of these groups. In the past they aimed very much at passing on information and christian behaviours. Whilst these are still part of what we do they are not an end in themselves. Children's ministry is first and foremost about spiritual formation (Csinos & Beckwith, Children's Ministry in the way of Jesus, 2013, p57) as, like adults they are disciples of Jesus on a journey. So look at how you connect with the children and young people from that perspective.

One idea is to have your groups follow the same topics as the main service. It is not always easy but can offer great opportunities to share what and how each other have met Jesus that morning. You could also suggest a question or challenge for families to think about over the week.

Children have very different experiences and expectations from their parents. Visit the groups that run in your church. Would they benefit from a rethink or a revamp to make them feel more current? There is lots of great new material available some at minimal or no cost for all styles of church. We have a list of resources and are happy to visit and chat, please ask.

Baptism

Consider how you connect with families who come for baptism. Every church manages this differently but consider how your church could be more intentional in its connection with families. We have examples we have found of good practice and an information sheet which we can share.

- Baptism preparation can be done purely by clergy or by a team. Even if the family is still finding their faith they have asked for Baptism so they see it as a good thing for their child. Consider giving a Parenting For Faith book as you visit which is very accessible to everyone. (Babies and Toddlers Nurturing your Child's Spiritual Life, Rachel Turner)
- Invite the families to a couple of services in advance of the Baptism – they will be more familiar with your style of worship and it will give an opportunity for others to engage and make friends with them. Encourage those that have been part of the preparation to greet and sit with them during these services.
- Help families know what to expect – a visual service order for children who will be attending will help. Or try Baptism Cubes. If there is a 'Family Seating Area' explain how it works. Reassure them that noise from children is ok. They will be unsure how the church will react!
- Explain to families before the service if there will be activities their children will be welcome to join and that they can accompany them (check how this will work with your PSO). During the service make it clear that all children are welcome to take part in activities.
- Ask those involved in the baptism preparation to give the Baptismal candle during the service. Give a good children's bible too (ask us for ideas).
- A child's baptism is an opportunity for follow up. Send cards and invite them to church on the anniversary. Include what is currently happening in church life especially toddler groups, preschools and family events.
- The Church of England has some helpful information here [Christenings](#)

Church Communication

Aim to have regular contact with parents whose children are part of your ministries. It may be that you need to tailor your communication to each group.

Be intentional in sharing major dates well in advance (so diaries can be filled in plenty of time). Be clear if you need responses for events and share everything as widely as you can so no one feels excluded. Eventbrite is widely used and is helpful for knowing how many are planning on coming.

Ask families who are occasional visitors to be on your email list – the more often they are contacted the more opportunity they have for joining in. And be aware of GDPR but as long as they have said yes to communication – communicate (with a polite opt-out clause at the bottom); they will be expecting it. Do not be discouraged by a lack of reply just bless their inbox occasionally.

We have some excellent examples to share – just ask.

Church Structures

Often our churches are designed around the needs of the adult members of the congregation. Consider how you could be more intentional in your welcome and discipling of all ages in your church

- Intentionally prioritise listening to the voices of Children and Young People. Talk to us about how you can make that happen.
- When you set your budget be intentional in spending more on your CYPF (children, young people and families) ministry. It may be possible to find funds from elsewhere to help with this; we have a 'How To' sheet of potential funders for CYPF projects.
- Be intentional about entrusting and empowering all generations, including teenagers and emerging adults, with roles and responsibilities. Based on research by the Fuller Intitute

[Research](#)

- Develop appropriate ministry teams or committees to decide on policies and guidelines for all activities. Many of these policies are already available on the Diocesan website. Do ask for help with these.

There has been research on this topic by Liverpool Hope University – here are their preliminary findings.

[Research](#)

Church Family Events

An excellent way to help all families feel connected to your church is to have social events that are suitable for everyone to be part of. When there is an opportunity to invite families who do not regularly worship with you please do. Advertise clearly especially if you expect people to book.

Be intentional in finding regular opportunities to meet socially –. BBQ's, picnics and Bring and Share lunches for visiting speakers are a great chance for families and their children to hang out and chat. Board Game nights with puddings work well too.

Keeping our kids

Sadly many churches find that in spite of all their best efforts some children stop being part of the congregation. There are many reasons given including sport, homework and timing. Some of the ideas listed here may help – giving them roles, encouraging intergenerational friendships and relationships but there are other things to consider.

Parents are a main influence on their children as they grow and research has proved that is equally true in teenage years (Barna) but do our parents know it? And more

importantly do they know how important it is for their children to have faith now? Help parents understand that knowing Jesus for themselves will help their child at all the stages of life, through name-calling in the junior playground to life-changing decisions as a teen. As parents start to desire a living faith for their children they will want to help them prioritise church and faith relationships. Talk to us for ways to offer support to parents in this vital task.

As a church we need to support our parents as they support their child's faith journey, a role for which they often feel ill-prepared. We have a sheet on parenting for faith to help as you look more seriously at how you can support your families.

For teenagers an early morning may not fit in with their biological clock and need for sleep. And for those families where Sunday morning is sometimes dedicated to football consider having a service at a different time. Several churches have tried 4pm as an option for a family-connected service. It may also be worth thinking of an opportunity for your young people to meet outside Sunday mornings? A Sunday evening or a bible study mid-week?

And find ways to include these youngsters as much as possible. Invite them to be involved in holiday clubs, summer fayres, Christmas services- help them know you recognise their on-going part in your congregation even if Sunday mornings are not working for them. Our desire is for these young people to have a faith, rather than simply attending church.

Connecting with School

Many children have little connection with churches so any opportunity you have to connect will help them see they are welcome. Build a relationship with your local schools whenever and wherever you can. Primary schools often welcome churches to lead assemblies, start lunchtime clubs or even teach the Christianity part of the RE syllabus. And even if this is not possible for whatever reason there are Christian schools work organisations who would love to help. Some schools are more reluctant – they may have had a bad experience with a church in the past or are worried about other's reactions. Do not give up - do what you can to offer friendship and support to the school. This may be a long journey but worth it.

Christmas is a great time to welcome schools into the building – make it a good experience. The staff may feel the need to 'shush' them but we can make them feel comfortable.

We have a 'How to connect with your local school' full of ideas to help.

Connecting with your Community

Many churches run Toddler Groups as a way to serve their communities. Some are styled more as church and others have no explicit faith input and then at every point in between. There is no right or wrong apart from the welcome. Some welcome lots of families whilst others have much smaller groups. They offer a much needed space to local families and help them see what church family can be like. Research has shown that

most families have a link with a church before their children start school. What a great way to start building local relationships.

If you already have a group have a look and see if it is still meeting the local need; would it benefit from a rethink?

Or could you start a group – they can meet in most spaces (including churches), think of what you have to offer families. And as parents stay it does not need a massive team. We have a resource sheet on the 'Why and How of Toddler Groups' let us have a chat and help.

Cafes and Warm Spaces

If you run one of these in your church consider how it could welcome those with young children. Include a child friendly logo on the publicity, have a box of toys clearly available and a comfy place for them to be used and plastic plates and cups will help everyone relax. Grandparents will welcome the space as much as parents.

You

For your church to grow younger it needs everyone to be involved. Whether as prayer support, hospitality, Sunday Welcome or premises this needs to have everyone on-board. Everyone needs to be prepared to adapt and embrace change for this to become a reality.

And look after those for whom this is their specific calling and ministry.

Your Volunteer Team

Find ways to grow, enthuse, encourage and thank (both publically and privately) those who are part of your CYPF team.

- Find ways to meet as a team regularly. It can be a practical time or simply a social gathering but make sure cake is available at all times!
- Do your team feel in need of inspiration and encouragement? Have a look at our Training Directory to see what we can offer (generally for no cost). Have a conversation with the CYP team to help decide what could work. Other nearby churches may wish to join you.
- Encourage your volunteers to connect with the Diocesan CYP Team; we are there to support them. We also hold Afternoon Tea's in each Archdeaconary to thank them for their service.
- Hold a church service annually where those involved in the team are commissioned for ministry. Ask the children and young people to pray for them.

- Consider taking part in the Cathedral service where the Bishop Licences and Commissions those in CYPF ministry. Bring their family, friends and congregation along too. Contact the CYP Team for information.
- Do you want more volunteers on the team? Look at the JOIN resources from the Church Of England. There are video's which could be shown over a few services, flyers and posters can be ordered free. To connect it to your church interview a couple of your current volunteers and ask them to share the good reasons they are part of the team. [Available here](#)

Some Theory

There has been extensive research done by the Fuller Institute to help develop a lasting faith in children and young people. (Sticky Faith, Kara Powell, Chap Clark, Zondervan 2011) These were their findings:

- Shift from a behaviour-based gospel to a grace-based gospel. The research found that the impression many children and young people have of the gospel is one of obeying the rules: 'do this, don't do that' (actually, mostly 'don't do that'). And so, when they inevitably fall short of these rules, standards and expectations, they think that they're not 'good enough' to be a Christian. We need to help them trust in Christ, rather than their own ability to follow the rules.
- Shift from separating children and young people from the rest of the church to integrating them into the life of the church. While there is definitely a place for age-appropriate groups, a strong faith is formed when children and young people are part of an intergenerational community, worshipping God together. Faith is also strengthened when children and young people have friendships with adults in the church who are not their parents – they get to hear about other life experiences and chat about things without family pressures getting in the way.
- Support parents as they help their children connect with God. There has been a tendency in the past to leave faith-sharing to churches but parents are the primary spiritual care-givers for their children, and we need to help them in this important task. Creating space in the home to talk about faith, read the Bible, discuss doubts and answer those tricky questions (that parents might rather not answer!) will help faith grow.
- Include your children and young people in long-term, relational, everyday service.

The research team found that faith was truly strengthened when children and young people exercised their faith in their own local area. Whether this is serving in their own church or going out to help in the community, the impact of showing God's love and making a difference in their own neighbourhood can be great.

They have also done research on 'Helping Young People Discover and Love your Church' (Growing Young, Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, Brad Griffing, 2016, Baker Books) this is what they found:

- Churches that grow young have leaders (across the board) who demonstrate 'keychain leadership' i.e. aware of the keys they hold and are willing to entrust and empower young people with their own 'set of keys'.

These leaders are mature, real, warm, know what matters to people, trust and empower others and take the long view.

- Churches grow young by empathising, or feeling with, this generation of young people who wrestle with 'Who am I? Where do I fit? and What difference do I make? Young people start questioning earlier and find answers later. Look at understanding their world and how they see your church.
- Take Jesus' message seriously; by this they mean that "understanding that faith is about more than behaviours or following rules." They suggest talking less about abstract beliefs and more talk about the person and work of Jesus. They also recommend helping young people use story language to describe God's work in the world rather than specific steps to salvation and finally talk less about heaven and more about life here and now.
- Fuel a warm community i.e. surround children, young people and their families with supportive, accepting and authentic community. Young people used the words 'welcoming, accepting, belonging, authentic, hospitable and caring'. 'Like family', a place "where I can just be myself" were other phrases that were frequently heard as positives for a church to belong to. It was important for leaders and the whole church to be open about their own struggles and 'mess'.
- Churches growing younger prioritize young people and families everywhere. When thinking about budget, strategy, worship planning, programming, community life, theology and all other aspects of church life they think about young people. It is the tangible, institutional commitment to allocate resources and attention across the life of a church.
- Be a church that is the best neighbour to it's community. Young people need to see the church living out Jesus' command to love their neighbour. An attitude of 'going out', serving and accepting people no matter their background. That does not simply equate to acceptance; as Tim Keller said 'All churches must understand love, and identify with their local community and social setting, and yet at the same time be able and willing to critique and challenge it.'

We also have a number of books that will inform your understanding of children's spirituality and faith formation that we will be happy to lend or recommend. There is a large body of academic work to draw on as you consider how to 'grow younger.'