

A woman with glasses and a pink top is smiling as she works on a craft project. In the foreground, a young girl in a pink and white striped shirt is focused on placing a red heart on a blue board. Another child is partially visible behind her. The board has several red hearts and a brown cross already attached to it.

# Starting up Sunday Groups for children in your church



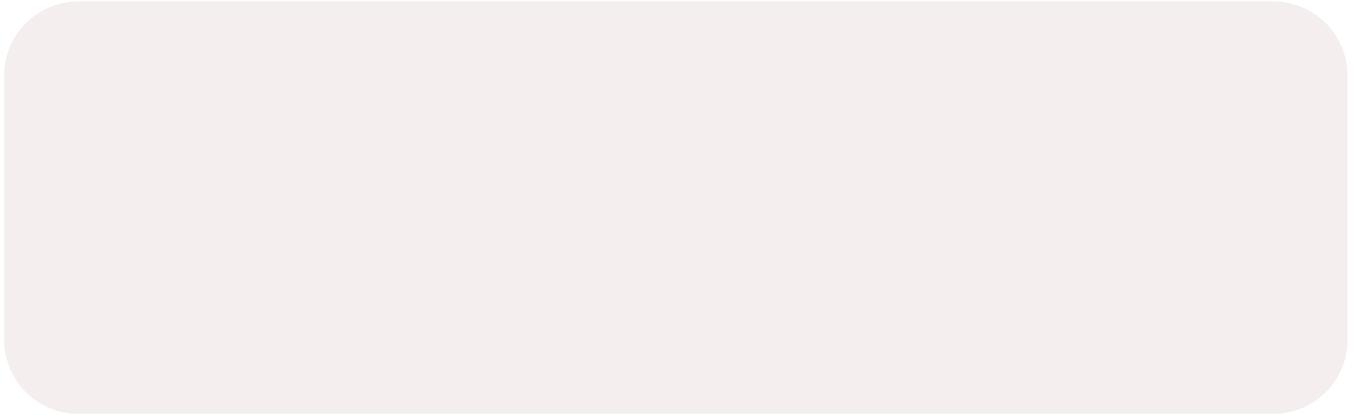
THE CHURCH  
OF ENGLAND

Diocese of Leeds

# Purpose

Why are we starting this group?

It is important to ask ourselves why we are doing what we are doing.



The Sunday School movement began in the 1780s and for many working class families, they were the only way that children could get an education. Sunday Schools have traditionally been about religious education and teaching children about Christianity.

Sunday groups for children can and should be much more than just religious education.

- They are not school to teach children to know about Jesus and how to be good Christians.
- They are not babysitting sessions so grown ups can sit through a church service without disruption
- They are not entertainment for children so they are not bored in church.

At their very best, Sunday groups are a chance for children to explore faith and to encounter God for themselves. Sunday groups are there to encourage children to become lifelong followers of Jesus who will bring about God's Kingdom through their words and actions and thinking.

How do we make our Sunday groups a place where this can happen?

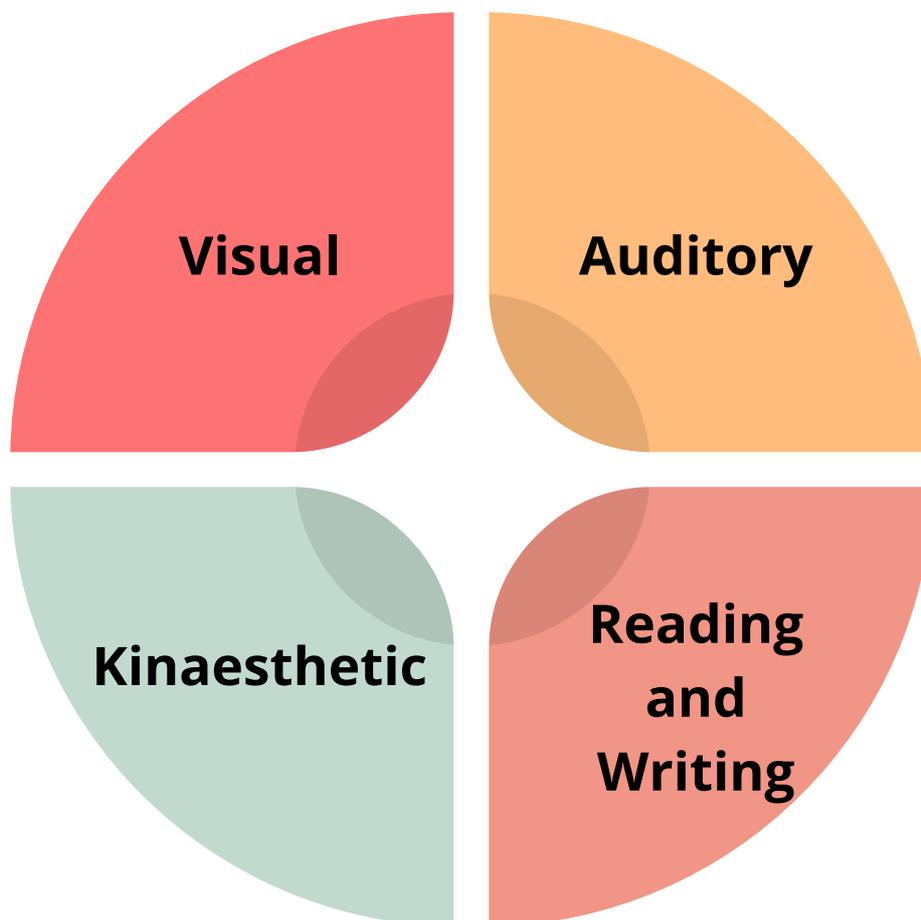
# Learning styles

When starting children's groups, it is important to consider the different ways people learn. We all have a preference of the way we learn best.

Neil Fleming developed a model of Learning Styles called VARK in 1987.

According to the VARK model, learners are identified by whether they have a preference for:

- Visual learning (pictures, movies, diagrams)
- Auditory learning (music, discussion, lectures)
- Reading and writing (making lists, reading textbooks, taking notes)
- Kinesthetic learning (movement, experiments, hands-on activities)

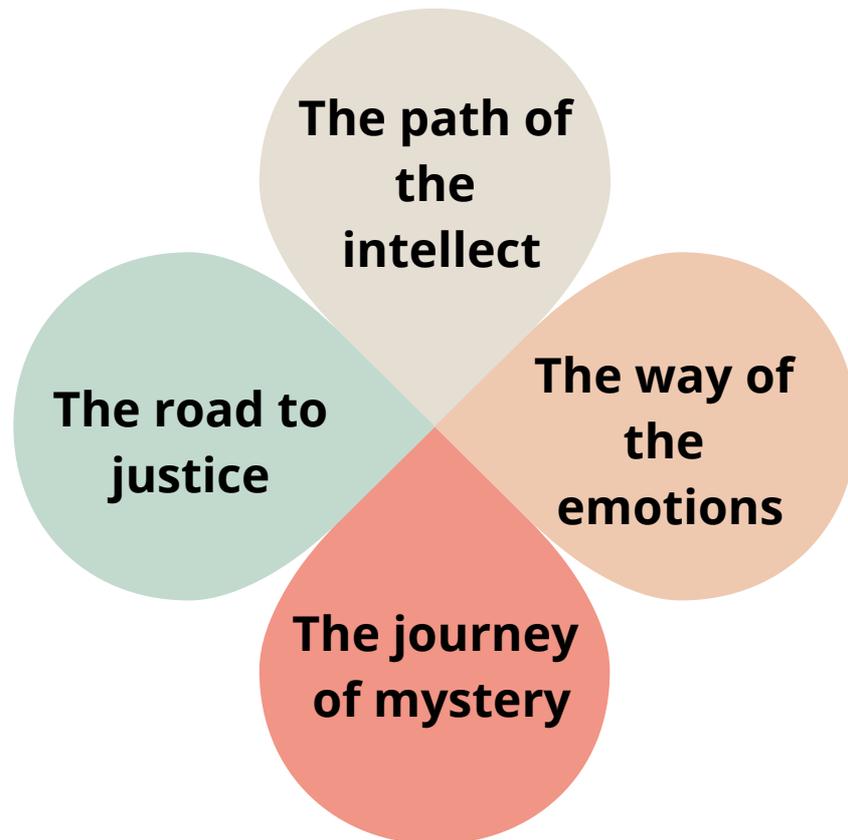


For more information about Neil Fleming's VARK model, please visit:  
<https://www.verywellmind.com/vark-learning-styles-2795156>

What learning style is your preference?

# Spiritual styles

Not only do we all have preferences for learning styles, David Csinos has identified that we all have preferences for spiritual styles; different ways of knowing God. He believes that we come to know and experience God in different ways. Within this diversity, four vital spiritual avenues can be identified:



Dave Csinos recommends that youth and children's groups that wish to nurture the spirituality of each individual do well to take into account the different spiritual styles through which they can come to know and experience God in real, life-changing ways.

To find out more about spiritual styles, please visit:

<https://www.rootsontheweb.com/worship-and-learning-support/spiritual-styles/spiritual-styles-part-1-different-ways-of-knowing-god>

What is your preferred spiritual style? How might that impact you leading a Sunday group?

# Discovery Learning



Discovery learning means allowing children to explore and learn for themselves with the premise that what they learn for themselves is more likely to stick than if they are taught it by another.

Reggie Joiner has a wonderful analogy about mountaineering and children's ministry in his book 'Think Orange' p205 to explore this idea.

*"Think about this for a second. Let's say you're going to teach a class on mountain climbing. You tell the students all the details of what it's like to climb a mountain, what rock configurations to look for, and what footholds to use. You even tell them what the experience is like when you get to the top of the mountain – the feeling of having climbed for hours and being awed by the breath taking view before you. [...] How motivated do you think [the students] are to climb after just listening to you talk?"*

*But let's suppose instead that you take them to a place where they can experience just a little bit of mountain climbing and you take them up the mountain as you teach. They get to apply all the information they are hearing. Do you think the impact will be different?"*

In our groups, are we letting our children experience God or are we just teaching them about God? As adults, are we getting in the way?

## **Being a High Priest**

In Rachel Turner's Book 'Parenting Children for Faith Omnibus' she mentions that parents can easily fall into the trap of being a high priest, doing the work and the prayers for their children instead of empowering them to do it for themselves. Her point is that Jesus death and resurrection removed the need for God's people to have a high priest to intercede for them - and neither do our kids. Here is a lovely video of a children's leader explaining the power of creating space for children to encounter God:

<https://www.parentingforfaith.brf.org.uk/post/not-being-the-high-priest-childrens-ministry-with-parenting-for-faith-values/>

What might we consider doing with our groups to encourage discovery learning?

# Structure



Structure can be helpful for children to engage with the session and for continuity especially if you don't have the same leaders running the group each week. How do we structure a Sunday Group session? What components could we include to encourage discipleship? Here are some things to think about:

**Worship** – this could include songs or a short liturgy, lighting a candle and saying a prayer. Starting with worship sets the tone and the intention of the session : We are here to worship God. What could you do?

**Community** – relationships are key and being friends to one another is a key factor in children continuing with their faith. Sharing a drink and a snack, checking in with one another, creating a space where everyone is valued is important.

**Fun** – playing games is another way of breaking the ice and building community but can also be away of learning too. If you have space to play active games or to get outside, this can be very beneficial for children too. What fun or games could you play?

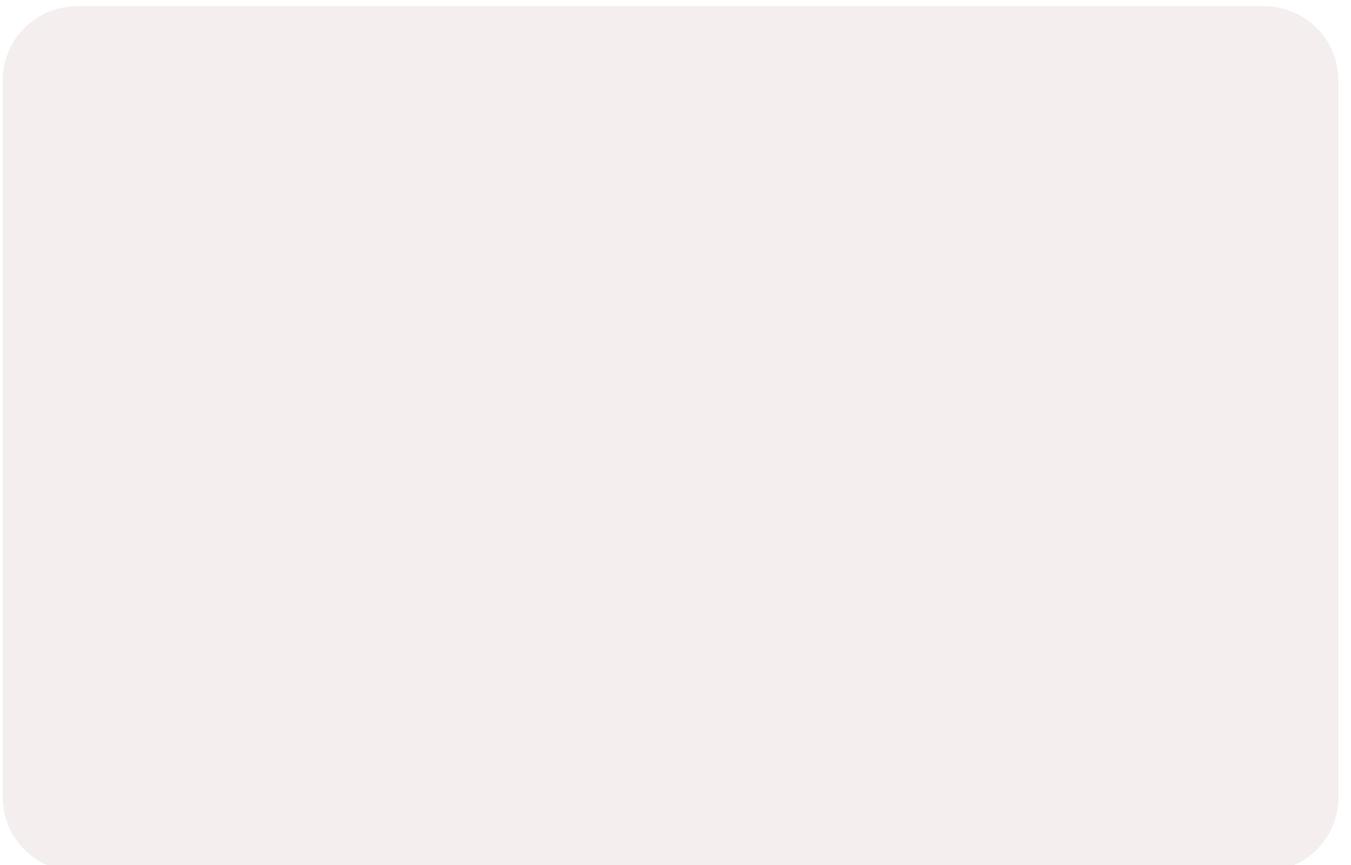
**Bible** – a key part of discipleship is discovering God through scripture. There are lots of ways to explore God's word. For younger kids, using a storytelling bible such as Desmond Tutu's 'Children's Story Bible' or Sally Lloyd Jones 'Jesus Storybook Bible' could be helpful. Using props to tell the bible story or Godly Play with some wondering questions is another way for all ages to engage with the bible stories themes. Older children may be capable of more in-depth Bible study or Lectio Divina.

Another helpful model is God Centred Bible Storytelling by [Meredith Miller](#) and appears in her book: 'Woven - nurturing a faith your kid doesn't have to heal from' and there are 4 steps to follow to help children see God as the hero and not humans:

1. Read the bible story for yourself in an easy translation like the NLT.
2. Make a list of the various things you notice God being and doing.
3. Tell the children the story, paraphrasing what you have read and highlight one attribute that you have noticed.
4. Close by asking the children what else they notice about God, how God is being or what God is doing and follow their lead.

This approach opens the children up to explore the story and discover the nature of God for themselves.

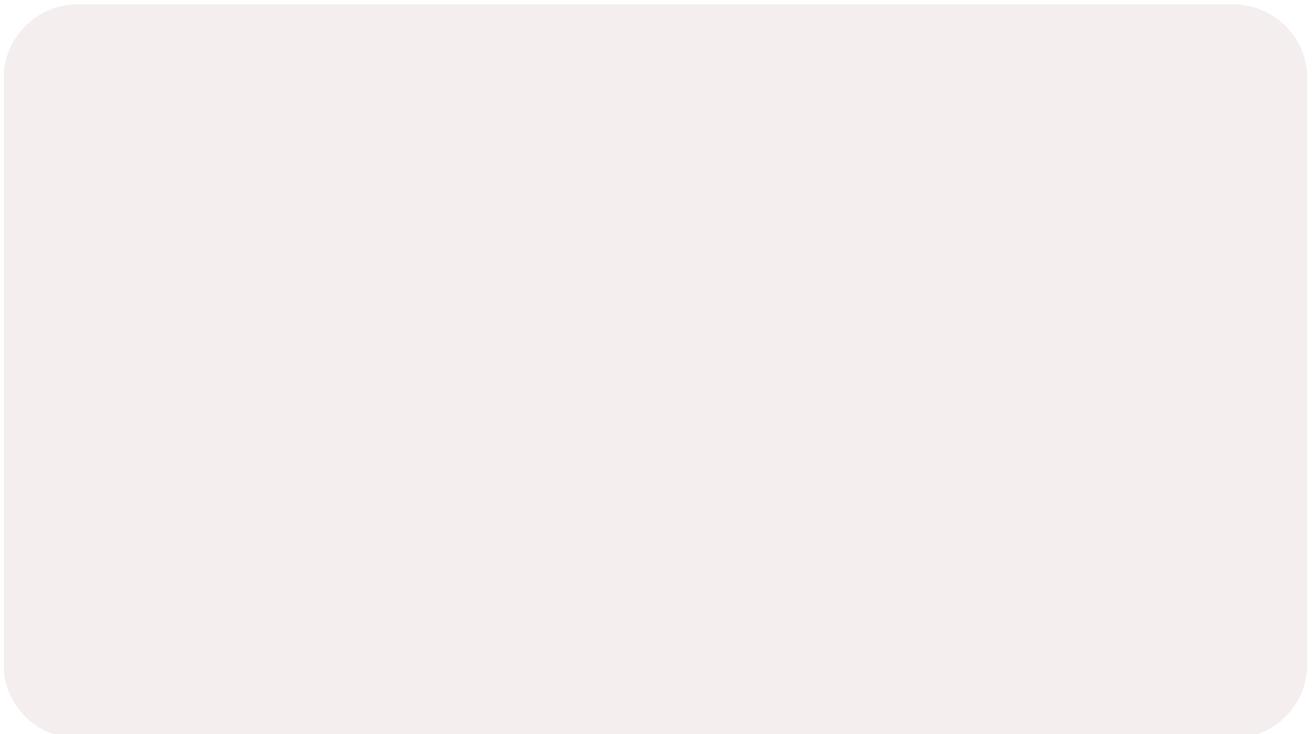
Bible study can be the area where many people feel out of their depth and worried about the questions children will ask. It is helpful to explain to the group that we are all learning together about faith and that even if you are the leader, there will be things you don't know or understand and you may have to go away and research. What ideas do you have for encouraging Bible Study?



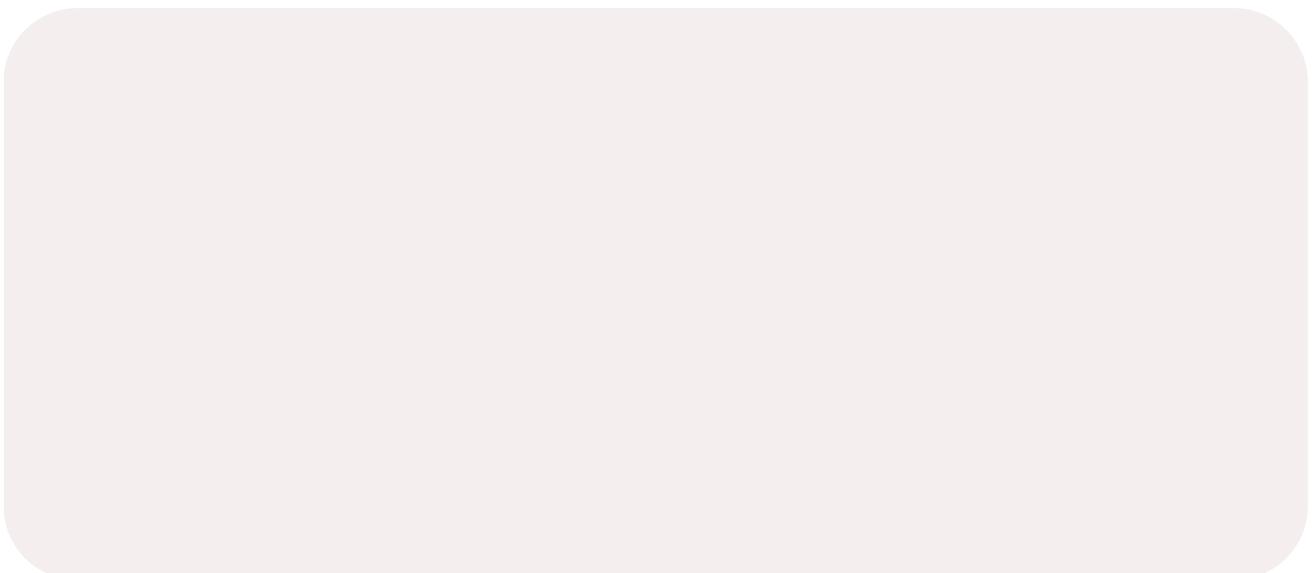
**Prayer** – children need to be empowered to pray and to build a relationship with God for themselves. The Chatting and Catching tools from Parenting for Faith are a great way to explain prayer to children and encourage them to try it for themselves.

Another helpful source of inspiration for prayer is the Teenage Prayer Experiment notebook by Miranda and Noah Threfall-Holmes - there are lots of creative prayer ideas in this book to help children pray. Prayer Spaces in School and Teresa Cho both have creative prayer ideas on their websites you can take a look at.

There are lots of different ways of praying that children could try – have a think about which ones you would like to try?



Action – Faith is more than just believing what could the children do with what they have learnt? What can they take home to continue the learning with their family?



# Sample session planning form

Welcome and  
worship



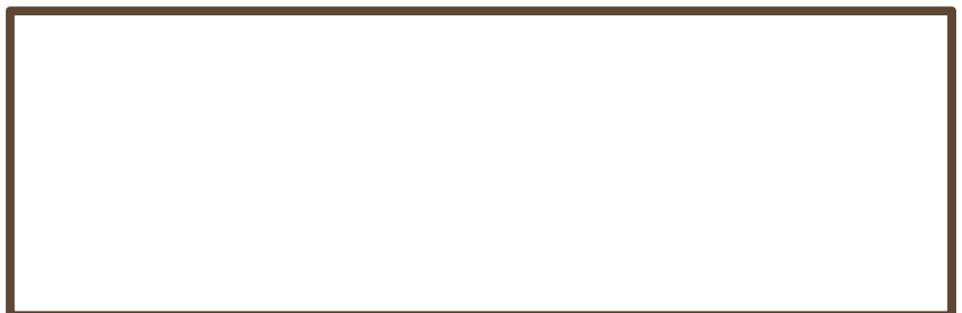
Active game



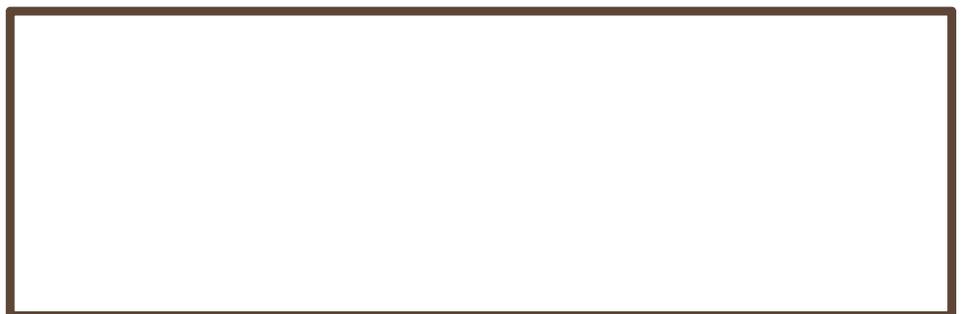
Snack,  
drink and  
check in  
time



Bible time



Response  
Activity &  
Prayer



# Resources

What resources are available to help you run a session?

Before you pick one – think about the children you will be serving.

Ask God what do these children need from the Sunday Group.

Ask the children what they are interested in or would like to know.

Ask parents about their children, what they are facing and what they might need support with.

Resources can also be a jumping off point for you to tailor the material to the group you are leading.

Below are some resources that may be helpful – most have a subscription charge to use them.

Foundation Stones - <https://www.foundationstones.co.uk/>

Roots on the Web - <https://www.rootsontheweb.com/>

Connected Hearts - <https://connectedhearts.co.uk/>

Illustrated Ministry Mini Revolutions -

<https://store.illustratedministry.com/products/mini-revolutions-subscription>

Urban Saints Energize - <https://www.energize.uk.net/>

Faith in Kids - <https://www.faithinkids.org/>



# Team



To run the Sunday groups, you need to gather a team of committed leaders and volunteers who catch the vision and know the purpose of the group and want to see children and young people grow in faith. Here are some things to consider and put in place before you start.

## Checklist:

- Adult to child ratios: To deliver group sessions safely, you need to have a minimum of 2 DBS checked, safeguarding trained adults but you may need more; the number of adult leaders and volunteers needed is dependent on the risk assessment.
- Safely recruit your team – Identify individuals who would be good for your team and work with your Parish Safeguarding Officer/Clergy/Leaders to safely recruit these leaders and volunteers.
- Make sure each person receives a role description - so they know what is expected of them. The Church of England have a Code of Safe Practice that is essential reading: <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2021-07/code-of-safer-working-practice-02.07.2021.pdf>
- The Parish Safeguarding Officer will also ensure that the leaders and volunteers complete the Church of England Safeguarding training.
- Before you start, organise some training for the team – The Children, Young People and Families Team offer a 3 hour 'Ministry with Children and Young People' course that covers the foundations of what you need to know to be involved in Sunday Groups, We also have other sessions such as 'Discipleship in children's groups', 'How to do Bible study with children' and other sessions that may be of use– do contact us about your training needs - [childrenyouth@leeds.anglican.org](mailto:childrenyouth@leeds.anglican.org)
- Ask the team to meet regularly to pray for the children and young people in your care, to plan for the term and to evaluate how things are going.
- Take good care of one another and make sure the same people are not rota-ed on to do the session every time. Decide when you are going to run your Sunday groups and make sure everyone has a chance to be in church and off the rota so they have a chance to worship.

# Safety



Before you begin any activity with children and young people – please read through the Safer Environment and Activities guidance document from the Church of England which outlines everything you need to consider:

[https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/safer-environment-and-activities-oct19\\_0.pdf](https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/safer-environment-and-activities-oct19_0.pdf)

## Checklist:

- Risk assessment of activity and environment – always write a risk assessment with a group of people and remember it is a living document that can be adapted as your activity may change or evolve. There is a link to a sample Risk Assessment form below.
- Consent from parents – ensure that you have consent for every child in your care in a form or an online document and that this information is stored securely in accordance with GDPR regulations
- Records – keep register of who attended each session (children and adults) and store this securely according to GDPR regulations. Record any incidents on this log for future reference
- First Aid – need at least one trained First Aider on sight, first aid kit and accident book should be visible and accessible.
- Food Hygiene – if you are serving food, adhere to food hygiene standards; it is recommended to have a member of the team trained in Food Hygiene. Check if any children have any food allergies before serving.

Model templates for Risk Assessments and Consent forms are available here:  
<https://www.churchofengland.org/safeguarding/policy-practice-guidance/templates-and-resources>

If you have any questions or need any advice about running an activity safely, please contact our team [childreneyouth@leeds.anglican.org](mailto:childreneyouth@leeds.anglican.org)

# Environment

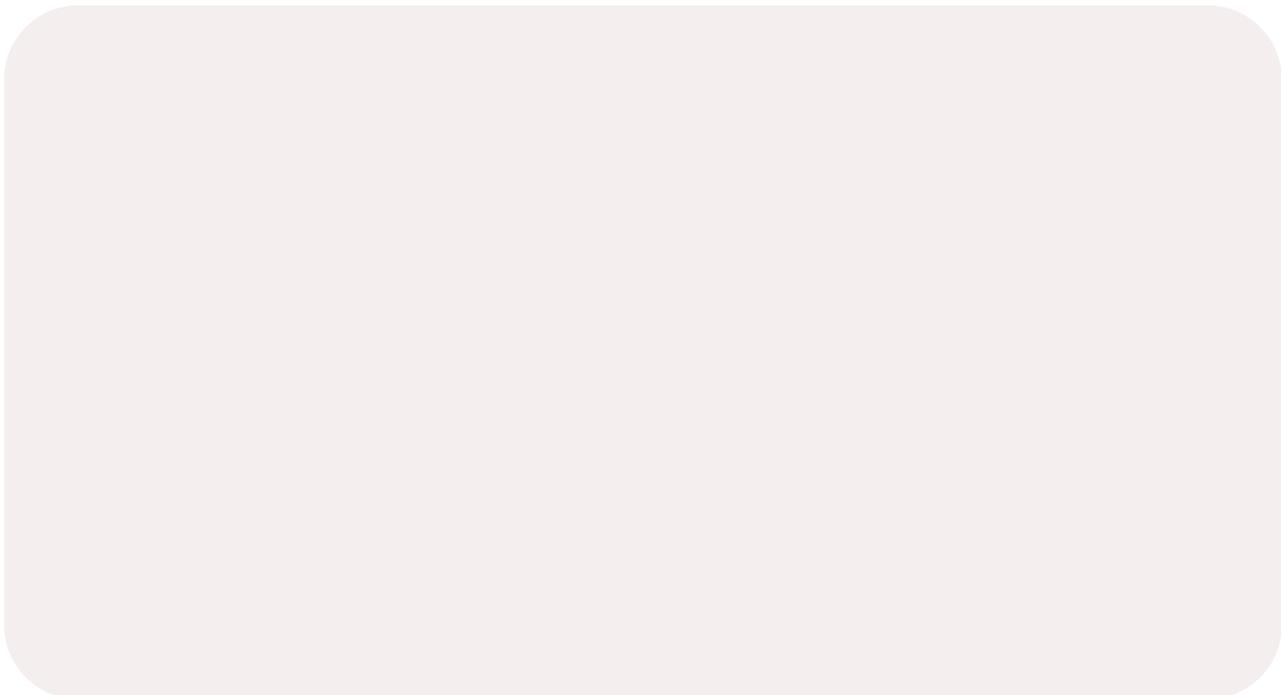
We understand that in churches, particularly older buildings, space is at a premium and rooms are multi purpose. However, it is important to consider the environment we use for our Sunday Groups may have an impact on the behaviour of the children and can convey messages to the children we are serving about their value and worth.



If the space we are using is cramped or messy or used for storage, what does that say to our children?

If the space we are using is light and airy, has comfortable seating or inspiring art work on the walls, what does that say to our children?

What is the space like that you will be using for the children's groups?  
How can you make this space more appropriate for children to learn and to play in? How will this space be a place where they are comfortable and can be inspired?





# Additional Needs

You may find that you have children attending your groups with additional needs and you will need to consider how you tailor the activities you are running to ensure these children are included and can engage.

Every child is an individual and will have different requirements. Speaking to the child and to their parents to ask what is helpful is important.

Some things to consider:

- What is the access like to the space you are using?
- Think about your session structure and try to make it consistent every week. Make and display visual timetables that you can refer to or use with children.
- Have some tools at your disposal that may help children with sensory processing such as a black out tent, wobble cushions, fidget toys or ear defenders.
- Think about styles of learning and how to include different abilities. For example, Godly Play is a method of Bible storytelling using sensory props and 'wondering' reflective questions which is inclusive for many ages and abilities. For more information about Godly Play training and resources, visit: <https://www.leeds.anglican.org/how-we-can-help/children-and-youth-work/children-0-12/godly-play/>

The Additional Needs Alliance is an invaluable source of information, especially their Facebook page. The 'Invited to Belong' training pack from Youthscape and Urban Saints is a simple, effective way to help leaders and volunteer reflect and develop good practice.

# Behaviour



Sunday group sessions are not school or entertainment but they do need to be safe places. Sometimes children, for a multiple of different reasons or factors, struggle to behave well. Managing challenging behaviour well needs some forethought and team decisions, here are some things to consider:

- As leaders, have conversations with your team about what you consider acceptable behaviour. It's different for different people.
- Structure can be good! Some groups find it helpful to draw up 'rules' – if you do this, do it in conversation with group members (so that they have some ownership of them), and be clear what the consequences of 'breaking' the 'rules' might involve.
- Avoid being like school.
- Children and young people can have very clear ideas of justice/fairness. Try to be consistent wherever you can, so that they know where they stand, and so they know that leaders will treat them alike. If you need a second opinion about an appropriate response, talk to another leader (this can be particularly helpful when you're wound up or when what needs responding to is particularly serious).
- Relationship will help you judge when to challenge people immediately and when to respond afterwards. Sometimes saying something in front of others is right, often saying something to one side is better (although be aware of the impression you create).
- Be mindful of the causes. Someone having a difficult situation at home doesn't make it ok to whack someone else, but it does mean that they are less in control than they might otherwise be. A child with ADHD might find sitting still really difficult!
- Love people. Be optimistic about behaviour and outcomes. Give people second chances and always aim for the best. We don't need to be a pushover, but, thinking back to influences, what does our response say about who God is?

# Reflection

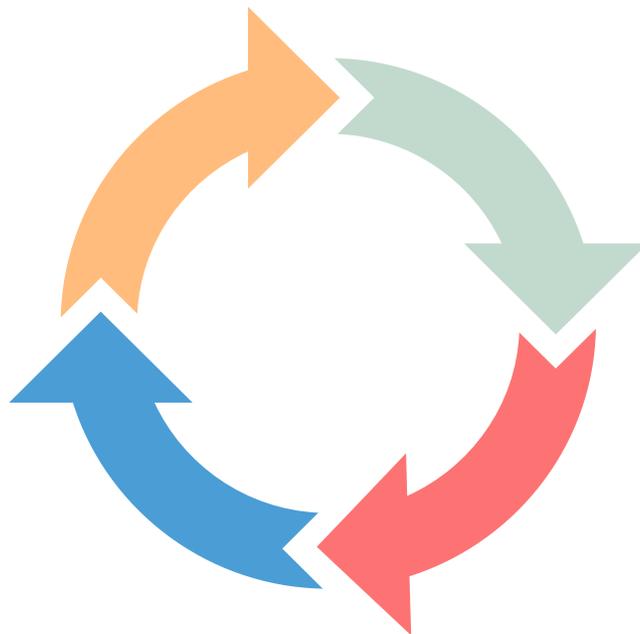
Once the group is up and running, it is important to make time for the Sunday group team to talk through how the session is going, review what works or doesn't, reflect on where the children are encountering God or not and think creatively about what they might change to improve on what is happening.

Messy Church put together a model of reflection for Messy Church Teams to work through to evaluate their sessions, taking inspiration from Laurie Green's reflective cycle. In this resource, the team are invited to assess a session, to think about what happened and how they experienced it. They are then encouraged to explore how what happened made them feel and where they encountered God. From these reflections, the group is encouraged to then think how they might respond in the future and what they might do differently.

This is a good way to help your team grow together, to pay attention and notice God at work in the children you are serving.

There is a pdf of the exercise available on the website:

<https://www.messychurch.brf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2023/11/A-model-of-reflective-practice.pdf>





# Parents

As Sunday group leaders we will see children, maybe once a week for maximum one hour and not even every week – with that amount of time we can have some influence on children but not as much as parents. Parents are with their children for much more time and at more crucial points in their days and lives and they have the opportunity to disciple their children in faith.

As Group leaders we need to encourage parents to see their own influence on the spiritual lives of their children and not to see this as a burden or pressure but to see it as a wonderful opportunity to share faith.

How can we support and empower parents to disciple their children?

Run the Parenting for Faith course: <https://www.parentingforfaith.brf.org.uk/> or Raising Faith course: <https://www.careforthefamily.org.uk/courses/courses-involving-faith/raising-faith/>

Meet with families individually and discuss their spiritual needs and children's needs and work with clergy and church leaders to encourage discipleship across the whole church family.

Invite parents to children's groups to see what they are like.

Use materials that have a take-home element to follow on from the morning's learning so families can continue learning together.

# Notes

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