

Useful Websites

www.faithinhomes.org.uk
www.going4growth.org.uk
www.1277.org.uk
www.godventure.co.uk
www.engagetoday.org.uk/playtime
www.messychurch.org.uk
www.barnabasinchurches.org.uk
www.themothersunion.org
www.livelent.net

Websites for Resources

www.eden.co.uk
www.123smartkids.co.uk
www.beulahenterprises.org
www.tts-group.co.uk
www.sbs-educational.co.uk
www.bakerross.co.uk

For more information

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Church For Children



Ideas to enable young children to
encounter God through all aspects of
church life

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Faith at Home

This leaflet is designed to help you think about ways in which you can enable children and their families to feel welcome and to be part of church.

It also gives you ideas both for during a service and ways to enable families to grow in faith both at home and as part of the church family.

How, as a church, can you support families to grow in faith within their own homes?

- † Eat together, at least once a week
- † Spend time together
- † Pray together
- † Read scripture together
- † Be thankful
- † Create a time of silence
- † Create rituals
- † Explore nature and God's world
- † Celebrating festivals together

Encourage families to celebrate festivals and seasons by suggesting ideas and activities for them to do together.

- † go for a walk together
- † Make an Easter Garden
- † go on a nature hunt finding something for every letter of the alphabet or colours
- † Have a special meal together

Prayer

Enabling children and their carers to learn to pray is important.

- † Encourage the children to think about things to pray for rather than saying a collective prayer
- † Introduce 'Please', 'Thank you' and 'Sorry' prayers
- † Provide items or visuals for reflection
- † Encourage silence

Belonging

It is also important to encourage relationships and connections with the wider church, to enable people to feel they belong to something bigger.

- † Invitations to special services (but consider what experience they will have if they come!)
- † Encourage them to take part in church activities and events: run a stall, a play area or a display
- † Notices of activities and events they could come along to

What opportunities are there for children and their families?

- † Services
- † Social activities
- † Specific groups like Toddler groups
- † Enabling families to grow in faith at home

Services

It is important to think about the welcome we give to children and their families;

Does it say "We welcome you"?

It is not just the way we greet people at the door that is important, but also the facilities and resources.

- ? Is it a nice warm environment to be in?
- ? Are children able to be with their families?
- ? Do you have adequate facilities?
- ? Do the congregation as a whole welcome children and their families?
- ? Is there a specific children's area or activity bags available?

Children's Area

- ? Is the area in a place where children can see what is happening? Do they feel as if they are part of the main congregation?
- ? Are the toys or activities clean and useable, do they enable children to encounter God?

Old, broken cast off toys in a dark, unmaintained corner do not say "we welcome you"

Toys and Activities

If you provide pew bags or activities keep them low-maintenance like toys rather than colouring sheets etc that need replacing

Choose toys that are different to the ones children may have at home

Look for toys and activities that have some connection to the church building or the Bible (there are ideas and suggestions included overleaf).

Include things that can inspire children's imagination and can take some inspiration from what they see and hear around them.

Toddler Groups

What distinguishes a church toddler group from any other?

The principles are the same as those for toys in church.

- ? Does what you do and provide say "we value you"?
- ? Are the toys clean and well maintained?
- ? Are there any toys that enable children to encounter God or to nurture prayer and spirituality?

For ideas see: 'Suggestions for Toys and Activities'

Include toys, books and material for dressing up. It is also important to include items from nature or made of natural materials not just plastic.

You could create a Birthday Bag for children when it is their birthday. Fill it with activities, stories and games to take home and do together. They could be either to keep or to return next time.

Social Activities

When planning the social calendar or an event remember:

Small children cannot go anywhere without their families!

Time

What time does the event start and finish?

6.00pm is a much better time than 7.30pm as this is often bedtime for a lot of young children.

Weekend events should be suitable for all ages.

Due to work commitments, families often spend little time together, thus meaning sometimes that one parent or grandparent brings the children.

Events and Activities

- † Plan events that are fully inclusive
- † Make small changes to already planned events so they can easily be included
- † Add things to enable children to feel included. Eg: a play area or an activity table with appropriate activities

Suggestions for Toys and Activities

Think about biblical themes or toys on a church - based theme so they can be inspired by things that they see around them.

When considering toys and activities remember they do not all have to be expensive toys - ask members of the congregation if they may be able to help either with sewing or woodwork.

Some basic items should always be part of a play area to help stimulate the imagination like:

- † dressing-up clothes
- † a selection of crosses
- † wooden building blocks and shapes
- † wooden people
- † visual items made from natural materials

Other toys can be linked to the theme, season, festival or linked to the service.

Remember that you are a church not the local library or community centre!

Things to consider:

Type of Service

- † For communion services include a small altar/table, with linen, chalice and paten or items used at meal times or for picnics
- † For a baptism service include a doll, bowl, candle, linen cloth, a cross and maybe a shell

The Seasons and Festivals

- † Advent and Christmas: include nativity figures and items for journeying or travelling
- † Lent and Easter: include items used at meal times or for picnic. The story of The Hungry Caterpillar and Caterpillars and Butterflies. Items for growing and gardening; planting or growing seeds
- † Pentecost: include kites, streamers, bubbles, books in other languages

- † Harvest: include 'Bodge plants a seed book, natural things such as leaves, conkers, acorns, seeds of corn etc, play food
- † Others suggestions: All Saints day, Remembrance Sunday or seasons - Spring, summer, autumn, winter

Bible Stories

- † Old Testament stories like Creation, Noah's Ark, Jonah
- † Parables like Lost Sheep, Good Samaritan
- † New Testament stories like The Last Supper, stories about Jesus eg. Calming the Storm

Some are more easily available or easier to create than others!

Don't forget to include Story books or bibles in the play area to read the story too.