ANTIOCH
KIDS MINISTRY

Kids Ministry Survival Guide

Equipping kids ministry heroes to create spaces where every child thrives!

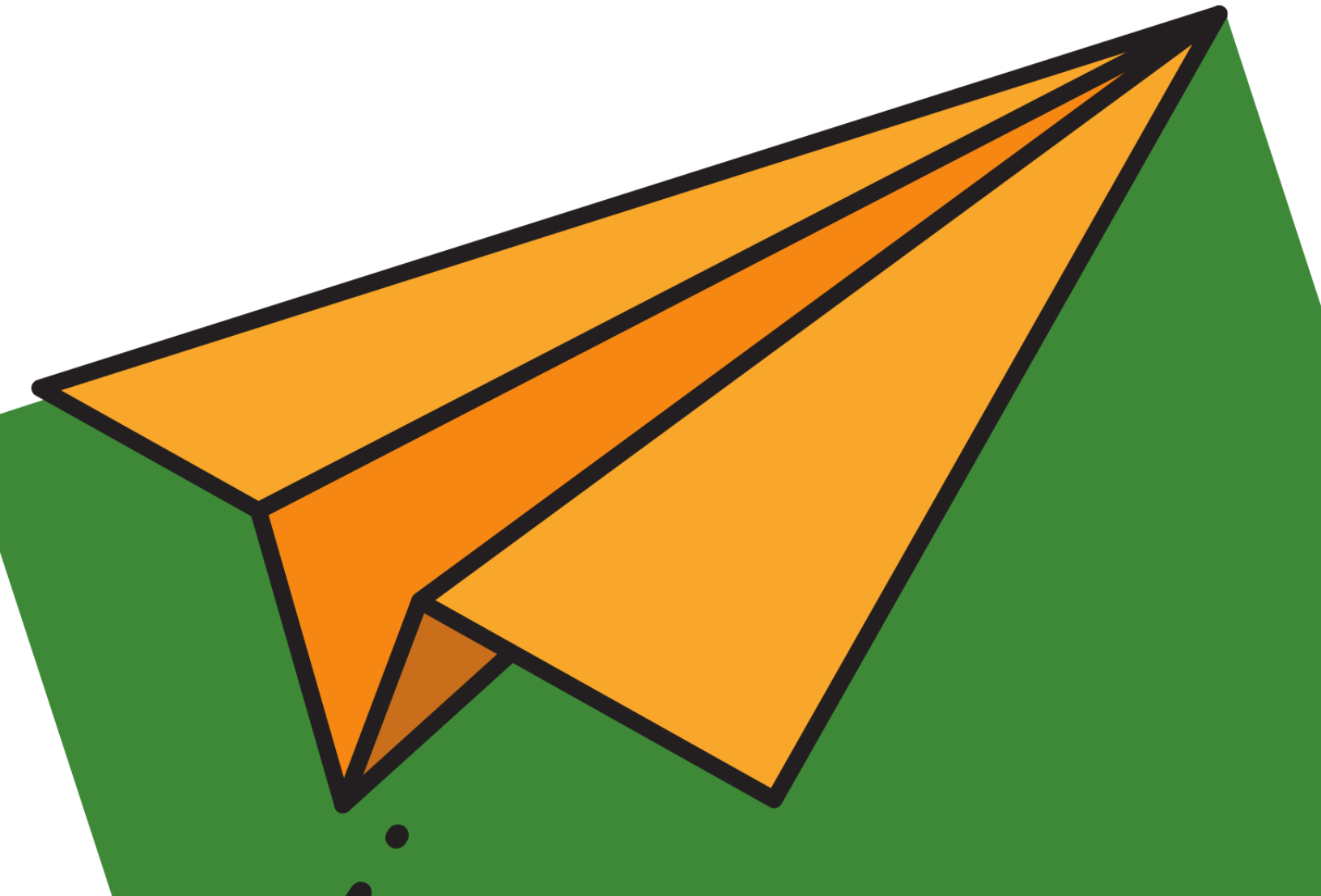


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Introduction: The Value of Kids and the High Calling of Kids ministry

Why Kids Matter

You have been entrusted with one of the most sacred callings in the Kingdom of God: shaping the hearts of children to know and follow Jesus. Whether your title is director, pastor, or coordinator, you stand on holy ground every time you step into the world of kids ministry. You are not merely organizing classrooms or filling volunteer schedules—you are shepherding souls.

Children are the most spiritually open people group on earth. Barna's research tells us that ***83% of believers come to Christ between the ages of 5–12***. A child's moral foundation is largely set by age nine. Toddlers begin forming their earliest impressions of the character of Jesus at 15 months old. The Jesuits understood this when they said, *"Give me a child until the age of seven, and I'll show you the man."* These early years are not incidental—they are destiny-shaping. And you have the divine privilege of being a safe, loving adult who helps children see Jesus clearly and see themselves through His eyes.

Great evangelists throughout history recognized the unmatched potential of reaching children:

- ***D.L. Moody:*** *"If I could relive my life, I would devote my entire ministry to reaching children for God."*
- ***Charles Spurgeon:*** *"The opinion that children cannot receive the whole truth of the gospel is a mistake; for their child-condition is a help rather than a hindrance: older folk must become as little children before they can enter the Kingdom."*
- ***Wess Stafford:*** *"Every child who crosses my path in the grocery line, at church, or at the ballpark I consider a divine appointment, an opportunity to lift that child up... It may just be the moment that will launch a life or restore one that needs kindness today."*

Working with kids is not babysitting. It is not crowd control. It is not a side ministry so adults can learn about God. ***Kids ministry is frontline Kingdom work.*** It is evangelism. It is discipleship. It is spiritual formation at the most impressionable stage of a human's life. Children are not the church of tomorrow—they are the church of today, standing right in front of you with hearts wide open and ready to respond

to Jesus with a purity adults often struggle to reclaim. Thus, the window of childhood is a sacred and strategic space to share with kids!

What you do with the kids in your church matters deeply to their parents, to your church family, and, most of all, to God. For however long you are given to influence these young lives, be all in. Champion them. Advocate for them. Surround them with leaders who will love them well. As a shepherd, your investment in these children will shape not only their eternity but the eternity of countless others they will one day influence.

At the beginning of the book of Judges, we read of a generation that rose up who *"did not know the Lord or the works He had done for Israel"* (Judges 2:10). They drifted into idolatry simply because no one told them the stories of God. No one passed down the faith. No one showed them who Yahweh was. ***May this never be said of us.*** Our children deserve to hear the gospel in a way they can grasp, from someone who genuinely loves them. They deserve to know that Jesus does not just love the world—He loves *them*, right now, as children. They deserve to see the gospel embodied in the way we change their diapers, tie their shoes, listen to their stories, and chase them across the playground.

Kids ministry is incarnational ministry. It is sharing the gospel and sharing your life. Paul captured this beautifully in 1 Thessalonians 2:8: *"We were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us."* May you find that same delight—even on the days when the room is full, and the volunteers are few. Christ is enough, and He is with you.

May God ignite in you a passion that burns bright for the children He has placed in your care. May you see every child as a divine appointment. May your ministry be a place where kids encounter the living God in ways that shape their hearts forever. May your ministry be a place where kids KNOW God in a real and personal way and not just learn ABOUT Him. You are not alone! There are many of us throughout the Antioch network of churches who have made many mistakes that you do not have to and have come up with creative second options that you can implement as Plan A. Please know we are in this with you not just in spirit and heart, but practically too!

This playbook has many great ideas and strategies, and when you do not find what you need, reach out to the many who have gone before and labored in the trenches for the sake of kids. It is our joy to come alongside you. God is going to use your life to impact generations. Thank you for championing those

who might not be able to say thank you! Your work will be seen by the One who takes what little we have and multiplies it to feed the many.

Chapter 1 - Vision and Mission

Kids ministry in the Antioch Movement is a foundational part of cultivating the next generation of disciples. This resource is designed to equip kids pastors to lead with excellence, aligning their ministry with the vision of the Antioch movement, their local church's unique expression of those values, and the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

VISION: The Antioch Movement

Key Pillars:

A Passion for Jesus:
As leaders in the Antioch movement, our driving conviction is that everything we do flows from a wholehearted love for Jesus. A deep, personal relationship with Him is the foundation for both life and ministry. This means being captivated by who He is—His love, grace, and truth—and allowing that to shape every decision and action. This passion is nurtured through salvation, the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit, prayer, and daily devotion to Jesus, anchoring all we are and all we do in His presence.

His Purposes on the Earth:
As disciples of Jesus, we live and lead with intentionality, aligning every part of our lives with God's mission to bring healing, hope, and salvation to the world. Our calling goes beyond personal transformation, extending into a vision of global renewal. Jesus invites us to participate in His work of restoring all things, using our gifts, talents, and time to serve others, share His love, and reflect His kingdom. As leaders, we cultivate mission-focused teams within our circles of influence and embrace the Great Commission to impact our cities, nation, and the nations of the earth.

Biblically Based & Spirit-Led
Everything we lead is grounded in the unchanging truths of Scripture and guided by continual recognition, discernment, and response to the Holy Spirit in daily life and ministry leadership.

Practical Applications & Reflection Questions:

- Go to the Antioch Movement website and look over the calling, beliefs, and values.

- Note the language used and the themes highlighted. Make it a practice to review these at least annually.
- Reflect on what parts of the vision inspires or resonates with you the most and what parts are more stretching for you. How will you ensure your personal preferences and gifting don't limit your ability to lead? What intentional steps could you take to ensure you hold these tensions? Have a conversation with your authority about how this could impact your work and what support may be helpful.
- What unique challenges and opportunities does your kids ministry face when responding to and reflecting on this vision?

VISION: Your Community

Adapting to Your Context:

- Each church in the Antioch movement should be aligned with the 5 Circles of Church, but understanding your church's specific mission and vision is critical for a fruitful kids ministry.
- Think about how your church's kids ministry fits into the broader church strategy.
- Think about how the kids ministry leaders can partner with other ministry leaders in the church to create a unified approach to discipleship.
- As you think through your church and the context of your community, what unique considerations need to be made, whether to capitalize on an opportunity or head off a threat to your kids ministry?

Examples:

- Are you reaching an English as a second language community?
- How could the location of your gatherings create opportunities and challenges?
- What is the racial history in your city?
- Are you familiar with the unique demographics and needs of the families in your city?
- Are there cultural or spiritual strongholds unique to your city or area?

Practical Steps:

- Meet with your leadership to understand their expectations and priorities.
- Think about how you could "knead the Antioch Movement DNA into the dough of your community" through the kids ministry.

- Review what your kids ministry already has in place and ensure consistency in branding, language, and events.
- Identify the unique demographics and needs of the families in your church and community.
- Outline how your kids ministry uniquely participates in and contributes to the church's vision.
- If you are unsure or find there to be strongholds or unique challenges that your kids ministry will be pressing up against, get help and start praying!

VISION: Cultivating a Kids ministry-Specific Vision

Building Your Vision:

- Pray and seek the Lord for a specific word or direction for your ministry.
- Engage families and volunteers in developing this vision.
- Clarify how your ministry will help kids know Jesus, build friendships, and live missionally.

Vision Implementation:

- Set short-term and long-term goals.
- Create regular rhythms for evaluating and adjusting your vision.
- Align your budget, programming, and events with your ministry's vision.

Reflection Questions:

- What does success look like for your kids ministry in the next year? In five years?
- How are you equipping parents to disciple their children?

VISION: Empowered to Respond to the Present Word of the Lord

Hearing God's Voice:

- Spend time in prayer and Scripture daily.
- Involve your team in seeking the Lord for direction.
- Be flexible and willing to pivot when the Holy Spirit leads.
- Is there a "seasonal" word or theme the leadership of your church is highlighting? How can the kids ministry respond and participate?
- Get familiar with the Word Of The Lord content produced at https://www.antiochwotl.com/

Practical Applications:

- Hold regular prayer meetings with your volunteers.
- Ensure that you are intentionally training kids to listen to God and practice hearing His voice.
- Build in flexibility to respond to immediate needs or opportunities.

Reflection Questions:

- How do you stay sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading?
- How do you help children and families recognize the Spirit's work in their lives?

Chapter 2 - Leading Kids to Follow Jesus

Teaching kids about Jesus means clearly explaining salvation and what it looks like to follow Him. Here are principles for sharing the gospel with kids effectively.

Principles for Leading Kids to follow Jesus

1. Communicate the Gospel in Kid Friendly Ways

- ***Use language kids understand.*** Talk about *following Jesus* or *becoming best friends with Jesus* rather than "asking Jesus into your heart." Kids understand following someone and can relate to best friends as a real relationship.
- ***Explain the "why."*** Help kids understand their need for forgiveness and what Jesus did on the cross.
- ***Use simple tools.*** The Billy Graham "Four Spiritual Laws" tract is effective for kids. You can get the Steps to Peace folding track here. The bridge illustration is excellent as well because both are visual, tactile, and easy to grasp.
- ***Show it, don't just say it.*** Use drama, object lessons, or drawings to help kids *see* how salvation works. Kids often respond when the gospel is communicated via a drama such as "Choices" or "Life or Death." (more resources for dramas are available under special events in the resource chapter at the end of this manual)

2. Create Meaningful and Authentic Invitation Moments

- ***Invite kids to say yes to Jesus regularly.*** Elementary-age kids are thinking deeply about heaven, hell, and faith—so include the gospel often.
- ***Avoid group pressure.*** Ensure kids don't feel pushed to make a decision for Jesus. We want it to be an invitation! Their decision should be authentic and personal. In large-group invitations, make it clear that not being ready is okay and that God leads each child in timing. Emphasize that the decision must be personal.
- ***Make responses personal.*** After a group gospel presentation, let small-group leaders have one-on-one conversations with kids who want to respond. Each kid is unique, so just having them raise their hands and repeat the prayer means there is not a lot of good follow-up and kids might not really get it. Ensure each kid responding has a one-on-one follow up.

3. Honor the Work of the Holy Spirit

- ***Recognize that kids respond because the Spirit is moving.*** Their desire to say yes again is often a longing for fresh surrender. Whether it is the first time or the seventh time, the child is responding because they want more of Jesus. Help parents, leaders, and the kids to understand that the Holy Spirit is prompting them to obey Jesus and that is amazing!
- ***Normalize repeat responses.*** Assure kids they don't *have* to say yes again, but if they're unsure, it's okay to respond. Sometimes this might mean that a kid needs a tangible celebration or moment that they can look back to as that was the time when they gave their life to Jesus. Often this remembering happens through the sacrament of Baptism – kids will remember this act.
- ***Don't miss the moment.*** Salvation can feel abstract, so offer clear opportunities whenever the Spirit is prompting.

4. Help Kids Mark the Moment

- ***Give them something tangible.*** A booklet or next-steps guide helps kids remember what God did in their hearts. Some ministries provide a booklet (e.g., "I Have Decided") and can share a template for printing to give kids when they say yes to Jesus.
- ***Point toward baptism.*** If a child hasn't been baptized, begin a conversation with parents about this important next step. Some children are not ready immediately; a common indicator of readiness is when a child begins asking for baptism personally after responding to Jesus.
- ***Celebrate the decision.*** Kids need to feel that something real and meaningful happened so encourage families to mark the moment with a celebration of some kind so a kid will remember this amazing day.

5. Partner with Families for Ongoing Discipleship

- ***Always follow up with parents or guardians.*** Let parents know when their child chooses to follow Christ—this moment is too important to miss, and kids often won't bring it up on their own.
- ***Equip families.*** Provide resources or conversation starters so discipleship continues at home.
- ***Affirm the child's journey.*** Parents appreciate guidance on how to support their child's new (or renewed) commitment. Since many parents will look to ministry leaders for next steps, encourage simple family rhythms—like a brief morning or bedtime devotional—so kids begin to see friendship with Jesus as a daily relationship.

Teaching Kids about Baptism

One of the great privileges of kids ministry is helping kids take the next step of baptism. After a child receives Christ, baptism is a powerful way to mark what God has done in their heart. Some families choose to do this soon after salvation; others wait until the child is ready and can understand the meaning of baptism. Below are several helpful principles for baptizing children.

Set up an interview with the child and a parent or guardian to talk through baptism and discern readiness together. This is a shared discernment process between the family and the kids pastor. During this conversation, cover the following questions and teaching points.

- Ask: Why do they want to be baptized? If the desire is truly the child's, they can usually explain it in their own words. Many kids initially assume baptism is when water "washes away" sins. That's a common misunderstanding and doesn't necessarily mean they aren't ready—it's often an opportunity to clarify what baptism is (and isn't).

- Many kids don't understand the difference between salvation and baptism. Explain that salvation comes first; baptism is a sacrament that publicly celebrates what God has already done in the child's heart. Don't minimize baptism, but don't present it as "the" act of getting saved. Baptism proclaims that Jesus has already saved them and forgiven their sins when they believed in Him.

- Help the child understand sin in age-appropriate ways and how sin separates people from God (for example, choosing disobedience, lying, or speaking unkindly). Then connect that to the cross: Jesus took our place. A helpful passage is 2 Corinthians 5:21: *"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."*

Whiteboard Gospel Illustration

(a script to use for a class or talking one-on-one about getting baptized)

A simple way to explain salvation and baptism to kids:

Draw three hearts in a vertical line on a whiteboard. Make them the same size. Then draw a cross, a tomb, and Jesus risen. Then another picture of a heart, what looks like baptism water, and the words "new life;" this should be in same style and look of the above image of cross, tomb and Jesus risen. Tell

the kids that these pictures help us understand what happened to people's hearts because of sin, and what Jesus did to save us.

Here is an example of what your diagram should look like.

1. God's Heart

Show the first heart and explain that this is God's heart. Explain that God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit have a perfect heart with no sin. The Trinity is perfect and without sin.

2. Adam and Eve's Heart

Show the second heart and explain that this is Adam and Eve's heart. Explain that Adam and Eve were created with a heart like God's. In the beginning they had hearts that looked exactly like God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit's. They knew God closely, walked with God, and were friends with God...Then say, "but something happened..."

3. Adam and Eve's Sin

Let them tell you what happened (most of them know this part); if not, walk them through the Fall.

Ask the kids what God told Adam and Eve not to do. Most will know about the fruit. Walk them through it:

- God gave them one command.
- Don't eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
- But they did! They ate the fruit.
- They chose to disobey.
- No longer did their hearts look like God's (perfect and pure).
- They sinned.
- Tell them that they just sinned once, but something happened.
- They couldn't be with God anymore because of their sin.

Color in a small part of Adam and Eve's heart to show that their hearts had changed. Explain that the Bible says sin separates us from God (Isaiah 59:2). That's what happened to Adam and Eve.

4. Our Heart

Point to the third heart labeled "Us." Explain that we inherited something from Adam and Eve. Help them understand the word "inherited."

Tell them:

- Sin passed down to us.
- We were born with a heart that wants to sin.
- The Bible says all of us have sinned (Romans 3:23).

Ask a few simple questions:

- Have you ever lied?
- Disobeyed your parents?
- Been mean to your brother or sister?

This is where you need to ask if they have sinned and can acknowledge that.

(It's very important that kids understand and personalize their sin so that they can understand and personalize their need for Jesus. DON'T SKIP THIS PART. If kids cannot, then we usually think they are not ready to get baptized as they don't understand their need at all for Jesus.)

Tell the kids that because of our sin, our hearts look like Adam and Eve's too. Not perfect. Color in the "Us" heart to show that we've ALL sinned too. Make sure they understand this part clearly. We all have sinned, and sin separates us from God.

5. Get to the Good news: God's Plan through Jesus

Tell the kids that the story doesn't end with sin, God had a plan. Explain:

God Sent Jesus

- Jesus was born without sin.
- The only one ever born without sin.
- Explain that Jesus lived a perfect life and died on the cross for our sins.
- He never lied, disobeyed parents, etc.....
- But something happened when he was 33 years old.
- Then ask, "Do you know what happened when Jesus was about 33 years old?"

6. The Cross

Jesus was crucified for us:

- Show the picture of the cross and Jesus on it and the picture of the heart alongside.
- Remind them: Jesus never sinned.
- Tell them: But the Bible says something really interesting in 2 Corinthians 5:21: - *"He who knew no sin became sin."*
- Ask the question: Whose sins did Jesus have on the cross? (Let them "get it")
- Jesus took all our sin on Himself – your sin, my sin, your mom's sin, your pastor's sin...
- ***Draw multiple sin blotches in the heart to explain...***
- Say: Jesus took our place. Jesus took the punishment for all our sin.

7. The Tomb and the Resurrection

Show the picture of the cross, the tomb and Jesus risen. Explain:

Jesus rose from the dead

Using the last illustration of the cross, tomb and resurrection explain that:

- Jesus took all our sin.
- He died on Friday.
- Jesus died with all our sins on Him.
- He died and defeated the power of sin and death for EVERYONE.
- He was put in a tomb all day that night and Saturday (show the body).
- Then ask them what happened on Sunday. (They know – He rose from the dead).
- On Sunday, He rose again with a clean, perfect heart.
- Because of this, He made a way for us to be forgiven (Colossians 1:13–20).

8. How We Are Saved

Tell the kids:

"When you ask Jesus to save you, forgive you, and be your best friend forever, the Bible says you are saved when you say it with your mouth and believe it in your heart."

Romans 10:9–10 says:

- Declare "Jesus is Lord."
- Believe God raised Him from the dead.
- You will be saved.

9. What Jesus Does When He Saves You

Explain that when Jesus saves someone:

- He cleans their heart. ***(Erase the sins from the heart of Adam and Eve, and Us hearts.)***
- He takes away all their sins—past, present, and future.
- He makes them God's child.

10. Connecting Salvation and Baptism

Make this part very clear:

- Salvation is the first step.
- Baptism is the next step.
- Baptism does not save you—Jesus does.
- Baptism shows everyone what Jesus has already done in your heart.

11. Now Connect Baptism

Show the last image of the heart, the baptism water, and the "new life" words.

- Remind the kids that if they are saved, they are God's child.
- Explain that baptism is how they make that public — it's how they tell people.
- Tell them that baptism shows on the outside what Jesus has already done on the inside.
- Point to the picture of the heart, the baptism water, and the new life words.

Connect baptism to Jesus' story:

- Remind them that baptism is a picture of what Jesus did for us on the cross.
- Briefly explain again how Jesus took our sins, died, and rose to new life (refer to the earlier illustration).

Connect baptism to their own story:

- Explain that baptism is a picture of what God has done for them personally.
- Point to the heart and say that before they were saved, their heart was full of sin.
- Remind them that they said yes to Jesus.
- Tell them that when they get baptized, they are showing that they no longer have a sinful heart.
- Explain that going under the water shows they have died to their old way of life because of Jesus.
- Explain that coming back up out of the water shows they are a new creation.
- Tell them this is why we say, "Buried with Him in baptism and raised to walk in newness of life."

Summarize the meaning:

- Baptism is a picture of what God did to forgive us — Jesus took our place, died, and rose again.
- When someone gets baptized, they identify with that story and make it their own.

Talking to Kids About Salvation & Baptism

Purpose of This Guide

Much of your job as a kids pastor is to talk about following Jesus. We often talk about salvation and baptism when we speak of following Jesus. The below guide provides a simple, step-by-step plan for explaining salvation and baptism to children. It includes conversation prompts, biblical clarity, and a visual whiteboard illustration to help kids understand the gospel.

General Guidelines

- ***Kids need to feel like you are connecting with them.***
- ***Hang out for a second together and simply connect through play or talk.***
- ***Give them a snack.***
- ***Introduce the topic: "So I hear you are interested in getting baptized..."***
- ***Tell them how great that is that they are thinking about this.***
- ***Explain that together y'all will talk through baptism.***
- ***Tell them this isn't a test but more like learning and talking.***
- ***Encourage them that they are going to do great!***

Introductory Questions

Tell the kids: *"I'm going to ask a few questions—anyone can answer!"* If you are talking to more than one child, let 2–3 kids answer each question.

- ***Why do you want to be baptized?***
- ***What do you think happens when someone gets baptized?***
- ***Why should we be baptized?***
- ***When did you ask Jesus into your heart or cry out to God to save you?***

These questions help them articulate what they believe and help you as the pastor know where to guide the conversation.

Common Misunderstandings About Baptism

Explain that many kids have all these ideas about getting baptized that are confusing. Examples include: "Many have told me:"

- "The water is magic water."
- "The water washes all your sins away."
- "Getting baptized is when you get saved."
- "You stay under the water for a long time."

Clarify these gently and simply.

What the Bible Shows About Baptism

Walk the kids through the biblical pattern:

1. People ***cried out to God.***
2. God ***saved them.***
3. ***After*** they were saved, they obeyed God and were ***baptized immediately.***

Bible stories:

Philip and Ethiopian Eunuch - Acts 8: 34 – 30
Cornelius's household – Acts 10:44-48
Philippian jailer – Acts 16:30-34

Key point:

Baptism comes *after* salvation. We are justified not by any works, but baptism is a sign, symbol, a holy sacrament, and a means by which we declare to others that we follow Jesus and have said yes to Him.

Acknowledge Confusion

Let the kids know that many people—kids and adults—get confused about salvation and baptism. Tell them you're going to look at what the Bible says so they can understand clearly. Tell them that you are going to show them something to help them understand and that you will need their help as you go through this. (This keeps them engaged.)

Readiness checklist: Key questions to review

- Does the child understand Jesus' death and resurrection? Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25–26)
- Does the child understand the need for a Savior? "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." (Romans 3:23–24)
- Does the child understand salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone? Salvation is based on what Jesus has done—not on personal effort or good works. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." (Ephesians 2:8–9)
- Are there outside influences shaping this decision? For example, did the child attend an event with an altar call and feel pressured, or see a friend respond to Jesus and feel compelled to follow? Ask whether the child is choosing Christ from personal conviction and revelation from the Lord, not primarily in response to someone else.

Chapter 3 - Volunteers

Kids ministry relies heavily on our teams of volunteers. They are the heart and soul of what we are able and not able to do on a Sunday morning. As much as kids are a part of your ministry, so are your volunteers!

What are the available volunteer roles/job descriptions?

Our volunteers need to clearly understand what we are calling them to! They need to understand their role and their responsibilities so they can serve with confidence.

- First, the ministry should clearly define volunteer opportunities (e.g., serving with different age groups, leading worship, supporting tech, greeting and check-in, classroom oversight, mid-week admin, or classroom setup and organization).
- Clear role descriptions should be created for each position, so recruiting is effective, and volunteers know what to expect. Existing role descriptions should be located when available; otherwise, new ones should be written (see examples in the forms section).
- Any role that serves directly with children should require appropriate safety screening and training.
- As volunteers are placed into roles, leaders should consider the best fit. Serving should build people up—sharpening skills and helping them grow in their giftings—which requires getting to know individuals well enough to place them wisely.
- Leaders should also stay creative in forming new roles that allow people to use their giftings.

System to track current volunteers

How are you tracking your team of volunteers? This can be in the form of a spreadsheet, or managed through a software like Planning Center, but it must include volunteer names, when they serve, and contact information.

Here are some helpful questions to ask:

- What is our serving rhythm?
    - It would be very helpful to know how often volunteers have traditionally served each month. Has this been a helpful, workable schedule? Do they serve on a consistent schedule each month? If not, this might be a step in the right direction

- How are our serving semesters organized?
    - E.g., divided by school year and summer, quarters, etc.
- Who are our key people we lean on?
    - If I need help or need to call someone into a leadership role, who are those extra reliable people?
- What scheduling system do we use?
    - It is helpful to know if there is an existing program or spreadsheet that shows all volunteers, their contact information, and when they are typically scheduled to serve. For smaller ministries, just a spreadsheet and email or text message reminders might be an efficient way to communicate with volunteers. For larger ministries, a more comprehensive database program such as Planning Center might be helpful for scheduling volunteers across multiple ministries.
- Who are our volunteers that crossover with other ministries? Worship people, tech people, etc. It is super helpful to be aware of this so that we can honor all people's commitments.
- How do we divide up the 5th Sunday of the month? Since these are irregular, churches can rotate weekly teams through the four 5th Sundays throughout the year, have a backup/5th Sunday team that just serves on special occasions, or do a sign up to see who is available to serve each 5th Sunday.

How do we recruit new Volunteers?

- Volunteer recruitment is not just about finding people to fill spots in your classrooms. While we need people to serve to open classrooms, it is so much more than just that – it is inviting people alongside you as you live out the mission and vision of your Kids ministry; as you recruit volunteers, you are inviting them to represent Jesus to the kids of your church. Make sure that you are casting a compelling vision as you invite people into the work of ministry – share testimonies of what God is doing in your kids ministry, share your personal heart for why you believe in kids ministry, and/or make sure people know they are joining something bigger than just themselves. We don't want "warm bodies" to fill our classes; we want people who are envisioned for the next generation of disciples!
- Making personal asks is always a win! Have others help you brainstorm people to ask, then joyfully offer them the opportunity to serve.
- Ask your current volunteers to recruit a friend! You could even offer some kind of treat as a thanks for this. Personal asks are the #1 proven way to recruit!

- Ask your leadership if you can make an announcement in front of the whole church. If you can do this periodically, think of what testimonies you would like to share about the exciting things happening in Kids ministry. Who are excellent volunteers who could share their story of serving with the congregation?
- Offer the opportunity for Lifegroups or families to serve together.
- Can you publicize needs through our church communications or create a visual representation, such as a visual board displaying volunteer needs where people can take cards to fill a role and leave contact information to connect with you? Follow up quickly to find a fit for these folks!
- Send home cards displaying your volunteer needs with parents on Sunday mornings! People will often read what you put in their hands on Sunday mornings more effectively than they will read an email.
- Offer summer serving semesters as opportunities for people to try out serving or for parents to help cover the loss of college student volunteers over the break.
- Remember that you are not just begging for help but offering something that people desperately need! People need to feel connected to their church, like a part of the body, to be known by church staff and other members, and to be reminded of fundamental truths about God and how much He loves them. Don't just share your kids ministry needs but share how serving the church meets the needs of the person you are recruiting!

Screening & Onboarding Volunteers

Why we screen: Screening...

- Keeps kids safe—we want to build a high wall and set a high standard to keep our kids safe
- Protects and builds up the volunteer— we're asking the hard questions that reveal discipleship and pastoral issues before they start serving, then choosing to proactively address them!
- Ask your leadership: What does our insurance require for safety coverage? Many insurance policies require church membership for a certain amount of time before someone can serve. This also ensures that a person is walking in community and is known before they begin to serve.

Suggested Process for Onboarding New Volunteers

- ***First:*** Training – Meet with new volunteers to acquaint them with their role, their classroom, helpful procedures, safety protocol, best practices, curriculum, and anything else they will need to know to function successfully in a classroom. It often works well to do this training on the morning before they shadow, so that they can then see it in action immediately following training.

- ***Second:*** Shadowing – Invite new volunteers to come in and shadow an experienced volunteer who serves in the same role so that they can see it in operation and get a feel for the role.
- ***Third:*** Follow Up – Follow-up in person or over the phone to see how they felt about the role, if they have any questions, etc. Check in with the teacher they shadowed to see if they have any feedback or suggestions as well.
- ***Fourth:*** Scheduling – Schedule the volunteer to serve for the first time. Make sure they understand how the scheduling process works and how you will communicate with them, when they need to arrive, and what it will look like.
- ***Fifth:*** Feedback – Give feedback after they serve for the first time. See if they have any questions you need to answer or any needed retraining.
- Overcommunicate everything!! It will feel like too much to you, but will be just enough for someone who serves once a month

For information regarding screening and onboarding volunteers see Chapter 14 on Child Safety

How to communicate with Volunteers so everyone is on the same page

- What are your church's communications systems? Ask around – your church may already have a system such as MailChimp, BombBomb, or Mojo Text that allows you to communicate important information to large groups at a time. One helpful suggestion is to send a pointer text to ask people to check their email whenever you send out email communications.
- Many ministries have had success with apps like GroupMe and Band that can enable communication to whole volunteer groups at a time. You might choose to create a group for your whole ministry, groups for Elementary and Preschool Ministry, or groups divided by teaching roles.
- Does your scheduling program communicate with people directly? If not, you might need to add a step of direct communication each week.
- Overcommunication is always best! At the point you feel like you've said something in 10 different ways, that is probably the moment someone finally saw it!
- Texting often yields more fruit than email – even a text that links to an email.
- Do you have or want to create a regular rhythm to communicate seasonal information or get regular feedback from your team? You might consider a newsletter or a GroupMe check in seasonally.

What are our expectations for volunteers?

How do they communicate with us?

- Ensure a two-way communication platform, such as GroupMe, Band or simply text or email so that volunteers can easily communicate with you and with each other about classroom feedback, scheduling concerns, etc.

How do they handle it when they have to change their schedule?

- You will reap a great benefit if you create expectations that teams will work out the switch among themselves, then share the arrangement with you. If volunteers have access to GroupMe or to a volunteer list with contact information, they can quickly identify who is able to do the same job they do and organize a trade. Ask volunteers to notify you of sickness as early as possible so that you can plan for a change ahead of time. In case of emergency, create a pool of on-call volunteers that are willing to jump in last minute (can be existing volunteers).

When do we expect them to show up on Sunday mornings?

- Volunteers need clarity, and you need stability – what time will enable everyone to be in their places and ready to roll? Consider hosting a volunteer "huddle" to share brief chunks of equipping, encouragement, and any important announcements. Snacks and coffee go a long way toward bringing people in on time! This also enables you to make sure all your volunteers have arrived in a timely manner and are ready to roll.

What are their Sunday morning responsibilities

- Clarity brings confidence! Is there a way to give your volunteers access to Sunday's curriculum ahead of time? (Upload to Planning Center, email, or text it out to team, etc.) Make sure your volunteers know exactly what to do when they arrive at their volunteer station – clear instructions.
- Make sure that classroom materials are set up and easy to follow – this will ensure that your volunteers can keep their primary focus on the kids, instead of searching for what they need.
- Is your curriculum clear and easy to follow? This is a great opportunity for you to check in with your teachers each week for feedback. This enables you to make small adjustments to your lessons that help them hit their target more effectively.

- Is there a clear schedule for each class? Post it in a clearly visible place in the classroom so that your teachers can easily follow it.
- Do your teachers know the clean-up procedure? Once again, it is super helpful to place this in a clearly visible place in the classroom.
- Make sure that if you are utilizing teen volunteers, expectations for their behavior in the classroom are clearly outlined as well.
- Is there a volunteer t-shirt or lanyard that you want them to wear as an identifying marker?

What is our training rhythm, and what do we cover in each training?

According to your church's calendar, when will it be best to conduct whole group training? This needs to happen at least annually and preferably by semester to keep vision, safety, and best practices in your team's mind, as well as to incorporate new people onto the team. Bi-annually is a rhythm that has worked well for many ministries.

Your training needs to include:

- ***Relational Connect and Team Building:*** Your volunteers need to feel seen, known, equipped, prepared, and listened to! This could be as simple as an icebreaker question allowing volunteers to share a piece of their story. Volunteers also need to get to know each other so they can develop team camaraderie and see themselves as part of a bigger story of God's people – give them opportunities to practice teamwork, share experiences, share what's working, and share what's not working. Many volunteers also sign-up because they have an unspoken but very real expectation that as they serve they will belong. We need for our volunteers to feel community, belonging, and friendship and your job is to cultivate that. We want our volunteers to understand that they are part of an army discipling the next generation together.

- ***Vision training:*** Your volunteers need to be envisioned for the ministry they are called to! We want them to understand why we do what we do as a leadership team, and why we are asking them to do what we are asking them to do. We want to cast vision for the calling and the beauty of discipling kids and families so that they can be refreshed and recharged for the work of ministry. This is a great time to share testimonies about beautiful things happening among the kids and families of our ministry so that they understand the value of their faithfulness and their investment.

- ***Seeking Feedback:*** This is also an opportunity for you to hear from them! Do they have ideas about how things could function better in your classrooms? Their input is valuable and creative!

- ***Practical training:*** Practical training includes the following:
    - Curriculum training
    - Classroom management
    - Training in any spiritual disciplines they will practice in the classroom
    - Communicating with parents
    - Policies & Procedures
    - Child Safety/Abuse awareness (see Chapter 14)

- ***Most important... Celebrate your Volunteers:*** This is best done through FOOD! Offer a meal or amazing snacks as a way of thanks!

What is your volunteer culture like? How do you value and retain your volunteers?

People need to feel seen, known, appreciated, equipped – they will stick around if they are happy! We want to be leaders who get to know our people, recognize their strengths, and seek them out! People rise to the occasion when we empower them! If they feel they are being built by serving, they will stick around. Our volunteers can build interpersonal skills, teaching and preaching skills, Gospel sharing skills, and communication skills through the act of serving with kids, and we want them to benefit from this! It is also our critical responsibility to create life-giving rhythms that don't wear people out! God will honor your integrity when you allow people to have space and be healthy, and your volunteers will serve sustainably. This includes keeping tabs on other places people are serving so that they will not burn themselves out. This is life discipleship for our people. We also want to show our volunteers tremendous appreciation – we can never say thank you enough!

How do we do encourage, celebrate, and honor our volunteers?

Here are some examples:

- Send big group shout outs through your communication platform.
- In your Sunday morning huddle – speak appreciation and identity!
- In your training – major on encouragement and appreciation!!
- Have good snacks on a Sunday morning – offer breakfast once a month or quarterly.

- As a whole ministry or church, make a big deal of appreciation by hosting a special event/dinner or giving gifts.
- In any communication – lay on the encouragement, especially if there is any correction involved.
- Personal Encouragement – we want to honor and celebrate people! You need to be present, watching, and getting to know your people. Be ready to verbalize the great thing you saw or your thankfulness!
- Recognize birthdays or send Christmas cards.
- Do a regular ministry volunteer spotlight.
- Pray for your volunteers and provide pastoral care: if God has placed a volunteer team under your authority, He has also anointed you to pray for them and care for them. Watch for when volunteers are going through hard circumstances and seasons and reach out! Sending a card or a meal, checking in on them, or providing a visit to someone can go a long way toward encouraging them through their season of difficulty.

How do we seek intentional feedback from our volunteers?

When you are face to face with volunteers, intentionally seek feedback! We want to know what's broken so we can fix it! We want to learn from their perspective and ideas – make them a part of the solution! They have great ideas! Pro tip, not every piece of feedback you get will be helpful, but, if you are hearing the same thing from multiple trustworthy people, open your ears. This is probably something the Lord wants to bring to your attention. Invite these kinds of people to lean in and help you solve the problem.

How to practically seek feedback:

- Sunday morning feedback forms -These are simple forms that your teachers can fill out in a few minutes on a Sunday morning that allows you to get a window into each classroom, monitor situations that need your attention, and make sure teachers have all the materials and training that they need. Make sure teachers put their name on this form so that you can follow up when more information is needed, or you can let them know when you enact their suggestions.
- In trainings – this is a great opportunity to take time to hear from them about how things are going in the classroom and how they might be made better.
- Meet them for coffee! We want to be people who invest more in our volunteers than we ask from them. Be open to building relationships, offering encouragement, and receiving feedback from them!
- Pick a few people from each age group served and do a focus group phone call or phone survey about their experiences in your ministry.

- Use your GroupMe for teaching groups to get periodic feedback – set a reminder and ask: What's working, what's not working, what kiddos are hard right now?
- The more you seek feedback, the more you will hear about hard things right away and be able to address them before they get weird or ugly.
- Are there people in your ministry that have the pulse of other parents or volunteers in your ministry? Ask them what they are hearing from others.

How to handle difficult feedback

- Pray, pray, and pray! Guard your heart against bitterness.
- There is almost always something we can learn – ask the Lord!
    - Could you have handled the situation differently?
    - Are there things you can see in hindsight that you can learn from?
- Process it with someone else you trust – if you are hearing the same thing from multiple, trustworthy people, this is probably something that needs to be addressed. Ask those trustworthy people for helpful input to solve the problem.
- In all situations, seek to bless the person who gave the feedback. This will keep the relationship open and honest.
- Often, addressing the situation personally and directly with a cool head and a soft heart will completely diffuse the situation. You might need to acknowledge their feedback but take 24 hours to pray and hear the Lord about the situation before you have a longer conversation. There is often something else going on in their heart! Face to face or phone calls is always the best!

How do we handle difficult situations with volunteers?

When we seek to address the situation personally and proactively, there is almost always a pastoral way forward that is a win for you and for them.

- Keep in mind and heart that we are caring for the volunteers too, even when they are being difficult!
- Often, they are being difficult not because of anything that has to do with your ministry, but because of personal situations. Take time to pray and hear God, then approach the volunteer with gentleness and curiosity about what is going on in their world.
- Approach asking them to step down or take another role by releasing them in all grace and love to take time to rest and be restored or take a different role in the church.
- Make it clear that the door is open for people who just need a season of pastoral care to be ready for ministry again.

- If a volunteer demonstrates unsafe behavior, immediate intervention is needed.
    - Retraining is the first resort! We want to make sure this person clearly understands the expectations we have for them and the tools available to them. Once retraining has happened, this person must understand that you will practice careful observation and reevaluation of the situation.
    - If unsafe behavior occurs again, or occurs intentionally, immediate documentation and suspension is necessary. Notify your supervisor early on and immediately of everything that is happening.

For more information regarding conflict resolution, whether it's between you and a volunteer or between volunteers in your ministry, please refer to your church's conflict resolution policy. Here is Antioch Waco's Conflict Resolution Policy for refence if your church does not have one at this time.

Chapter 4 - Sunday Mornings & Curriculum

Elementary Age Groups

Here are some things you want to take into consideration when you are deciding how to form your Sunday morning time:

- How do you structure classes? Are you working with mixed age groups, or would it be best to divide the ages into smaller groups? A common practice is to divide preschoolers into smaller, aged-based groups, then form mixed age elementary groups, such as 1-3rd graders and 4-5th graders grouped into classrooms. You can further subdivide the multigrade rooms into small groups to help create a more intimate time for connection.
- What kind of space are you working with? This might dictate both age groupings and the kind of activities that work best in the space.
- How many services do you have? If you have more than one, will each service be structured the same?

While you do not have to structure your Sunday morning class experience exactly according to this example design, we have discovered that these common elements are being widely practiced across many Antioch Kids Ministries as the basic building blocks of our Sunday morning time with kids. You can think of this as a menu to choose from when structuring your classroom. Each section includes vision for why we feel like this is a worthwhile element of classroom structure as well as examples of how it might look in your environment.

8:45 – Arrival & Activities

- Kids arrive and jump into activities (gaga ball, four-square, art station, etc.)

9:00 – Small Groups

- Kids connect with their small group leader
- Brief check-in and warm-up conversation

9:15 – Large Group

- Welcome the kids
- Review rules

- State today's Big Idea
- Weekly traditions (Welcome Jesus, prayer, birthdays, encouragement moment, etc.)
- Worship (live or Spotify; ideally male + female leaders doing motions)
- Sermon
- Response time

10:00 – Back to Small Groups

- Engage the lesson
- Discuss and apply the truth they just heard

10:20 – Closing Activities

- Finish with a game or activity
- Keep kids engaged as parents arrive for pickup

Kick it off right: Welcome, Group Games/Stage Games, Rules, Vision

We want our classrooms to be welcoming, relational spaces where kids can open their hearts and minds to connect with each other, encounter Jesus, and learn from Him. To this end, we want to welcome them warmly, engage them in fun teamwork, help them know what to expect in the classroom and what we expect from them, and cast a meaningful vision for our time together.

Welcome – Kids should be able to easily find their way to their small groups and be welcomed by someone who is ready to get to know them, encourage them, and invest in them. Here are some examples of how this can happen:

- Give hi fives and learn names
- Answer an icebreaker question
- Play High/Low Buffalo
- Debrief their JAM sheets together
- Have a team chant

Group Games/Stage Games – This is a fun game, led from the front, that encourages teams to cheer one another on, gets everybody laughing, and loosens everyone up.

Vision – Why are we here and what are we doing together? We want our kids to have abundant clarity about exactly why we are doing what we are doing! We're here for a reason, and we want them to know it by heart!

Fort Worth example vision:

We are here to... Encounter Jesus! - Respond in Love! - Love What He Loves! - Do What He Does!

Rules – What expectations do we have of how we will practice Kingdom Culture together? Kids thrive when they know what we are expecting from them and what they can expect from us, so we want to spell it out in black and white.

Fort Worth Example Rules:

Classroom HONOR-- Q: "What's the culture of our classroom?" A: "A Culture of Honor!"
Q: "How do we practice honor?" A: "HONOR!"

- H – Honor my classmates
- O – Obey Cheerfully, Quickly, and Completely
- N – No Crazy Bodies
- O – Over and Above Kindness to All
- R – Respect all people & things with my words, actions, and attitudes

Waypoint Omaha Example Rules – Practice these with motions and sound effects:

- Sit up straight in your chair
- Keep yourself to yourself
- Don't talk unless you have the microphone
- Come expecting good things

Practice God's Word: Bible Memory Work with Motions

We want our kids to be people who have God's word written on their hearts for their lifetimes, so that their moral warehouse, the grid from which they will make their decisions and live their lives, is full of the Word and wisdom of God! To that end, we practice God's Word.

- Practice the verse with silly voices or silly body movements
  - example: say the verse like a fish, swimming in the sea!
- Verse word puzzles

    - example: putting the words in the right order
    - fill in the blank
    - give the first letter of each word and fill in all the blanks
  - Songs to memorize the books of the Bible
  - Memory verse coloring pages
  - Verses sent home to practice

Lead Kids to Surrender their Hearts to Jesus in Worship:

We want our kids to practice life with Jesus in our classrooms! Worship is one of the primary ways that we both Encounter Jesus and Respond to Him with surrendered, loving hearts. In the place of worship, God wins our devotion and shapes our affections. We want this for our children! May our children be raised up as a sold-out generation for the King of Kings!

Examples of how this can look:

- Video worship with motions for full body engagement or live worship with a leader can both be great ways for kids to engage with the Lord!
- Elementary kids or 4th/5th graders can stay and worship with families as a periodic or Sunday morning option.
- Planning longer times of worship at special events can let kids experience engaging with the Lord together.
- Leaders can use this time to pray over kids and encourage them.

Listen to the Holy Spirit: We want Kids to Hear for Themselves!

Our kids may be young, but they are not pursued by or filled with a junior Holy Spirit! The Lord speaks to them, so we want them to understand that fact and experience it for themselves. We cannot force these encounters, but we can create an environment where children can quiet their spirits, invite the Lord in, and make space to listen to Him.

- Lectio Divina (Latin for "divine listening") – examples for this practice can be found using the Lectio 365 App
- After Lection Divina: Praying the Scripture back to God
- Lectio Visio
- Soaking in God's Presence
- Encouragement Games – have the kids listen to the Lord for one another, then speak, write or draw what they hear and share it with the person

- Praying over each other – encouraging kids to pray out loud, even if it is just a few words

Lesson time: Putting in the Big Rocks of Learning and Applying God's Word

We want our children to be students of God's Word, His heart, and the person of Jesus as they also learn who they are because of all He has done. We want this firm foundation to be the viewpoint from which they understand the world, live in it, and make their life decisions. Therefore, we study and apply God's Word together, majoring on Jesus and His Kingdom, as He reveals the person of God and the kind of Spirit empowered new humanity He is calling us to.

- Bible story and Christ connection – How does the story point us to Jesus?
- Missions moments or missions lesson Sundays, learning about other cultures
    - Overseas and neighborhoods
    - Encouraging kids to pray for featured missionaries with prayer points
- Featuring the Gospel prominently— every Sunday and through specific, targeted lessons
- Application—Make sure we are using small group time to make the rubber meet the road for their own lives of faith—Hear from the kids to help them process!

Curriculum: The meat and potatoes of Sunday planning and lessons

Choosing curriculum will affect the way every Sunday in your kids ministry is planned and executed. You want to choose a curriculum that is simple for you to plan, set up, and communicate to your teachers and simple for your teachers to execute. At the same time, that curriculum must have meaty content in the form of Bible-centered, Jesus-revealing theology that uses developmentally engaging, tactile activities and makes space for kids to process, pray, and apply what they've learned. This is a big task! Luckily, there is freedom to experiment, supplement, or even to write your own. This is a helpful article that might help you think through the process.

Here are some example curriculums to check out that have worked for other Antioch churches:

- Go
- Grow
- Gospel Project
- Orange (now called Amazing)

Games, crafts, service enders: Make it fun without losing your mind before the parents come.

Brain research has proven that we are better learners in environments where we feel relationally connected and have fun, so we seek to create that kind of atmosphere for our kids! Practically, we also want them to have fun without chaos breaking loose in our classrooms, and for that, we must have a plan! Here are some example activities that can aid in applying what you've learned or just make things fun:

- Art Projects
- Missions Projects
- Group Games:
    - Bible Trivia
    - Bible Pictionary
    - Bible Charades
    - Wacky Simon Says
    - The 60 second game
    - Quiet Water Still Water (like the quiet game and statues combined!)
    - The Sheep Game
    - 4 corners
    - Head Shoulders Knees Toes Cup
    - Here's a document with instructions for easy games that can be done anywhere
- Free play with activity stations:
    - Giant Jenga or magnet blocks in their small groups
    - Board games in their small groups
    - Giant puzzles or giant coloring posters in their small groups
    - Basketball
    - Stations: hula hoop, jump rope, cup stacking, etc.
- Other ways to make it fun:
    - Weird national holidays – Look it up! These are a lot of fun to learn and celebrate.
    - Give away prizes! Prizes for games, bringing a Bible, JAM sheet completion, great listening, or Bible Memory verses can make things fun for the kids
    - Die of destiny
    - Spin a wheel to choose the activity
    - Fun icebreakers
    - Hear From the Kids! (Take a survey of kids and volunteers after the icebreaker)

- Magnet World on YouTube

Preschool Age Groups

We likewise want our preschool classes to follow the same process as above with a few modifications to make these spaces more age appropriate for our younger kids.

Example Preschool intro Activities:

- Coloring pages or play dough available for those who prefer quieter, creative activities
- A variety of free-play options with a volunteer to help engage preschoolers in play
- Duplo's
- Large plastic dinosaurs, sharks, jungle animals, etc.
- Magnetic tiles
- Play kitchen with food and dishes (or just food and dishes, if mobile or space is limited)
- Youth volunteers are often particularly great at engaging preschoolers in play.
- Use these toys to help draw in a preschooler reluctant to enter the room by mentioning what they can choose from to play with.
- Parents will often then scan the room and mention to the preschooler favorite toys that they see.

Examples of active learning opportunities for preschoolers:

- Act out the Bible Story they just learned, or portions of it (for example, packing a suitcase for a story about a journey; serving a pretend meal for a story about a banquet or hospitality; build a blanket or sheet fort for a story about a tent or a tabernacle)
- Costumes
- Blocks to build significant structures from the story
- Play with animals, babies, kitchen items, or doctor's kits for related stories
- Craft Projects – the internet is a cornucopia of Bible story related craft ideas!
    - Bless your volunteers by remembering the developmental abilities of preschoolers when choosing crafts. A craft that a parent could do one-on-one with a child may not be the best to try to do with a group of preschoolers.
- Create a poster

        - Write the "main idea" or a Bible verse from the story across a poster and print large figure outlines (the disciples in a boat, Moses with the 10 Commandments, etc.) for children to color together.
        - Hang the poster where parents and children can discuss the morning lesson as they pick up and leave (e.g., outside the classroom).
- Missions or Service projects
        - Make a craft that preschoolers can use to simply share the gospel and invite families to come together to do that.
        - Invite families to meet at a local park to hand out popsicles and offer prayer.
- Group Games that reiterate aspects of the lesson
        - See how many people you can get into a tape outline of a boat for a boat-related story.
        - Set up a relay of people to get the (printed) grain into the basket for a lesson on Ruth.

Helpful Notes:

- Have a consistent structure so the kids know what to expect. Here are some example classroom schedules.
- Make sure volunteers are ready to introduce themselves and take ownership of discipling their group of kids.
- Allow different volunteers to lead different activities!
- In a large room, small groups can be divided using rugs.
- Make lesson activities as tangible, developmental, and movement oriented as possible.
- Incorporate the liturgical calendar to mark special seasons – Advent, Lent, Easter, etc. -- through curriculum and celebrations.

Chapter 5 - Partnering with Families/Parents

We believe that God's design is for parents and caregivers to play a central role in the spiritual formation of kids. Because of this, kids ministries in the Antioch Movement should be intentionally designed to equip, encourage, and partner with families in discipleship.

This conviction influences far more than parent communication. It should shape ministry philosophy, programming, events, resource development, volunteer training, and leadership decisions.

While every family situation is unique, building toward God's design provides a framework that helps ministry leaders navigate complexity with wisdom, grace, and dependence on the Holy Spirit.

Building Ministry Around God's Design For Family

Foundational Conviction

Parents and caregivers have a unique opportunity and responsibility to disciple the kids entrusted to them. As kids ministry leaders, we are not called to replace that role. We are called to support, reinforce, and strengthen them.

This lens should influence:

- Curriculum selection
- Event planning
- Volunteer training
- Resource development
- Parent communication
- Budget priorities
- Staffing decisions
- Ministry evaluation

When considering a new idea, ask: How does this strengthen our partnership with families and support discipleship beyond our Sunday gatherings?

Getting Practical

Review your current ministry calendar. For each event, program, or initiative, ask:

- How does this help equip families?
- How does this support discipleship at home?
- How does this reinforce the vision of your church?
- Is this helping us focus on our highest priorities?

Reflection Questions

- What current ministry efforts most effectively strengthen discipleship within families?
- What activities or traditions may be consuming significant time and energy without advancing that goal? How could your church shift your efforts to align with that goal?
- How does/should your leadership team evaluate whether something should be expanded, maintained, redesigned, or discontinued?

When Reality Doesn't Match the Ideal

Leading Through Complexity

Every church serves families with different stories and circumstances. Some families are highly engaged in discipleship. Some are growing in confidence. Others may be disconnected from church, overwhelmed by life, new to faith, or facing significant challenges. Rather than creating rigid responses for every situation, ministry leaders should develop a framework for discernment.

Helpful questions include:

- Who are the primary adults influencing this child?
- How can we encourage spiritual growth within that family system?
- What support would be most helpful?
- How can the church family reinforce healthy discipleship?
- What is the Holy Spirit highlighting in this situation?

Getting Practical

When discussing kids or families with your team:

- Start with curiosity before assumptions.
- Avoid one-size-fits-all solutions.
- Seek to understand the unique context.

- Consider both family dynamics and church support.
- Pray together before making significant decisions.
- Try to align your programs, events, and ideas with the flow of families in your community.

Reflection Questions

- How does your ministry currently support families with varying levels of engagement?
- Are there situations where your team tends to become overly dependent on programs rather than relationships?

Communication Builds Trust

One of the primary ways partnership is established and trust is strengthened is through communication.

Parents and caregivers should clearly understand:

- What their kids are learning
- Why it matters
- What opportunities are available
- How they can participate
- What expectations exist

Communication is not simply information transfer. It is a ministry tool that helps families feel informed, valued, supported, and connected. Poor communication can create confusion and erode trust, even when ministry philosophy, leadership, and programming are strong.

Getting Practical

As you prepare communication, consider:

- What information is most important? And is it clear?
- What information can be removed?
- Which communication channel(s) are most effective?
- Can our team consistently deliver what we are promising?

Review your communication systems regularly.

- A helpful rule of thumb is that parents often need to encounter important information three different times before it can be considered effectively communicated. Consider using multiple channels and reinforcing key messages consistently over time.
- Seek feedback from parents regarding clarity, frequency, and effectiveness.

Reflection Questions

- How would parents describe communication from your ministry?
- Are there areas where your ministry may be overcommunicating, under communicating, or creating unnecessary confusion?
- What communication habits have you used to build trust with families in your context?

Where To Start

Each church in the Antioch Movement shares common values, beliefs, and ministry practices while maintaining a unique expression that reflects the needs, opportunities, and calling of its local community. Establishing a partnership with parents and caretakers should start by identifying a small number of discipleship priorities that will remain central year after year.

These should align with:

- The Antioch Movement
- Your local church vision
- The needs of your community
- The leading of the Holy Spirit

Examples might include:

- The 5 Circles of Church
- God's Heart for the Nations
- Engaging in Worship
- Hearing God's voice
- The Power of the Holy Spirit
- Generosity and Stewardship

Seasonal Priorities

In addition to long-term priorities, many ministries benefit from identifying one or two seasonal focuses. These may emerge from:

- A church-wide emphasis
- Observed needs within families
- Cultural opportunities
- A specific direction from the Lord

Examples

- Family prayer

- Marriage support
- Parenting support
- Sharing your faith
- Technology
- Emotional health

Getting Practical

- Identify the core values of the Antioch Movement and your local church.
- Evaluate how those values are reflected in your communication, events, resources, discipleship pathways, and volunteer culture.
- Consider what adjustments could help parents and families more clearly understand and embrace those values.
- Identify one or two areas you believe the Holy Spirit may be highlighting in this season.
- Evaluate how your communication, programming, and resources reflect those priorities.

Reflection Questions

- What core discipleship values define your ministry?
- What themes or opportunities seem particularly important for families in your current community in this season?
- How do you ensure the ministry aligns with long term vision and serves seasonal initiatives? How do you ensure those are competing efforts?

Partnership Is Relational

Many leaders think parent partnership means:

- newsletters
- resources
- events

Those matter. But partnership is ultimately built through relationships. Parents are more likely to receive encouragement, correction, vision, and support from leaders they know and trust.

Getting Practical

Consider:

- How are parents getting to know ministry leaders?
- How are ministry leaders getting to know parents?
- Where do meaningful conversations naturally happen?
- How can your ministry create opportunities for connection, not just information?

How To Evaluate Your Partnership

If you are intentionally trying to build your ministry with a partnership with parents in mind, it's important to be able to evaluate how you're doing.

Examples could include:

- Parents know what kids are learning and what's happening
- Parents have simple next steps and a clear call to action
- Parents feel known by ministry leaders and know who to contact
- Parents have opportunities for feedback
- Parents are being equipped, not merely informed

Chapter 6 - Special Events

Kids ministry events can be some of the most memorable and impactful experiences throughout the year. While they often require additional planning and effort, they can also offer significant value and create lasting memories for children. There are SO MANY different events that you could do as a church and/or kids ministry that you may have different responsibilities for.

It is important to establish a sustainable ministry rhythm and determine which events your church or ministry is best equipped to lead and support. There are also special occasions/events that happen during the year such as Easter, Christmas Eve, etc. that you may have special events for.

There is no way for your church to do it all, so pray and ask God which events will strengthen families, kids faith, and your connection to parents so that you can partner most effectively with them.

Additional events a kids ministry might coordinate include:

- Kids Camp
- VBS
- Family picnics
- Toddler coffee gatherings
- Family Park days
- NEST (a ministry to moms with kids ministry available)
- Kids day camps
- Halloween or neighborhood outreach events
- Baby Dedications
- World Mandate Kids
- Summer sports camps
- Christmas/Easter Production (FX) - a service for adults and kids together
- And many others...

See below for the planning process of Kids Camp, Baby Dedication, World Mandate Kids, and a Halloween Outreach as examples

Kids Camp

• ***Twelve months out (one year out)*** – Secure the campground you will be using for Kids Camp. As soon as dates are confirmed, communicate them to families immediately so they can plan their schedules.

• ***3-6 months out*** – Meet with key leaders to determine the theme of camp and begin building out large group elements such as main activities and games. Begin considering who will be the camp speaker and invite them early so they can pray and prepare. If you are working with a team, set clearly delegated responsibilities and set deadlines. Follow up regularly to ensure all areas of camp preparation are progressing smoothly. Things to delegate include, but are not limited to: Skit writing, small group guide writing, decorations, graphic design, emcee at the event, etc.

• ***3 months out*** – Once the theme is finalized, begin developing all design materials, including flyers, registration graphics, t-shirts, and session slides. If your church requires you to request worship and tech teams through a formal process, begin those conversations now to ensure availability.

• ***2-3 months out*** – Build and launch the registration process. Ensure you are collecting all critical information, including allergies, dietary restrictions, medications, and t-shirt sizes. Confirm that all required waivers are included (such as liability releases, lodging forms, etc.).

• ***2 months out*** – Determine medical coverage needs. If the camp does not provide a nurse, secure a qualified individual who has both medical experience and a warm, kid-friendly demeanor.

• ***1 month out*** – Close registration and begin the process of assigning cabins and small groups. Ensure that all delegated tasks are completed and ready for camp.

• ***Leading up to camp***– Focus on training all leaders thoroughly. Ensure they understand safety procedures, their specific roles, expectations for camp, and who to go to for help.

• Follow this link to see example camp documents.

World Mandate Kids

• ***One year out*** - Meet with your church leadership and determine what Kids ministry will look like for your church at World Mandate. Are you hosting an elementary aged kids conference or are you providing childcare for younger children? Make sure that whoever oversees registration sets up the registration for kids correctly so that there are no surprises. A Kids Mandate Conference is usually not a free event, so make sure that you set the price at the right dollar amount for you to be successful.

• ***Three months out*** – Utilizing the primary theme for the adult World Mandate, begin asking the Lord for a similar but unique theme for the kids conference. Once you have identified a spiritual theme—including verses and what you sense that the Lord wants to do during the conference—develop a corresponding visual theme. Draw inspiration from the verses and any images or impressions you've received to create a visual concept that can transform the building into an immersive experience for the kids, as well as support the skits that will accompany the teachings. Be thinking through "who are going to be my leaders?" and begin recruiting workers to help execute the conference.

• ***Two months out*** – Begin the detailed planning process for World Mandate. Using the theme as your central inspiration, break it into three teachable sessions. Reach out to potential speakers and secure their commitment. Create session schedules, aligning timing similarly to the main adult conference. Design unique breakout activities for each session to follow the main teaching. Order supplies for decorations, skits, games, crafts, and activities. Coordinate with someone who has a theater background to write the skits and assemble a cast—delegate this responsibility so you do not carry it alone.

• ***One month out*** – Finalize all speaker needs and order any remaining supplies. Complete the skits and hold at least two rehearsals before World Mandate. Purchase all snacks (e.g., from Costco) to prepare for the event.

Baby Dedication

Baby Dedication is a very special moment for families of the church - it is important to speak with your church leadership about the format of Baby Dedications they would like to do. Some churches include dedications as part of their weekly service whenever a new baby is born; some do it quarterly within the service for all babies born in that time frame, and some create an outside event to create a separate space for Baby Dedication. Work with your church leadership to see what they desire most - below is an outline of planning a Baby Dedication as a separate event on a Saturday morning,

• ***Three to four months out*** – Set the date, time, and location for the baby dedication (Saturday morning). Secure your main speaker and confirm their availability early so they have time to prepare. Begin coordinating with worship and tech teams through your church's required process to ensure they are scheduled.

• ***Two to three months out*** – Build and launch the registration process for families. Collect all necessary information (parent names, child names and birthdates, contact info, etc.). Begin planning the parent training component, including content, schedule, and who will lead it.

• ***Two months out*** – Finalize the format of the event, including the flow of the morning (welcome, worship, teaching, dedications, etc.). Begin working on decorations and overall environment to make the event feel special and celebratory. Start planning refreshments, such as cookies and drinks.

• ***One month out*** – Conduct parent training (or schedule and communicate details clearly if it will happen closer to the event). Ensure all registered families understand the purpose of dedication and what to expect. Begin assembling parent packets, including dedication certificates that will be signed and presented.

• ***Two to three weeks out*** – Finalize all materials for parent packets (printed dedication certificates, any instructional content, small gifts if applicable). Confirm all supplies for decorations and refreshments. Follow up with the speaker, worship leader, and tech team to confirm all details and run of service.

• ***One to two weeks out*** – Prepare and organize all event elements: complete parent packets, gather decoration supplies, and purchase cookies/refreshments. Finalize the event schedule and communicate any final reminders to participating families and volunteers.

• ***Week of the event*** – Confirm all volunteers and roles. Ensure certificates are ready and organized. Do a final walkthrough of the event flow with your speaker, worship, and tech teams.

• ***Day of event (Saturday morning)*** – Arrive early to set up decorations, prepare refreshments, and organize parent packets. Host the event with excellence, making it a meaningful and memorable experience for each family.

Halloween Outreach

• ***Three months out*** – Set the time and find a host home for the Halloween outreach. Begin casting vision for the event with your team and identify key leaders who will help execute it. This is an amazing time for 4th and 5th graders to be empowered to share the Gospel! Start thinking through the general flow of the night, including outreach strategy (skits, sharing the Gospel, candy distribution, etc.).

• ***Two months out*** – Build and launch signups for 4th and 5th graders who want to participate. Clearly communicate the purpose of the outreach and expectations for involvement. Begin asking families in the church to donate candy, providing specific details on drop-off times and quantities needed. Make sure that you have requested the appropriate tech equipment to be able to play music for the skit and to share on a microphone.

• ***One month out*** – Begin developing the skit and outlining how kids will share the Gospel in a simple, clear, and age-appropriate way. Continue promoting signups and collecting candy donations. Start planning any additional logistics for the host home (setup, flow of groups, safety considerations, etc.).

• ***Two to three weeks out*** – Finalize the skit and Gospel presentation plan. Communicate clearly with all registered kids and their families about the upcoming training day and event details. Continue gathering candy and organizing supplies.

• ***One to two weeks out*** – Host a training day for all participating kids. Teach them the skit, walk them through how to share the Gospel and their testimony confidently and clearly, and help them understand the heart behind outreach. Use this time to build excitement and unity within the group. If possible, organize a dress rehearsal on a Sunday morning! Have the participating students perform for the rest of the elementary kids in your ministry and share the Gospel with them.

• ***Week of Halloween*** – Finalize all logistics, including organizing candy, confirming volunteers, and preparing the host home for the outreach. Send reminders to families with event details and expectations.

• ***Day of event (Halloween night)*** – Arrive early to set up at the home, organize candy distribution, and prepare kids for their roles. Make sure that you have requested the appropriate tech equipment and have it set up in advance. Lead the outreach with intentionality, encouraging kids as they perform the skit and share the Gospel, making it a fun and impactful experience for everyone involved.

Chapter 7 - Kids Transitioning in and out of Kids ministry

Transitioning into Elementary Kids ministry

To prepare children for the transition from preschool ministry to elementary ministry (whether from pre-k to kindergarten or from kindergarten to 1st grade, depending on how age groups are structured), it is helpful for leaders or speakers who regularly teach in the elementary class to visit the oldest preschool class as guest leaders. This can take place during the weeks or months leading up to Promotion Sunday.

Churches may also choose to designate one or two Sundays for parents and children to visit the elementary class together for part or all of the service. This gives families the opportunity to become familiar with the classroom setup, hear the class guidelines, and experience the flow of the morning. Parents attending alongside their children helps ensure everyone understands the expectations. On these Sundays, elementary leaders can also explain key differences between preschool and elementary ministry, including what children need to bring, available snacks or incentives, and check-in and check-out procedures.

When possible, using similar behavioral expectations and shared terminology from upper preschool through elementary ministry can help create a smoother transition. For example, using the same classroom rules or consistent names for parts of the morning, such as Kids Discipleship Groups (KDGs), can provide children with greater continuity and confidence as they move into a new environment.

Preteens in Kids ministry

The preteen years (roughly ages 9-12) are a student's last stop on their way out of kids ministry and into the world of youth! The preteen years are full of transitions that can feel so hard for kids. Their minds and bodies are changing faster than they can keep up with, they struggle to regulate new emotions and impulses to assert independence, they are moving up to middle school, and many of their friendships are changing too.

The first few weeks in youth group will likely feel a bit overwhelming, but leaders can do a great deal to prepare kids for the transition—while also reinforcing what God has done in them throughout their years in kids ministry.

Sunday Mornings

Fellowship and Community

Preteen ministry should start with relationships. Provide opportunities for them to build friendships with each other and their leaders through activities, ice breakers, games, discussion, and unstructured free time. Games especially help kids build friendships so that when it's time to be vulnerable or serious, they have the trust to do that with one another.

Worship

As much as possible, we recommend using live worship for preteens or making sure that there are dynamic volunteers leading the kids through worship via Spotify. Preteens will feel more self-conscious than younger elementary kids, so seeing people they think are cool worshipping from the stage can help them step into worship more freely.

Teaching

Preteens have so many questions! They are growing in their capacity for abstract thinking, deep concepts, and critical thinking. Try engaging your preteens during the teaching by giving them space to discover what this Bible passage is teaching them about Jesus on their own through guided questions and facilitating some group discussion. Preteens want to know how this relates to their lives and their identities!

Point everything back to Jesus. We want our preteens to learn to see Jesus every time they open their Bibles and to know that He cares so much about all the things going on in their world.

Small Groups

We recommend using a small group model with the kids to prepare them for Lifegroups in youth group. As much as possible, keep leaders and kids consistent in the groups so they can grow in their relationships with one another, learning to pray for one another and keep each other accountable to obey the things they hear God telling them to do.

Developing a Missional Mindset

We are a people on mission and so are our preteens! Engage your preteens and prepare them for the life of youth ministry by finding ways for your preteens to partner with the work of the church in your city. This might look like:

1. Prayer walking around the neighborhood.
2. Planning an outreach.
3. Asking church leadership how the kids can pray for the service on Sunday mornings and having kids actively pray for those things.
4. Providing volunteer opportunities, either with younger age groups on Sunday mornings or partnering with other ministries.
5. Practicing sharing the Gospel and then making plans for who they will share with.

Sending Preteens to Youth Ministry

Communication with Youth Pastors

Before sending the kids to youth group, invite your youth pastor(s) to drop by for a visit on a Sunday morning to introduce themselves to the kids and play a game they play a lot in the youth group to build anticipation for the fun times ahead.

Meet with the youth team briefly to tell them about the kids: relationship dynamics, strengths and weaknesses, or anything else that might be helpful for them to know. This helps the youth team know how to love and welcome the kids well!

The Last Sunday in Kids ministry

This is a huge deal for both kids and parents! Make space to celebrate and honor kids on their last Sunday to check in to kids ministry by treating it like a missions send off. Have the younger kids and leaders gather around them to pray, speak words from the Lord over them, and recognize that this next step is something God is leading them into.

Graduation Events

Events are an *extra* special way to say goodbye to and celebrate your preteens well before they are in youth group! The most important part of a kids ministry graduation event is to bring in families and community to speak identity into each individual kid to remind them that they are loved, seen, and have an important place in the body of Christ. A couple of ideas for this are:

1. A one-day event: invite the kids to the church on the Saturday *after* their last Sunday in kids ministry to have fun, pray together, remind them of their identity, and give families the space to celebrate their kids.
2. A multi-day event: on a Friday night and full Saturday, facilitate friendship building and spiritual formation in the kids before they begin youth group.
3. A multi-week study and culminating ceremony: during the last few months of the preteens' time in kids ministry, partner with the middle school ministry to have kids visit the youth group for part of the service and then meet separately with the students for the second half to cover topics such as the Gospel, identity, or prayer.

Detailed outlines for these graduation events can be found here.

Ultimately, finding ways to prepare kids for and then to recognize the transition from kids to youth ministry is so important. This tells the kids that we see how they have grown; we recognize they are not the small kids they used to be, and we are so excited for them to participate in the church in this new capacity.

Chapter 8 - Kids with Disabilities

Why is it important to make adaptations to welcome kids with disabilities?

God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them. Genesis 1:27a NIV

- We are all created in His image; therefore, each person is valuable, both to Him and to the Body. And each person has something to teach us about God. Each person has inherent value, and we honor God when we show them (and their families) that we also value them.
- Studies show that kids with autism are 84% more likely than average to have not attended church, and around 1/3 of families with a child with a disability report that they have left at least one church due to their child not being included or welcomed.

By adapting our ministry to be inclusive of kids with disabilities, we are welcoming those God welcomes, and we are ministering to kids and families who would not otherwise receive ministry.

How do I start adapting Kids ministry to those who are already attending?

- Pray. Ask God to highlight needs and to highlight those people He has already prepared and gifted to meet those needs.
- Determine which kids in your ministry need extra help.
    - A child who's been a challenge behaviorally may be expressing a need for adaptations.
    - A child who is particularly quiet may need help understanding and engaging.
    - A child who has delayed reading skills may be struggling to keep up in a print-heavy elementary class.
- Determine what kind of help those kids need.
    - They may need a leader who is made aware to give them more direct instructions.
    - They may need noise canceling headphones when the environment is too loud.
    - They may need a 1:1 buddy who redirects as needed, keeps an eye out for their safety, and facilitates breaks when necessary.
- Ask parents.
    - What works for your child at home when they're tired/hungry/overstimulated? And at school (if applicable – a child's IEP or 504 plan might offer great insights)?
    - Is there a particular person who seems to have the most success in calming, teaching, and welcoming/including your child? Could you contact them to get some tips & tricks?

- Ask around in your congregation for those who have a heart for those with disabilities. You may find people who:
    - Have previously volunteered/worked with the disability community.
    - Have a sibling with a disability - As much as possible, avoid pairing siblings directly with their brother/sister as a buddy, since they likely spend so much of their time helping already.
    - Currently working in the field (therapists, teachers, coaches, etc.) — Be aware that some therapists will not be able to volunteer with a child with whom they work professionally.
    - Have a heart for a particular child or family.

What is a Buddy, Friend, or your ministry terminology?

Buddies assist a child with extra needs, whether physical, developmental, or emotional (with or without a formal diagnosis) for that child to participate in an age group (or near age group) classroom. A buddy will mentor and provide things like:

- Helping a child find his/her place in an activity.
- Help with a child's wheelchair, crutches, or other device.
- Staying nearby but in the background unless needed.
- Playing, singing, and participating alongside a child to help them engage.
- Helping a child celebrate a holy moment.
- Taking a walk with a child who needs a break.
- Sitting with a child separate from the class when larger groups feel overwhelming.
- Keeping the child safe and keeping other kids safe.
- Helping the child interact appropriately with other kids.

Above all, a buddy's job is to help the child learn about Jesus in ways that work for them. This will be an adult or teen who has shown compassion and gifting for working with kids with disabilities and has been trained in helping adapt an environment to a child's needs.

What a buddy is NOT?

- An extra leader for the group, in general.
- There to guide or direct other students in the classroom/group.
- An extra pair of hands for preparing activities, if it takes him/her away from the disabled child.

What kind of support and adaptations do we offer?

Your ministry can offer any combination of these, depending on your space and the needs of the children. These are special tools and exceptions available to a child who needs support but doesn't necessarily need a 1:1 buddy.

Classroom accommodations:

- The child may be allowed to play with toys in the corner of a classroom or under a table where they feel safe and/or less stimulated when the rest of the class is doing other activities.
- Offer noise-cancelling headphones if the child feels overwhelmed.
- Offer alternate seating options like a beanbag or a "wobble seat."
- Offer fidgets and other forms of sensory input to help with focus level.
- Provide a visual schedule of the plan for class time and a timer as it is helpful to anticipate transitions.
- Toys not usually offered at a particular age level may be brought into a classroom to provide a more welcoming, developmentally appropriate environment. For example, you might offer a train set or Legos at the back of an elementary classroom to help a child focus.

1:1 (or 2) buddies with kids in their age group classrooms

Assigning a child to a classroom that is more appropriate for their age developmentally, more adaptable to their needs, or in which it is easier to keep them safe within a reasonable range of their age and size. However, if accommodations can be made in the class at their age/grade level, that should be the first choice.

- A child who makes attempts to elope from the classroom may be assigned to a room that has a locking half-door. ("Elope" is the term used in the disability community when a child leaves a designated area without permission).
- A child who is overstimulated by the loud environment of the elementary classroom might be assigned to a younger room where the volume and light level are adjustable.
- A child who is developmentally delayed may be assigned to a room where the teaching and activities are more accessible to them.

A self-contained classroom for kids with disabilities

Even with the above modifications, a self-contained classroom might be necessary for some children if:

- The child may be overstimulated in any classroom with more than a few other children.

- The child may tend to elope and need more secure containment.
- The parent may ask for a self-contained room for other reasons.

This room could use the age group class curriculum, a younger, more developmentally appropriate curriculum, or a specific curriculum for kids with disabilities. With some technical adaptations, this room could also stream the age group service. This would offer them the content that is age appropriate while in an environment that is more adaptable in terms of light, volume, sensory friendly seating, and the freedom to make more noise than might be welcome in the age group class.

How are kids placed developmentally?

When a new child joins kids ministry and parents share a developmental disability, leaders should ask for the child's developmental age, strengths, and challenges to determine the best class and setting.

When a child struggles in a class (or needs to be picked up), leaders should connect with parents at pickup, ask what helps the child feel safe and included, and reassure them that we are not angry and we look forward to welcoming the child back into class.

Leaders can suggest a different classroom when it appears to be a better fit, such as:

- a combined classroom with same-age and younger children
- an older classroom with a calmer environment
- a more secure room when elopement is a safety concern
- Parents are rarely surprised; most children face similar challenges in other settings.
- Most parents are open to reasonable classroom adjustments.
- If not, leaders should collaborate with parents to find an approach everyone supports.

How is promotion handled?

Ahead of promotion, leaders should partner with parents to assess the child's best placement for the coming year. When moving to a new classroom is best, parents may be invited to attend the first Sunday to support the transition and communicate any updated expectations.

How are buddies and volunteers trained to serve kids with disabilities?

Leaders should meet with prospective volunteers to understand background, training, interests, and strengths.

- Some volunteers who work in disability-related roles prefer to serve with a different age group or support need than their day-to-day work.
- Some have a passion for supporting specific disabilities or accommodations.
- Some have skills such as conversational fluency (or certification) in American Sign Language.

After placement, volunteers should receive the Exceptional Kids training email, which outlines the ministry's general onboarding process and includes the Exceptional Kids training document with the information below:

Take time to read verbal and body messages of your student and process the information into your attitude and action.

- *Does the student cringe when touched?*
- *Does the student live in a pretend world or have difficulty telling the truth?*
    - *You may need to say: "You can tell me anything but tell me if it is pretend"*
- *Does the student respond to side hugs, prefer a smile, or fist bump, etc.? (All touch needs to be within the AKM definition of appropriate touch.)*
- *Do repeated directions give the student sensory overload?*
    - *Possibly, get the student's attention before giving the advice only once.*
- *Does the student need movement to pay attention?*
    - *Alternate movement activities with quiet activities or remove a student to move without disrupting the group.*
    - *Provide a fidget to allow them to have movement while participating in the larger activity.*
    - *Leave the room for a brief walk through the halls to help when overstimulated by the environment.*
- *Observe the person's special gifts, likes, and dislikes. Use the gifts.*
- *Speak love: Be loving, but firm.*
- *Routine is important and comfortable for students.*
    - *Follow the posted schedule, when possible, although there will be deviations.*
- *Help students make choices, but do not force them to participate.*
- *Refocus the student's attention when needed.*
    - *Plans will include times for the students to have activities that do not require attention to focus.*
- *Ask parents (or other leaders) whether the child likes to be touched.*

    - *The student may respond to being led rather than being given verbal directions, and repeating directions that are not followed can cause sensory overload. Learn how to lead a person with autism instead of repeating instructions.*
- *Autistic individuals sometimes avoid establishing eye contact.*
    - *Don't force eye contact. If a child can make eye contact, sometimes the concentration involved means they are less able to pay attention to what you are saying.*
- *Never pretend you understand something if you don't.*
    - *Ask the student to repeat or use a picture communication chart, sign, or gesture.*
- *Give only one direction at a time.*
    - *Conflicting or repetitive directions cause sensory overload.*
- *Notice when students are behaving or participating and encourage them.*
    - *Accentuate the positive and encourage victories.*
    - *Celebrate whenever possible.*
        - *But be sensitive to students not wanting attention drawn to them or disliking loud, sudden noises*
- *When giving directions or requests, it is sometimes helpful to have the student tell you what you just told them.*
- *Provide breaks in activities and use variety in activities when necessary.*
- *Avoid abstract ideas when it seems to be confusing for the child.*
    - *Many students are concrete thinkers and very literal in their understanding of what you say.*
- *Use a timer for taking turns or knowing when an activity will end and a transition is coming when the student needs this help.*
- *Know that students often do "parallel learning," that is, they learn from what is going on around them even though they are not actively involved with the group.*
    - *For example, a child may be crawling on the floor chasing a toy car, but he is learning from what he observes and hears. The evidence is that later he may repeat what was said, ask a question about it, or rush to a table, and quickly finish a project.*
- *Look at the child's nametag for food allergies and monitor snacks and treats carefully.*
    - *If the group does food projects such as making sandwiches, it is important for those with allergies to NOT touch the food.*
    - *If your student has allergies, work with the group leaders to plan food and treats that are more inclusive.*
- *Look for individual or group holy moments to celebrate at any time.*

    - *Naming the moment and celebrating it, teaches a student that God is active and recognized in everyday life.*
- *Watch experienced leaders to learn how they discern or prevent meltdowns.*
- *Ask your ministry leader for details of what is expected of you in your role, then talk to that person about your own boundaries of what you are comfortable with or need to learn more about.*
- *Watch out! You are going to enjoy this job more than you ever thought possible.*

If an Exceptional Kids training video is not available, a preschool training video can be used to cover common classroom scenarios. A future training video can provide a full overview of the training document and available resources for adapting Sundays to each child.

When possible, new volunteers should shadow experienced buddies and classroom teachers. This will be your most invaluable training.

Why "disability" rather than "special needs" or "differing abilities" or "superpowers" or "heroes"? Here's a great article to help understand the reason behind the title. Adults with disabilities ask that you say "disability" and not "special needs" when you are talking about disability. Many of the other terms come across as patronizing and condescending.

> "Disabled people should control the conversation about their disabilities, and the language used about them, not their parents."
>
> Louisa Shiffer
>
> "A need isn't special if other people get to take the same thing for granted."
>
> Lawrence Carter-Long
>
> "Those of us living with a disability are absolutely living a dual existence: we move through the mainstream world, which is largely inaccessible and not disabled, and we have our own experience with the fact of our bodies."
>
> Meriah

Chapter 9 – Missionary Kids

How Kids pastors Can Support the Youngest Members of Their Missionary Family

One of Antioch's core values is sharing the Good News with those that have never heard. We plant churches and we send our best to the nations as missionaries. As the kids pastor, missionary kids (MKs) are part of your ministry, even when they live on the other side of the world. They carry the weight of transition, culture shifts, and constant change, and they need their home church to remember them, pray for them, and stay connected. As a kids pastor, you get to help anchor these kids in identity and belonging — and you get to support their parents as they lead their families through big transitions.

Below are practical ways to walk with MKs and their families before they go, while they're on the field, and when they come home for a season of rest.

Supporting Families in the Pre-Field Stage

The pre-field season is full of anticipation and unknowns. Families are excited, overwhelmed, and trying to prepare their kids for a life they've never lived before. Your presence matters here.

Build Relationships with the Whole Family

This takes intentionality, but it goes a long way in helping families feel known and supported.

- Take the kids out for ice cream or something fun.
- Take Mom and Dad out for coffee and ask what's on their hearts as they prepare to go. Reflect the strengths you see in their kids.
- Invite the whole family over for a meal. It won't be perfect — parents may feel nervous about their kids behavior, and kids may act differently — but it helps you get to know everyone at once.

Assign Mentors for Pre-Field MKs (Ages 12+)

Older kids need a steady adult who will walk with them through the transition into cross-cultural life. Assign each one an MK Mentor (MKM) who will stay connected throughout their journey.

Create a Parent Mentor Resource List

Put together a list of trusted parents — some on the field, some recently transitioned, some in your church — who can offer wise, godly parenting insight. Make this list available to pre-field families so they know who they can reach out to.

Supporting Missionary Kids on the Field

Once families are overseas, a consistent connection from you and the church helps our MKs feel rooted and remembered. Small touches matter more than you think:

Stay Connected Through MKMs

Make sure every MK age 12+ has a Missionary Kid Mentors. Stay in touch with MKMs so you can pray with insight and know how each child is doing.

Send E-Cards for Birthdays and Milestones

A simple birthday message or celebration card reminds MKs that their church family sees them and remembers them.

Pray Intentionally for MKs

Set aside time for your staff to pray for MKs by name. Email parents beforehand to gather specific requests, then follow up afterward, so they know their kids were lifted before the Lord.

Share Your Church's Discipleship Resources

If your church creates materials for families at home, send digital copies to your missionary families. This helps them stay connected to the same spiritual rhythms as their church back home.

Send Personal Emails and Texts

A short message — "Thinking of you today" — communicates presence across oceans. These small touches help MKs feel remembered.

Share Helpful Parenting Resources

Families on the field face unique pressures. Send articles, blogs, podcasts, and tools that might encourage them in their parenting.

Attend Regional Conferences (rCON)

As a kids pastor, attending an rCON is one of our favorite parts of the jobs. We highly encourage you to jump in and serve at an rCON if possible. You will get to pastor both your kids and the kids of our movement, as well as work alongside other Antioch kids pastors.

Include MKs in Kids ministry

Kids on the field desperately need to be remembered. Consider keeping the MK's from your church in front of the kids by giving updates in your kids services. Maybe have a spotlight once a month to help kids at your church to get a heart for kids overseas. Some of these kids will one day be on the field and so letting them sew into celebrating MK's will go a long way when they are the ones reaping that same kindness in the future.

Support Families During Refuel, Sabbatical, and Re-Entry

Transition seasons are tender seasons. Kids pastors can help families land softly and re-enter with grace. Be aware of when they are returning and look to greet them by name on their first Sunday. This goes a long way in helping kids feel like their sending church remembers them, loves and knows them.

- Share the youth & kids ministry calendar before the family returns.
- Help parents plan their re-entry rhythm and prepare their kids to reconnect with the church.
- Schedule debrief sessions with MKs: Give kids space to talk about their experiences, transitions, and emotions. A thoughtful debrief helps them feel seen and supported.
- Raise up a volunteer in your kids ministry to personally reach out to the MK and make connections while they are in town. As a pastor you can't do everything so give away this pastoral job to a great volunteer who has vision for it! Check in with them and get them what they need to mentor and walk alongside the missionary kid that needs friends.

A Shared Calling

As the kids pastor, caring for missionary kids on a practical level at all 3 stages helps their parents know that their Antioch Church from home is still "with" them. Your intentionality goes a long way in helping these kids thrive where God has called them and their family.

Chapter 10 - Leadership Staff Structures/Interactions

Every church in the Antioch Movement structures staffing differently. Some churches have full-time kids pastors and teams of staff. Others are led by part-time leaders and volunteers. No one structure fits every context.

What matters most is not the exact organizational chart, but building healthy leadership relationships, clear expectations, and sustainable systems that allow kids and families to flourish.

Make Sure Kids Have a Voice

Kids ministry should never become an afterthought.

As a kids ministry leader, advocate for kids to have a voice "in the room." This does not mean demanding influence—it means helping church leadership understand the spiritual significance of discipling the next generation and how kids ministry contributes to the overall vision of the church.

Ask questions such as:

- How does kids ministry support the vision of our church?
- Who represents the needs of kids and families when decisions are made?
- How can I stay aligned with the larger mission of the church?

Healthy alignment produces healthy ministry.

Clarify Expectations

One of the greatest gifts you can give yourself and your leaders is clarity. If you are stepping into a new role, seek clarity around:

Who do I report to?

- Who provides spiritual oversight?
- How should we communicate?
- What decisions can I make independently?
- What decisions should involve my supervisor?

Who is on my team?

- Who are the staff members and key volunteers?
- What are their roles and responsibilities?
- Who owns what?

Who do I oversee?

- Who reports directly to me?
- How often do I connect with them?
- What level of support, encouragement, and accountability do they need?

Clear roles create confidence and prevent unnecessary frustration.

Build Healthy Rhythms with Your Oversight

Don't wait until problems arise to communicate.

Regular meetings create alignment, encouragement, and help everyone stay focused on what matters most.

Helpful rhythms include:

Full-Time Staff

- Meet with your supervisor weekly for at least 30 minutes.
- Use the time for encouragement, feedback, priorities, and prayer.

Part-Time Staff

- Meet with your supervisor every other week for at least one hour.
- Clarify priorities and discuss any challenges or opportunities.

Quarterly Meetings

In addition to regular meetings, many churches benefit from half-day or full-day quarterly meetings for:

- Strategic planning
- Evaluating ministry health
- Reviewing goals and calendars
- Team building and prayer

Regular communication prevents unnecessary confusion and strengthens trust.

Think Beyond Yourself

As ministry grows, it becomes difficult for one person to pastor everyone.

Consider developing layers of leadership.

For example:

Kids Pastor

- Elementary Coach
- Preschool Coach
- Preteen Coach

Those leaders then invest in small group leaders and volunteers. This mirrors the biblical principle of discipleship and many of the leadership structures practiced throughout the Antioch Movement. The goal is not to build a hierarchy but to build people. You do not have to pastor everyone directly. Pour deeply into a few leaders who can help care for many.

Build a Core Team

Ministry is too difficult to do alone. Surround yourself with people you genuinely enjoy doing life and ministry with.

Look for people who:

- Love Jesus and love kids.
- Bring strengths you do not possess.
- Think differently than you do.
- Will tell you the truth.
- Carry joy and faith.
- Enjoy solving problems together.

Diversity on a team creates health. People with different gifts often see things we miss and help strengthen areas where we are weak.

Stay Connected to the Church Community

It is possible to work for the church without actually being part of the church. Over time, kids ministry leaders can become isolated because they spend Sundays serving and weekdays preparing. Be intentional about staying connected.

Ask yourself:

- Am I part of a Life Group?
- Who pastors me?
- Who knows my family?
- Where am I receiving ministry?
- Who has permission to speak into my life?

Don't simply lead the church. Be part of the church.

A Final Encouragement

You do not have to build everything immediately. Start simple. Build healthy relationships. Clarify expectations. Raise up leaders. Invest deeply in people. Ministry structures will change over time, but healthy leadership, clear communication, and intentional discipleship will serve you well in every season.

Chapter 11 - Strategic Planning

Yearly Staff Offsite

Each year, we recommend starting with an offsite for your kids ministry team and any key volunteers who you would like to invite to be a part of setting the goals and calendar for the year. We recommend having this offsite at the beginning of each calendar or school year, whichever makes the most sense for the rhythms of your ministry. The offsite should be a time for celebrating the last year, looking forward to the coming year, praying, worshipping, and seeking the Lord. Make your offsite something that your team looks forward to! It can be a half day or a full day depending on what your team needs!

Here are some things you want to make time to include: prayer, worship, encouraging your teammates, wins and losses from the last year, calendaring for the upcoming year (as best as you can), setting short term goals for the ministry and the staff of the ministry, and some time for fun/connection!

Staff/Ministry Goals

Goals guide the work we do daily — we are working towards short term and long-term goals each day. Setting long term goals can give you and your team long term vision for where you want the ministry to be in 5-10 years, and short-term goals can help keep you grounded in the day-to-day work of ministry that needs to be accomplished before you can reach the long-term goals.

As we talk about goals, it is important to note that we are called to do Kingdom Work in partnership with Jesus. For each of your goals, short term, or long term, please make sure that they are God's heart and goal for your ministry and not just something you think is a good idea or something that you think needs to happen. We are called to build God's Kingdom, not our own, so let's build His Kingdom with the strategy that He wants.

We recommend setting ministry goals each year at your team offsite; these can be as an entire ministry or individually for staff members. It is good to have collective goals that your entire team is working towards as well as individual goals for the year. Make sure that your goals are filtering through the question, "Do these goals help us accomplish our mission?"

Short term goals should be planned for the 3–12-month period using the SMART Goals system as much as possible.

*S*pecific, *M*easurable, *A*chievable, *R*elevant, *T*ime based

Some examples of short-term goals:

- Increase volunteer base in the next six months by 15%.
- Create a system that allows our team to wish every kid in our ministry a happy birthday.
- Create a system that allows monthly check-in with each volunteer.

Long term goals can be set for anywhere from 1-10 years. It is helpful to have multiple that create a journey for the foreseeable future

1 year goal examples:

- Implement a new curriculum model in infant-toddler classrooms.
- Create Lifegroup curriculum for kids in Lifegroup that can be used throughout the year in Lifegroups.
- Increase volunteer base by 30%.

3-year goal examples:

- Create a three-year curriculum that covers the entire Biblical narrative over three years.
- Raise up leaders within Kids ministry to lead each area of service.

10-year goal examples:

- Create a pipeline that allows kids to transition into youth leaders and into adult leaders within Kids ministry.
- Increase the percentage of parents serving in Kids ministry by 40%.

Calendar

Each year, it is important to look through the whole year (calendar and school) and think through all the things happening on the church-wide and Kids ministry calendars. Church wide and movement wide events often impact when and how Kids ministry events can be run. Spend some time at your offsite planning through the year and tentatively scheduling your big events: kids camp, World Mandate kids, baby dedications, family events, outreach opportunities, and whatever else happens on a yearly basis for you! Don't forget the church and liturgical dates – be aware and don't plan an all-kids sports day for your Kids ministry on Good Friday or on the Saturday of a three-day weekend.

Obviously, you may calendar your entire year, but then the church may plan something else on a date. Remain flexible and communicate with your leadership early about the plans Kids ministry is putting in place.

Budget

Each year, it is important to plan your budget for the year based on what church leadership has allocated towards Kids ministry. Spend time seeking the Lord and asking, "Where do you want us to use these funds?" It is our responsibility to steward the resources that have been allocated to Kids ministry in a way that honors the Lord and advances His Kingdom.

If you can, run a report of your budget from the previous year to see how accurate your predictions and actual spending were from the previous year. You can use this as a rough guide to see where you spent your money. If there are any large changes/reallocations that need to happen, this is your time to adjust your budget for the year.

Some things to make sure that you are budgeting for include family events, volunteer appreciation, kids camp, baby dedication, Sunday morning supplies, curriculum fees, and many more!

Chapter 12 - Operations & Administration

Organizing Classes

Aim to organize classrooms thoughtfully based on space, age, and developmental needs, so every child is placed in an environment where they feel safe, known, and able to grow. When possible, use larger rooms for older or larger groups, group preschoolers by age, and group elementary kids by grade and gender.

Set classroom caps to protect both kids and volunteers. Suggested ratios by age are below (adjust as needed based on room size, volunteer experience, and the presence of youth volunteers):

Babies/Crawlers – 2:1
1's – 4:1
2's – 6:1
3's–4's – 7:1
5's–Kinder – 8:1

Elementary capacity often has more flexibility because kids are typically in larger rooms and are developmentally able to manage basic needs independently. Consider dividing larger rooms into small groups by grade and gender to encourage deeper discussion. Aim for no more than an 8:1 ratio in small groups, and use more than one leader per group, when possible, for support and accountability.

When assigning preschool classrooms, consider bathroom access. If possible, place younger classes near (or with) an easily accessible bathroom to reduce transitions and maintain appropriate adult coverage in the classroom. If a bathroom is not available in the room, build scheduled bathroom breaks into the class plan. For more guidance on our bathroom policy, see the Child Safety chapter.

Classroom Set-Up

Prepare classrooms and supplies ahead of time, so volunteers arrive at spaces that are organized, sanitized, and welcoming. A ready environment reduces stress and helps volunteers focus on loving and discipling kids.

Snacks

Offer age-appropriate snacks with careful attention to allergies and dietary needs, so every child is cared for, and parents feel confident in what is provided. Common options include Goldfish, Cheerios, and Rice Chex. Snacks are typically provided for ages 1–5. If a special snack is offered, post an allergy notice outside the room and inform parents at drop-off.

Candy is sometimes used as a reward in elementary rooms. Before offering candy, confirm that the child is permitted to have it (verify with parents at drop-off or pick-up). Consider keeping alternatives on hand for families who prefer a treat-free option (e.g., a small toy or fidget).

Volunteer Snacks

Provide coffee, snacks, or an occasional breakfast to help volunteers arrive on time and serve with energy. Thoughtful hospitality is a simple, tangible way to communicate appreciation—plan for it in the budget or get creative when resources are limited.

Volunteer Huddle

Gather volunteers 10–30 minutes before service (as the schedule allows) to center hearts on the mission, share vision and gratitude, and communicate one or two key notes for the day. This is also a great time to reinforce one brief training point (e.g., walking ropes, bathroom policy, or sick policy).

Check-In Process

Each church should implement a secure check-in system (e.g., Planning Center Online, Church Community Builder, Breeze, etc.). Establish one clearly monitored entrance and one exit for the kids area and require parents to present a parent security tag when entering this area and at pick-up. Partner with the church security team to build a cohesive, campus-wide approach that strengthens safety and trust for families.

To keep things flowing smoothly during Sunday check-in, consider the size of your ministry and budget to provide the number of check-in stations needed for your church. Larger churches may need upwards of 4-6 kiosks in addition to a couple of manned stations, whereas smaller churches may just need one manned and potentially one unmanned (or 2 manned if you have the extra staff). Many churches provide unmanned kiosks to allow families to check-in and print their stickers independently. While these are wonderful and needed, it is still advisable to have a staff member or volunteer ready at a manned station to help new families and for those encountering difficulties in checking in.

In addition to the aid check-in systems provided on a Sunday, they also help maintain accurate attendance records, which can be important during child safety inquiries.

Welcoming New Families

Build a warm, intentional first-impression experience with clear signage, a simple intake process, and a consistent follow-up plan so new families feel seen, valued, and excited to return. When a welcome ministry exists, partner with that team to create a smooth pathway—from greeting to kids check-in, to walking families to classrooms, to helping them find the main service and answering questions along the way.

If needed, create a clearly marked place for new families to complete a new-family form to prevent bottlenecks at check-in. When possible, use a digital form that integrates with the check-in system to reduce manual data entry. The form should capture contact information so a pastor or leader can follow up that week to thank the family for visiting and answer questions. Here's an example welcome letter. Multiple personal touchpoints help families feel genuinely welcomed. Consider using a workflow to automate these emails and keep notes of any follow up conversations you have with these families.

Communicating with Families

Now more than ever, people are inundated with communication. It's important to find an avenue of communication that works for your ministry and that reaches your families. This can be done through email (work email or a service like Chimp Monkey/Bomb Bomb), bulk texting, social media, or your church provided service (i.e., Planning Center). Find what works best for your families and gets the most response. You might have to do everything suggested above to adequately reach the families in your ministry. Be concise and provide the essentials for families to be informed and sign up for upcoming events. However, don't just communicate an event once. Most people need several touches from several platforms before they respond.

Promotion Sunday

Choose one intentional Sunday each year to celebrate grade-level promotions as a milestone for families. Coordinate this date with the youth ministry since some students will promote from kids to youth. This is usually best done during the summer months (after camps, where applicable). Update grades in the check-in system the week prior—ideally using a bulk update rather than individual changes. Pay special attention to children whose promotion may vary (often in the 4-year-old to kindergartener range or

those with disabilities); a brief parent form can clarify placement. Note: Promotion Sunday does not apply to preschool classes, where children promote on birthdays. For more detail, see the chapter on kids transitioning in and out of kids ministry.

Chapter 13 - Child Safety

What policies and documents are required for Antioch Churches?

Below you will find some items that are "required" of you as an Antioch church and items that are considered "best practice." While it's best to have ALL the documents below, we know that can be very overwhelming for some of our newer/smaller churches. Please start with the items that are first addressed as "requirements" and grow your CS plan from there. If you have questions as to where you should start or what needs to be your church's priority, please email child.safety@antiochwaco.com for a personal consultation.

Required Child Safety Elements

1. *Antioch Child Safety Mission Statement (standardized across the movement)*
2. *Child Safety Definitions (standardized across the movement)*
3. *Personalized Child Safety Policy (which includes an abuse response plan)*
4. *Designate a staff member as a "Child Safety Advocate"*
5. *Personalized Child Safety Code of Conduct (signed by staff and volunteers of minors)*

All Antioch Community Churches are required to uphold the same child safety mission statement and child safety definitions. For more information about this CS mission statement, the CS definitions and what is required for your church, please refer to this document: Antioch Child Safety Policy requirements.

Additionally, each church is required to have their own Child Safety Policy. Here is Antioch Waco's policy to use as an example. To help in the creation of your own policy, here is a template you can personalize. The sections highlighted in yellow are for you to customize to your specific state and church size, etc. The other areas should remain unchanged as they are general and should be present in your policy.

Each Antioch church should have someone on their staff who serves as the "***Child Safety Advocate***" for their church. This person should be trained in child safety best practices and be well informed of your church's and state's response processes. They will be the point person leading out a small response team

should a child safety issue arise. Additionally, they should be empowered to create and implement CS policies at your church. Here's an example job description (this is a shared role with a Kids Operations Director but could also be a shared role with your kids pastor/director or Executive Pastor depending on who is the best fit for the job).

All Antioch staff members and every volunteer who works with minors must complete a Child Safety Code of Conduct prior to reporting to service. The one linked here can be updated to fit your church's needs. This CS Code of Conduct will help your staff and volunteers clearly see what are the set guidelines that they are being asked to uphold and what is expected of them should they suspect abuse. Integrating this form into your church's software (Planning Center, etc.) will ease the tracking of completion.

Best Practice Child Safety Elements

As a ministry, please give your volunteers a handbook they can reference as needed. Here is an example of Antioch Waco's volunteer handbook that includes policies and procedures in addition to guidelines for minimizing risks in abuse and incidents. This handbook is meant to be robust and is to be given to every volunteer when they are onboarded. They need to sign that they have read and will agree to abide by the standards laid out. Consider having a Volunteer Agreement Form that summarizes these standards to ensure your volunteers understand what is expected of them as a kids volunteer. This signed document can be referred to if you should have any volunteer conduct issues in the future.

Volunteer Onboarding Checklist

Adding new volunteers to your ministry is wonderful but can also feel overwhelming. Here are the general steps needed to follow for best practices in onboarding. Consider each of these like a slice of Swiss cheese; on it's on it has holes, but as a block it is effective in keeping out harmful volunteers from your ministry.

1. Application (Example Application)
    a. Ask the "hard questions" (prior abuse, criminal record, pornography, etc.)
    b. Find a secure location to digitally store your application (Wufoo, etc.). Due to the sensitive nature of these applications, they should be stored so only necessary staff can view them.
2. References

    a. Collect 2-3 references on your application and check them. Consider using a short form to send to references that just asks a couple basic questions: "do you have any concerns regarding this applicant working with children", "what is the context you know this applicant; for how long," etc.
3. Cleared background Check (see below)
4. Interview (Suggested Interview Questions)
5. Training (include CS/Abuse awareness, response protocol, classroom policies, and procedures - see below for training options)
6. Agreements (Code of Conduct/Volunteer Agreement Form)

Background Checks (BGCs)

There are many companies that process BGC's. Shop around to find one that suits your church's needs. It is ideal to use a program that integrates with your church's software to streamline the process and to prevent your church from having to collect SSN's and other sensitive information. There is a wide variety of options when it comes to the packages that are available. Best practice is to get the highest coverage based on the level of trust given to that individual, particularly when it comes to child safety. For instance, get the highest-level package for a permanent kids pastor. Get the basic package for an individual who only occasionally works with minors and will have a high level of accountability. This decision can be cost-prohibitive for your ministry. Remember, a BGC is not the end-all for child safety; it is simply another layer of protection from unsafe people entering your ministry.

What if they have charges?

Below is an example document that Antioch Waco uses to approve or decline individuals based upon the charges in their background check. Your church will need to develop a similar procedure based upon your state and local school district's standards: Antioch's Background Check Approval Process

If you have an individual who is not permitted to work with minors based on their BGC, you will need to communicate with them very carefully. Here is an example process in doing this:

1. Develop a small team of highly trusted pastors from various ministries.
2. This response team will consist of selected pastors and the Child Safety Advocate. The hope is to include members from across various ministries so that the most relevant pastor can respond.

3. Here's what is asked of these pastors:
    - Receive an email from the Child Safety Advocate containing the individuals BGC and the reason (charge) they have not been approved and the length of their exclusion period. The BGC guideline document will be included in this email for reference.
    - The pastor will call the individual to discuss the results of their BGC (within 48 hours of receiving the email from our Child Safety Advocate).
    - Ask if they want to talk about or explain the charges that are on the check or if there has been a mistake with their charge/record.
    - Hear their story and offer comfort/prayer.
    - Most importantly, affirm their role in the church, extend grace for past mistakes, and point them to alternative places to serve that don't require a cleared BGC.
    - If they contest their charge(s), please send them back to the Child Safety Advocate so that appropriate steps can be made.
    - If they ask if there can be a reduction of time to their exclusion period, tell them that we can reevaluate after 10 years (if their exclusion is 30 years or permanent). Waco makes no reduction for 2-, 5- or 10-year exclusion periods.
    - The pastor then notifies the Child Safety Advocate and the area pastor where they had applied to serve and share any needed information for follow up.

Reporting Abuse

Depending on your state's guidelines, you and the adults in your ministry may be mandatory reporters. In the state of TX, all adults are mandatory reporters; in other states, only those who are considered "professionals," such as teachers, doctors, pastors, etc., are mandated to report. Know what your state mandates. Even still, consider these to be the minimum of what you should do if you suspect abuse. As we are ministers, we not only have a legal responsibility to the state; we also carry a pastoral responsibility to each member.

Personalized Church Response Plan

Develop a plan and procedure for your staff and volunteers to follow if they suspect abuse and how your staff will respond to the accused individual and alleged victim. This also needs to include your pastoral response for all people involved. See Antioch Waco's CS Policy under Child Safety Advocate

and Response Protocol to see Waco's example of this. Here are two additional documents to help create these procedures:
EXAMPLE Antioch's Response Process to Suspected Abuse.docx
EXAMPLE Antioch Response Process Visual.png

How to Record Findings

It is important that you keep records of any reports made to the Department of Family and Protective Services. Additionally, you need to keep the testimonies of every person involved. This can be a simple Word document that contains the incident/concern and then the testimonials of all affected people, including all consulted pastors. This applies not only to alleged abuse but also should be recorded whenever an incident happens in which CS is a concern (i.e., child was left alone on campus; the leader was accused of unkindness towards children, etc.). However, these records are very sensitive. Find a way to save these documents securely using encryption (this can be done within "Teams" and "SharePoint" or other online file sharing services). Additionally, all emails should be encrypted to prevent unwanted access to the information shared. If you have paper documents (which are not necessary), please ensure that they are in a lockable file cabinet.

Emergency Plans

Every church needs to develop emergency plans for your adult and kid areas that are communicated to your staff, safety team, and kid's/youth volunteers. These should be posted in every classroom for ease during an emergency. Based on the needs of your area of the country, include fire, bodily fluid clean up, incident reports, medical emergencies, active shooter/lockdown, tornado, earthquake, and abuse response protocol (this is a great reference for your volunteers to regularly see).

We recommend keeping these plans posted in each classroom and covering them during your CS trainings. Here's an example: Classroom Safety Manual

Make sure that you consider how both adults and kids will safely exit the building and be reunited once evacuated. Make sure that you coordinate these plans with the safety/security team of the greater body so that it is cohesive, effective, and will minimize chaos when the plan is executed.

Additionally, you will need to develop fire escape route plans and post these by the exits of each room. Make sure you have checked what your state requires regarding this. Check out what daycares are

required to do if you're unable to find what is required for churches. If tornados are common in your area, develop and post plans for sheltering when needed. Typically, you will want classes to avoid rooms with exterior walls or windows. Interior bathrooms are considered the safest rooms to shelter in if you're able to utilize these spaces.

Training for church staff and volunteers

All church staff and any volunteers who work with minors in your ministries must be trained in your child safety policies and abuse awareness, during on-boarding and again a minimum of every 2 years. Your church's Child Safety Advocate can provide these trainings in house, or you can provide video trainings using a professional service like those listed below, just know that the training needs to include the following:

- Abuse awareness (based on your state's definitions of the 4 types of child maltreatment)
- Abuse response protocol which includes your church's response and the state requirements
- Classroom protocols/procedures (the "rules" for your ministries – kids, youth, LG, etc.)
- Emergency plans

Child Safety Training Resources

"In-House" Trainings:

- Here's an example of what a child safety training could look like for your staff and volunteers: Child Safety & Security Training
- Antioch Waco Child Safety Training — This video is meant to supplement Telios Capable Guardian training, providing TX and Antioch Waco specific laws/policies.
- Child Safety for Lifegroups
- Antioch Movement STT/ETN Child Safety Training (includes a code of conduct for STT/ETN- Short Term Team/Engage The Nations)

Outsourced training:

- Telios CS training videos – these have a cost per view/membership but are easily traceable for a ministry to maintain for all staff and volunteers – Waco currently requires all volunteers

working with minors to complete the "Capable Guardian" training in addition to the Antioch Waco CS training linked above.

- Ministry Safe CS training videos - these have a cost per view but are easily traceable for a ministry to maintain for all staff and volunteers. This also integrates with Planning Center and offers BGCs
- Ministry Safe Institute—16 hours of seminary level child safety training for Child Safety Advocates, HR directors, Kid & Youth ministry staff.
- Protect My Ministry—online ministry trainings (we have had some negative feedback on this one, but it's a resource and integrates with Planning Center and offers BGCs).
- Love Wisely—for short term teams.

Here's a link to the full list of Child Safety Resources. If you have any further questions regarding child safety at your church, please email child.safety@antiochwaco.com

Chapter 14 - Tending your Soul

Personal Assessment

Throughout different seasons we all encounter highs and lows. There is no glory in the highs and no shame in the lows; this is just a natural part of the human experience. How do your days feel? Peaceful? Rushed? Joyful? Too full? Exhausting? Refreshing? Full of life? Lifeless? Recognizing where you fall will help you determine if a little more "tending" is required for this season.

Many westerners would say they feel "busy" but there is a difference between "busy" and "hurry." Most of us will consider ourselves busy if we work, have kids, are in school, etc. However, if we commonly find ourselves in a state of "hurry" that's where we need to take a step back with the Lord and evaluate our inner condition.

> ***Busy is an outer condition of the body***
> ***Hurry is the inner condition of your soul***

Signs of Destructive Hurry:

- I can't shake the pressure I feel from having too much to do in too little time.
- I am ignoring the stress, anxiety, and tightness of my body.
- I am overly concerned with what others think.
- I experience inappropriate escapist behavior (needing to just "get out," "travel," etc.)
- I am always rushing.
- I am defensive and easily offended.
- I am preoccupied and distracted.
- I fire off quick opinions and judgements.
- I feel unenthusiastic about or threatened by the success of others.
- I spend more time talking than listening.

> *"Jesus knew his limits well and instinctively knew something we often forget: time must be properly budgeted for the gathering of inner strength and resolve to compensate for one's weaknesses when spiritual warfare begins."*

Gordan McDonald, Ordering Your Private World

If you find yourself in a season of struggle for whatever reason, don't go through it alone. Bring a friend/spouse into your inner thoughts. Find a professional counselor who can address issues that seem too big for you to "fix" (marriage/parenting struggles, grief/loss, depression, addiction, etc.). You are not alone. These struggles are common to all humans. The quicker you own up to your state, the quicker you will find a breakthrough.

How fully are you participating in the 5 circles of church?

This section is not for you to measure how you're "performing" at your local church. This is to remind you of ways that your community is available to you. These circles are not meant to be rules or expectations but are meant to provide structure in how we receive and give care through our local body.

1. ***Time with the Lord***
   - Daily Word - Worship - Prayer
   - Sabbath - If you work on Sundays, find another day of your week, or even a ½ day to rest.
   - Silence & Solitude
   - Personal days & Retreats
2. ***Life-on-Life Discipleship***
   - Do you have intentional accountability? Are you being vulnerable with others?
   - Find a regular prayer partner(s). Even if you don't have someone who can pour into your life through traditional "one-way" discipleship for hours each week, you can have a 15–20-minute phone call weekly with a trusted friend for mutual accountability. Use these times for both of you to pour out your greatest needs and take time for intentional prayer. These are easy touchpoints that make discipleship attainable in a busy season of life or where there is not a leader who can make the space for your regular discipleship.
   - Threads: Weaving disciple making into the fabric of your life
3. ***Lifegroup***
   - Are you in one? If not, get in one! Is it lifegiving? Do you have to lead it? If you're leading it and it's not lifegiving, what can you change to make it better? Life's too short for a bad community experience. Shake it up if the traditional model isn't working!
4. ***The Church Gathered***
   - Find a way to make it to the "big service" at least once per month. We know this can be quite challenging depending on your staff size and number of volunteers. Make the effort to train

others to do what you do. Even if you miss portions of the service (1st song or two, response time, etc.) it's important that you are engaging with the greater body. You can be replaced...meaning you don't HAVE to be with the kids or running the ministry every week. If you have multiple people on your team, offer each other turns to attend the service. If you're a one-man band, you can find a trusted volunteer to train who can offer you a chance to be a part of the church, not just serve at it.

- Create structures that enable you to worship and participate in community (make a schedule for your staff to attend and stick to it)
- If you can't regularly get to a Sunday service, does your church offer other opportunities for you to engage with corporate worship and prayer? Prayer nights/groups? Engaging staff meetings? Etc.

5. ***Mission to the other spheres***
    - I know this sounds crazy, but how are you serving your church/community outside of your "job"? When your job is ministry, it's difficult to imagine that you should do MORE...but we're not talking formal ministry, we're talking about enjoyment! What do you love doing? Find something that refreshes you and do that but do it with intentionality, loving people and sharing about Jesus!
        - Do you love evangelism? Great! Go out and share the Gospel!
        - Do you love women's/men's ministry? Be a champion for your women's/men's ministry at your church. Go to the events and invite others.
        - Do you love sports? Great! Participate in sports at your kids school and mentor the kids! Serve in a little league. Attend sports events and talk to the people you're sitting by.
        - Do you love gardening? Join a club and share with all the old ladies!
        - Love reading? Join a book club! Don't start one with all your friends at church...find a community one at your library. Get outside of your usual sphere.
    - These things may feel like an extra commitment but if it's something you love, it will refresh you rather than just being another obligation.

Resources for Tending your Soul:

Pause App - great for daily silence and solitude

Lectio 365 App - great for daily study of the word and feeling "lead" through the word

ABCDE Exercise.docx - great for processing situations you're facing and getting fresh perspective

Journey of the Soul: A Practical Guide to Emotional and Spiritual Growth This book talks about different seasons of faith and particularly addresses "the wall." Super helpful for the "dark night of the soul" or even helping others who are in that season.

Ruthless Elimination of Hurry and the Unhurry Workbook (this link includes videos on silence, solitude, Sabbath, simplicity, and slowing, in addition to a companion workbook)

Chapter 15 – Resource Links

Available Resources:

Child Safety
Christmas
Curriculum
Discipleship
Easter
Elementary
Kids with Disabilities
Missionary Kids (MKs)
Operations & Admin
Parenting
Salvation & Baptism
Special Events
Tending Your Soul
Volunteers