

Vision & Getting Started

for Shepherds

Know

Love

Follow

Share

Kids Ministry is partnering with families to help children **know**, **love**, **follow**, and **share** Jesus.

Why we do this, how we communicate, what behavior is telling us, how we hold attention, how we lead small groups, and what to expect at every age from the nursery up.

A COLLECTION OF RESOURCES FOR SHEPHERDS

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Why Do We Have Kids Ministry?

We know from Scripture that God's design is for parents to have the primary responsibility for discipling their children. So why do we have Kids Ministry?

Because discipleship doesn't happen in just one environment. God uses a variety of God-given influences to shape a child's faith. The home plays a primary role, and the church family comes alongside to encourage, support, and reinforce a growing faith. As children experience truth taught, modeled, and lived out in multiple environments, their faith is strengthened.

God never intended for families to walk the discipleship journey alone. He designed His people to live as a church family, encouraging one another and passing faith from one generation to the next. Children are a valued part of our church family, and God often uses the influence of caring adults beyond their own home to encourage, teach, and model what it means to follow Jesus.

That is why we are committed to partnering with families as they nurture faith in the next generation.

WE SUM IT UP THIS WAY

Kids Ministry is partnering with families to help children know, love, follow, and share Jesus.

Nursery Ministry: Why It Matters

At LEFC Kids, we believe that parents have the primary responsibility for discipling their children, and we count it a privilege to partner with families in helping kids know, love, follow, and share Jesus.

When people think about nursery ministry, it's easy to assume it's simply childcare. While caring for little ones well is certainly important, nursery ministry is so much more than that.

The earliest years of life are filled with remarkable growth and development. Babies, crawlers, and toddlers are learning about the world around them at an incredible pace. During these tender years, children are developing trust, forming habits, building relationships, and establishing foundational understandings that will shape them for years to come.

As young children are lovingly welcomed and cared for by trusted adults each week, they begin learning that church is a safe place, that God's people can be trusted, and that they belong within the family of God. Long before they can fully understand biblical truths, they are experiencing them through consistent care, loving relationships, and the rhythms of church life.

They are also forming habits and memories that matter. Week after week, they are learning, "This is what our family does. We gather with God's people. We worship together. We are part of something bigger than ourselves."

As children grow into the toddler years, they begin learning simple but profound truths through age-appropriate lessons, songs, and conversations. Phrases like "God loves me," "God made the world," and "I have friends at church" become part of their vocabulary and understanding. These simple truths are seeds planted in young hearts—seeds we trust God to nurture and grow.

Nursery ministry is not merely preparing children for "real ministry" someday. Ministry to our youngest children begins now. God is already at work in their lives, and the loving care, relationships, routines, and biblical truths they experience in the nursery are meaningful parts of their spiritual formation.

The ministry of helping children know Jesus starts in the nursery. It's real. It's significant. And it is a privilege to be part of what God is doing in the lives of our youngest little people.

Blessing the Little Ones

Lynne Howard, The Wonder Ink Team

The nursery is more than a place to babysit infants while their parents are worshiping. It's about ministering to the littlest of these.

While it's easy for most people to get on board with ministry to elementary-aged children and older, many people think the nursery is simply a place to babysit infants while their parents are worshiping. But did you know that babies—yes, even infants!—can praise God and connect with Him?

"You have made sure that children and infants praise you. Their praise is a wall that stops the talk of your enemies."

— PSALM 8:2

Babies not only can praise God, but their praise stops the enemy! John the Baptist encountered the presence of Jesus and leapt from within his mother's womb! Leading kids on a journey with Jesus doesn't have to wait until they are old enough to read.

We can minister intentionally and purposefully to the youngest in our churches.

Ministry to Babies

From before my kids were even born, God put a special Bible verse on my heart for each one, and I prayed that verse aloud over them each night before bed. Both have memorized the verse and say it with me now each night. They ask for it, if I forget.

My son calls it his "special prayer." I started praying the words of Scripture over them and declaring God's truths to them even before they were born and have continued almost every day of their lives. They are not only hearing those words and truths, but they're internalizing them, remembering them, and being shaped by them. One of the most important ways we can minister to babies is by declaring God's truths and Word over them.

Even if they don't understand it now, the words you speak to babies can take root inside their hearts and grow.

Leading kids on a journey with Jesus doesn't have to wait until they are old enough to read. We can minister intentionally and purposefully to the youngest in our churches.

Speaking Blessings and Scripture

Not only can we read Scripture over them, but we can speak blessings over them. There is tremendous power in declaring blessings.

"People were bringing little children to Jesus. They wanted him to place his hands on them to bless them. But the disciples told them to stop. When Jesus saw this, he was angry. He said to his disciples, 'Let the little children come to me. Don't keep them away. God's kingdom belongs to people like them.'"

— MARK 10:13-14

Jesus took the time to show value to children, to bless them and welcome them, and commanded others to do the same.

"Fundamentally, blessing is a spoken word ... When we speak out blessings, saying the words aloud, we are imitating God. The Holy Spirit then confirms those words. At that moment, Creation's redemption is underway ..."

ROY GODWIN, AUTHOR OF "AND I WILL BLESS THEM"

God spoke blessing over the world. Jesus blessed those He encountered. The Bible instructs us as His followers to bless others. We can start by speaking blessings over the littlest ones we're entrusted to care for in our churches.

Divine Appointments

"Every child you encounter is a divine appointment. With each one you have the power and opportunity to build the child up or tear the child down. A life can be launched with as little as a single phrase, an uplifting word, or an act of kindness. The spirit of a child is a lot like wet cement. When a child is young, it takes very little effort to make an impression that can last a lifetime."

DR. WESS STAFFORD, AUTHOR OF "TOO SMALL TO IGNORE"

Can babies learn about God? Yes! Babies are learning from the day they're born! Babies learn and explore the world through their environment and through their senses. They learn through play and through songs.

Babies not only can praise God, but their praise stops the enemy!

Sensory Learning and Repetition

Taking all of this into account, when teaching babies about God, use play and sensory activities, such as hugging a stuffed animal while you talk about how much God loves us, looking in a mirror while you talk about How God made us. Sing songs about God, while clapping and smiling. You might notice the baby smiling and trying to clap along too! Babies are very aware of expression and emotions. Show pictures or use dolls as you talk about the Bible. Let the babies feel a variety of textures.

Babies also learn through repetition. Keep your stories and main points simple and consistent. Hearing the same Bible story each Sunday for a month might seem redundant for us, but babies, it's the way their minds learn and understand!

Laying Foundations

While you're teaching and caring for babies in your nursery, remember that you're laying the foundation for how they feel about God and the church. If they feel safe, loved, and welcomed by you, they'll grow up with a foundation of feeling safe, loved, and welcome by God and by the church. This will allow them to continue to grow and learn as they grow up in the church.

One last thing: always remember that when you're serving in the nursery, you are ministering to babies, and you're also ministering to parents. Creating a trusting relationship with parents and encouraging them in their faith journey, as well as empowering them to continue to disciple and lead their own children at home, is a vital ministry to parents. And by ensuring that their babies are safe and loved, you give them an opportunity to worship in peace and

connect with God.

Keep It Simple

A ministry to babies doesn't have to be complicated. Keep it simple and age appropriate, and offer opportunities for babies to play, learn, worship, and experience God's presence. Don't overlook or underestimate the importance of ministry babies, for each one was fearfully and wonderfully made by their Creator who loves them and has a plan for their life.

Keys to Good Communication

Stop, look, and listen.

Why is listening the first step in communicating? Stop, look, and listen . . .

- to learn how the child perceives his world.
- to learn what is important and interesting to the child.
- to show the child you are interested in him.

Choose your words carefully; speak your words clearly.

The adults sang,

"He is exalted, the King is exalted!"

The child heard,

"He is exhausted, the King is exhausted!"

The adults said,

"Thanks be to God."

The child heard,

"Thanks, speedy God."

The adults said,

"Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James . . ."

The child heard,

"Why did he bruise James?"

The adults said,

"Lead on, O King Eternal."

The child heard,

"Lead on, o kinky turtle."

Choose your words carefully; speak your words clearly . . .

Play with children.

How does play help you communicate with children? Play with children . . .

- to make sense of a child's logic.
- to avoid symbolism.
- to minimize misunderstandings.
- to develop their trust in you.
- to enjoy them.
- to provide a relaxed format for communicating.
- to build relationships.

Use good manners.

List some ways you are respectful to adults. Discuss how you can respect children in those same ways.

Use good manners . . .

- to show your respect for the child.
- to provide a good example for communication.

More Than Words Can Tell

7%

of what we communicate comes from our actual words (the content).

38%

of what we communicate comes from the sound people hear (the tone of voice).

55%

of what we communicate comes from the way we look (body language, gestures, and facial expressions).

Try this:

Say "I love you" in the following ways:

sarcastically

angrily

passionately

as a question

fondly

as a matter of fact

in fear

sadly

The content was the same each time.

Turn to the person next to you. Cross your arms, lean back, and say, "You're one of my good friends." Now turn to the same person. Uncross your arms, lean forward, and say, "You're one of my good friends." What was the difference in the way the listener perceived each communication? What does that tell you about communication?

Nonverbal Communication

Turn to the person next to you. Choose which of you will be person A and which will be person B.

1. Person A should stand up.
2. Person B should kneel in front of person A.
3. Person A should tell person B, "I'm so glad you're here today. We're going to have a very good time."
4. Now sit back down, eye to eye, and say the same thing.

What's the difference in what is communicated?

- Did the meaning stay the same? Why?
- What does this tell you about communication?

One educator says that when we communicate with children, we should be on a level at which we are "eye to eye and heart to heart." Why?

Why Children Misbehave

Misbehavior usually occurs because children are choosing inappropriate ways to get their perceived needs met. They may not even be conscious of the specific need or be able to express it. What are some needs that could cause negative behavior?

1 • Attention

"I need to feel valued and wanted. I need someone to listen to me."

2 • Leadership

"I need to do something significant. I need my efforts to be acknowledged."

3 • Security

"I need to know that there are boundaries. I need you to help me learn to control myself."

4 • Encouragement

"I need to know you think I can do it. I need to have successes."

5 • Health

"I don't feel well today. I'm cranky. I need to rest."

6 • Nutrition

"I didn't get breakfast today. I need to eat something."

7 • Comfort

"There are problems at home that I don't understand. I'm afraid, angry, confused."

Negative behavior can be stopped for the short-term, but if the need is not met, negative behavior will occur again. If negative behavior is going to be stopped, someone will have to help meet the child's need or show the child how to meet his own need in positive ways. Each need is met in different ways.

What Can I Do . . .

TO PROVIDE ATTENTION?

- Give the child attention at times when he is not exhibiting negative behavior.
- Try to ignore the negative behavior.
- The most important moments of class time for this child are the first five minutes after he arrives. Make sure to pay attention to him as soon as he comes in.

TO PROVIDE LEADERSHIP?

- Give the child choices as to how she will comply with your wishes. For example, "Would you like to clean off the table or the shelf?" "Would you like to tiptoe to the rug or march to the rug?"
- Provide her with valid leadership opportunities.

TO PROVIDE SECURITY?

- Communicate the rules and enforce them consistently.
- Be patient with the child as you train him in self-control, helping him make the right behavior choices.

TO COMFORT THE CHILD?

- Pray for the child.
- Have compassion.
- Maintain a stable classroom routine.
- Give time for the child to talk to you, one-on-one.

TO PROVIDE NUTRITION?

- Have snacks available.

TO PROVIDE HEALTH?

- If you suspect a child is getting sick, let her rest away from other children.
- Ask her parents to come and get her.

TO PROVIDE ENCOURAGEMENT?

- Express your confidence in the child's abilities.
- Give him tasks you know he can do successfully.

ADAPTED FROM THE TRAINING RESOURCES OF KARYN HENLEY

Getting & Keeping Kids' Attention

The best ideas are borrowed! Here are some tried and true attention getters.

START HERE

- Arrive early to set up and feel comfortable in the room and your surroundings.
- Present yourself with confidence from the moment kids walk in; it sets the emotional tone for the room.
- Be genuinely present once class begins — kids notice quickly when a teacher's attention is divided, and mirror that same distractedness back.

Auditory Cues

- Ring a bell — use it to interrupt off-task behavior, but pair it with praising a child who's doing the right thing, so the bell becomes associated with positive attention, not just correction.
- Drop a paper wad — hold a wadded-up ball of paper overhead and wait silently until the room quiets down, then drop it and ask, "Can you hear that?" Repeat as needed.
- Countdown — hold up a hand and count down from 5 to 1 with your fingers; repeat if the room isn't quiet by "1."
- Clap or snap a rhythmic pattern — start a pattern, kids either copy it back or answer with a different pattern (e.g., leader claps 3 times, kids clap 3 times back). Keep going until the whole class joins in, then transition back into teaching.

The article recommends avoiding cues that require a specific object, so kids can respond anywhere, anytime.

Verbal Cues & Call-and-Response

STATEMENT-RESPONSE PAIRS

"Macaroni and cheese" **"Freeze!"**

"God is good" **"All the time."**

"All set?" **"You bet!"**

"1, 2, 3, eyes on me" **"1, 2, eyes on you."**

"Peanut butter" **"Jelly time!"**

"Yakety yak" **"Don't talk back."**

Names a noun (cow, waterfall, train) **Respond with the sound it makes**

- "Code Word" — pick a code word ahead of time. When the class gets restless or you need a transition, call it out; kids jump up, shout it back, and (optionally) do an assigned motion.
- Callouts — teacher says a short line, kids respond with a set phrase (e.g., teacher: "All set?" / kids: "You bet!").
- Quiet your own voice — instead of talking over a loud room (which risks straining your voice and sounding like yelling), drop to a whisper, as if sharing a secret. Kids lean in to hear, which naturally quiets the room.

The article notes kids respond best to a consistent pairing used the same way every time, rather than switching it up often.

Physical & Movement Cues

- "Do This, Do That" — teacher says "do this" while modeling an action; kids copy it. Say "do that" instead, and kids must not do it. Whoever moves is "out." Speed increases as the game goes — especially good for burning off wiggles.
- "If You Can Hear My Voice..." — say softly, "If you can hear my voice, clap twice" (or another action). Keep going with new actions until the room has quieted. A gentle, non-confrontational reset.
- Building on "If you can hear me...", have kids do a specific silly action that has the side benefit of stopping talking — e.g., "catch a big bubble in your mouth," or "mustache time" (kids hold their fingers over their upper lip). Note: this style takes kids' hands being free, so it may not always work if they're mid-activity.
- Get them moving — jumping jacks, stretches, arm circles, a quick "Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes," or (for younger kids) a pretend "train ride." Especially useful if kids seem drowsy during teaching rather than restless.

Music & Song

- Sing a song — silly, a familiar kids' Bible song, or an action song; the teacher's vocal talent doesn't matter, kids respond to the energy of it.
- Background music — upbeat music as kids arrive and settle in, switched to calmer instrumental music when the room needs to settle down.

Humor, Silliness & Novelty

- Be silly — stand on a chair, try a funny-face challenge, wear a goofy prop, tell a joke. The sillier, the better, according to the article.
- Start the lesson with something other than straight teaching — a joke, short video, quick game, or funny story — before moving into the Bible content.
- Occasionally swap who teaches — a grandparent, a guest, someone whose real-life experience connects to the lesson (e.g., someone who hunts, teaching the week about Esau's birthright) adds novelty and relevance.
- Special greetings at the door — a different greeting each week (high five, secret handshake, silly dance), posted visually so kids know what to expect.

Principles for Choosing & Rotating Techniques

- Commit fully — a half-hearted attempt at a silly phrase gets a half-hearted response; the more enthusiastically a leader commits, the more kids buy in.
- Use repetition, even when not strictly needed — practicing a cue when the room doesn't actually need quieting helps kids build the reflexive response for when it matters.
- Rotate in new cues over time, rather than relying on just one — one method gets stale. The article suggests preteens can learn and retain around 5 different cues introduced gradually, while preschoolers do better with just two or three simple ones.
- Match the cue to the age group — what's fun for 3-year-olds isn't the same as what lands with preteens.
- Always pair the cue with a clear expectation of what happens next — a clap pattern or phrase only works if kids know exactly what behavior is expected once it's used (e.g., "sit down," "eyes forward," "voices to a whisper").
- Avoid making attention-getting purely competitive (e.g., rewarding only the fastest individual or team to respond) — this can work against a sense of shared classroom community.

What to Avoid

- Avoid air horns or other sudden, sharp sounds — kids who have experienced trauma or abuse can have a real negative reaction to loud, jarring noises.
- Don't single out a child by name in correction — call a volunteer over instead, unless the child is in immediate danger.
- Don't shout or raise your voice at the class — yelling costs a teacher credibility with kids; if a teacher feels that frustrated, it's a sign to take a break or ask another leader for help.
- Never physically handle a child to move or relocate them — for a child who won't cooperate (e.g., won't go to a designated "quiet chair"), involve a parent or Kids Ministry staff team member instead.
- When correcting misbehavior, redirect toward a replacement behavior rather than only stopping the negative one (e.g., "let's use gentle hands" instead of just "stop that").

Leading Small Groups

Written by Aaron Meservey

When my wife and I began to let our oldest daughter feed herself we had two options: try to keep her relatively clean and get frustrated by the constant mess or learn to accept the process. While the latter is clearly the right answer, I tried the former for many long months followed by anger, outbursts, and frustration.

She wanted to play instead of eating, or grab a handful of mashed potatoes, while going through the motions of "Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes." Covering herself in food became a nightly routine. Our dog gained 15 pounds from dropped food. Our table constantly felt sticky and the impulse to make her eat like a "big girl" was strong.

While we certainly had certain rules to follow to help reduce some of her immaturity, the real shift in the dining experience came with accepting that the mess will happen.

Leading tween-ager small groups is like that.

Our students will want to play instead of being fed and conversations that we have nicely planned may become a messy experience due to rabbit trails of whatever they're thinking about at the moment. If you are set on keeping everything organized, neat and clean it will be unending frustration as you try to wrangle students to get through material.

Of course we'll never abandon small groups because on good days, we realize how effective small groups are at building community, going deep, and inspiring application. But on those bad days, it can be some of the hardest and most frustrating work we do.

Unfortunately, I don't think there's a surefire way to make leading a clean process, but you have to learn to accept the craziness as part of the process. While trying to eliminate mess will drive you mad, you have the ability to limit it and sometimes even use it to your advantage.

Just like with the self-feeding toddler, your job at the moment isn't to keep the area clean, but to get the child fed.

Below you'll find a few tips that will hopefully help you to keep the mess to the level where there's still some food left to eat.

Prayer

Yes, prayer matters. I don't mean a generic prayer but real, deep intercessory prayer for the time that you and your team will be ministering.

While prayer can at times be hard, it is the most important thing we do in preparation as we invite Jesus—the Chief Shepherd to be at work. The God who can still the stormy seas can also still restless tween-agers, though the former at times seems easier.

You will never say, "I wish I had spent less time praying and more time studying for my message."

When you try to teach, preach, and lead small groups without real prayer, students seem less focused, have a harder time applying truths, and you may not feel as sharp as a teacher.

Phones Away

When I first became a youth pastor, I didn't bother to get rid of phones. I wanted to appear relaxed and down to earth. I didn't want to stretch students too far and wanted to give them the opportunity to use their phones appropriately: Bible app, take notes, etc.

Two things completely transformed my approach.

First, I read some of the science about how the mere presence of a phone distracts people from one another, decreases conversational quality and empathy for others. Community, relationships, and conversations, the very things small groups are designed to facilitate, are being undermined. Phones can be an addiction, which means even if you're a great leader/speaker, its presence will be distracting their minds.

Second, I realized how much phones affect me. I was intentionally a late adapter to the smartphone, but when I finally gave in I noticed how my own compulsion to grab my phone to check emails, texts, social media would distract me from family time. If it distracts you and I, it will most likely distract tween-agers.

The other day, one student was pleading to hold onto his phone. "I just want to be able to check the time" he repeated over and over and over.

...there was a wall clock right next to him.

The perceived need to have their phone reveals the actual need not to have their phone.

Every week before we get started, I let them know that because this particular time is sacred, we put our phones away as a gift to God and to one another. While some resist, for many it has become a refreshing ritual where they can escape the tyranny of constant connection for an hour.

Even if they truly are intending to use their phones to only take notes, read the Bible, or check the time, its presence transforms the dynamic of the room. Experiment for a month and see how students engage differently.

Conversational Judo

When a student goes on a random tangent, my initial reaction is to get the conversation away from the tangent as quickly as possible, but I've come to try to employ what I call "conversational judo."

Judo, like many other martial arts uses the other person's force against them. It allows a petite woman to be able to throw a big, hulking man, whom she probably couldn't even lift if he was stationary. His own momentum, not her force, is used to send him hurling through the air.

Tween-age students have minds that often make bizarre connections that have nothing to do with the topic. These tangents, for which tween-agers are so prone to having, are like the big hulking man attacking the defenseless conversation. Conversational judo lets you take the bizarreness of the comment to create a powerful object lesson.

IN PRACTICE

For example, last night I was talking with students about how God gives people a vision to join his mission to reach the world. Hearing the word mission caused one student, whose dad is a helicopter pilot for the Coast Guard, to recall a mission his dad went on where they came across a guy who wouldn't leave his boat in a bad storm and washed up dead on shore a couple days later.

Conversational Judo takes the random story and explains how many people in the world are in severe danger but they're so concerned in holding onto their stuff that they reject the salvation brought by the gospel. God calls us to go offer his salvation, but we can't make someone leave their boat.

Molding the story that had little to do with the conversation into an illustration gave the group (and especially that student) a new understanding of our role when we evangelize.

Yes, at times your responses will be forced or awkward, but tween-agers rarely notice and it's way more helpful at getting students to learn.

While my reaction to the bizarre wanderings of the pre-teen mind is to shut it down and reset the conversation, learning to pause and ask myself "How can I use this?" has helped to funnel the random asides into constructive portions. Students then feel that they're really contributing to what's happening and they become more engaged.

Recap Questions

In my context, our boys' small groups meet after a large group teaching and not as its own event. When I teach high schoolers, I am pretty confident that they have heard, understood, and retained the main point of the message. For them, I am often able to jump right into application.

Tween-agers are a different breed. Even when I feel that I'm at my best teaching, and most of the students are tracking, there is almost always one or two who have zoned out. Stress, pressures, or just an overactive imagination have kept them from fully getting what's going on.

What I've begun to do more of is ask general recap questions that make sure they are still with me. It also allows one student to explain it to another, which further solidifies the story and teaching in their minds.

When students have missed the content, it's much harder to focus on the conversation. Very briefly going over the main points and story arc helps the tween-agers engage.

Bonus Tips: Let Boys Be Boys

While this phrase can be used to suggest that we should tolerate crude behavior or comments from boys, I intend it only to suggest that we recognize how boys relate differently than girls. Girls often bond to one another if they are able to "share their heart" and so small groups work naturally into their strengths. Boys (typically) bond through competition and activity.

My wife and I serve as resident directors at a college and every year my wife places roommates together. While there are a couple exceptions, we've learned that when girl teammates are put together things generally end poorly. Since our girls volleyball team arrives early, many of their first relationships as freshman are with their teammates. They often asked to be moved to room with their newfound friend, which almost inevitably ends in disaster.

However, males almost always end up rooming with their teammates. When guys compete with one another, it forges deep friendships. When boys come to rely and depend on another in competition, it suggests to them they can depend on them for other things.

While our female small groups will begin with talking, conversing, and catching up, our boy groups will begin with a team game or activity. Depending on your particular group, you can grow together through board games, athletics, or even taking little adventures/field trips around the building.

Closing Thoughts

"Where there are no oxen, the manger is clean, but abundant crops comes by the strength of the ox."

— PROVERBS 14:4, ESV

One of my favorite proverbs is the one above. For most of the year, a farmer will be feed an ox spending a lot of time, energy and resources keeping the manger full, without any fruit from it. Perhaps this reminds you of your tween-ager small group, where you are putting a lot into it without seeing the fruit.

Know that as surely as the ox helps bring abundant crops, your energies into your small group will reap an abundant harvest.

It will often be messy, crazy, and at times frustrating, but it will always be worth it.

WRITTEN BY AARON MESERVEY

Age Characteristics

Twos through tens. Use it to set expectations for the room you serve in.

Two-Year-Olds

Three-Year-Olds

Four-Year-Olds

Five-Year-Olds

Six-Year-Olds

Seven-Year-Olds

Eight-Year-Olds

Nine-Year-Olds

Ten-Year-Olds

Two-Year-Olds

Toddler-Twos Don't Understand the Flow of Time

For a toddler-two, the time from one Sunday to the next seems like an eternity. This age child doesn't string together, in time order, the Bible stories told from week to week. When you say, "A long time ago, there was a man named Abraham," the preschool mind interprets it as yesterday. To them, that was a long time ago. So Bible stories are not covered in biblical order in this curriculum. Instead, our lessons incorporate very simple Bible stories that support the weekly age-appropriate themes. The toddler-two is still being introduced to God, so themes focus on God's love, God's care, and the toddler-two's response of thankfulness.

Toddler-Twos Are Self-Focused and Independent

At the beginning of the toddler-two stage, children are still very self-focused. They are becoming aware that they are individuals in their own right, separate and apart from parents and caregivers, so they assert their independence. However, at about 2½, preschoolers begin "perspective taking" — they begin to realize that others have rights, feelings, opinions, and possessions. The self-focus is still there, but a sensitivity to others begins. At first the lessons center around thankfulness for God's creativity, love, and care, relating these to the child and his everyday experiences. By the fourth quarter, the focus deepens to include helping, obeying, taking turns, and cooperating.

Toddler-Twos Learn by Imitation and Repetition

Toddler-twos often imitate the significant adults in their lives. If they see parents and caregivers pray and read their Bibles, they will usually imitate them. If they hear words, rhymes, and songs over and over again, toddler-twos will begin repeating those words, rhymes, and songs themselves. Toddler-twos also learn by touching and doing. Our lessons rely heavily on teacher interaction as teachers model and repeat the important themes and guide children into experiences that enrich their understanding of God's creativity, love, and care.

Toddler-Twos Are Sensitive to Music: Melody and Rhythm

A preschooler's short attention span can often be held and strengthened by songs when the child seems oblivious to spoken words. The simple melodies and rhythms repeated in childhood stay in the heart and mind for a lifetime. So key truths, themes, and verses are presented not only in spoken words, but also in song.

Toddler-Twos Are Attracted to Sensory Experiences and Action

Toddler-twos will gravitate toward any place where there is something going on that's interesting, active, musical, colorful, tasty, or fun to touch or hold. But occasionally they need someone to draw their attention to these activities. Teachers must sometimes bring activities to toddler-twos. At other times, teachers will have to help toddler-twos go to where the activities are.

Toddler-Twos Have a Very Short Attention Span

While some children are more distractible than others, most toddler-twos move quickly from one interest to another. They live in the immediate present and will pursue whatever catches their attention. As Shepherds in our twos classes, be ready to move to a new activity when the children are ready to move on.

Three-Year-Olds

Social / Emotional

- try to please adults; conform more often
- begin to show some self-control, but resort to temper tantrums when extremely angry
- take turns more readily
- like to hear themselves talk
- respond to verbal guidance and enjoy encouragement
- play cooperatively with others
- have imaginary companions

Spiritual

- identify some Bible characters and stories
- recognize the Bible as a special book; enjoy handling and using the Bible
- enjoy singing songs about the Bible, family, nature, friends at church
- understand that God, Jesus, and church are special
- begin to develop a conscience and are sensitive to feelings of shame and guilt

Physical

- use large muscles
- dress themselves fairly easily
- display some fine motor skills
- notice the differences in boys and girls
- dislike nap time and have difficulty sleeping during this time

Four-Year-Olds

Social / Emotional

- have total confidence in their own abilities
- bossy; show great independence
- tattle frequently
- focus on cooperative play and take turns
- like to be helpers if they initiate the idea
- respond to reason, humor, and firmness
- play cooperatively with other children

Mental

- use 500 to 2,000 words
- can remember name and address
- have increased attention span
- can do two things at once
- are highly imaginative; cannot separate fact and fantasy
- show a curiosity about life cycle
- understand time concepts better
- enjoy being silly
- use many words without knowing their meanings

Spiritual

- like to retell Bible stories
- enjoy Bible verse games
- recognize that God and Jesus love people and help people in special ways
- accept responsibility for helping people
- exhibit a conscience
- express love for God and Jesus
- may show concern for others
- can sing songs about Jesus

Physical

- show good large muscle coordination
- develop a longer, leaner body
- develop fine motor control for painting, drawing, and cutting with scissors
- walk backward
- need a high level of physical activity
- exhibit right- and left-handedness
- enjoy building materials with parts to assemble

Five-Year-Olds

Social / Emotional

- get along well in small groups
- comfort friends who are upset
- have best friends, but change friends often
- may be prone to self-criticism and guilt
- may continue to express fears
- enjoy imitating adults
- begin to distinguish truth from lies
- enjoy competition
- can accept responsibility

Mental

- print their name but not too clearly
- name most uppercase letters
- utilize a 2,000-word vocabulary
- say numbers 1-20
- know morning from afternoon
- are challenged by new tasks
- seek explanations concerning why and how
- begin to recognize basic reading words
- enjoy classification, sequencing, and sorting

Spiritual

- remember and like to tell Bible stories
- use the Bible and like to find Bible phrases/verses
- like to take care of God's world
- begin to ask questions about God
- can make life application of Bible verses
- continue to develop a conscience

Physical

- skip well; hop in a straight line
- cut well with scissors
- exhibit well-established right- or left-handedness
- begin cutting permanent teeth
- have good hand-eye coordination
- dress themselves
- can control their large muscles
- develop appetites for favorite foods

Six-Year-Olds

Social / Emotional

- want to be first
- are competitive; enthusiastic
- are sometimes a poor sport or dishonest; invent rules
- are anxious to do well
- view any failure as hard; thrive on encouragement
- can be bossy, teasing, critical of others
- are easily upset when hurt
- view friends as important (may have a best friend)
- complain frequently

Mental

- may like to work
- may like to explain things; show-and-tell is useful
- may love jokes and guessing games
- love to ask questions
- like new games, ideas
- love to color, paint
- learn best through discovery
- enjoy process more than product
- try more than they can accomplish (eyes bigger than stomach)
- recognize representative symbols as more important
- begin to understand past when tied closely to present
- interested in skill and technique for its own sake

Spiritual

- see Jesus as a friend and helper
- may enjoy praying
- like learning from the Bible
- may know many basic Bible stories
- may make conclusions about God
- may begin to understand truth and honesty, right from wrong; may not make personal application
- may begin to recognize fantasy as fantasy
- may begin to have a simple understanding of sin
- may begin to have a simple understanding of the gospel
- may be easily manipulated by a desire to please adults
- know the right answers, but may not understand application

Physical

- are sloppy, in a hurry; speed is a benchmark
- are noisy in classroom
- are learning to distinguish left from right
- may struggle with fine motor skills
- tire easily
- suffer frequent illness
- enjoy outdoors, gym

Seven-Year-Olds

Social / Emotional

- don't like to make mistakes or to risk making them
- are sometimes moody, depressed, sulking or shy
- need security and structure
- rely on teacher for help
- are sensitive to others' feelings
- are conscientious and serious
- need constant reinforcement
- have strong likes and dislikes
- are good listeners and precise talkers
- like to send notes

Mental

- like to work
- are interested in all sorts of codes
- like to review learning
- need closure, must complete assignments
- may like to work slowly and alone
- may like to be read to
- may have growing reflective ability
- erase constantly, want work to be perfect
- like to repeat tasks
- like board games
- want to discover how things work; like to take things apart

Spiritual

- may begin to put Bible stories into sequence
- may begin to understand the relationship between the Old and New Testaments
- may be interested in finding out more about God and Jesus
- may understand that Jesus is God's Son and begin to understand what that means
- may ask why God would let Jesus die for the wrong things that everyone else does
- may recognize consequences for their sin
- may begin to realize that God forgives when asked
- may understand that people become Christians by accepting Jesus as Savior and Lord

Physical

- work may be more tidy, neat
- sometimes tense
- like confined space
- experience many hurts, real and imagined
- improve fine motor skills
- use pincer grasp and pencil point

Eight-Year-Olds

Social / Emotional

- like peers of the same sex and dislike the opposite sex
- are eager to please and want to be liked by peers and adults
- boys shout; girls giggle and whisper
- idolize heroes
- like to work with others

Mental

- like to experiment and find out how things are made
- vary with peers in reading ability
- value money
- are eager to learn

Spiritual

- ask serious questions about religion
- are developing values
- can be truthful and honest
- often have difficulty making decisions

Physical

- have good hand-eye coordination
- may overdo it with physical activities and have trouble calming down

Nine-Year-Olds

Social / Emotional

- need to be able to let off steam and may take out feelings on others
- are interested in own community and country
- are beginning to feel that the group is as important as self
- are great talkers and need to be allowed to talk
- change moods quickly

Mental

- have lengthening attention span
- are able to be involved in experiences that deal with feelings and thinking
- accept carefully worded criticism
- are beginning to think abstractly

Spiritual

- are often beginning to feel the need for a Savior
- are growing conscious of themselves and of sin
- want to do things the right way and may feel ashamed when wrong
- think in terms of right and wrong more than good and evil

Physical

- like to draw and sketch
- have slow, steady growth and good muscle control
- girls' bodies usually develop more quickly than boys

Ten-Year-Olds

Social / Emotional

- are motivated most by own interest and think of themselves, using own experiences
- can operate comfortably within a group
- like acceptance and encouragement, can become easily discouraged

Mental

- are continuing to think abstractly
- are imaginative, creative, and curious
- have developed basic reading and writing skills
- can express ideas, understand cause and effect, solve problems, and plan

Spiritual

- are developing concepts of love and trust
- are developing a conscience and a value system

Physical

- like to use abundant energy and physical skills