

## What About VBS?

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Among all the uncertainty of the day, churches are wondering about Vacation Bible School. Many churches have announced their dates for the event and purchased all the materials. Do they need to move it to July or right before school starts? Should they just cancel the event this year? If you were thinking along these lines, you are not alone. Here are some options to consider.

Vacation Bible School is an annual event that churches have supported with budgets and personal service. Primarily, because VBS is an outreach to families in your community and an evangelistic event where kids accept Christ and the gospel is shared with families. So how do we preserve the outreach and evangelism of VBS during this difficult time?

Traditional VBS is marked by a church hosting a gathering at their church building either in the morning or evening and sharing a daily Bible teaching experience with singing, crafts, missions, and recreation games. This might work later in the summer if our pandemic concerns improve greatly and there is no relapse. Churches should be mindful of how many teachers are 65 & over in case those teachers are unable to return yet.

Alternative VBS is often enjoyed by kids at parks and even as a Backyard Bible Club but for a shorter meeting time period. This is an excellent way to move the large church-size group into smaller groups and spread throughout the community. This could be a more effective outreach since you have the opportunity of inviting neighbors living close-by. Create a schedule that is about one and a half hours. Begin with a worship rally using the pledges, Bible verse, motto, and songs and share the Bible story group time. Kids can be divided into two groups if there are a lot present. One group can enjoy the crafts while the other group plays the rec games. Everyone comes together for a snack and Mission video before switching to the opposite activity. Finally, gather the group for a quick recap of the Bible story and verse before praying and dismissing. Concerns will include restrooms needed, group size, unapproved adults walking up to help, children coming with no adult around, and enrolling children with parent contact numbers. Any VBS scenario will come with challenges so plan to make a list of challenges and work with your team to solve them so you have a plan in place. This VBS option is strong for reaching children outside the church building.

Family VBS can be very effective especially if you are able to connect to the family by digital means. We seem to have improved with this greatly over these past two months. To host a Family VBS, leaders will need to create VBS packs. Each child should get a pack with each day's materials. It's good to remember that preschoolers will need activities that are age appropriate. We are still laying foundations for salvation even though we are not presenting the gospel like our elementary children will hear. Following an abbreviated schedule, begin each evening with a worship rally the family can watch at home. You can stream this live from the church or prerecord the rally. Always provide the URL so families will know where to find the rally. The Bible story group time can be taught by the parent or prerecorded from a teacher at church. Be sure to provide the parents with needed materials to lead this. Games, crafts, family mission project can be great fun if you choose activities and projects that are not too complicated. Family mission projects could support this difficult time with notes and posters supporting our medical workers and community workers. Maybe taking a treat and thoughtful note to a neighbor that has been stuck in their house during this quarantine period.

Virtual VBS is the same as a Family VBS but focuses on neighbors with kids. Church members without kids at home sign-up to take Family VBS packs to those homes around them. This can be a terrific outreach since these people do not come to the church building. You are providing a way for the church to meet them. Families can see your pastor, meet teachers and see the inside of the building. This has great potential for reaching people right where they are at. Maybe they might hear the gospel and choose to trust Jesus with their life.

When considering new options for VBS, I hope you will not drop it but choose to lead in a different and new way this year. If your VBS is one week or one day, just be sure to get the word out and share the gospel! Who knows, it might become a new way of enjoying Vacation Bible School each year.