



BECOMING A FAMILY-FRIENDLY CHURCH

Growing churches have discovered a direct link between reaching parents and providing a high-quality teaching/learning environment for their family members. In addition to providing Bible study, worship, ministry and fellowship opportunities, the effective church must give attention to age-appropriate settings to meet the needs of children and parents.

Is your congregation family-friendly?

1. Give preschool and children's ministry a high-priority in your church budget:

- Appropriate curriculum resources
- Clean, safe, spacious well-lighted rooms convenient to parents' rooms
- Age-appropriate equipment and furnishings
- Staff assignments according to the size and purpose of your church
- Clean, safe, age-appropriate, fenced outdoor playground (if space and budget permit)

2. Develop appropriate ministry teams or committees to establish policies and guidelines for all activities involving preschoolers, children and youth.

- Security procedures
- Health and hygiene issues
- Accurate and up-to-date information on each child
- System for contacting parents when they are needed in the preschool area (when a preschooler becomes ill, etc.)

3. Determine the most effective ways to clearly communicate policies, guidelines, and ministry information to parents and the total church family.

- Parent Information Center
- Church bulletins
- Church newsletters
- Brochures to be delivered during outreach visits
- Parent newsletters
- Announcements during Bible Study and Worship Service
- Telephone calls
- E-mail messages and web pages
- Personal contacts
- Parent meetings/seminars



4. Enlist and equip qualified volunteers to understand the needs of the age-group and to commit to regularly plan, prepare and teach. In addition, communicate to teachers their roles in ministry to each child and the child's family throughout the week.

- Provide a minimum of two adults who are not from the same family for each group of preschoolers and children.
- Require adults to be members of your church for at least six months before being allowed to accept responsibilities in the preschool and children's areas.
- Determine a background check system which is appropriate for your church.
- Provide nametags for all preschool and children's leaders.
- Agree on methods of positive guidance and positive verbal responses to children.
- Set a regular planning time at which teachers can report their ministry contacts (cards, phone calls, home visits) with children and families.



5. Provide signs which help parents easily locate preschool and children's rooms:

- Designated parking near the preschool entrance can be helpful, especially for expectant parents, single parents and parents with more than one child.
- Clearly marked entrances for parents of preschoolers and children provide a warm welcome.

- Attractive and easy-to-locate signs on classroom doors increase the friendly environment. Adopt definite age-grouping guidelines to assure that children remain with others their age and have a recommended ratio of teachers to the number of children enrolled.
- Post birth dates of children in the room by the door for ease of locating correct classes.
- Equip church greeters to know your church's grouping plan and to be available to direct families to the correct location.
- Involve older children in assisting as early greeters.
- Establish and clearly mark men's and women's restrooms with diaper-changing stations and baby-safety holding seats for the convenience of parents.
- Consider designating a "family restroom" and a specified nursing area near preschool rooms.
- For safety purposes, locate preschool rooms on ground level.

6. Acknowledge and plan for family members with disabilities and special needs.

- Inquire about the preferences of the individual and any special directions provided by parents or other family members.
- Mainstream the individual with her age-group or grade-level, when possible.
- Plan ahead for accessibility by wheelchairs and other devices for assistance.

7. Involve families in worship services each Sunday through:

- Greeting guests and distributing worship bulletins
- Serving as offering receivers
- Occasionally reading Scripture and making announcements

8. Provide children's worship bulletins for younger children to encourage quiet activities related to the worship service. Some churches offer preschoolers a

small bag of quiet activities to be used during the sermon. The bag might include such items as chenille craft stems, two or three crayons, a small notepad of blank paper, and a Bible-related matching game.

9. Plan activities which allow families to participate together, rather than separating into age groups.

- Occasional intergenerational Bible Study (maybe on holidays)
- Family meals
- Opportunities to worship together
- Fellowship Activities (such as picnics and game nights)
- Mission Projects (such as delivering food baskets, visiting homebound adults, sorting clothes for a crisis ministry)

Recognize that a child's "family" may be a single parent, a grandparent, or foster parents. Use terminology which helps all children and family members



feel included. Involve committed church members who are willing to serve as an "adopted family" for the child whose family members do not come to special events at church.

10. Encourage church members to be accepting and affirming of children and their families as they get to know them by name.

- The pastor may model this affirmation, as he recognizes the presence of children.
- Church members may demonstrate their affirmation as they smile and greet children and as they volunteer to assist.

11. Although most children are competitive, keep in mind that a family-friendly church should avoid emphasis on competition which labels children as “winners” or “losers” in church attendance or memory skills. Children can be motivated to do their best and complete tasks without imposing the stress of having to get the most points. When sports events require team work, encourage leaders to emphasize achieving success in cooperation and team-building.

12. Plan a Children’s Day as an annual Sunday event when children, their families and children’s leaders are celebrated.

13. Provide space for children at church which is inviting and depicting a clean and uncluttered setting appropriate for faith-based learning.

- Avoid using “cute” and “catchy” phrases or decorations. Appropriate age-level teaching methods and relationships are more effective when they are not in competition with unrelated decorations.
- Remember that experiences with realistic pictures rather than distortions or cartoon figures help the literal-minded child grow in Bible concepts.

- Permanent murals in teaching areas limit opportunities to focus on new Bible-teaching themes.



14. Be sensitive to personal or family problems which may be discovered in ministry to children and families. Always protect the privacy of the individual, but be alert to issues which might endanger the child or others. Be prepared to refer

difficult situations to a church staff member or other professional.

15. If your community allows partnering with schools or other organizations which relate to children, find ways to respond to new ministry opportunities.



Jesus welcomed the children with open arms! May your church become a family-friendly place, where children are acknowledged, accepted and affirmed as valuable contributors to the church body.

For further information, contact your State Baptist Convention personnel. They are available to assist you in finding additional resources to maintain a family-friendly church.



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