

PREPARING FOR PRESCHOOLERS AND CHILDREN

As restrictions begin to be lifted, we must be mindful not to be quick to go back to what we've always done, just because we can. A good reminder from 1 Corinthians 10:23 is that while everything is permissible...not everything is beneficial.

When looking at re-entry for preschoolers and children, churches would be wise to weigh risk vs. benefit. Take a careful assessment of all those affected. Evaluate if it will be beneficial or harmful to them to be a part of coming together while social distancing is still a requirement. Those affected might include:

- Preschoolers
- Children
- Senior adult leaders
- Grandparents in the “at risk” age range

Both parents and the church have the responsibility to protect children entrusted to their care. Have parents been asked if they are comfortable with their child returning to a small group? What things would need to be in place for them to allow their child to return to a small group?

Important areas to consider when deciding about re-entry, should include but not be limited to, the following:

BEGIN WITH WORSHIP ONLY

1. Have an entry and dismissal plan.
2. Families sit together.
3. Practice social distancing within the worship area.
4. Eliminate items that require physical touch, i.e. bulletins, offering plates, hymnals.
5. Continue to equip parents to disciple in the home.

EVALUATE OR ESTABLISH WRITTEN POLICIES AND PROCEDURES PRIOR TO PHASING INTO SMALL GROUPS.

1. Include best practices for age-appropriate hygiene and cleaning procedures.
2. Limit access to preschool and children's areas.
3. Consider establishing a check-in station outside classroom areas.

4. Label each child's personal items and provide a way to keep these items separated. Consider providing a basket, that can be sanitized, for each child.
5. For babies and toddlers, request parents to place diapers, wipes, bottles, etc. in a labeled gallon size zipper bag or in an assigned basket. Do not allow diaper bags to be left in the classroom.
6. Require older preschoolers, children and adults to use alcohol-based hand sanitizer before entering classrooms. Teachers should wash the hands of infants and toddlers as each child arrives.
7. During seasons of highly contagious illnesses:
 - Reduce group sizes and enforce size limitations.
 - Create a plan for sanitizing meeting areas that includes training and accountability.
 - Eliminate snack times to discourage children from touching their mouths.
 - Close play areas outside individual classrooms and close water fountains.
 - Plan activities that do not require physical contact.
 - Prepare an individual set of supplies for each child (crayons, scissors, glue, pencils, etc.) to eliminate sharing needed items. Used supply sets should be removed until properly disinfected.
 - Reduce the number of toys in each classroom, leaving only toys that are easily cleaned and sanitized. Remove stuffed toys and animals from classrooms.
8. Post policies in areas with high visibility and email or mail these policies to parents and volunteers, prior to children gathering in small groups on the church campus.

These past few weeks have been a beautiful picture of churches partnering with the home by equipping parents with tools to give them confidence in taking the lead in the spiritual growth journey of their children. As we transition back to our church campuses, we must be careful not to go back to "business as usual" by allowing parents to abdicate to the church their responsibility in the spiritual growth of their children. While the church does share some responsibility for the spiritual growth of children, God's design for the home to be the center of Biblical guidance is clearly mandated in Deuteronomy 6:6-7 and cannot be ignored. We must continue our efforts to equip our parents in their role as the primary disciplers of their children.

Additional resources:

Childhood Specialists:

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6 Considerations for Reopening Your Children's Ministry: <https://www.lifeway.com/6considerations>