

50

50 Ways to Strengthen Ministry with Children

From the Lewis Center for Church Leadership of Wesley Theological Seminary



Honor the spirituality of children

- 1. Regularly lift up children as persons of worth with a unique place in God's Kingdom. Scripture teaches that adults should be like children, not that children should be like adults.
- 2. Understand children as participants in ministry, not objects of ministry.
- 3. Teach children to pray. Encourage them to share joys and concerns, participate in prayer chains, and have prayer partners. Have children write devotionals for use at home or in corporate worship.

Demonstrate your congregation's love and respect for children

- 4. Don't guess at children's needs. Listen to children. Solicit input and feedback from children themselves, not just parents and adults leaders.
- 5. Give children real responsibilities.
- 6. Showcase children's artwork. Hang framed photos of children throughout your building.
- 7. Advocate for children. Hold a children's Sabbath service that highlights issues concerning children.
- 8. Celebrate the arrival of new babies.

Welcome children in worship and involve them actively

- 9. Always have a creatively presented children's sermon.
- 10. Include at least one hymn every Sunday that children love and can sing with the congregation.
- 11. Have children serve alongside their parents as greeters and ushers.
- 12. Invite children to assist in worship.
- 13. Design a special weekly service for children or children and families.
- 14. Give small children entering worship a small activity packet with crayons, pipe cleaners, and other items.
- 15. Have a cry room.
- 16. Print a booklet for parents to use in explaining elements of worship to their children.

- 17. Designate special times for children and their families to visit the sanctuary to ask questions and learn the stories behind symbols and stained glass windows.
- 18. Plan special communion services for parents and children to make them comfortable with the ritual. Have "love feasts" in Sunday School classes.

Support families and parents

- 19. Make your space child friendly. Nursery and classrooms should be clean, safe, sanitary, and visually appealing to children and their parents.
- 20. Give pagers to parents who leave children in the nursery.
- 21. Host seminars on parenting. Have a Sunday morning class focused on family concerns.
- 22. Sponsor a parent's night out or morning out.
- 23. Provide childcare for all church events. Don't just warehouse kids. Make it fun and enriching.
- 24. Give gifts to expectant moms. Offer a support group for new parents.
- 25. Have an annual family retreat or camping trip.

Strive for excellence in Christian education

- 26. In a congregation with more than one worship time, strive to offer Sunday School in conjunction with all services, including evening or weeknight services.
- 27. Revitalize a tired Sunday School program by adopting a more creative and interactive curriculum. Incorporate music and drama into Christian education.
- 28. Provide early Christian education to infants and toddlers. Explore programs that use special classroom settings, songs, sounds, stories, finger play, and toys to teach even the youngest children about God's love.
- 29. Encourage teaching teams of adults who rotate classroom responsibilities. This strengthens involvement, improves morale, decreases burn-out, and improves the quality of teaching.

- 30. Hold a training event for teachers at least once a year. Be sure to emphasize the teachers' spiritual growth and development as well as teaching strategies.
- 31. Communicate regularly with your teachers. Consider gathering them just very briefly at the conclusion of each Sunday School hour to ask "How is it going?"
- 32. Formally recognize and thank teachers each year.
- 33. Work to develop a sense of ownership for children's Christian education within the congregation as a whole. Involve adults who can't take on teaching in other volunteer roles.
- 34. Pair an adult class or group with each children's class to forge intergenerational bonds. The adults can provide support and encouragement and help with special activities.
- 35. Perform required background checks for volunteers and staff working with children. Implement policies and procedures to prevent child abuse.

Plan effective special events for children

- 36. Have special children's events throughout the year, for example, a Noah's ark costume party, movie nights, seasonal events, etc.
- 37. Hold a yearly vacation Bible school. Explore alternative formats such as a one-day VBS, an evening VBS, or a cooperative VBS with other churches. Or hold VBS at a different time of year, such as a mini-VBS during spring vacation.
- 38. Have a fellowship group for 4th and 5th graders paving the way to youth fellowship.

Reach children and families beyond your church

- 39. Request that parents presenting their children for baptism meet at least twice with the pastor to consider the significance of the sacrament. Form groups for parents whose infants or children are being baptized.
- 40. Give 10 nicely printed invitations to the baptismal family so they can invite their friends.
- 41. Use a preschool, day school, or after-school program to build your children's ministry. Appoint a chaplain. Invite, but don't pressure, kids and parents to take part in church activities. Look for opportunities to build personal relationships with the families.

- 42. Use VBS as a way to reach out to new families. Follow up with them afterwards, even if it's something as simple as sending a birthday card to the child.
- 43. Have an outdoor carnival for children in the spring or fall. A fair can help neighbors know the church is there for them and foster acquaintances.
- 44. Rather than waiting for kids to come to church, take ministry to where kids already are. To attract unchurched kids, consider locating activities in a store front, park, or recreational center. Organize a VBS in an apartment complex or housing development.
- 45. Adopt an elementary school.
- 46. Develop a tutoring or mentoring ministry.

Involve children in mission

- 47. Have each Sunday School class choose a mission project to support on an ongoing basis. Include a mission project as part of VBS.
- 48. Have a mission day camp or a day-long mini-retreat for children with service-learning activities.
- 49. Connect kids with the church's overall missional efforts. For example, have them help support Volunteers in Mission trips or other ongoing service activities.
- 50. Teach stewardship to children. Involve children in deciding how their offerings will be used. Designate a special project for their support and lift up their stewardship regularly in worship.

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