

Children In Home Church Environments

Concepts & Best Practices

General Concept: Many gatherings of the church in Home settings find common questions arising around how to care for and disciple children without traditional child care facilities and trained child-care workers present.

Thousands if not millions of small group gatherings take place around our world today on a regular basis, so we queried leaders of Home Churches in the US to find the best practices learned and employed in these environments. We invited over 2000 church group leaders to respond and in those responses identified common themes, concepts, and tools that we will list here.

We will start with the broader concepts and finish with a list of tools.

Key Concepts:

1. **Unified Plan:** Leaders found that before making a plan it was important to have a conversation with the families/parents about what they wanted for their children. While many groups have children, often they gather for the purpose of community and fellowship for the adults. Often new groups list their Children as a distraction and frustrating element of their gatherings.

- a. Help the adults arrive at the conclusion that we don't want to just have the kids entertained we want this time to be meaningful for the Children's spiritual development as well.
- b. One leader said, "the methods are important, but even more important is unity among the adults regarding the plan moving forward."

Key Concept: Adults in the group should discuss how to care for the children and arrive at a unified decision together.

2. **Inclusion:** Many leaders commented that the children who can be involved in the adult group, should be involved in the adult group. They mentioned that parents who wanted children involved typically help the children grow accustomed to the time and focus.

- a. **Starting Out:** The leaders mentioned that at the beginning the children only joined for the 1st 1/3 of their time together. The highs/lows, the Worship & Prayer, the accountability session, and vision casting. Typically less than 30 min with variety regarding activities.
- b. **Later:** Found that the children would grow accustomed to spending larger time with the adult group. One leader said the children over 6 would stay the entire time with the adults actively engaged sometimes over 2 hours.

c. **Give Responsibility:** Many leaders mentioned asking specific children to have responsibility. Such as choosing and leading songs, asking accountability questions, providing feedback to questions, even if adults are asking. And giving them time to set goals out loud.

Key Concept: Including Children in the 3/3rds Process helps keep the study moving and adults and kids engaged.

3. Interactive: Many leaders reported that by including the kids in their adult group session they found that they needed to be more interactive in the various teaching and discovery processes in the 3/3rds.

a. **Tactile:** Many leaders found that the kids were more attentive when they had prepared interactive tools for them during the worship, prayer, study, and goal setting times.

b. **Adults Enjoyed as well:** Several leaders reported that by making the time more interactive they found that the adults enjoyed the interactive tools as well. Adults liked the coloring sheets, or the instruments, and so on...

Key Concept: The more interactive your time, the more your children and kinetic learning adults will interact and feel engaged.

Best Practices:

Below is a list of specific tools that were mentioned multiple times in response to our general query. By and large they are interactive activities that try to bring stories and discussion to life.

Act It Out: Many group leaders described asking the children to prepare and act out the specific story or scripture that they were going to study for the day. The children were given specific time in another room to prepare. They then acted out the story as a part of the HEAD section of Head, Heart, and Hands.

Coloring Sheets: Many leaders said their younger children enjoyed doodling on coloring sheets during the sessions. Having colors, coloring books, and papers helped the kids to stay attentive during the lesson. Some challenged the children to draw what they thought of when listening to the story. They then gave time for the children to describe their drawings. Note: Some groups that the parents really enjoyed this tool as well.

Let them Lead: Many leaders described asking Children to lead portions of the 3/3rds. They had them ask the questions, read the story or lesson, pick the songs... This seems to be a key to involving Children in adult group life.

Be Flexible: Almost all leaders stressed the need to have massive grace for the kids. If the children are overwhelmed let them go play. If Parents are embarrassed or angry with the kids, it will hurt progress moving forward. Groups must exhibit massive grace for the children and work to make

sure that the group sessions are good experiences. Sometimes that means cutting down the study time to keep the Children's attention. Other times it may mean letting the children go earlier than anticipated to play in another room.

Final Concept: Christianity is always meant to be experienced in community. Families loving Jesus together make for strong families. Parents are the best and most qualified spiritual leaders for their children. Modeling what Christian Community looks like as adults with our children present will only help them to mature to become Christian adults. It is part of our discipleship responsibility to disciple our Children. What better way than for them to see us pray, sing, read God's word, repent, confess, encourage, and grow in Christ as a community together. This is how Church looked in Acts 2.