

MINISTRY TO CHILDREN

Part 5

Welcome to our 5 minute Leadership Training Blog.

We're ending our mini series on ministry to children today and as we do so, we're going to look at the practical side of things; at the facilities that you use to minister to children. The reality is that if you're anointed and you're serious about ministering to children, you can do it under a tree or on a sports field, but if you have a few resources at your disposal, here are some pointers on the facilities that you can set aside for them.

Exclusively Kids

I grew up in a tribe that loved the notion of multi-purpose buildings. Nothing was ever customised for kids - it was multi-functional with grey carpets, grey walls, chairs that could be moved in and out, sound systems that could be moved; you could have coffee in there or do kids ministry in there. Multi-purpose sounds brilliant but it's just boring for kids.

When you say multi-purpose, you're generally saying that it's a building for adults and that the kids are allowed to use it too.

How about being really daring and saying lets do something *exclusively* for kids! Adults can come in it if they want to and sit under a Volksi bus, sticking out of the wall, or stand under the neon flashing sign on the wall- they can use the kids facility!

Multi-purpose generally means purposed for adults, not kids. With that out of the way let's look at what you would do to organize things for kids. Often I see people replicating a school environment. They put on a whole lot of classrooms together and they put the kids in them; the 5 year old, 6 year old, 7 year old, 8 year old, 9 year old, 10 year old, 11 year old, 12 year old and you have a whole lot of little groups. The problem with that is a leadership one. You're now asking the leader to be mom, disciplinarian, small group leader, preacher, entertainer, logistics operator rolled into one and you're going to have a shortage of helpers.

I believe that you can organise them like this. Children these day are different to how they grew up ten or twenty years ago. They love the noise, they multitask, they love stimulants. When you go to a restaurant, which is the best one to go to? One that is *tjoep-still* and quiet and where you have a little cubicle with just you and your family in it, or one that has a buzzing atmosphere. You've got your little space but there's a noise in the background. Kids have grown up like that.

Big Spaces

We recommend big spaces rather than little ones. I think you should separate the little children from the bigger ones. Younger than five or six years go one way and older kids go another way, because you can't really minister effectively to a 4 year old and a 12 year old in the same space. Moms and dads wouldn't like that either - imagine a 12 year old boy running past a little 5 year girl... bump she's down on the floor.

We encourage children to be divided into large-ish groups - maybe into three big groups - but not to be split and separated into different rooms per year because the model, which you use if you're replicating the atmosphere of a restaurant or a public space, and which children are used to, is a model that your best preacher will be able to preach to them all, your best worship leaders can worship with them all and your best storytellers can tell stories with them all. In a bigger group your strong disciplinarians are also able to hold it together for you.

This is the trick though - you can't just leave the children in that big space in a completely unorganised fashion, otherwise they'll just be like cattle being herded around. You need to be able to find a space within the bigger space and to create a sense of separation, perhaps by installing little booths or placing kids of similar age around a table. One of the things we've done at a One Life Site, where we haven't got a lot of money available is cut circles out of masonite, painted them bright colours and put them on the floor - it's like a table on the floor and the leader plus 8 kids sit around those tables. Our more extravagant sites have made little restaurant type cubicles with the small group activities take place.

We would really recommend that big spaces that are divided up such that there is still the buzz of a big room but the feeling of exclusivity as well - kids love it!

Best Foot Forward

First impressions are important, especially for parents in this area of Ministry to Children. If you're going to invest money into the children's facilities, make sure you do the foyer and entrance well. When you theme you could get a good artist to paint a picture on the wall, but some of the best churches, in terms of creating irresistible environments, in America use 3D. So you could paint a picture of a window frame on a wall or you can bolt an actual window frame onto the wall. It's a combination of painting and using actual objects. You could paint a vehicle coming towards you or you could cut a vehicle in half and bolt it onto the wall. You could paint a lamp against a wall or you could buy a lamp and attach it to the wall. You could paint a flower box or you could put a real flower box there. You could paint a rubbish bin or you could install a rubbish bin. A combination of painting and 3D really makes a facility come alive.

Pay attention to the car park and hat you put there. We've converted little nissan vehicles into trains, put guys dressed up with balloons, volunteers waving large styrofoam hands in the car park - it doesn't cost much but it just makes a great impression on people as they arrive.

Teaching Tools

One last comment about your curriculum and the tools you're using. At One Life Church, we've been using a curriculum that was designed over 10 years ago and we try improve on them every year.

There four big components to a curriculum:

1. The Gospel - the kids must be able to meet Jesus
2. A big idea - a single, clear, take-home idea that you're trying to communicate
3. A guide to help tell a story or to preach that big idea, and assist leaders with questions in the small group to help the children digest the big idea
4. A nice bonus to have is a resource to send home so you can partner with parents in ministering to their children

I think the churches that are using media have really found a way to access children in a relevant way because this is a digital generation, it's their language.

Have fun! You can do it under a tree, but if you have a bit of extra resources I hope these things help you.