

Re-Launching Kids Ministry after COVID

Great Plains Conference

This document provides guidelines for re-launching Kids Ministry programming after extended periods of social distancing. It is a supplemental document to be implemented along with the Great Plains Conference's Best Practices for Returning to our Houses of Worship.

To Gather, or Not To Gather?

- What are your State Guidelines?
- What are your Local Guidelines?
- What is your School District doing?
- Has your church re-opened for worship yet?
- Many churches cease regular kids programming over the summer. If that has been the tradition, please do not try to add something this summer.
- We advise against large group in-person events, including but not limited to, Vacation Bible School.

It Won't Look the Same

“Look! I’m doing a new thing; now it sprouts up; don’t you recognize it? I’m making a way in the desert, paths in the wilderness.” – Isaiah 43:19 (CEB Version)

After spending so much time isolated and under lockdown, it is understandable that kids and their families are excited about returning to normalcy. The reality is, though, things will not and cannot look the same in Kids Ministry. Much of what we do includes engaging in activities like crafts, games, singing, and snacks within close proximity of one another. Kids Ministry – and really, all ministry – must adapt to a new way of being. As a ministry leader, we encourage you to allow time and space for people to grieve this loss, while also pointing to Jesus, who is called the trailblazer of our faith. Now is the time for innovation and creativity! Take this time to audit your Kids Ministry. What was working, and what wasn't? What will need to change, and what could you afford to prune completely? What new thing might emerge? Spend time in prayer and conversation with others to discern. Consider the following:

- Crafts
 - Communal bins for crayons and other craft supplies should be removed Provide one small pack of crayons for each child, place their name on the pack.
 - Provide craft supplies for each individual child that they may use Place what will be needed in a ziplock bag for each child
 - Consider simpler crafts that require fewer supplies
 - Consider how you will disinfect the supplies that are left at church

- Provide a small box of some type for each child to leave their crayons, and other supplies in from week to week.
- Games and Singing
 - Many Kids and Youth Ministry games intentionally move people closer. These should not be played during this time. Games include, but are not limited to: Ninja, Duck Duck Goose, Ring Around the Rosie, Down by the Banks, Hot Potato, Leap Frog, Tag, Sardines, Hide and Seek, Red Rover, Gaga Ball, Musical Chairs, Hungry Hungry Hippos, any Hand Clapping Games, Thumb Wars, Rock Paper Scissors, London Bridge
 - Note that congregational singing is discouraged in the original Best Practices document. Please apply this to KidsMin also.
- Refreshments
 - Suspend snack time during KidsMin programming

Phases of Relaunching Kids Ministry Programming

No matter the size of your church or Kids Ministry, we advise against relaunching Kids Ministry immediately. Please consider your relaunch as phasing into a new way of doing ministry together, over four phases. There is no definitive timeline on these phases. Rather, be in communication with your pastor, volunteers, and families. Make decisions for the good of the whole, based on accurate data provided by your state and county.

Phase One – Intergenerational Worship and Strategic Preparation

This is the time to fully embrace intergenerational ministry! Our goal as ministry leaders is to equip parents and guardians to be the primary faith formers in the home, so let's lean into this model. Here are some ideas to do this:

- When your local church begins reopening for in-person worship, do not add age-level programming yet. Continue doing the things you've been doing virtually.
- Do not convene Children's Church during "Big Church." Celebrate families worshiping together!
- Kids Message during worship
 - Children do not gather with an adult onstage or on the steps.
 - Designate a space in your worship center for families with young kids to sit up close to the stage.
 - Kids message leader speaks from the stage while kids stay in their seats (or, for extra fun, stand on the pews so they can see!)
- Provide Kids Activities that can be taken home
 - Think creatively here! How might you turn an activity bag into another resource for families to do discipleship throughout the week at home? Talk with your pastor about their sermons – what are some ways to reinforce the scripture for the week?
- Incorporate families into worship – scripture reading, liturgy, greeters, even pre-recorded announcements or giving moments

While kids worship with families and continue faith formation at the home, think strategically about the next phase. Use this time to prepare your space for phase two. Here are some guidelines:

- Deep clean and disinfect entire KidsMin wing
- Declutter. Secure all loose items in bins, cabinets, and other storage containers, out of reach of children.
- Remove all items that cannot be cleaned or disinfected well (including, but not limited to, couches, bean bags, chairs with cushions, stuffed animals, puppets, anything plush)
- Determine how many people can be seated with a minimum of 6 feet between persons (side to side and front to back) in each room. Consider a pre-register or RSVP strategy to ensure compliance with capacity and social distancing guidelines.
- Designate sitting spaces with painter's tape to comply with social distancing.
- Stock each room with adequate disinfectant, hand sanitizer, and other essential cleaning products.

Part of thinking strategically includes reviewing and updating all policies and procedures. If you do not have set policies, now is the time to adopt them! Here's a list of some policies to review:

- Registration Policy (including an RSVP protocol if you have to limit the number of kids that can come)
- Sick Child Policy (fever-free without medication for at least 24 hours)
- Child Hygiene Policy (handwashing, etc.)
- Special Needs Policies (how will this affect families with special needs for accommodation?)
- Check In/Out Protocol (we cannot have unattended children running around the building)
- Communications Protocol (how will all this be shared with families?)
- Nursery Policies and Procedures
- Volunteer Retention
 - Contact all volunteers and gauge their interest in serving during this transitional time
 - Many volunteers in KidsMin are part of vulnerable populations, so have a plan in place for fewer volunteers, while maintaining Safe Gatherings policies.

Phase Two – 3rd graders and up

The younger a child is, the less able they are to grasp the concept of social distancing. For that reason, we suggest phasing in to KidsMin programming, starting with 3rd grade and older. Continue to emphasize and celebrate Intergenerational Worship as primary faith formation for younger children. Here are some guidelines for transitional KidsMin programming:

- Before and after each gathering, sanitize all surfaces that have been touched.
- Disinfect all doorknobs and bathrooms, microphones, remote controls, etc.
- Restrict access to water fountain usage by covering it completely with a sturdy plastic bag and taping it securely at the bottom.
- Indoor doors propped open

- No hugs, handshakes, or high fives – air fives and friendly waves are great!
- Take temperature as folks come in
- Have volunteers wear masks.

Phase Three – Kindergarten and up

Please keep in mind that there is no definitive timeline for these phases. As state, local, and school district guidelines relax, it is possible that we may see a second “wave” that may require further social distancing. For that reason, please practice shrewdness while moving into Phase Three. Remember that younger children struggle to cognitively make sense of abstract concepts, and practicing social distancing may not be possible for them.

- Contact every parent of a young child to gauge interest, fears, and concerns. Be ready to answer difficult questions.
- Continue practicing all aforementioned guidelines and suggestions

Phase Four – Nursery, Preschool, and up

Nursery and Preschool aged children should be the last age groups to phase into regular KidsMin programming due to diapering and toilet training; teething and drooling; hygiene training; and ability to remember and practice adequate social distancing. Often, very young children need assistance from an adult in many typical KidsMin activities, so this phase should only be implemented when local guidelines have relaxed enough that adults can adequately aid children.

- Contact every parent of an infant/toddler/young child to gauge interest, fears, and concerns. Be ready to answer difficult questions.
- Deep clean and disinfect entire Nursery wing.
- Declutter. Secure all loose items in bins, cabinets, and other storage containers, out of reach of children.
- Remove all items that cannot be cleaned or disinfected well (including, but not limited to, couches, bean bags, chairs with cushions, stuffed animals, puppets, anything plush)
- Determine an appropriate adult to child ratio for the nursery, given new standards and guidelines. Consider a pre-register or RSVP strategy to ensure compliance with capacity and social distancing guidelines, while still maintaining Safe Gatherings Policy.
- Stock the nursery with adequate disinfectant, hand sanitizer, and other essential cleaning products.
- Continue to stay away from communal storage of all items.