

Reopening Your Children's Ministry

Churches are cautiously moving toward on-site regathering during Covid-19. We know that preschool and children's ministries will likely be some of the last ministry areas to reopen in many churches. Considerations for children, parents and volunteers, particularly those over age 60, must be taken into account during decision making. Churches, through no fault of their own, must regain the trust of parents and volunteers by demonstrating through their intentions and actions they are doing everything possible to provide safe and clean teaching environments.

What are steps your church can take now to get ready to reopen your preschool and children's ministries?

READY...

- Carpets and flooring

One of the first steps your church can take is to clean carpets, rugs, curtains and other porous surfaces in your preschool and children's areas. Remove old rugs, wall hangings and curtains that both date your children's areas and can harbor germs, dirt and viruses.

- Equipment and furnishings

Clean, remove or update equipment and furnishing with cloth coverings. Baby swings, walkers, and rocking chair seats and armrests should all be sanitized. Crib sheets, mattress pads, blankets and nursery smocks should be cleaned and a plan for doing so each week should be included in your plans for reopening. A thorough cleaning and sanitizing of tables, chairs, play equipment, counters, restrooms, doorknobs and light switches should be undertaken, as well as a plan for weekly cleaning once children return.

Water and sand play and other communal activity centers should be removed until further notice. The number of items in home living should be reduced to only those volunteers are willing to clean, especially if your church offers multiple teaching sessions.

Purchase touchless thermometers if your church will require health checks before volunteers or children can be present in the children's ministry areas.

Consider purchasing walkie-talkies for dismissal if you plan to limit traffic to children's classrooms.

- Toys

Toys are a crucial part of any children's teaching space but during this time only the toys that directly reinforce the teaching for that day should be present. Remove toy boxes and store the majority of your toys until later. Only provide toys that can be cleaned and sanitized with a liquid cleaning solution and limit the number of toys in the room to the number that volunteers are willing to clean on a regular basis.

- Cleaning Supplies

Purchase spray bottles, bleach, Clorox wipes, paper towels, gloves and other materials teachers will need to sanitize the teaching areas throughout the teaching sessions.

- Written policies

Document steps so that volunteers and parents are all on the same page with the ministry's expectations. Post these plans on your church website and email to homes.

Consider creating videos that show what will happen when families arrive. Show check-in, mask requirements, health checks, sanitation of toys and equipment, diaper changing and other procedures that you may want parents and volunteers to understand and comply with.

Update and post your illness policies both on-line and throughout your teaching spaces.

SET...

Once you feel ready to reopen by preparing your teaching spaces for the arrival of children, what can you do to advance to "Get SET"?

- Numbers and social distancing

Consider the latest state mandated requirements for gathered numbers and social distancing to plan for the number of classrooms to open and the number of volunteers you will need to provide safe environments. You may need to limit the number of children in one room or use spaces outside the children's area. You may have to rethink your program schedule by offering multiple sessions, requiring pre-registration or using a large group model in a larger room with children spaced for social distancing. You may want to limit the amount of singing by children unless they are masked or offer music with movements instead of singing.

In your nursery, you may have one child assigned to one designated volunteer to avoid contact and exposure to multiple caregivers.

- Volunteer training

Plan now for how you will train volunteers about your expectations for the arrival and dismissal of children, wearing masks, use of materials, physical interaction, restroom procedures and cleaning. Zoom calls, video creation, in-person training and posters are all ways to train about the new protocols volunteers will be required to follow when children are present.

- Traffic

One way that many churches will minimize contact with children is by limiting the number of people who are allowed in the children's ministry areas, especially hallways. Parents and guardians may be required to drop off their preschoolers and children at the entry to the ministry area where they will be taken to their classrooms. Using walkie-talkies, children will be brought to parents who are socially distanced in a waiting area.

If your church has children's classrooms along main corridors in your church, consider ways that adults can move throughout the building outside of this area or stagger times when children and adults use the hallways.

- Communicate changes

Change always seems to bring conflict but well communicated reasons for that change will greatly mitigate the hardships that change can bring. Consider how you will communicate the necessary changes to your church. Some commonly used ways are through pastoral messaging, email, video, website information and texts with links to where people can find the information they need. It has been said that when you arrive at the point where you are weary of saying the same thing over and over is the time people are just beginning to hear what you are saying!

GO!!!

- Entrances and exits

Have signage that clearly states where parents are to enter and if they are to check-in and have their children escorted to their rooms. Will you have one way in and one way out to limit face to face contact? Will you have a health check station that attendees must pass before entering the building?

- Crayons and craft supplies

One way to consider offering high touch items is to provide an individually packaged bag of crayons, scissors, glue sticks, markers and other craft items for each child. Each bag will be marked with a child's name and used by that child only. Consideration should also be made to provide personally designated bags for worship activities if your church chooses to provide them.

Parents should be directed to bring only necessary supplies to the nursery in a clear zip lock bag. One to two diapers, marked bottles and pacifiers and wipes should be sufficient for the teaching session. Diaper bags should not be left in the nursery.

- Clean as you go

A mindset of keeping a clean environment should be instilled in volunteers. "Classroom Cleaners" may be a new category of volunteer for which you can recruit to instill trust. Safely store cleaners away from little hands but also visible to remind leaders to clean throughout the session.

For help with making plans for reopening see our resources at ncbaptist.org. For resources specific to children's ministry check out <https://ncbaptist.org/resource-preparing-your-childrens-ministry-for-post-covid-19/>

Thank you for allowing me to share important information your church's children's ministries need to safely reopen. For more help, feel free to contact me at cmarkland@ncbaptist.org