

Children's Ministries Assessment

Use the following questions to assess approaches to children's ministries in your congregation. Note any discrepancies, such as variations between programs, age groups, or teachers, on the right side of the margin. The goal of this activity is to assess what is already happening within your congregation, not what you aspire to.

This assessment is largely based on "75 Years of Evangelical Children's Formation", a keynote lecture given by Scottie May at The Children's Spirituality Summit in Nashville, Tennessee, June 2018.

NOTES

1. After a Bible story is shared with children, they are commonly asked to...
 - a. Recall what happened in it.
 - b. Relate the story back to the class through art or drama.
 - c. Ask their own questions of the story.
2. The teacher in our classes can best be described as...
 - a. The Boss or Expert
 - b. The Planner or Coordinator
 - c. The Shepherd or Co-Learner
3. On a Sunday morning, children generally
 - a. Sit and listen, filling in worksheets or reading from the text
 - b. Play active games or create art correlated with the story
 - c. Spend time in listening, reflection, and discussion.
4. In order to motivate children to participate in learning, we generally...
 - a. Offer rewards like candy, tickets, or other prizes.
 - b. Tailor each lesson to multiple learning styles and try to engage children in what they like most.
 - c. Focus on relationships and invitations, waiting for children to respond in their own time.
5. Our chief goal in children's ministry is that...
 - a. Children understand the Bible and how to navigate it and apply it.
 - b. Children feel loved and accepted, knowing Jesus' love through their relationships and experiences at church.
 - c. Engage in prayer and worship, knowing God through our forms of worship and learning.

6. The metaphor that fits our children's ministry best:
 - a. A Training Camp- children are learning how to do things, what to do, and how to grow!
 - b. A Playground- Children are learning through engaging in fun activities and building relationships.
 - c. A Journey- Children are exploring faith alongside the teacher, engaging in a set learning process that allows open-ended responses.

7. Children come to church to...
 - a. Learn what to believe and why.
 - b. Have fun while learning and gaining a positive view of the church.
 - c. Worship and learn.

8. In the larger congregation, children...
 - a. Are expected to engage in listening, worship, and prayer just like most of the rest of the congregation.
 - b. Rarely attend the larger congregational contexts. It's not fun, and we want to create something special for them. Also, it frustrates the adults when they attend.
 - c. Engage in listening, worship, and prayer, but we adapt our expectations to invite their developmentally-appropriate participation.

9. Children can be described as...
 - a. "Wet Cement"- they're so impressionable at this age!
 - b. "Explorers"- they want to adventure into everything!
 - c. "Plants"- God's making them grow, and we're helping guide them.

10. In planning, we focus our attention on...
 - a. Content. What do the children know, and what do they need to know?
 - b. Students. Do we have a relationship with each one? Do they feel loved? How do we make learning fun for them?

- c. Processes. How do children learn best? What systems can we put in place to facilitate this learning?

Count the times you chose A, B, and C; each letter corresponds with a different type of learning and children's ministry. All three forms of children's ministry are useful and sometimes necessary, but most churches lean in one direction. If you lean heavily in one direction, look at alternative answers to some of these questions to consider alternative approaches to achieving similar goals.

Mostly As: Content-Centered, Ministry To Children

Content-centered children's ministry focuses on helping children learn about God and the Bible. Children in churches that focus on content often have a strong understanding of how the Bible fits together, how to look up Scripture verses, and they are able to recall doctrinal truths. Unfortunately, children raised in content-focused ministries sometimes know more about God without having a relationship with God, focusing on learning rather than worship. Children with learning disabilities often struggle in these environments because they have difficulty mastering the subjects at the same rate as their peers. Children who can achieve the learning goals easily sometimes grow more in pride than relationship with God. Giving children opportunities to ask questions or respond to open-ended questions can help them engage in deeper thinking.

Mostly Bs: Student-Centered, Ministry For Children

Student-Centered children's ministry recognizes the unique gifts and learning styles of children, seeking to make an environment where they feel welcomed and loved. Oftentimes leaders of these ministries create engaging, exciting activities to make the Bible lessons interesting to children. Sometimes, however, the activities eclipse the lessons or worship itself. Children may begin thinking that the goal of church is to have fun, and if the children's ministry fails to entertain them, they can become disengaged or misbehave. This type of ministry puts intense pressure on leaders to keep children from being bored and to cater to each learning style every week. Keeping the focus on worship and learning rather than entertainment can help these creative leaders continue to create a church environment hospitable to children but focused on God.

Mostly Cs: Process-Centered, Ministry With Children

Process-centered children's ministry allows children to learn at their own pace and recognizes the continuing work of the Holy Spirit in guiding children. Leaders in these ministries are often good at inviting children into various aspects of worship in the church, engaging them in meaningful activities that many may not consider child-friendly such as meditative prayer. Sometimes children in process-centered ministries lack a cohesive understanding of how the stories of Scripture or the doctrine of the church fits together. When leaders focus intently on serving as co-learners, children are sometimes confused as to who is actually guiding them on their faith journey. These ministries sometimes focus on integrating truths into life without actually sharing the truths directly with the children. Process-centered ministries can grow by considering what children have been directly taught and helping them see the overarching stories of Scripture and doctrinal truths.