

Kids' Ministry Training Video 3: Heightening Engagement

As kids' leaders, we want children to engage and participate well in our programs, so that they are able to hear the awesome message of the gospel and find a supportive peer group to connect with. Here are some ideas that might help you get and keep their attention.

Consistency

Get to know the kids and be consistently present.

- ❑ **Leaders.** Have consistent leaders, who get to know the kids – what interests them, what worries them, where are they passionate about? A lack of consistency in leaders very quickly plays out in reduced engagement by the kids.

Preparation

Preparation is the number one way that we can help kids stay engaged and participate well.

- ❑ **Concept.** Have a clear understanding of the “big idea” of your session. If kids are confused, they may tune out and miss what's important. Make sure you can communicate the central idea clearly and succinctly, and ensure that everything points to this concept.
- ❑ **Organisation.** Be organised ahead of time. If kids are left unattended while you set up for the next activity, go to find a prop, or have a conversation with another leader, you will lose their attention. Have one leader running an activity, while another leader sets up for the next.

Structure

- ❑ **Movement.** Many kids like some adults have shorter attention spans, and like to move around more frequently. Have a look at your program. Are there parts where they will be sitting or just listening for too long? Plan to have kids moving, using their hands, standing, or starting a new activity regularly throughout the session.
- ❑ **Personality.** Every child has a different personality and learning style. Mixing up the types of activities you do can help engage all the children.
- ❑ **Participation.** Who is doing the talking? Do the kids get to use their voices? Do they get to look for the answers themselves in the Bible, do they have opportunity to research, create or retell the story or big idea?

Choice

- ❑ **Options.** Giving children a choice between two options can be a helpful technique for engagement. For example, rather than asking, “Would you like to sing a song?” offer two options and ask them which of the songs they would like to sing or two activities drawing images to go with today's story or creating a lego model.

Leaders

- ❑ **Ratios.** By far the most effective way to help children engage is to have plenty of adult leaders available to help kids participate, come alongside children and model engagement. Too often we ask the question, “How many helpers is enough?” rather than, “How can we provide ample leaders to disciple children?”
- ❑ **Expectations.** Help your leaders agree on expectations, and be consistent with implementing them. When children are confused as to the expectations, they are less likely to engage. Be consistent in your encouragement of those following the expectations.

When None of This is Working

- ❑ **Next steps:** When behaviour is impacting others offering the child a choice of participating with the group without extra help or a parent or carer coming into help them participate and engage may work. Think about what consequences say to a child. “You will have to go into church” sounds like gathering with the people of God is a punishment.

Children with Additional Needs

- ❑ **Ask.** Each child has unique needs. Ask their parents or carer what will be the best way to help them engage. An idea that works with one child may not help with another. Work with families to find the best way to help the child be involved.
- ❑ **Training.** Get some additional training as a team. There is an additional module on the Baptist Children and Family Ministries website. There are also other agencies that can provide resources and ideas. Helpful resources can be found through CBM’s Luke 14 ministry for a wide variety of additional needs or Sue Larkey for specific help with help children with autism.

Further Reading

- <https://www.group.com/childrens-ministry/blog/sunday-school/5-guaranteed-ways-to-engage-kids-in-sunday-school/>
- <http://www.cogic.org/childrensministry/2013/01/29/strategies-for-small-church-childrens-ministry/>
- Communicating in the Classroom Module 4 SRE Training designed for SRE teachers, but would have helpful principles to apply in other contexts email sre@nswactbaptists.org.au to purchase a copy

Questions for Your Team

- Is our central “big idea” clear to the leaders and kids alike in our program?
- How can we be better organised, and work together as a team, so that our program seamlessly flows?
- Do we have children moving around, or are children getting “wiggly”? Can we tweak our structure?
- Would our team benefit from additional leaders? Who could we ask?