

10 Tips for Making Church Kids' and Youth Groups More Accessible



- 1. Know the children – plan for them:** As you prep, identify potential barriers for specific children in the group and simple ways to overcome them (see examples on page 2).
- 2. Setup and structure:** Use the space the same way every week so that it's a familiar and safe place, and follow the same weekly structure (e.g. register on the rug, Bible story in the middle of the room, craft at the table, prayer in the prayer corner).
- 3. Communicate the structure (especially if it's different):** You could: use a visual timetable (remember to refer to it!), tell the group what they will be doing in the session at the start, prepare for transitions with regular timing updates, and use 'now and next' language ('now we will read a Bible story and next we will watch a video').
- 4. Remember EATS:** Behaviour communicates something. For example, when you struggle to show your normal level of patience, perhaps it's because you're hungry! Dealing with the reason for the behaviour is better in the long run than dealing just with the behaviour (see page 2).
- 5. Quiet space:** Set aside an area for a sensory break – this could be a corner or a table set slightly aside. Add some quiet fidgets, playdoh, colouring in, books, a prayer card, a 3-minute sand timer, a weighted blanket or lap pad – whatever will help your children calm down most. If this isn't possible, think about building in a quiet reset activity for the whole group.
- 6. 'Go-To Person':** Have a specific team member each week (not necessarily the same person each time) focused on watching out for children who are struggling during activities. Ensure the children know they can go to this person if they are finding something overwhelming. This team member can offer solutions, such as ear defenders or a time-out, and pass the information on to the rest of the team to support future planning.
- 7. Set your group up for the win with realistic aims and expectations:** A straight 45-minute Bible study with everyone sitting still might not be achievable; an awesome, wriggly 10 minutes followed by a game, discussion, and prayer might be. Sometimes less is more.
- 8. Celebrate small (and big) wins:** Has a child who usually struggles to sit still and listen sat nicely? Celebrate with them! 'You're all sitting so nicely, especially you, Lily.' Has a young person who usually avoids group activities joined in this time? Notice it and tell them how great that was afterwards.
- 9. Don't be afraid to try and fail:** Doing something is always better than doing nothing! Work with the family to develop support solutions and keep chatting about what works and what doesn't. Being willing to try is half the battle and can transform how a family feels about church.
- 10. Know yourself:** What behaviours might really get to you? Pray for your own heart and an attitude of love towards those who have the potential to wind you up.

Pray and remember it's God's work that we get to take part in. We don't need to be perfect or get it right every time. He says: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12:9)

Examples of Barriers

Activity	Barrier	Possible Solution
Fiddly craft	Requires fine motor skills	Pre-cut some for those who struggle / offer an alternative craft
Worksheets	Reading level (dyslexia)	Use the worksheet as a group Bible-study resource with a leader reading the questions
Competitive game	A greater than usual emotional inability to cope with losing	Plan an activity between playing and finding out who won / plan a game that isn't competitive / offer alternatives
Loud activities	Sound sensitivity	Offer ear defenders / think about ways to make the activity quieter
Long Bible passage	Attention span, sitting still for long periods	Break it into sections with movement breaks inbetween / act parts out / use visuals for main concepts

Behaviour as Communication: E.A.T.S.

Escape	Attention	Tangible Gains	Sensory
<i>Running away, always needing the toilet for a particular activity, playing the class clown, hiding.</i> Are there any activities which a child tried to avoid? Remember to pass this observation to your team – why might they want to avoid it? (Too hard, too much sitting, too loud?)	<i>Interrupting, asking questions, messing around, breaking the rules obviously in front of you.</i> Is there a group member who seeks attention negatively? Think of positive ways to give attention which redirects behaviours; a special job, a reward chart.	<i>Getting up at inappropriate times to get a desired item, having a tantrum, constantly asking about a specific activity, fighting over an item.</i> Are there favoured items that cause fights? Could more be made available or the item removed? Are there particular activities that individuals or the group love? How could you use these as incentives?	<i>Avoiding or seeking e.g. hands over ears vs making loud noises. Touching other people vs sitting away from the group. Self-regulating: e.g. rocking, rolling to calm the nervous system.</i> How could you engage the senses to keep attention, bring the Bible to life and help children stay regulated? Touch, taste, smell, sound, sight and movement.

Engaging the Senses

Touch	What items could they touch to get into the Bible action? Water, sand, wool, sackcloth? Would some children benefit from 'fidgets' or putty?
Smell	Can any smells link to the Bible passage? Is there a smell you could use each week during part of the session to create links between that smell and that activity (i.e. prayer time)?
Taste	Is there anything that could be tasted connected to the passage? Would sucking a lolly help these kids to focus?
Hearing	How can loud or quiet sounds help tell the story? Will you be loud enough for any with hearing loss? How could sounds be used to create the right atmosphere?
Visual	What visual aids might support the teaching – pictures, props, everyday items, videos, signing, actions? How can you use visuals to support those who struggle to read?
Movement	What opportunities for movement breaks come naturally in the session? How long have you planned for them to sit still – is it too long? Do any children need a wobble cushion or to stand up?

Useful Equipment – and Cheap Alternatives

Having a few readily available items (often called fidgets) can be quick, simple and effective ways to help children and young people in your groups cope well with the activities. Many items can be purchased relatively cheaply from specialist retailers or online platforms, but there are often even cheaper DIY alternatives available. Ask parents what works at home or school and be willing to try and fail!

Item	Potential Use	Top Tips
Ear defenders	• Provide relief from auditory sensory overload. • Reduce stress and help prevent meltdowns in loud environments.	Sometimes the cheapest place to get these, especially in larger sizes, is DIY outlets. Teens may prefer to use in-ear options such as ear loops, which are a personal use item.
Squishy or tactile fidgets e.g. • Putty • Stress balls • Pea pods • Poppers • Faux fur/ sheep skin • Flip sequin items • Textured worry stones	• Calming effect • Improve focus • Reduce stress	You can make your own playdoh or putty and stress balls easily and cheaply, for example by filling balloons with flour or water beads. Just look online for some ideas. Why not use this as an activity in your kids' group? Or consider using playdoh modelling as part of how you tell the Bible story?
Moving / movable items e.g. • Fidget spinners • Tangles • Fidget cubes • Stretchy items	• Expend energy • Improve focus and concentration • Keeps hands busy • Relieve anxiety • Redirect energy and emotion	Cheap / homemade or easily available options include: • Hair ties, especially spiral hair ties • Pipe cleaners – perhaps with added beads • Interconnect keyring loops – again perhaps with added beads We tend to avoid elastic bands as they often contain latex which is an allergen and they are inviting to ping!
Seating aids • Wobble cushions • Wedge cushions • Vibrating cushions • Chair bands (<i>these can go around the legs of chairs to give the feet something to rest on/ stretch/ push</i>)	• Promote 'active sitting' aiding those who struggle to sit still. • Provide balance, sensory and bodily awareness. • Can increase concentration, relieve stress and help with self-regulation.	An inexpensive partially inflated large ball (like a beach ball) could be used as a cheap wobble cushion. A towel or blanket could be used to form a wedge-shape seating pad. An exercise band could be used as a chair band.
Weighted items • Blankets • Lap pads • Shoulder wraps • Weighted soft toys	• Calming effect • Promote a sense of security and safety • Aids self-regulation • Those with anxiety, sensory processing disorders or ADHD may benefit from having a weighted item on their shoulders or laps	You can use every day items to place weight upon someone's lap, for example placing a securely sealed bag of rice or dried beans in a pillow case or putting rice into a long sock or pair of tights to drape around someone's neck. • Often a heavy blanket folded over and placed over someone or on their lap will work well.