

Six things a church can do now to support families with under-fives

Families with under-fives have generally found lockdown extremely isolating, so here are some ways for churches to make contact with, draw alongside and offer support to families with pre-school infants and children.

Make contact

Make contact in person where possible. Phone, message or knock on a door, step back, have a conversation. You can invite the family to a group, activity or service, and pray for them.

Enable connections

Restarting in-person groups for parents/carers, infants and toddlers in your building or community space will be a blessing to many families.

Attend to the spiritual life of under-fives

Offering ways for parents to connect with and nurture the spiritual life of their child when very young can provide a strong foundation for a life of faith.

Keep talking about baptism

Lockdown restrictions have meant families have been unable to celebrate the birth of their child in ways they would like, so let them know that baptism is still an option.

Get OWT! (Out with toddlers)

With this great resource from the Salvation Army, churches can offer facilitated walks and trails specifically for families with pre-schoolers.

Help families with everyday faith

It can be easy for busy parents to view church and faith as 'activities to do', so we've provided ways to encourage families to *live* their faith every day.

See next page for more detail on each idea.

For further ideas or help please contact:

Yvonne Morris – Discipleship Enabler (Dorchester and Oxford)
01865 208255 yvonne.morris@oxford.anglican.org

Ian Macdonald – Discipleship Enabler (Berkshire)
01865 208523 ian.macdonald@oxford.anglican.org



Make contact

Make contact in person where possible. Could your church invest in offering a 'bag of love' which could be delivered in a safe way to each family with under-fives?

Decorate a paper bag and put in a few things to express love and care, for example:

- a sachet of hot chocolate (Clipper offer a fairtrade 'cuddle in a cup')
- a pack of Love Hearts – know you are precious and loved
- a glow stick and/or battery tea light – Jesus is the light in the darkness
- a booklet, prayer, psalm or blessing – offering an accessible way to encounter God.

Enable connections

Enable connections by opening a group for 15 parents/carers with their children:

- Be socially distanced (round tables or on rugs).
- Bring your own drink/snack (hot drinks in appropriate travel mugs).
- No group singing (leader can sing from a distance, families can do actions).
- Bring your own toys or offer ones you can clean afterwards.
- Prepare a craft beforehand and quarantine it.
- Share story.
- Bless and listen deeply.

N.B. Adhere to Government rules and Church of England guidance for operating risk-assessed groups as 'Covid-safe' as possible.

Attend to the spiritual life of under-fives

We are all different in how we find deep connection with God, self, others and the world, and this is no less true for very young children. Helping parents/carers to pay attention to the spiritual life of their child can be an amazing gift. Help them notice:

- when the child is being quiet and wondering
- the types of questions they ask
- the songs they hum and sing
- the people and things they talk about and pray for.

These are all clues which can be further nurtured and resourced. These may be useful next steps:

Diddy Disciples: diddydisciples.org

Biblebuds: biblebuds.co.uk

Keep talking about baptism

Lockdown restrictions have meant families have been unable to celebrate and share the birth of their child as they may have imagined or hoped. Listening to their experiences, lamenting their losses and helping them mark significant events could be important steps on their family journey. Talk with families about what is available within the Church of England to celebrate and bless their new family members.

There are many good resources for parents/carers, godparents and guests on this Church of England website:

churchofenglandchristenings.org

Get OWT! (Out with toddlers)

Getting outside with toddlers can be tricky, but the benefit to the health and wellbeing of parents/carers and children is profound. *Get OWT!* is a fantastic resource from our friends at the Salvation Army designed to offer creative activity walks around an area. It can be customised to a variety of locations and situations, and the website includes everything you need to plan and facilitate these walks.

It goes without saying that any local Covid regulations must be adhered to, but there is scope to make these walks socially distanced or in small groups.

salvationarmy.org.uk/resources/get-owt

Help families with everyday faith

It can be easy for busy parents/carers to view church and faith as 'activities to do' but how could your church draw alongside to help families *live* their faith every day?

Encourage families to live 'God; any time, any where, any way' and try one of these ideas:

- Have prayer and Bible story books and read them together at any time.
- Notice when your child is transfixed at something in creation. Look at it together, hold silence or wonder about it aloud. Praise God for it.
- Ask 'Who needs God's special blessing?' Don't be alarmed when toys are named alongside real people; simply ask God to bless all these according to their need.