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Build the church community

Toddler groups provide great opportunities to build church communities – group users becoming more aware of and engaged with church, wider church community becoming more aware of and engaged with toddler group, team providing an inspiring example of missional community for the rest of church to follow.

Be distinctively Christian

Be open that this is a church toddler group. Most people will expect you to do so! Be intentionally distinctive in what they see, hear and experience (e.g. ask your minister along sometimes, include faith in your conversations, invite families to special services, tell a Bible story, have a prayer time, sing a Christian song, etc.) Encourage everyone to join in at certain points, e.g. gather whole group (including parents & carers) together for songs, or stories, without the distractions of toys. Remember to keep it all appropriate and engaging for toddlers.

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Connect with home

Nurture faith journeys of toddlers and adults. Make the activities easily accessible and replicable at home. Share links to songs via YouTube. Print the key message onto a sticker and attach to the take-home craft. Provide a toddler-friendly Bible for each family, ensuring that the stories you cover are all available to re-read at home. Consider producing Bible story sacks that can be borrowed for the week.

Maximise mission opportunities

Link into the wider mission of your church community. Share details and invite families to Messy Church, or child-friendly church services, as well as social and missional events suitable for young.

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Hints & Tips

Toddler Groups



Me reach
In reach
Out reach

Toddler Groups

Toddler groups have been part of the provision of churches for many years. Usually led by volunteers and run on a small budget, they have been a life-line for new parents and helped build community amongst those with young children in their care. In contrast to childcare which offers supervision of children away from their parents, toddler groups keep adults and children together as they take part in a range of play, story and craft activities.

Many church based toddler groups are closely connected with the church, having been established by church members and continuing to be run as part of the church's regular activities. However not all groups are confident about their Christian distinctiveness or about the missional opportunities Toddler Groups can offer.

As part of the God for All vision to help everyone across Cumbria discover more of God and God's purpose in their lives, we would like to suggest some tips for making the most of your pre-school contacts:

1

Welcome/First impressions

Becoming a parent can be a huge lifestyle shift. For those with no local family support it can be a lonely and exhausting time. It can take a lot of courage to try a new group, knowing no one. Toddler groups that can offer a genuine warm welcome, generous hospitality, fostering relationships between members of the group, creating a sense of family, helping new people feel comfortable as part of the group, can be a lifeline.

Love and serve young families

Demonstrate generous hospitality to all, through being friendly, welcoming, inclusive and inexpensive as well as by building relationships in a warm, family-like community. Toddler groups can transform lives through loving & serving. Without this foundation, any Christian distinctiveness we try to offer is likely to fail.

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Prayer

Encourage your team to pray both inside and outside toddler group context. Spend time together as a team, praying and planning for the future of your group and enlist the prayer support of the wider congregation. Think about including creative, toddler-friendly, simple prayers as part of your group. 'Messy Prayer' from BRF has some good ideas (www.brfonline.org.uk/9780857463791) As team, don't be afraid during conversations to offer to pray about a situation or concern, if that individual would like you to do so.

Team – support your toddler group leaders

Make sure your team feel supported by the minister, wider church family and other volunteers.

Try to meet together regularly for planning and review of progress, as well as mutual pastoral support and encouragement.

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Group – clear aims and intentional strategy

Toddler groups are a vibrant part of the church community and strategically important for the future. Do the aims of your toddler group align with the wider aims of church? Ideally toddler group leaders should be involved in church strategy and management meetings. Is your toddler group seen as one of the church congregations, or a community outreach project?

Keep in touch

Do you use social media? Often groups have a Facebook page, or a closed group set up. This enables continued contact and encouragement throughout the week with your families. Try to take photos of each child's craft from the session, and then post these in your toddler group online art gallery. Parents love 'liking' and sharing their child's creations! What do you offer those families whose children have out-grown the toddler group? A follow-on community they can belong to? Or activities they can still be invited to?

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