Top Tips from the Toddler Project

Top Tips for Worship

*I particularly love the church part…. it’s very laid back and it’s not in your face. Nobody is judging you.*

*If you go to a toddler group in a church and they don’t talk about God, you might as well go to an ordinary toddler group.*

*I’m a non-churchgoer but I go to the church service (at the Toddler Group). There is singing and a couple of prayers. It’s a valued part of Toddler Group.*

When we talked to parents and carers at church based Toddler groups, most people valued the Christian songs, prayers and stories that formed a short service as part of the session. Even if they didn’t have a faith, people valued the chance for their children to hear the stories of the Christian faith. So, if you haven’t thought about a time of worship in your Toddler Group, here are some Top Tips to get you started.

**Start small** – maybe have a song with Christian words and a prayer to close your time together, reminding everyone of God’s love.

**Singing is important.** One parent said, *‘My child can play with toys anywhere but it’s the singing he loves most’*. Include simple, repetitive songs in a short time of worship – with percussion instruments if you feel strong enough!

**Have a simple structure.** Structure is important – it allows for variety whilst enabling people to feel ‘safe’, especially if they are not used to worship. You will work out what is right for your group, but a simple start could be: songs with actions, Bible story time, prayers, birthday greetings, song to close.

**Make a simple focal point** or gathering place for your worship time. A low table covered with a coloured cloth provides a place to gather around. Place a candle (wax or electric) on it, to be lit at the start and extinguished at the end.

**Go to a different space.** If it’s possible to go into the church or another room for your worship time, it will leave behind the distraction of toys.

**Pray with actions.** Toddlers need to use their bodies (and parents/carers can help smaller ones). One way could be to stretch arms high as thank you prayers are said, stretch arms out as prayers for the world/local community are said, wrap arms around the body (hug) as prayers for family and friends (people who love us) are said.

**Print out the words** of songs and regular prayers on a sheet and laminate it. That way adults can join in and toddlers can hold the sheet without ingesting it.Some parents may appreciate a copy to take home.

**Tell the story** using toys and objects or pictures. Bringing things out of a box or bag or basket helps to raise curiosity, keep attention, and gives the storyteller prompts as the story progresses.

**It doesn’t have to be every week.** You might start with a worship time at church festivals – Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, Harvest – or to mark the beginning or end of term.

**It’s good to see the clergy.** Toddler group worship does not need to be led by an ordained minister, but many parents or carers value seeing the church leaders and it helps to build strong links with the wider church community.

**Make it optional.** Some parents might be uncomfortable at first and appreciate an opt-out possibility, but one mother told us, *‘I’m a non-churchgoer but I go to the church service here. It’s only about 10 minutes. There is singing and prayers. It’s a valued part of the Toddler Group.’*

For more ideas and links to resources, go to: <http://www.going4growth.com/growth_in_faith_and_worship/early_years>

