

Children's Ministry Models

Traditional

Classrooms are usually made up of between one and three grades. Curriculums vary from primarily sitting to combination of sitting and activities.

Staff: Teaching team does the entire lesson in one setting.

Strengths: Often strong Biblical and cognitive components. There is a consistent familiarity with the room setting, teachers, and expectations, thus creating a sense of security.

Weaknesses: Usually requires more preparation time for teachers. Teachers may teach to their learning style and strength, and omit some of the other elements. Can be too much sitting, or seem too much like school.

Rotational

Children rotate through a series of stations, similar to VBS; they may rotate through several on one day, or one per week.

Staff: Teachers are responsible for only one station, through which several age groups rotate. Counselors travel with their assigned group each week.

Strengths: Teachers can each focus on their strength area. This offers variety and opportunity for movement for children. It also allows counselors an opportunity to focus exclusively on building relationships.

Weaknesses: It can be difficult for counselors to assist the teacher when they don't know what is coming. If rotation is limited to one station per Sunday, it will not reach every learning style each week. Some weeks children may opt to drop out. It can be confusing to begin in a different room each week. This method requires special adaptation for small churches.

Large Group / Small Group

All children begin in a large group setting. This may include worship, teaching and games. After the large group gathering children break down into small groups for application. These small groups may be more of a reflective time or may include learning stations. (Story, Craft, Game, Prayer/Worship)

Staff: This requires up-front leaders for large group, or video leader, as well as small group leaders and possibly learning station leaders or developers.

Strengths: Requires fewer up-front teachers and allows the best teachers to minister in large group setting. Small group leaders can focus on building relationships with a small group of children. This may provide an opportunity for someone who likes to develop learning stations, but who cannot be present each Sunday morning.

Weaknesses: Some friends may be split up during small group time. Large group doesn't work for churches with few children. Large group can be more entertainment-focused, with limited movement.

Large group time may also excite some children making it more difficult to settle them down during small group time.

Large Group Worship

This is a large, group gathering for multiple grades of children in a worship setting.

Staff: Worship leaders, some counselors mixed in with children.

Strengths: Offers children an opportunity to worship in child-friendly environment. Usually includes planned movement. Counselor positions require training, but little or no prep time. It is often very celebrative.

Weaknesses: Lacks individual attention. It's hard to measure spiritual growth. This may become too entertainment-focused instead of God-focused. It also provides for little or no opportunity to process faith with others. Too, it may require elaborate set up which can be costly. Often this is used at the expense of including children in with adults.

Young Children and Worship

Designed initially for preschoolers, this curriculum uses mats and wood figures to tell the Bible Story while asking wondering questions of the children. The children sit in a circle while the teacher quietly tells the story and manipulates the figures. Story materials are always available for children to play with and re-enact the stories on their own.

Staff: Lead teacher and assistants.

Strengths: Good Biblical content. Wondering questions help children think more deeply and personally about their faith. Opportunity to re-enact the Bible stories is excellent reinforcement tool.

Weaknesses: Takes a well trained teacher to pull this off. It can be difficult for some children to sit and listen. Significant guidance may be required to help some children re-enact Bible stories instead of turning the figures into soldiers or super heroes.

Worship Center (The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd)

Children reflectively guided through the worship center sometimes called the atrium. The worship center includes a communion table and elements, candles, font, Bibles, work spaces, art materials, musical instruments, prayer circle.

Staff: Worship guides: these may be broken down into leaders for specific areas.

Strengths: Allows children to creatively interact with elements of faith and worship. Helps prepare children for corporate worship and allows them to explore their personal faith journey. Not meant to take the place of worship with adults.

Weaknesses: It takes some significant set up. It can take some time to help each child accept a posture of reverence. Although it is active, it does not include a great deal of large motor skills and activity.

Intergenerational

Children and adults are together. Sometimes includes youth as well. This can be offered as one of two or three options for adults. Requires an interactive curriculum and significant space for large and small group experiences.

Staff: Ministry leader, ministry facilitator and assistants are helpful for preparation.

Strengths: Number of volunteers reduced because adults are present as participants. It brings the generations together creating greater unity within the body. Adults will participate in active learning when children are present. Provides opportunities for built in mentors.

Weaknesses: Usually requires significant preparation time for ministry leader as this model always has some hands on elements. There are challenges of reaching each generation in a significant way. It requires a community mindset rather than individual mindset for persons who participate.

No matter what option you choose during worship, the entire scope of children's ministry requires careful planning. The following helps have been provided for planning a children's ministry that is formational in its approach. The annual ministry plan at the end of this chapter provides a church-wide example of formational planning. The blank annual ministry planning sheet can be used for children's ministry or for whole church planning.