

“What do we do with the kids?!”

How to address childcare needs in your small group

First, pray to seek God’s direction for handling this issue. It’s worth the time and energy to develop a childcare plan because as valued members of the community children are worth it.

Mark 10:13-16 – People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.

Matthew 18:1-5 – At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: “I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me.”

Next, have a conversation up front with all participants about everyone’s philosophy on how/if kids will be involved in the small group. Find out the number of children and their ages. Everyone probably agrees that children are extremely special and valuable, but that doesn’t necessarily mean they should be part of the group. Be especially sensitive if you have an intergenerational group, as those without children may not appreciate the potential interruptions and distractions. The content of the group’s study materials can also influence this decision. For example, if you plan to focus on marriage content it is appropriate to have children cared for at a separate location.

If you’ve already started your group without having this conversation, it’s not too late! There will probably be differing opinions amongst the members of your group, but you as the leader need to make the final decision after prayerfully considering all options.

Here are a few ideas to get you started. Each group has its own personality based on the participants, ages of the kids, etc. Be creative and work together to find a solution that suits your group’s needs.

Summary of Specific Options for Childcare:

1. Children remain present with adults every meeting at the host's home.
2. Children remain present with adults for part of the meeting, and then sub-group by breaking into a separate group in a separate room of the host's home.
3. Children and adults meet separately every time in the host's home.
4. Children join the adults every other meeting or once a month.
5. As a group, arrange for a caretaker for all of the children in the group.
6. Allow only for nursing infants to remain present with adults during the small group meetings, and arrange other care for older kids.
7. All of the small group participants rotate caring for children each week/biweekly/monthly.
8. Only those who have children in the group rotate the responsibility of caring for children each week/biweekly/monthly.
9. Each parent arranges for the care of their own children outside of the small group through a relative or sitter.
10. Trade off with another small group that has kids. On your group's meeting night, a couple members of the other group take care of your group's kids. Then on their night, people from your group take care of their kids. Only a couple adults will probably be needed each time, so the extra time commitment should be reasonable, possibly once a month. This is a great way to foster building of relationships between kids and adults within the church body.
11. Set up a 4-week rotation in which one week is a family get together with all children present, one week is just for the women of the group, one week is for the men, and the other week parents get sitters.
12. Recruit older children or teenagers in the small group to assist with caring for children. Have a couple teenagers lead a kids' small group. This fulfills the desire teens have to be needed too.

"In churches where small groups are the basic growing units for the adult congregation, the children need the same context for growth, a place to find peer acceptance within their spiritual family...A group of children who are walking together in the Christian way have a profound effect upon each other."

– Lorna Jenkins, Children's Cell Groups

If you choose to create a small group for the kids in the group, here are guidelines on how to build a life-changing children's small group:

1. Choose a room in the host's home that does not look like a classroom (e.g. have them all sit on cushions facing each other). Make the environment fun and exciting for them.
2. Develop and use 'ground rules' (i.e. core values & core practices) with children.
3. Prepare and share food together with children.
4. A children's small group should not exceed 8 children. You will need two adults to lead this many children.
5. Allow friends to stay together, but encourage them to interact with everyone at each meeting.
6. Do not just read the Bible to them; do story-telling.
7. Make a special time for children to share about their week with others in the group. Have them sit in a circle facing each other for this time.
8. Remain flexible as the leader of the children's small group.
9. Variety keeps it fresh with kids.
10. Encourage children to pray for one another and within the group format.
11. Encourage children to "be a friend to each other," (i.e. minister to each other).
12. Encourage children to sing together for worship or simply play lively Christian music in the background.

Ideas for Activities in Children's Small Groups:

Don't try to entertain children, involve them!

1. Invite children to use many of their physical, artistic, and musical skills during worship.
2. Have the children do a "puppet show" or skit for the adult small group participants.
3. Explain what the Lord's Supper means, and invite the children to celebrate it together.
4. Do water-color painting, clay sculptures, drawing, etc. that is based on a biblical story.
5. Do a nature walk and share about God's creation with children. Invite them to try to find or collect things along the way (like a scavenger hunt).
6. Oversee the development of a scrap book by all of the children in the group.
7. Compose a worship song together or act out a Bible story for a video to watch and discuss together.
8. After asking permission from the child, share a child's special need for prayer. Invite the other children to lay hands on him or her to pray.
9. Each week, or every other week, introduce an adult small group participant to all of the children and have him or her share briefly about who they are and about their love for Jesus.
10. Celebrate special events and holidays with the adult and children small group participants together.

Other considerations:

- Safety - You as the leader are responsible for making sure the childcare provided is safe and all parents feel comfortable with the arrangement. There should be some requirements established that the group agrees upon, such as the number of childcare providers per a certain number of children, references and/or background checks for childcare providers, and the diaper-changing policy.
- Training – will there be training provided for the teens or adults that are taking care of the kids?
- Expense – will the childcare providers be paid?
- Resources – what resources will be provided for childcare providers and who will arrange for acquiring those materials?

Whether or not children are active participants in your group, be intentional about making sure they are well cared for. This will encourage both parents and children to consistently attend the group.