

COVID-19 Guide to Re-Gathering Preschool and Children's Ministries

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As churches begin to prepare for people to return to church campuses around the state, it is exciting to anticipate the laughter, voices, and squeals of young children as they enter the church building once again. It is important to recognize that reopening preschool and children's ministries is very complex and intentional. With careful planning, strategic thinking, and lots of love and care, we will navigate this transition while making it safe and inviting for kids and families.

The one question that is asked most frequently is...

Is it safe for our preschool and children's ministries to gather again?

This resource will help you think through some questions and walk through team strategy sessions that will help build your systems to make them stronger and safer during this time of crisis.

Let's Begin...

Think of launching preschool and children's ministries in phases. Here are some suggestions, questions and points to consider in each of these phases. Churches will autonomously decide what they will do following health, state and federal guidelines.

Phase 1: EQUIP

This phase is about equipping families at home while transitioning to an in-person kid program. This might include a modified worship service with the entire family. Younger children's exposure is limited to others and families have a choice of attending worship services via virtually or in person. They can transition as comfort level is reached, while people move to the engaged stage slowly. Examine your resources to maximize family connections and discipleship.

Phase 2: ENGAGE

This phase moves families to the next level of engagement with strict care and wisdom while providing multiple controlled solutions.

- Number of available staff determines number of children's classes
- Leaders have been trained and are well equipped to handle classroom needs
- Trial class of essential worker's children will meet to test systems and processes
- Children may attend with parents to classes/worship services
- Limited and smaller groups of children per teacher ratio begin to meet
- Multiple time slots for small groups and/or worship available
- Families worship together
- Resource family connections and discipleship at home

Phase 3: ENCOUNTER

This phase keeps families in a routine and order that helps them feel safe, loved, and cared for. Their children know what can be expected as they enter the doors each time at church and they can't wait to learn about Jesus and tell others!

- With clearly communicated procedures and established routines, parents and children know what to do for ongoing safety and health concerns
- Leaders have been trained and are well equipped to handle classroom needs
- Class size and children/teacher ratio remains small
- Multiple time slots for small groups and/or worship available
- Limit children's church experience following guidelines set by CDC & SC authorities
- Continuation of other programming and events according to guidelines
- Resource family connections and discipleship at home

What policies and procedures need to be modified in each phase to provide a safe learning environment focused on the physical, emotional, and spiritual development of children?

Consider addressing these questions and points in the following systems:

Registration/Check In-Check Out

1. What are your procedures for registering children as they come to the children's area?
 - Pre-register at home
 - Same staffer registering guests on check in device
 - Only 1 parent allowed to drop off, pick up
 - Limit number of entrances and exits
 - Staff receive children at checkpoint and take to classroom
2. What are your procedures for gathering personal items for each child and limiting the spread of germs?
 - Label all outside items: pacifiers, bottles, blankets
 - Each child's needed items for the day will be placed in containers/baskets/Ziploc bags in each room (Diapers, bottles, wipes, pacifiers, etc...)
3. Will you perform temperature checks before allowing preschool and children to enter classrooms?
 - Purchase no touch thermometers
4. Will people (adults and children) be required to wash hands upon arrival?
 - Provide a way for people to wash hands if sink isn't near registration desk
5. What other stations are needed to ensure a smooth check in/check out procedure for families?

Cleaning/Sanitizing

1. What steps can you take to make sure you have a balanced environment that is sterile and inviting? (music playing, pleasant smells, smiling faces)
2. What resources/videos do you have to show volunteers new sanitation protocols?
3. Clean and sanitize all areas of your ministry with an appropriate disinfectant. This includes rugs, solid surfaces, and anything anyone uses (Crib sheets, blankets, smocks, bibs). Please refer to the CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL and the SC CHILDCARE LICENSING GUIDELINES for cleaning protocols.
4. Where will you post schedules of handwashing times for each class?
5. Do leaders know how to change diapers according to universal sanitation guidelines and is it incorporated into leader training?
6. Have a checklist of what's been cleaned (toys and other hard surfaces) and when it was cleaned in each room.
7. Prepare cleaning supplies for each classroom's usage.

Classroom Procedures

1. What engaging activities are you incorporating in today's lesson that keeps kids following safety protocols and standards, while still encouraging effective discipleship?
2. Reduced class size is dependent on availability of trained staff and follows SC Childcare guidelines.
3. Children remain in same classroom with consistent teachers.
4. Special areas such as playgrounds or common areas are not used unless one group is assigned each week.
5. Eliminate toy boxes and the number of toys available for play during each session. Clean after each session with disinfectant. Rotate toys each week so that the classroom will feel inviting and fresh to the children.
6. Create special personal bags for each child that contains their own crayons, glue, scissors, etc...to minimize spreading of germs.
7. How will you accommodate classroom procedures for any special needs students or high risk populations?

Communication

1. How will you communicate new policies and procedures to parents and guests before they arrive?
2. Where will schedules, reminders for cleaning, diaper changing policies, and handwashing policies be posted?
3. Where will you post schedules of handwashing times for each class, and schedules of cleaned toys and other hard surfaces?
4. How will you continue to inspire your families to share your ministry's vision and mission?

Training

1. What new positions or changes will need to be created or made for preschool and children's ministries?
2. Take a volunteer staff inventory to see who will be returning to their positions (Celebrate their service and look forward to their potential return).
3. What should you stop doing? What would you like to begin?
4. What are some positive take-aways from the last two months that you would like to incorporate into your new training?
5. How are you going to re-train your leaders to make sure they are fully prepared to embark on church re-gathering?
6. Have extra leaders available to assist children who are experiencing separation anxiety and need a little extra attention.
7. How are you supporting your families that are struggling with issues that may surface from the COVID-19 crisis? (job loss, marriage difficulty, emotional or physical abuse, depression)

Begin now by praying as God leads you through this process. Families will appreciate your diligence in providing a safe and healthy environment as they look forward to normalcy once again. For additional training resources, videos, and information, go to <https://www.scbaptist.org/regatheringchurch>.

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