



# Ideas for working with Under 5's

for children under 5 and their families,  
at home and in the community



**NEW FOR 2021**  
from the Go Team



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**Bath & Wells**

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# Ideas and 'go to' places when working with under 5's

## Introduction

As Autumn 2021 arrives, many people are looking to open up their youth and children's provision. As such, parishes and churches are keen to re-open or extend their provision for pre-school children, so to help, we have collated a booklet of ideas that will assist you with your work with under 5s.

The Go Team have collated this resource to give you some of the key places to go to best support your work with under 5s. Remember to consider all the different development phases of children under 5, including new borns, children learning to walk, walking and those children preparing to start school. Also think about those with additional needs or special requirements when planning your groups.

If you are planning activities and events for a group you will need to adhere to the Government restrictions and guidance in place at the time, ensuring necessary hygiene and social distancing procedures are kept in place and that you have an up to date Risk Assessment. Similarly, you must have all safeguarding procedures in place for in person and online activities. Latest information and guidance can be found at [www.churchofengland.org](http://www.churchofengland.org)

As we seek to live and tell the story of Jesus, we hope and pray that these ideas will help you and provide you with some inspiration.

For further help and support contact one of the Go Team Advisers. We would love to hear your stories and experiences of using this resource. Please share them with us by sending us an email or sharing your photos with us on Twitter and Instagram (@GoTeamAdvisers).

For all the latest news, resources and online events please subscribe to our newsletter **Inform** at [www.bathandwells.org.uk/ministry/children-young-people](http://www.bathandwells.org.uk/ministry/children-young-people)



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# How to start a Toddler Group

**'It is estimated that between a third and a half of all children in this country, aged under 3, regularly attend a church run toddler group.'** (*It's just the Toddler group*, 2019)

With this in mind, it demonstrates the huge significance of toddler groups in the church. They are amongst one of the most exciting and important starting places for mission for both adults and children.

Starting a new group can seem like a big and challenging task, but here are some adapted ideas from Care for the Family to support you as you consider embarking on this exciting journey. Most importantly, start this whole journey with prayer, seeking God's will for the people in your community. Then begin to ask questions as below:

## **1. Is there a need for a toddler group?**

It's easy to see quotes like that above and think that setting up a toddler group would be a great idea, but have you consulted those for whom a toddler group may apply? Find out what other groups exist in your local area. Don't start something in opposition to that which is already taking place. Consider approaching local professionals such as child minders, health visitors and local schools, and circulate a questionnaire to seek opinions and determine if there is a need.

If all your prayer and research returns a resounding 'yes', it's time to think about the type of group you are going to form. Do you want to run a toddler group, toddler praise, or a group just for dads? Hopefully you will have gained a feel for what is most desired from your research.

## **2. What support will you need?**

We never recommend doing things in isolation. Who is going to help you and who will be on your team? For any group to be sustainable, teamwork is essential.

## **3. What are your aims?**

Once your team is established, together you need to decide on the aims of the group. To use this as a missional group, think about how you can make your toddler group distinctively Christian, but in a sensitively appropriate way. Whatever aims you settle on, ensure they are shared and understood by your team. This will help in your planning and preparation. You should also share your aims with the wider Church, after all this has the potential to be a significant part of your ministry. Review your aims annually to ensure they are still appropriate and relevant.

#### **4. When will you meet?**

Once you have established the purpose of your group, think about the best and most appropriate time to meet. Remember to consult those who you anticipate coming to the group. It needs to be at a time that works for them. Check out when other activities for this age group are going on and be sure you don't put this group on at the same time. Also, it's worth being aware that toddler groups tend to be a very fluid group. Due to the very nature of parents returning to work after maternity leave or pre-school hours kicking in, you may see a large number of children, parents, grandparents and carers passing through your doors, meaning you may need to review your meeting times annually, to be sure it meets the needs of those who are attending.

#### **5. What will you do?**

For this age group, we don't suggest any longer than a two hour session, for example, 9.30 am to 11.30 am or 1 pm to 3 pm. Activities could include free play, craft, story, music, singing, prayer or refreshments. The environment within which you hold the sessions is likely to determine the kinds of things you do. For example, if space is an issue, we suggest avoiding physical activities that involve toys such as bikes and slides. Get creative in how you use your space and think about providing sensory activities. Pinterest is full of ideas you can use.

Remember, this is a church toddler group, so don't be apologetic for sharing Bible stories or including a prayer activity, embrace those elements and do it creatively. A wonderful example we have seen in the Diocese, involved the leader using a candle as a sign that the children were gathering for their story, followed by a prayer and using a bubble machine where she explained that the children's prayers were being heard by God. The children knew that the bubble machine signalled that the session had ended. This part of the session always engaged adults and children.

You may choose to adopt a theme for the term or be guided by the church year. You can reflect the theme through play, craft, story, music, prayer and even the refreshments.

## 6. How will we resource our toddler group?

It is important to provide a variety of types of toys, which cover different ages and abilities. Furthermore, those toys should be clean, of quality and in full working order. The toys may be linked to the Bible story, but that is not essential. Ensure that there are tactile and sensory toys available. Think about babies, have you got a safe area for them?

This naturally makes us wonder where we can get suitable toys from. You may be able to get some from families whose children are moving beyond the toddler years, also, look in charity shops. Also, speak to your Go Team Adviser, they may be able to point you in the direction of some suitable funding streams. We know of a number of toddler groups around the Diocese who have received generous funds to support their ministry.

## 7. Who will do what?

You have reached the point where you have your team, you have your vision and know what you are setting out to do. Teamwork is essential. You now need to allocate roles and responsibilities. Start by creating a list of what needs doing – for example, advertising, administration, finances, preparation, cleaning, health and safety, play, refreshments, craft, story and music. Allocate roles appropriately, thinking of peoples gifts and skills. We recommend reviewing roles and responsibilities regularly.

Health and safety is an important area. You will need to consider insurance, DBS requirements, risk assessments and child protect policies. We suggest you discuss with your incumbent and safeguarding officer.



# Resources for starting or reviewing your toddler group

1. [It's Just the Toddler Group](#)
2. [How to start a toddler group](#)
3. [Baby and Toddler Groups: A guide to running and setting up a toddler group](#)

## Toddler Group Training Resources

1. [Journeying Together—a free training course](#)
2. [Building Blocks, Salvation Army](#)

## Toddler Group Research

1. [Talking Toddlers](#)
2. [9Dot Research](#)



# Organisations to support work with under 5s

1. [Early Years Alliance](#)
2. [1277 Make Them Count](#) and [1277 Facebook Group](#)
3. [Care for the Family](#)
4. [Daniel's Den](#)
5. [Talking Toddlers](#)
6. [Who Let the Dads out?](#)
7. [Diddy Disciples](#)





# Top Tips for Worship

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.** Include simple, repetitive songs in a short time of worship – consider using percussion instruments or songs with simple actions or sign language.

**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 somewhere safe (wax or electric), 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 or put them on a screen. That way adults can join in. 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.

# Resource Ideas for Toddler Group Leaders

1. [Bible Buds](#)

+ [Bible Buds Facebook Group](#)



2. [Get Owt, Salvation Army](#)



3. [OneWay Sing With Me](#)

4. [1277 Make them count Facebook Group](#)



5. [The Little Worship Company](#)



6. [Babies and Toddlers: Nurturing your child's spiritual life - the book](#)

7. Diocese of Blackburn: [30 Ideas for Bible based invitations to play](#)  
+ a range of further resources

<https://www.beducation.org.uk/children/under-5s/online-resources/>

8. [The Dad Pad](#)



9. [It's just the toddler group](#)

10. [Truth Be Told: Storytelling For Life](#)



11. [Mainly Music](#)



# Top Tips for Inclusion

Church Toddler Groups are often respected for the unconditional love and care they show to young families. These qualities will attract families who might struggle to find a welcome elsewhere. Every child is unique and individual, but some families have children with special and additional needs that need to be considered. Aside from a warm welcome and supporting the parents, here are some ways you can support and include families with special and additional needs.

**Talk** – build a close relationship with the child and their accompanying adult. Help understand how to best fully include their child.

**Partially deaf/hearing** – Make sure that a child who is partially deaf is near the front for the singing, and demonstrate the crafts on a one to one basis with the child/ren.

**Down Syndrome** – Some children with Down Syndrome will happily join in with other children without requiring any additional support or provision at this life stage, but it's vitally important to build a relationship with the accompanying adult to understand how best to fully include their child.

**Autism** –Autism Spectrum Disorder/Condition can affect the way children engage with people and the world around them. Each child will need differing support strategies, but made sure there is a quiet area and shorter activities and favourite toys available. Also work with parents/carers to provide appropriate surfaces and graphics.

**Cerebral Palsy** – Make sure that there are clear pathways amongst the toys and activities so that the child/ren can move around safely.

**Multiple needs** – You may have a child who is unable to walk or talk and/or has limited sight. Make sure there are tactile toys and lots of floor space to roll around on. Often music can be really important to children with this level of needs, but building a relationship with their accompanying adult and understanding their child's needs is the most important thing to do.

**Behavioural needs** – It is important to help the child's parent/carer feel welcomed and reassured that this is a place where they wouldn't be asked to leave. Work with the parent/carer, and become sensitive to providing distractions and alternative activities if necessary.

**Developmental delays** – This won't necessarily need any special provision, but building relationships to understand the needs is crucial. Take the lead from the accompanying adults on how to support children with developmental delays.

**Accessibility** – you may encounter children in wheelchairs. Try to keep all activities on a flat surface with space for them to manoeuvre. A toilet that accommodates a wheelchair and a carer is important.

**Diabetes** – This often doesn't require specific provision as the parent/carer/accompanying adult will look after their medical needs. However, make sure the team are aware of the child's needs and are vigilant that they don't eat anything they shouldn't.

**Food allergies** – Give parent/carer notice of any activities involving food so that they can arrange to access and provide suitable food products in good time. The parent/carer is responsible for giving the child food at snack time, but make sure all the helpers know about the allergy.

### **Additional information**

[The Additional Needs Alliance Facebook Group](#)

[Additional Needs Alliance website](#)

[All Belong](#)

[Aslan](#)

[Messy Church](#)

[Urban Saints Additional Needs](#)

[Down Syndrome](#)

[The Autism Education Trust](#)

[Childhood diabetes](#)

[Childhood food allergies](#)

[Churches for All](#)



# Top Tips for Prayer

*At its simplest, prayer is communicating with God. There isn't a right or wrong way to pray – and it doesn't just need to include words. Church based Toddler groups can help children and adults become comfortable with a variety of ways of praying – using words, actions, symbols and song. Here are some tips for praying with your toddler group:*

**Pray as a team** – find a few minutes before Toddler Group begins to pray together and ask for God's presence, help and wisdom during your session.

**Use a Prayer Tree** – people can write or draw prayers on leaf-shaped paper and hang them on the tree. [One way to make a Prayer Tree](#)

**Use candles** – give each family an unlit tea-light. Invite them to bring it forward, place it on a candle tray and mention someone or something for prayer. Only light the candles after everyone has brought them forward (and we make sure they are out of the reach of little ones).

**Sing prayers** – children often remember what they sing, so you may like to consider singing a simple Grace before snack time.

**Use action prayers** – children like to move and stretch and wriggle, so have actions to match prayers – reaching up to praise/thank God for good things, reaching out to pray for our community or the world, hugging ourselves to remember that God loves us. [Actions to go with The Lord's Prayer](#)

**Ask for prayer requests** – ask parents/carers if they want to pray for something. They can write their requests down and leave them in a prayer box. Make sure that someone has the responsibility for praying for these requests.

**Use hands** – encourage adults and toddlers to hold their fingers in turn as we give thanks for good things (thumb), pray for people who point the right way to go (pointing finger), people with big/important responsibilities (middle finger), people who care for us and for whom we care (ring finger), people who need God's special help because they are sad, or ill, or lonely, or worried (little finger).

**Say the same prayer again and again** – use the same prayers regularly so that the children get to know them. You may also like to try to use The Lord's Prayer every week.

**Print out prayers** – Some families may like to use the prayers at home with their children, so print a few out for them to take a copy home. Include The Lord's Prayer, a simple Grace and a prayer that can be used at bedtime.

# Encouraging faith at home with under 5s

Church based toddler groups are often reticent about encouraging faith at home. They are worried that by being too pushy, families might be put off coming, so here are some of the top tips for encouraging faith at home without being pushy:

**Books to borrow** – have a small library of Bibles and Bible story books suitable for babies and toddlers and encourage families to borrow them and use them at home.

**Books to buy** – At Christmas and Easter, invite your local Christian bookshop to bring along a range of Bibles, story books and books focused on the season or collate a list to share with your parents/carers. You might like to suggest that parents buy them as presents.

**Songs and Prayers** – Make copies of the songs and prayers you use so that people can take them away.

**Saying Grace** – If you say a simple Grace before snack time, make copies of various graces available for parents/carers to take away.

**Story Bags** – Bible story bags often contain a small book, some objects to help tell the story, a craft idea and a prayer. Allow families to borrow these and then refill anything that has been used up.

**Take homes** – Produce a short and simple take home sheet to help encourage the conversation on the Bible story to continue at home.

**Seasonal Prayer/Activity booklets** – When it is Advent or Christmas or Lent or Easter, put together a simple prayer booklet or activity that can be taken home.

**Celebrating baptism** – As well as celebrating birthdays, if a child has been baptised celebrate their baptism by lighting a candle. It's a gentle reminder that they are part of God's family all the time, not just at Toddler Group.

**Prayer Bubbles** – During Toddler Group prayer time blow bubbles/use a bubble machine and watch them rise, as if they are our prayers rising to God. Offer small bottles of bubble mixture and encourage people to use the idea at home.

**Social media** – Use Facebook to post faith ideas and activities that could be tried at home. Parents can choose to use it if they want to.



# Organisations that help encourage Faith at Home

1. [Faith in Homes](#)  
Easy-to-use ideas and resources to help you live out faith together.
2. [Parenting for faith](#)  
Inspiring and equipping parents and leaders to raise children in the Christian faith.
3. [Church of England](#)  
Practical ideas for linking faith and home.
4. [Flame Creative](#)  
Creative ideas for prayer and for linking Bible stories and Christian themes.
5. [Build Faith](#)  
Good ideas about faith in the home from the Episcopal church.
6. [God Venture](#)  
Lots of prayer ideas (and more) from GodVenture.
7. [Kitchen Table Project](#)  
Simple ideas to nurture a living faith at home



# Ethical and Sustainable Arts and Crafts Suppliers for Youth Ministry and Groups.



Arts and crafts activities offer endless opportunities for learning about faith and creation and as a way to express thoughts, feelings and experiences throughout our Christian journeys. As good stewards of creation and the resources God has given us, we can commit to giving due consideration to the materials we use and where possible, choose ethical, sustainable and recycled or upcycled products that produce minimal waste and environmental harm.

Below is a brief guide to sourcing ethical and sustainable materials for Sunday school meetings, Messy Church, Youth Groups and craft groups. Realistically, some products do cost more but many are very reasonably priced and planning ahead can help keep costs low (e.g. accessing sales and end of season items or bulk-buying if possible).

## Upcycle and Recycle First:

The most sustainable materials are those that are being reused or repurposed. We are blessed in the diocese to have multiple scrap-stores which for a small fee offer a wide range of materials and craft essentials.

Yeovil: <https://www.thehubyeovil.co.uk>

Weston Super Mare: <http://communityscrapstore.org.uk>

Glastonbury: <http://yeastscrapstore.co.uk>

## Ethical Kidz:

Ethical Kidz has a clear and easy to use website that provides ethical and sustainable craft products and gifts including Fairtrade and charity-supporting purchases. They also have an excellent overview of their business considerations including how they reduce their own energy use and waste.

See <https://www.ethicalkidz.co.uk/shop/fairtrade/>

## Yarn Yarn:

Specialising in yarns and fabrics from India that support women's co-operatives, Yarn Yarn provides some beautiful, handmade supplies that also reduce waste and encourage a circular economy.

See: <https://www.yarnyarn.co.uk/pages/our-yarn-journey-1>





**Conscious Craft:**

Conscious Craft offer a wide range of plastic and waste free craft materials, toys and educational materials with the aim of providing items that will last. See <https://consciouscraft.uk>

**Myriad:**

Myriad has an expansive range of sustainable products, mostly produced in Europe and they do not use air freight. They source their products solely from manufacturers who pay fair wages.

See <https://www.myriadonline.co.uk>

**Baker Ross:**

A well-known craft supplier with a good ethical policy. Whilst they still have some way to go to be sustainable, there are sustainable and low waste options including a natural materials section.

See <https://www.bakerross.co.uk>

And finally, please share your stories, questions and sustainable craft photos with us.

For more info about our Diocesan Environment policy visit: [www.bathandwells.org.uk/faith/environment](http://www.bathandwells.org.uk/faith/environment)



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