

Baptist Basics University
Providing Online Training For Christian Workers

Children's Church 101
Lecture Notes

Prepared by

Matthew B. Gage

This work is part of Baptist Basics University, an online source for free Bible and ministry courses. If you enjoy this course, please visit www.baptistbasics.org/bbu/ for more courses.

© 2008 by Matthew B. Gage

Permission is granted for reproduction and redistribution of the information in this document, so long as it is for ministry or non-profit purposes.

Lesson 1

Introduction

One of the most neglected, yet most hyped, programs in our local churches is that of the Children's Church service. Many churches do a great job at bringing children in on buses. Many churches have phenomenal teen programs. Many churches have strong and well organized Sunday School systems. Sadly, they let the Children's Church service fall by the wayside.

What I would like to do in this course is outline the spiritual, philosophical, and practical aspects of having and leading a Children's Church service. I have had to learn a lot from the “school of hard knocks” that I want to pass on. I want to be able to jump start your new program or revitalize your existing one.

There is no end to ideas or methods in working with children. Many books have been written and workshops taught on the subject. I know I don't have all the answers or a fool proof system, but I think I can pass on some information or idea that will help you.

Children's Church

Perhaps you are unfamiliar with what a Children's Church program is. It is something that my church has had in place ever since I can remember. Basically, it is a separate “church service” for children.

I am not a fan of having many separate services going on that take people out of the main service. This goes for Sunday morning, Sunday night, or Wednesday night. I really think that people should be in the main preaching service. I don't like to see separate “youth” services, children's programs (AWANA's), singles ministries, or anything else keep people out of the main preaching service. There is a time for most of these, either in the Sunday School hour or before/after church.

With this said, I do like to see a separate program for kids on Sunday morning only. There are many positives to this, including eliminating distractions in the main service and running a service on the children's level. We'll deal with more reasons later on in this course. There is really no reason not to have one if you have someone who can run it and a place for them to meet.

A Children's Church service should be fun, kid-friendly, and under control. Songs should be sung that are on a child's level. Sermons should be preached on a child's level. If done effectively, most children will be reached for Christ after coming just a couple of Sundays on a bus route.

The Harvest

Have you ever been in a service where the preacher asks everyone to stand that was saved before they became a teenager? It is enlightening to see how many people in churches that have been around for a while we saved as children.

I used to hear people say that if we don't reach children by the time they are twelve years old that we probably won't reach them. I am now hearing it said that we must reach them before they are ten. Just look at the ages of the kids that ride your bus routes. The vast majority are probably four to ten years old. You may have some pre-teens that have ridden for years, but I doubt you sign many new ones up to ride. You might even get lucky and have a few teens, and in very rare cases you might have an adult or two. The fact is that from four to ten years of age is that best time to reach children.

The World and Satan have invested a lot in reaching young people. Just look at all the filth that's out there in cartoons and movies marketed to these age groups. Look at the popular toys and music right now. Slowly, these snares bind those young hearts until they are in bondage.

We should do our best to reach these children while we can. That window of opportunity is continually shrinking. The harvest is there. Time is drawing short. It is our duty to take to the fields and labor for our Lord.

The Problem (As I See It)

My personal opinion is that most workers have no idea on how to run an effective Children's Church program. I'm glad that they see the need for it and are willing to work, but most people have no idea about how to run an effective program. They can lead a few songs and preach a sermon, but the entire package has no appeal or power.

As I said, we've got a lot of competition out there for these children. If we want to reach them for Christ and make an impact in their lives we have got to do a better effort. No, we don't have the money or resources to compete with modern media. We do, however, have the ability to better.

Times have changed somewhat and most churches have not adjusted to this. There was a day when kids would sit still and do what you said because you were an adult and they had respect for you. It's not really that way anymore. It takes some effort to gain and keep a child's attention.

The Solution (As I See It)

It really doesn't take too much to run an effective program. You don't need a spectacular building or platform. You probably don't even need a sound system. Some effort is needed, however.

What most people need is a little excitement. It is time we get fired up about reaching children. Your attitude is contagious. If you have fun, the kids will have fun. If you go through the motions, the kids will just go through the motions.

We need to be able to lose ourselves in our work. Too many people try to lead a children's program like they would a nursing home ministry. They also expect the kids to sit as still as statues and never act up. If a kid does wiggle or whisper, they crack down harshly.

Working with children is really a great balancing act. You have got to have some fun and spontaneity, but also have order and structure. What I want to do in this course is pass on some things I have observed, learned, or invented that have greatly helped my own capacity to reach children.

Lesson 2

The Philosophy of Children's Church

“Philosophy” is quite the buzzword in modern church building. It is no longer the “hows” that garner the most attention, but the “whys”. Briefly, let me give some of my personal philosophy about Children's Church.

I. We Must Reach Young People

Children are open and receptive to the message of Christ. They have yet to become in bondage by sin.

II. We Must Reach Them On Their Level

I think this is what Paul was speaking of when he wrote in I Corinthians 9:22 about becoming “all things to all men”. To reach a child, you must be able to get down on their level.

Can you imagine trying to teach a kindergartner a course on Trigonometry? It's too complicated for their young minds to comprehend. However, the fundamental steps and practices of mathematics are being instilled in their minds. I didn't officially take Algebra until the eighth grade, but I do remember doing some very basics algebra-like problems in the first grade.

It is the same in dealing with children with spiritual things. You will lose them if you preach about “atonement” or “justification”, but you can tell the story of the Cross.

III. We Must Make A Focused Effort To Reach Them

If we must reach them and we must be on their level, then it obviously requires some effort to do so.

IV. Children Will Be Saved If You Let Them

The only thing that stops kids from being saved is you not giving them an opportunity. The Gospel has not lost its power and children are the most receptive audience you will find. You may not win one each week, but you should not go very long without seeing someone saved if you have any turnover at all in your attendance.

V. We Must Train Our Next Generation To Take Our Place

We live in a very selfish society that care only about themselves and not those that follow after them. It used to be that a man would work all his life to provide for and then leave some inheritance for his children. Today, most people work to support their own habits and keep

themselves happy. They give not thought about the influence they have on those that will take their place in this world.

We will not live forever on this Earth. We have only a short time to labor here before we must go to be with our Lord. We must not take the truths of God with us when we go. We must pass them on so that they will not disappear.

I was fortunate to basically grow up in church. I really don't remember clearly the time when I was very young that we did not attend faithfully. With that said, I don't know how many times I have heard older men and women say that they wish they could say the same. They imagine how much stronger their walk with the Lord would be if they could have had such a strong foundation laid when they were a child and not made the mistakes they did in their youth.

VI. We Must Reach Them Before It Is To Late.

The window of opportunity that we have to reach children grows smaller with every passing year. I remember when many twelve-year-olds rode our buses. Now, we are lucky to keep them past ten. I am continually shocked at what some of these children have been exposed to or have experienced at such a young age.

I can personally attest to this just in my work in the bus ministry. I personally have had kids as young as three to use curse words directed at me. I had a three-year-old boy spit in my face once. I had a 6th grade boy tell two X-rated jokes before I could realize it. I've had kids as young as four singing vulgar rap songs. Just to be honest, my bus routes haven't been that rough either, so I am sure there are worse stories out there.

Though the odds are that we must reach them before they are twelve if we are going to reach them, we must also bear in mind that we humans have no guarantee of tomorrow. I have attended a funeral for a little girl that rode the buses at Clays Mill Road Baptist Church in Lexington, KY. She was riding her bike to a birthday party when she was hit and killed by a vehicle. Thank God they had record of her accepting Christ as her Saviour!

Since I first started working on this course, we have had two young girls that faithfully rode our buses to church go on to be with the Lord. On Christmas Eve 2007, their family was involved in a car wreck that killed the father and one girl almost instantly. The other sister died just a few days later. Praise God that all three of them were saved because of our bus ministry!

VI. Get Them Hooked On Church Early

Too many kids get the impression that church is dull and boring. The fact may well be that the church that they go to is. It could also be that the Children's Church service turns them off of coming to church.

There may not be any candy or games in "big church", but the attitude and excitement about church that we foster in these kids carries on. If they enjoy church and love God at a young age, then they have a good chance of keeping that excitement as they grow up.

Lesson 3

The Setting of Children's Church

One of the greatest things about working with children is that they really don't expect or need a lot. Adults are very picky about their surroundings, but kids are just not picky. This has caused many churches to use less than adequate rooms for children's church and Sunday Schools. This is a shame, and a reason why some churches have seen a decline in their bus ministry.

I think that there are some musts if you want to have a good setting for your children's church...

1. Enough space

Don't cram your kids into some room that nobody else wants to use. There should be enough space for seating for all the kids, "aisle space" for movement, and room to run the program.

2. Heating/Air Conditioning

This should go without saying, but it probably needs to be said. It is really great if you have direct control over the temperature. If it gets too warm, kids will start to get drowsy. If it gets too cold, kids get fidgety. Or should that be "frigidly"? Plus, you can use the sound of the air conditioner to drown out the noise of the kids if you are close to the main auditorium.

3. Seating

You wouldn't want to sit on the floor, either. Folding chairs work well since you can have "one kid per seat" which helps keep some space between kids.

4. Restrooms

There should be boys and girls restrooms close to your children's church room. You don't really want them accessible from the room, as it will create quite a distraction. Kids will need to go and you need to accommodate this.

5. Clean

Shouldn't have to say this one either but I'm sure I need to. Even if the kids are not concerned by it, parents will be.

6. Distance from Auditorium

You'll get an ulcer worrying about noise levels if the crowd can hear you in the Sunday Morning service. It is great if you can have the kids get a little excited and yell without worrying

if you are being a distraction to other ministries. It also necessary if you have an “incident” and a unruly or upset child needs to be removed from your service.

A few things that would help, but are not necessary...

1. A Dedicated Room

You don't need a room that is set aside only for this ministry. Fellowship halls and large Sunday School classrooms do the trick. It is nice to have one, especially if you like to do a lot of decorating or have some elaborate setup.

2. “Decision Rooms”

These are really great if you have them. Empty Sunday School classes work great. It is great to be able use these to talk to kids about salvation or other spiritual needs by using these. It is much easier to be able to sit them around a table in a quiet side room and talk to them than in front of a noisy crowd. It does work to talk to them in hallways or even “up front”, but a separate room without distractions is a great blessing.

3. No or Limited Windows

I am a big fan of natural light. If you can have some, it really helps the mood. But it is also a HUGE distraction. Kids will watch the squirrels and passing cars instead of paying attention to your program. Plus, in the rare event of a storm you will have many scared kids who are more concerned about the storm than the program.

4. Sound System

If you don't need one, don't use one. They are a distraction and a hindrance. If you have to have it to be heard, then use it. If you can be heard without one, it is much easier just not to use one.

Lesson 4

Workers in Children's Church

One of the great things about Children's Church is that it doesn't require a lot of training to be an effective worker. It doesn't even require more than two or three people to run the program effectively.

Let me deal with the qualifications of Children's Church worker first.

- **Moral and Trustworthy**

It is no secret about the problems plaguing many religious organizations today. There are a lot of sick people out there, and sadly there are even some in churches too. You have to protect those precious children at all cost.

- **Love Children**

Some people just aren't good with little kids. Some are better with Teens, and some are better with Tots. Everyone involved in Children's Church should love working and interacting with kids.

- **Spiritual**

There are people who get involved with a ministry like a Children's Church just to get out of the main preaching service. Ideally, you should only have well-grounded and mature Christians as workers. However, this ministry is a great “starter ministry” to get new converts' feet wet. Regardless, a worker's love for children should only be surpassed by their love of God.

As far as positions go, there are two main positions that need to be filled:

- 1. Preacher**

You have to have someone who can preach to young people. This is the heart and soul of the ministry. If there is no preaching than you are wasting your time by entertaining and babysitting.

I don't think you even necessarily need to be “called” to preach to fill this hole. Ideally, they should be called and trained. However, any man can fill this position if they are effective and qualified.

- 2. Song Leader**

This can be the preacher also, but it is not best. They are two totally different realms.

The song leader needs to be personable, cheerful, and exciting. They need to have fun and be in control.

Other helpful positions to fill:

1. Bouncer

If you have a very large group or a rambunctious one, then you need a person or people who are in charge of dealing with unruly kids. These need to be on patrol at all times without being overbearing.

2. Altar workers

When a child comes down during the invitation, it is best to have trained workers available to deal with them. It may not be individually, but each worker should have as few kids to talk with as possible.

3. Musicians

This is one position that I am really not that experienced with. The way that I lead singing is not exactly conducive to accompaniment. Nonetheless, it is great to have someone on the piano or even guitar. It is also very great to have them to play during the invitation.

4. Bathroom Monitors

Kids will have to go, and you need to allow for that. Don't just point them to the bathroom when they do. You need to have people monitoring these kids and hurrying them back to the service.

5. Game Director

If you want to have a lot of games and activities, put someone in charge of it.

Lesson 5

The Structure of a Children's Church

I believe that there are four major areas of a Children's Church service: Songs, Preaching, Invitation, and Fun Time. The first three are very distinct periods, while the last can be spread throughout the service if you are diligent at it. We will be dealing with each of these areas at length in their own lessons, but for now I want to cover the underlying structure of the program.

“If you don't have a program, they will.” I have said it before and I will keep stating it because it is the truth. Either you run the show or the kids do. If you want to make an impact in these kids' lives, then you have to have a good, focused program that drives them to that goal.

Because most Children's Church services are afterthoughts, very little planning usually goes on. On the other hand, due to the fact that kids will be kids, it is basically impossible to have a rigid, unbending schedule. There will be something catch you off guard, like a kid having a nose bleed, that can derail a great program. You need to be flexible, at times improvise, and keep a good flow to your program.

Here's basically the program we use at my church:

11:15 – Kids arrive
11:15 – 11:30 – Songs and Games
11:30 – 11:50 – Preaching
11:50 – 12:00 – Invitation
12:00 – ??? – Fun Time

Here's a few other pointers:

- **Avoid “dead time”.**

Nothing kills a program than giving young minds and hands time to be distracted. You work hard in the song service to gain their attention, during the sermon to keep it, and during the invitation to capitalize on it.

The worst time for this is transitioning between parts of a program. Try to have no pause between the songs and the preaching and the preaching and the invitation. I have worked hard to get the attention of an active group of kids during the song service to see it all lost when the preacher is a little distracted in beginning his sermon.

You will probably never eliminate these dreaded pauses in action, but you can work to avoid them. Planning goes a long way to do so, as well as being quick on your feet if you see it coming. Jump into a song or a quick game because having something going on is better than nothing.

- **Don't make long speeches**

This, of course, does not apply to the sermon (though they usually need to be shortened, too). I'm talking about long discourses on rules and announcements. Kids tune out quickly if they see that you are rambling on with these.

Avoid this by spreading out announcements between songs. Also, try not to explain everything behind the rule or announcement: just tell them it. By the time you say, "Now, the reason why we ask you to be quiet during the preaching...", you have lost probably a fourth of the kids.

- **Have one emcee**

This doesn't have necessarily be the ministry leader, but it is really good to have one "face" for the ministry. Ideally, this should be whoever preaches but often it ends up being the song leader or game director. That is alright if you are all on the same team and nobody cares who gets the limelight. This person will probably be the one that they kids are mostly attracted to.

This person should do the majority of the announcements that are made. It is probably best if they are not the disciplinarian of the group. They should be happy and enthusiastic.

- **Allow for extra time at the end**

You can't let the kids out until their parents or bus workers are out of the main service. The easiest way to plan for this to be accomplished is to be finished with all of your program through the invitation by the time church normally gets out. That is, if the main service is usually dismissed by 12:15, then you need to have your invitation wrapped up by 12:15 at the latest. I have witnessed too many distracted kids who are worried about their bus leaving without them. You need to give your workers time to deal with these kids without worrying about time.

I like to use this time for some fun and games. Don't build it up too much since you are not guaranteed of having it. Some simple fun games or silly songs go a long way fill ten or fifteen minutes. Also, be prepared for services that may go longer leaving you with more time to fill, such as when a visiting evangelist is in town.

You really need to have some way of knowing when the main service is over. It is great if you have a monitor or speaker in your room that you can use, but don't turn them on until after the invitation. A runner will work well, too.

Lesson 6

Song Leading in Children's Church

I think this is the most neglected area of the Children's Church ministry. A lot of emphasis is usually put on the preaching, some even put a lot of emphasis on games and promotions, but most people put little emphasis on the music. Most Children's Church song leaders that I have seen are ineffective at preparing kids for the preaching. They usually succeed in putting the kids to sleep!

It is the song leaders responsibility to “set the stage” for the service. They must draw the kids' attention into the activities and service. They must keep that attention and not let it go. They must open the kids hearts for the message that is to follow. It is a very, very important task that will make or break a service.

If you want to re-energize your Children's Church, this is the easiest area to do it in. Let me share with you some things I have learned about leading singing in both Children's Church and on a bus route.

1. Get Excited

Most people when they try to lead singing in Children's Church become monotone statues. They don't smile or have fun. Your attitude is contagious, and if you are bored the kids will be too. If you want the kids to have fun then you will have to.

2. Sing Fun Songs

Every song doesn't have to be “Doxology” or “Amazing Grace”. Sing fun Bible songs. Sing fun silly songs. Now, don't have every song as an upbeat, crazy song. You have to have a balance.

3. Have Fun Between Songs

It is okay to have a personality. Laugh and cut up. Tell a silly joke. Play little games.

4. Have Variety

There are times that you need an established routine, of which we will speak more later. You also desperately need some variety in your program. Have a long lists of songs in your repertoire that you can sing.

Lesson 7

Preaching in Children's Church

While this is probably not the least neglected area in our Children's ministries, it could very well be the area that needs the most work. It takes a great deal of effort to effectively preach to young people. Just because you've got a good truth to give them doesn't mean that it takes based upon its own merit. You have to put the truth on their level and explain it in ways that they understand.

Preaching should be the centerpiece of your Children's Church. Everything should lead up to it and center around it. The song service prepares the kids for it and the invitation reaps the harvest sown by it.

There really is not one standard method of preaching to children. I have found a way that works for me and it seems that the kids understand and remember the message. You may be able to be stationary and calmly deliver your message. I can't. That just doesn't work for me. I know that there are other equally effective methods for some people, but I want to explain my personal philosophy of preaching to children.

1. Keep it simple.

You can't go very deep into the Bible before you lose kids. Stick with the basics. A sermon on tithing may be great for adults, but David and Goliath works much better for children. Simple structure, simple truths, simple explanations. It may be impossible to lower the level of your sermon too much.

2. Use Bible stories.

I have found that I am most effective when I preach a story. It takes up time and keeps their attention.

3. Have one truth per sermon.

If you try to hammer too many points home you will confuse kids. Preach about salvation when you tell about the Cross. Preach about standing firm when you preach about Nehemiah. Preach a Bible story to illustrate one great truth that you drive home.

The only exception is probably when you add a plea for salvation to the end of a sermon that really had little to do with salvation. You should talk about salvation and give kids an opportunity to be saved every week, but you should not necessarily preach on it every week. Kids need to hear about being honest, kind, obedient, and so much more after they are saved.

4. Be animated.

Jump around. Wave your arms. Stand in a chair. Movement catches the eye and those little eyes in the audience will follow you if you move around.

5. Vary your volume.

Don't be monotone. Yell and scream when appropriate, but it is very effective to whisper also. You can't get by whispering to adults, but it will keep a kid's attention.

6. Make it fun.

Preaching doesn't have to be grave and starchy. Make it fresh and exciting. Say something a little funny every now and then. I call it the "Mary Poppins rule".

7. Avoid reading a lot of Scripture.

I am not saying don't read any, but don't read a lot. I have observed that you lose a lot of attention when you read more than two or three verses at a time. I know that it is customary to begin a sermon by announcing a text, reading it, and then commencing your sermon. I think it is best to throw that custom out the window when dealing with kids. I usually keep my Bible open to that chapter and I will read selected verses or phrases but not the entire passage.

8. Use props when appropriate.

You don't want to get stuck in a rut doing so, but you can very effectively make a point with simple items. For instance, I preached a sermon about the parable of the lost coin and I had a small bag with ten big silver dollars. Not only was I telling the story but the kids could actually see it. The more of a child's senses you can stimulate the better your chance of getting the message to stick.

9. Keep it on their level.

This applies to not only the vocabulary and structure, but also to the subject matter. If you list sins, mention being mean to siblings or cheating at school. We were all kids once and we remember what we did.

I think the best illustrations are ones that we can draw from our own lives. Tell them stories about when you were little.

While I'm at it: Avoid using pop culture or media references. Don't illustrate a point with a reference to a movie or cartoon. About the only time these need to be even mentioned is when preaching against them.

10. Avoid mass participation.

This is when you throw the floor open by asking something like, "Who can tell me what this means?" or "How many of you have a puppy?" It is very tempting to do it because

participation is a much hyped method of learning. The problem is that it is a very poor method of preaching. It is distracting and invites problems.

11. Use kids to act out stories.

I wouldn't do this every week, but it is fun to do sometimes. It is best to have someone in mind that you can trust before you begin preaching. It is also best to keep it to three or less people.

12. Don't let the kids distract you.

This is what good workers are for. Don't let kids raise their hands and ask questions. Also train your workers to deal with discipline problems.

Lesson 8

The Invitation in Children's Church

The Altar Call is the primary focus and goal of the entire Children's Church service. The songs gain the child's attention, the fun things draw them in, the preaching moves the focused audience, and the invitation time reaps the harvest.

I am not a fan of high pressure Invitations for small children. For teens and adults they are great, but small children are too impressionable. Their hearts are so tender that they will come down because they know you want people to come down. You need to proceed with caution to be effective.

Until recently, I was leery about having an open altar. However, I now think that it is a good idea to let kids come down and pray if they want to. Try not to get too wrapped up with prayer requests for grandmas and puppies because your number one objective is salvation decisions.

Many ministries I have seen also try to single out visitors and new comers to present to Gospel to them. While this is a way to increase your numbers, it is also a good way to drive children away if you are not careful. Remember that most children are very uncomfortable in new environments so take care if you employ this method.

It is best to have some music during the Invitation. A piano playing is very good, but I wouldn't get too fancy. Having the kids sing is also a pretty good way to keep them occupied, but they will also bore very quickly.

The way we run the Invitation in our church is to have the kids sing while the piano plays. Kids are welcome to come down and pray, and many do. The kids that come down for salvation or other decisions come and speak to the preacher. If a child come comes for salvation, he points them to a worker who will take them aside and witness to them one on one.

Let me give a few tips for witnessing to young kids:

- **Weed out kids who are just not serious**

If the kid can't tell you why he came down, they probably aren't ready. If they are constantly distracted or just not paying attention, it would be better to talk to them next week. Be especially wary of this if you are dealing with more than one kid at a time.

- **Stay on track**

Kids will have questions. They will at times be very distracting. If this gets out of hand, refer to the previous point.

- **Don't use a complicated Salvation presentation**

Use three or four verses. A lot of kids that come down will hardly be able to read anyway. Keep it simple: everyone is a sinner, there is a punishment for that sin, Christ died for us, we call on Him in faith to save us. Don't use big words. Use simple illustrations.

- **If they aren't following you, don't go all the way through**

I know this is similar to a point I have already stressed, but if the kid does not understand don't let them pray. Many times a kids will not confess that they are a sinner. If they don't, I might go through the rest of the plan of salvation very quickly just so they hear it.

- **Ask questions to make sure they understand**

“Now, do you know that you have sinned and broken God's rules?” “Where do we go without Jesus in our hearts?” Don't get too technical or deep, but make sure they grasp the fundamental concepts.

- **If they pray with you, go ahead and give them something about assurance and security**

Many kids will come down more than once for salvation. There is not a lot you can do to prevent this, other than really trying to nail it down the first time. Be patient with the ones that come back the next week. If they have any doubts, go through it again. If they are not sure or don't think they meant it before, pray again. I may be odd, but I usually assume they are saved unless they convince me otherwise.

Lesson 9

Fun Time in Children's Church

I think many ministries do fine when it come to the spiritual aspects of working with children, but fall terribly short when it comes to the practical. There must be a balance between the two. In Children's Church I think it can be put slightly different, that is, a balance between the spiritual and the fun.

Don't get me wrong, there are a lot of ministries out there that focus on the fun and neglect the spiritual. We lost some bus kids one time to a church that took kids to the Six Flags theme park on Sunday, instead of taking them to church. I hope they preached or did something spiritual with the kids, but it is obvious that they were too focused on fun.

It is hard to have a great balance. Instead of even trying, I've seen a lot of people just cut out one or the other. The fact is that you need both fun and spiritual in working with children. The fun creates excitement and the excitement opens hearts and doors.

Let's look at a few tools you can use to add fun and excitement:

1. Prizes

Perhaps the simplest way to create excitement is to give stuff away. It doesn't take much, like a piece of candy. I don't recommend giving away money for two reasons: (1) kids don't get excited about it unless it is \$5 or more, and (2) a two liter Coke looks better to kids than the dollar bill used to buy it.

Also, I do not recommend using what I call "survey prizes". This is when you give away prizes, accolades, or whatever by asking input from the group of kids. A couple of examples are asking whose birthday is this week or who is a first time visitor. I have seen many people attempt this, but I have never seen it work well. You will get many clowns that will kid around with you or, even worse, lie. While you are deciding who is honest and who is wasting your time, you lose everyone else.

I do like having "best kid" prizes. Have workers be on the lookout for who is behaving the best and reward them. Kids will get excited about it, it encourages good behavior, and it is relatively easy to do. Big candy bars that you can buy for a dollar work great.

2. Games

This one is a little harder to do. There are obstacles for running games: time, space, resources, and many others. I like quick games that don't require much skill or time.

A very simple game that I use is giving away candy to the first person who can do

something. I'll say: "I'm looking for the very first person who is sitting in their seat, hands in their lap, looking this way, not talking, who can..." do whatever. Some things that work well are: "... be the first person who can show me a penny", "... be the first person who can show me a map in the back of their Bible", or "... be the first person who can take off their shoes". There is really no end to the possibilities, and it can be interjected quite easily into any part of the singing time.

Just remember to have a quick setup, short instructions, and a fast pace to keep the kids attention when running a game. This is why very simple games work best.

3. Promotions

Special days go very well with Children's Church. You can build them up a week or two in advance to really build momentum. You can also string together some promotions for a few weeks and have a program.

One thing you can do is give things away to every one that comes. Toys, candy, and just about anything will work if you build it up right. Pickles, t-shirts, Bibles, and two-liter soft drinks are just a few things I have seen.

Another thing you can do is have special activities. I remember when I was little having bubble gum blowing contests and I have found that they work pretty well today too. A variation of this is to have "silly days", like everyone wearing crazy or mismatched shoes.

There is really no limit to ideas here. Just keep it moral, legal, and spiritual!

Lesson 10

Discipline in Children's Church

I know that this is not the most exciting part of the ministry, but it is one that many people do not do very well. Kids will act up and you need to deal with it. If you are not in charge, then the kids will be.

The best way to deal with behavior problems is to prevent them. There are many ways to do this, but let me give you a few ideas...

- **Isolate trouble makers**

If a kid acts up when they sit next their cousin, don't let them sit together. If a kid just can't sit still, move him to the back or somewhere else away from most kids.

- **Encourage good behavior**

Give “best kids” prizes. Give out rewards to good kids and praise them in front of the crowd. Many kids act up for the attention, so give them attention for doing good.

- **Keep kids occupied**

Kids minds are constantly active and you have to keep their attention on the program. If you can, that leaves a lot less time for them to get in trouble. A good program goes a long way into preventing discipline problems. Remember that bored kids create problems.

In spite of all your best efforts, there will still be kids that act up. Here's a few tips for dealing with unruly kids...

- **Workers need to deal with discipline, not the preacher.**

This is very important. Nothing derails your train of thought when you are preaching or leading the singing than to have to stop and address discipline issues. Leaders, make sure your workers are on the ball in this area.

- **Keep it as low key as possible**

Don't make a big scene or make an example out of kids. Don't yell across the room either. When a kids acts up, then they are already a distraction to those around them. Do your best to not be one too.

- **Have a plan for removing kids from the service**

This should not happen very often if you are doing your job and the bus captains are too. There will probably be a time were a child is so unruly that you need to get them out of the service for the sake of saving the service. Be prepared for it and have a place for them to go with people to deal with them.

- **Be consistent**

If you consistently enforce the rules, kids will know the type of behavior you expect. Don't go crazy one week and then be drill sergeant the next. Kids thrive in structure when they know what they need to do.

Lesson 11

The Total Package

We've covered many areas of this vital ministry, but we must avoid the temptation to make Children's Church a series of separate events. The entire time needs to go by seamlessly. The service should be one total package.

Your ministry, like every other, will have strengths and weaknesses. I'm am not going to tell you to neglect your strengths and focus on your weakness for the sake of "balance". That really doesn't work in real life. However, you can adjust and tailor your service to fit what you have and what you need.

That's the great thing about Children's Church. You can do practically anything you want. There are no rules or set ideas about how it should be run. I like it to be a cross between a regular church service and a bus program. You may decide to tone it down a little from what I do and do a craft or something after the preaching. As long as you are effective in reaching your goal, which should be making an eternal impact on these kids, there is really no set practice or procedure on how you should run things.

A lot of what I have said is really centered around having a large portion of bus kids in your service. Perhaps your church has a separate service for the church kids. If that is the case, you can usually tone things down quite a bit because you will probably not be fighting so hard to keep their attention. Or perhaps you are running a program for a group totally made up of bus kids. You may need to go a little crazier to keep their attention, or maybe you can enforce strict discipline.

You are going to have to find what works for you. This may mean some experimentation and a few really wild services until you find how you work best. When you find what works best for you, model your program around that. If you can keep things running at a manic pace and be effective – GREAT! If you can keep things very calm and low and be effective – GREAT! If it works, do it. Well, as long as it is Scriptural, moral, and legal.

Also, don't sacrifice your goal for the sake of running a great program or eliminating discipline problems. One verse in the Bible that illustrates this is Proverbs 14:4 - "Where no oxen are, the crib is clean: but much increase is by the strength of the ox." Solomon is illustrating the fact that if you are going to get things done, other problems will occur. If you want a clean barn, then you better not have any oxen. But if you want to run a great farm, you are going to have to clean some stalls. The same applies to any ministry: if you want to get anything done, you will create "problems". For instance, if you want to run a bus ministry, you will have discipline problems, sick kids, buses break down, and all sorts of problems. Don't focus on these "problems" - that's the price of getting things done!

Let me hit a few quick points to finish this lesson out:

- **One part of your service is not more important than the others**

Every part of the service has a purpose. The singing prepares hearts and captures attention so that the preaching will hit its target. The preaching delivers the truth and presses for a decision. The invitation encourages kids to follow the Holy Spirit's leading and make that decision or come to know Christ as Savior. The fun time adds spice and excitement throughout, really making kids want to attend. Everything has its place and is of the utmost importance in its place.

- **Keep things flowing**

Avoid the dreaded pauses in action throughout your program. Try to make seamless transitions between different parts of the service. Act quickly if you see this happening.

- **Keep everything focused on your goal**

My main goal is to see children saved. My second, but not lesser, goal is to see kids grow and advance in their Christian walk. My goal is not to occupy time or babysit. My goal is also not to entertain. Keep things in focus.

- **Pray**

I realize that I have focused much on the very practical side of the ministry. However, you will not succeed without the Lord. Bathe your service in prayer.

- **Prepare**

Know what is going to happen before it happens. Adjustments are easier made than creating entirely new plans.

- **Never stop learning**

Always look for new tools and ideas for your ministry. Learn new songs. Play new games. Keep things fresh and exciting.

Appendix A

Sample Song List

Song	Tempo
Walk, Walk the Bible Way	XX
Oh, Soldier	XXX
Knock, Knock, Rattle, Rattle	XXX
B-I-B-L-E	XX
Jesus Loves Me	X
Jesus Loves the Little Children	XX
I'm in the Lords Army	XX
My God is so Big	XX
I will make you Fisher of Men	XX
Who's the King of the Jungle	XX
Little Birdie	XXX
My Lord knows the way thru the Wilderness	X
Read Your Bible, pray everyday	XX
Deep and Wide	XXX
Devil Wants Everybody Grumpy	XX
I'm all Wrapped up	XX
Tony Chesnut	XX
In right, outright, upright, downright	XXX
I've got Jesus on my mind	XXX
God is so Good	X
Peace like a river	XX
Joy, Joy, Joy	XXX