



How to Train Children's Church Workers

by Bob Hahn

Children's Ministries Pastor at First Assembly of God, Joliet, Illinois

Although some good children's church workers have been recruited hastily and trained by trial and error, it is absurd to think of entrusting the souls of boys and girls to an untrained and/or virtually unknown volunteer. Necessity can at times tempt us to solicit and place volunteers without a strategy for screening, training, and supervising, but we must consider the seriousness of our task and try to do it right. Every church should have a well-devised plan for equipping its leaders for ministry to children. Some suggestions follow.

Pre-Service Screening

Anyone who is being considered for a children's church position should first be interviewed, consent to a background check, be approved by a pastor, and be presented with a copy of the church's requirements for spiritual service. A simple worker's covenant form can accomplish these prerequisites. This form can be given to the person as a job application and previewed in an interview with the department leader before the person completes it.

This form should include a place for the applicant's name, social security number, date of birth, basic spiritual qualifications, a statement of the church's

beliefs, authorization to check references, and permission to do a police background check. It is important for you to realize that anyone who is qualified to do volunteer work with children will have no objection to a background check. If the applicant does object, he should immediately be dropped from consideration for any position whatsoever. Churches that have good worker screening systems in place will find they have more compliments from grateful parents than complaints from would-be teachers. The well-being and safety of the children are of utmost importance for the child and for the church.

Classroom Visit

Prior to being placed in a position, a prospective volunteer should observe the group where he will be placed if he commits to Christian service. It is important for him to realize the group he is visiting may not be running smoothly because it is in need of a helper such as him. Hopefully, the Lord will give the person a calling or a burden for this group, and he will then prayerfully consider joining the staff.

When visiting the class, give the prospect a copy of the session plan so he can follow along with the group. After the session, the leader should explain what the group did and why they did it.

Encourage the prospect to pray about a commitment to help in this ministry.

Training Materials

Some good resources listed below are available from Gospel Publishing House, at reasonable cost, to present to a children's church worker for training. *Focus on Children* and *Children's Church: Turning Your Circus into a Service* are two books written by Dick Gruber, a children's pastor, which can inspire new workers to minister to kids. *First Steps for Teachers* by William Martin, *StepONE, a Guide for Teachers*, and a leader guide for the *Young Explorers* curriculum are also good materials to place in the hands of your children's church workers.

A comprehensive curriculum for training teachers called "All Church Training Series," or "ACTS," which includes an overview of the church in ministry, general Bible knowledge, doctrine, and teaching methods, is also available. Student books for the "ACTS" series are very inexpensive, and, although in-church training classes are recommended, the six books can be used as an independent study course which the prospect can complete on his own.

Churches should either require teacher training before the volun-

teers are allowed to teach or they should require that teacher training be in process before serving.

On-the-Job Training

No volunteer should be turned loose to teach a group of children without some on-the-job orientation and hands-on training. A common practice that many find successful is to: first, ask the new teacher to watch the department leader teach a lesson; second, the two of them should work together to prepare and teach a lesson as a team; and third, the new teacher should prepare and

teach a lesson while the leader observes. In other words, the leader would say, "Watch me do it, then we do it together, and finally, I'll watch you do it."

Supervision, observation, feedback, and encouragement are necessary for success and longevity as a children's church worker. One author says, "Catch them doing something good and affirm them as soon as possible." Most workers, and especially new ones, need the feedback and encouragement of their leader.

There will also be opportunities to redirect and educate as the leader sees the worker doing

things that are ineffective or ill-advised. A gentle approach is needed when correcting a well-meaning volunteer, but this should not compromise clear communication on what was done improperly and what should be done in the future. It might be helpful if the leader talks in terms of what is best for the children and avoid implying that the worker had failed. Most volunteers mean well and simply need help to see what they can do to serve their group better.

Questions For Further Study—

1. What methods are in place in your church to recruit, screen, and train children's workers?
2. What improvements in the screening and training methods are needed in your church?
3. What actions can you take to improve the quality of your church's staff screening and training methods?

This article originally appeared in *Young Explorers: Let's Celebrate*. Young Explorers is a grade-school children's church program that utilizes environmental themes for a fun learning experience. For a complete theme chart and order form, call 1-800-641-4310.

