



Jesus told His disciples that by welcoming children, we welcome Him (Mark 9:37). In the Roots Church network, children are a priority.

CHILDREN'S MINISTRY PHILOSOPHY

When children ran to Jesus, the disciples feared they would be a burden to Him. But Jesus told His disciples to let them come, and then He laid His hands on the kids and blessed them. (Mark 10:13-16)

Jesus wants children to encounter Him and experience His love and blessings. Kids are just as capable of interacting with the Lord as anyone else, and since Jesus so frequently held them up as an example to adults, they may even be better at it than the rest of us!

In Psalm 103:7, David wrote, "He made known His ways to Moses, His deeds to the people of Israel." There is a difference between knowing the deeds of God and knowing the ways of God. The people of Israel knew God's deeds—they walked through the Red Sea and saw the fire on the mountain. They told the stories again and again. But Moses knew God's ways, actually being the vessel through whom God parted the sea and being the one God called up the mountain to commune with Him.

Much of children's ministry today effectively teaches the deeds of God, telling Bible stories about heroes of the faith and the miracles God worked through them. But at Roots Church, we also want to teach kids the ways of God, drawing truths from the Bible stories that invite children to experience the same supernatural Savior.

We teach our kids how to pray for each other, share their faith, and partner with the Holy Spirit in the expression of His fruit (like love, joy, and patience) and His gifts (like healing, miracles, and prophecy). All this is done in non-spooky, age-appropriate, and down-to-earth ways so our kids can meaningfully experience and share the love and power of God.

Parents: the first ministers

We also believe the most important ministers in a child's life are the adults in his or her home. We encourage and train parents, grandparents, stepparents, foster parents, and surrogate parents to be the best caregivers they can be, raising their children to know the God who loves them so deeply. We sometimes host parenting seminars and classes, and we look for ways to come alongside parents to help when we can. Kids don't come with a manual, but the Church comes with a family.

Children's Ministry at Big Gatherings

On the first and third Sundays, during the Encounter Nights where all our house churches come together, the Sprouts Kids' Ministry meets simultaneously to the adult teaching time.

Kids remain with parents during the music portion of the meeting and then go with our children's ministers to an age-appropriate class of their own.

For security purposes, kids are "checked in" as families enter the meeting place, and parents can pick up their kids afterward using our secure system.

OPTIONS FOR CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

Best-case scenario: Certified children's ministers from our network

A church focused on meeting in homes presents unique needs for ministry to children. Older kids may want to be involved in the main house church meeting while younger kids would probably prefer something more age-appropriate. Whatever the case, we want parents to be able to fully engage in the conversation and ministry without feeling like they have to keep one eye on their young ones.

Whenever kids want to participate in the conversation with the adults, we love to have them involved. But if you find the kids in your house church need a place of their own, we have a solution: A team of trained and background-checked children's ministers from throughout our house church network who will come to your house church meeting to teach the kids, pray with them, eat a snack, and play games together. As long as someone is available at the time your house church meets, we can connect them to your group. You provide the room, and we'll provide the ministry.

For safety and accountability purposes, we require two mature people with the kids at all times (either two adults or an adult with a responsible teen). If one of our children's ministers is not able to find a volunteer to bring with them, we request someone in your house church (approved by the parents) help out for the meeting.

Whenever possible (and particularly when there's interest on the part of the kids), it's great to include children with the adults during times of worship or prayer. If you plan on doing this, we recommend telling the children's minister before the meeting so he or she can plan the schedule accordingly.

When the ages of kids in the meeting are varied, we mainly teach to the primary age in the room while also making sure the youngest can remain interested and engaged. Older children are treated like helpers in a room of younger kids and may even be invited into the ministry process by reading to the kids or facilitating a part of the meeting they can handle.

All our children's ministers are Mission-Partners of Roots Church, fully engaged in house churches of their own.

Second best situation: Certified ministers in your own house church

The best situation, described above, allows for children to have consistent interaction with the same minister every week. But when such ministers are unavailable from outside the house church, a rotation of ministers should be developed from within.

Three or more qualified, mature adults in the church should complete Levels 1 & 2 of the Roots Church children's ministry training and apply for certification. Once they pass their background check and are approved, they can take turns leading the children's meeting, aided by trusted teens or background-checked adults who have watched the Level 1 training video.

Immediate solutions for unexpected children

Options vary according to many factors, such as the child's age and disposition, the arrangement of the house, and the number of children showing up. When children's ministry wasn't planned, the ideal option, if at all possible, is to include them in the meeting with the adults. Older kids can participate in the conversation. Younger kids can play on the floor or color at a table, etc. As long as the discussion content is appropriate for young listeners, and as long as the child's parents do not look frazzled or frustrated by their children, this is a great option.

Someone in your house church with a gift of hospitality—perhaps even the host or one's spouse—should be prompted to offer hospitality to the child, offering snacks with mom or dad's permission and perhaps even providing quiet toys, coloring supplies, etc.

In situations where accommodations have been made but the child is particularly unruly or disruptive, the house church pastor should ask the parents if they're okay with having two trusted adults take the child to play in the yard, read some stories, or watch a video in another room. These adults should be hand-selected by the house church pastor based on trust and personal knowledge of their integrity. More adequate plans should be made for future weeks.

"Family house church"

Some house churches may choose to have a special weekly meeting that caters to children and parents together. In such meetings, the focus is the children, though adults will benefit too.

Kids can participate and even help lead worship. Families can take communion together. Kids can be invited to pray for adults. Adults can speak words of encouragement, blessing, and affirmation over the children. Older kids can be given responsibility to read passages of Scripture. Younger children can act out Bible stories as they're read. House church pastors can guide the meeting with help from the Roots Church children's curriculum while also including the standard "What is God speaking to you?" portion of the meeting, encouraging adults to target their sharing toward the kids.

A major benefit of such meetings is that whole families are disciplined together, which may spark great dialogue outside the meeting. It also is a great place to invite children from the neighborhood and their parents, allowing for great discipleship relationships to emerge with entire households.

A drawback, however, is that certain mature topics are inappropriate for most younger listeners, which makes such meetings non-ideal for new believers who are coming out of drug abuse, violence, sexual sin, etc. Such adult new believers need to be connected to a house church where they can be open and transparent about their struggles and temptations.

CHILDREN'S MINISTER TRAINING

There are three levels of training for our children's ministers:

Level 1: Volunteers

Roots Church children's ministry volunteers simply need to watch a 10-minute video about our ministry and their responsibilities, followed by a background check for adults or a parental reference form for teens (in cases where parents are not available as references, any qualified, trustworthy adult who knows the teen may serve as an acceptable reference).

By making this entry-level certification simple, volunteers can be found in a last-minute situation, shown the video, passed through the background check system, and immediately put to work assisting a certified children's minister.

Level 2: House Church Children's Ministers

We want anyone leading a children's meeting to feel confident and equipped to minister to children, manage their behavior, and serve families well. The Level 2 training videos are far more robust than Level 1, offering classes in classroom management, behavior modification, use of the curriculum, emergency preparedness, tips for working with various ages, and so forth.

Only those who have passed the Level 2 training are considered "certified" and are therefore eligible to receive a monthly financial stipend from our network.

Level 3: Encounter Night Children's Ministers

A third tier of training is for those who would lead children's ministry at an Encounter Night gathering. This includes two tracks, depending on whether the person will be working in the nursery or with school age children.

A person does not need to complete Level 2 training in order to watch the Level 3 material, but Level 2 Training is still necessary for those who lead or wish to receive a stipend for their ministry.

STARTING A CHILDREN'S MINISTRY IN YOUR HOUSE CHURCH

Contact the Roots Church Student Ministries Director on the Senior Leadership Team to talk about options available to you and your house church.