

Practical Family Ministry During a Pandemic

When the pandemic started and so many things changed, I was hopeful that by the time fall rolled around I would be able to implement faith formation programming the way we had in the past. I even sat down in April and created a scope and sequence for our Sunday morning and Wednesday night programming. I pulled the curricula off the shelves and lined it up in order like I would every year. I wrote a teacher training lesson and set dates for other programs that typically take place in the fall and continued to plan and dream.

However, today is July 31 and the pandemic is not over. Our church is continuing to offer online worship and no in-person programming. I am not going to be able to use any of that planning for now. Today, I need to decide how to do lessons online and how to engage our



families and to continue to create community in new ways through social media or socially distanced activities. Intermixed with the planning, I am experiencing some grief. I am sad I won't see the children on Rally Sunday or hear their laughter. I also am sad that I won't be able to interact with the many volunteers who are so much more than volunteers; they are my friends. I am sad about what we can't do.

But honestly, there just isn't a lot of time for that right now. I can still have those feelings but I need to look to the hope the future can bring as I faithfully plan with God guiding me. Today, I need to plan and prepare for how life is right now. You might be in the middle of some of these same issues and even feeling some of these same things. Please know you aren't alone. We are all in this together. Because of this, my friends from the CENetwork Board and I would like to share some ideas you might be able to use to help with programming, which may have to look a bit different this fall.

Facebook:

- **Create a closed Facebook group for your families in children's ministry.**
 - This can be a safe space to help create community for your families.

- **Sunday morning Facebook live**
 - One way to do this would be to create a lesson by piggybacking off the Children's message or the Scripture reading that was just done during online worship.
 - Go live following the worship service.
 - Incorporate some activities or rituals that feel familiar to the children.
 - Call and response
 - Prayer
 - Open the Bibles to read scripture together.
 - Teach a lesson based on the verse we read.

- At the end of each teaching time, give families an idea of something they can do at home to build on the lesson (example - create a family altar and ask families to post pictures on the Facebook page).
 - This website has great tips and ideas for how to connect with families virtually. <https://ministryspark.com/teaching-virtually-tool-set/>
- **Music lessons**
 - During school, this could be done as a brain break, a chance for children to take a break during their online learning.
 - Incorporate things families have at home to make music with (plastic cups, bowls, wooden spoons, etc)
 - Use songs that are familiar to the children.
 - If the children have learned actions to the songs, use the actions. If they haven't learned actions, they can be taught during this time.
- **Family resources**
 - Post things that are resource driven. (examples - ways for parents to teach their children to pray, a scavenger hunt, etc.)
 - It is helpful to be intentional about making sure some of the resources are aimed at families with preschoolers and some are geared more toward families with older children.

Note - Engagement on Facebook varies greatly. Sometimes families seem all in and then sometimes it is pretty quiet. Try to offer enough of a variety so families can pick and choose what they are able to do but don't expect families to do everything you offer. Remember that it is okay if you don't always have lots of views on every post. Families are busy and it feels like many of them are experiencing screen fatigue. It's okay and possibly even good if they aren't all over your Facebook group all of the time.

Socially distanced activities:

- **Reverse Parade in the church parking lot**
 - Mark the beginning of Sunday morning or Wednesday night programming.
 - Have the church staff, pastors and key volunteers line the sidewalks in the parking lot.
 - Pick a theme if you'd like and everyone dresses up. (example – luau)
 - Play music.
 - Make fun signs.
 - Encourage families to drive through the parking lot following a specific path and plan so it isn't chaotic.
 - It's a fun way to be able to "see" the families.
- **Bible Activity Bucket**
 - Families pre-register for and pick the buckets up in the church parking lot.

- See the resource list below for suggestions
- Also include an outdoor scavenger hunt for families to do on your church property, children’s worship bulletins for the current worship series, and a Family Books of the Bible Challenge.
- **Service Projects**
 - Pick a project for families to do at home.
 - Before the families start the project, invite a guest speaker associated with the organization/project to a Zoom meeting with the families. Let the speaker talk about the importance of the project and answer questions from the families. (If this involves animals, have a guest appearance by one of the animals!)
 - If families need supplies, arrange to have packets of materials picked up at church. Be sure to have clear instructions.
 - Collect the projects, donations, etc if needed.
 - Have a follow-up Zoom meeting to debrief with families. Find out what they liked about the project and how it tied in with their faith.
 - For more information and ideas for projects, check out the article “Virtual Mission Camp” at www.buildfaith.org.

Resources:

- **Ministry Links** www.ministrylinks.online
- **Milestones Ministry** <https://milestonesministry.org/> (also on **Facebook** at milestones ministry llc)
- **Spark House free resources** <https://www.wearesparkhouse.org/free-resources/>
- **Family Sunday School** by Sparkhouse on Youtube
- **Building Faith** <https://buildfaith.org/> (also on **Facebook** at BuildingFaith)
- **Saddleback kids**
https://www.youtube.com/results?sp=mAEB&search_query=saddleback+kids
- **Parent Cue** <https://theparentcue.org/>
- **Bible Bucket** <https://vanessamyers.org/summer-bible-bucket-a-summer-bible-resource-for-kids/>
- **Vibrant Faith - A Guide to Transforming Faith Formation for a New World**
<https://files.constantcontact.com/5ffa1538201/46534c54-cf68-4868-aec2-8e0c92187886.pdf>