



NOT ON OUR WATCH

Church Training Module #2

Equipping Leaders

I asked my small group leaders to tell me something they have learned when leading their groups that, when implemented, has made it easier and has made things run smoother. These are their answers.

Flexible

When it comes to kids, it's all organized chaos. Let's be honest. It is hard work, it is exhausting work, and most of the time you walk away wondering if they even remember a fraction of what you talked about with them. However, when kids get it, when they connect all the dots and all the stories and realize they need Jesus, it is the most glorious moment any small group teacher can explain. Being flexible is the best advice that can be given to a small group leader. Have a plan, yes, but understand that there are going to be times when this plan does not always work out the way you would like. Teach a lesson, yes, but understand that if children are asking questions that need to be answered, let them.

Time management

Without being aware of the time you are using you will look up and not have discussed any of your lessons. You will have talked about all the other things going on in the life of the child. However, they are at church to hear about Jesus. Therefore, the lesson needs to be discussed. Find a way to alleviate rushing through your lesson so that you can spend time on the point and on things that matter. Make sure you are getting things prepared ahead of time so that you are not spending class time on activities that are difficult for the children.

Being prepared

Children know when you are not ready for them. If you are experiencing chaos in your classroom it is probably because you are not prepared. Rather than being reactive to the chaos, when you are prepared, you can be proactive and avoid the chaos before it happens. This means looking over your lesson before you come to class and have an idea in your mind of where your lesson will go. Write down some talking points for your kids. Know what Bible passages you are supposed to be focusing on. Know what questions you will ask after the passage is read. You should never walk into class without having some idea of where you are going. Also, you should never have a class where the Bible story is not read and talked about. If the Bible Study is not discussed, what are the kids at church for anyway? Preparedness equals less chaos in your room. Preparedness equals more successful conversations about Jesus in your classroom. Preparedness equals more children experiencing the life changing power of the gospel.

Have them participate, let them lead, and give them responsibility

Children want to be included. They desire for someone to tell them they can try something. Even if they fail, letting them try is huge in their spiritual walk. If we never let them try tasks they will grow up thinking the church is just a place of service for grown ups. However, the church should be a place where believers, no matter their age, are allowed to serve in different

capacities. There have been studies done that indicate that children who serve in the church are more likely to stick with their faith when they leave the home and go to college (A child who regularly served in church while growing up has 7.5% stronger spiritual health as a young adult, Nothing Less, pg. 80). Children want to be in a place that believes in them, and that takes a chance on them. Have them participate in your small groups. Let them pray, let them take roll, let them set out the snacks, let them be greeters and door holders. Let them lead. You know who the more outgoing kids are in your class, maybe let them lead out in a part of the lesson. Let them plan the game, or the craft. They might fail, but you are creating a safe atmosphere where kids are given the chance to try things. Give them responsibilities they are in charge of, and yes they might forget, but that's ok. Give them space and let them learn through real life experiences. They will remember you forever because of that.

Give them pipe cleaners

Learning for children has changed. The way they learn and retain information has changed. Due to screen time, and the amount of information at their fingertips children are now born to be multitaskers. Therefore, the way we teach should be able to communicate the way they learn. I am not saying go out and buy 27 tablets for your kids ministry. I am saying that we need to use the right vehicles necessary to communicate the Gospel to children in a way that will impact their lives for eternity. Learning how each child thinks and what benefits them the most is our job as their teachers. Therefore, maybe if we are having issues with one child in our classroom, we are not teaching in a way that reaches that child. Give them pipe cleaners. What I mean by this is that children are not learning through lectures anymore. They need to have their hands busy. We might think they learn best when they are sitting down and quiet, when in reality they might be learning more when their hands are busy. Pipe cleaners are an amazing way to keep your children busy, but also keeping them in their seats. They can still listen while they are moving. Let them move, and let them learn the way God created them to learn.

Get them into the story & apply it

When you are teaching children it should be an experience for them. Get them into the story. Ask them questions about what it would have been like for them to be in the same situation as the people in the story. Let them think about being in the shoes of the characters of the story. Use visuals, because those images will stick with them more. I am not saying you have to go all out and decorate like it's VBS each week, but I am saying you need to put some thought and planning into your lesson. Have pictures that connect to the story. Have props that connect to the story. Have object lessons that connect to the story. And ultimately, make an application for them. Children should never walk away from a story not knowing how to apply it to their lives. Without application there cannot be life transformation. Children need to know how to apply it to their little lives. How should the story of David and Goliath change the heart of 2nd graders? Ask them what they think a verse means. What connections can we make to allow them to walk away knowing how this story is not just a story from a book, but it is God communicating through his Word to his people. Get them into the story and apply it to their lives.

Making community

One of the things I think is cool about small groups in children's ministry is the fact that it becomes its own little community. Week after week the same kids walk into your classroom. Sometimes they go to school together, sometimes not. But you are creating a community of little

people. They should be growing together. They should be growing closer together. They should be praying for each other. Do not lose sight of the fact that more is going on in your classroom than you think. Lives are being changed by the friendships that are being made, and the deep spiritual transformation that happens when people study the scriptures together. Make your classroom a welcoming place. Make it a safe place for children to come and not be afraid to ask their hard questions. Let them wrestle with the scriptures. If you are not the one answering their questions, then they will ask someone else, and that person might not have their best interest at heart. Create a community that prays for each other and holds each other accountable, and that ultimately grows closer to the Lord and closer to each other.

Practice what you preach

Teaching children week after week from a well that is dry will never work. You must be teaching from a well that overflows. When you are teaching children you should make sure you are being held accountable in your own walk with the Lord. Are you in a discipleship group with adults? Many times children's workers can hide behind the fact that they work with children to give them an excuse not to attend adult classes. However, this is a dangerous place to be. When you are pouring out you must make sure you are being poured into. If we are teaching children about the life changing power of the Gospel, then we should be experiencing the same life changing power. Through our daily bible reading and through adult discipleship we need to make sure we, as leaders, are practicing what we are teaching children. A well that gives and gives will eventually dry up.

Partnering with parents

Studies have been done that say when someone other than the child's parents are involved in their spiritual development their faith is more likely to stick beyond college (Our research has shown that beyond the benefits of the mere presence of mentors, the more adult mentors who seek out the student and help the student apply faith to daily life, the better. Sticky Faith, pg. 107). Therefore, your involvement in the life of a child is more than just a temporary influence, you are influencing them for a lifetime of faith. However, this influence works best when it is a partnership with the parents. Working as a team is the best way to go. Therefore, one of your jobs as a small group leader is to partner with parents. This means contacting them and checking on them. Check on how discipleship in the home is going. See if you can be of any help to them. Encourage them that they are not alone in this discipleship journey. You can achieve this by writing notes to the kids and their parents, maybe weekly. This could look like you texting them and telling them you are praying. We don't want to make them feel guilty, we simply want to encourage them and come alongside them as we work together to raise a generation who never forgets the things of the Lord.

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