



# CHILDREN & FAMILIES

## MINISTRY

### HEALTH CHECK



Church of Ireland ✚  
Board for Ministry with  
Children & Families





# Welcome to the Children & Families Church Health Check.

No matter what activities and facilities you have in place for Children and Families it is always good to review that provision, particularly in our ever-changing world. The needs of families in your area will change, the congregation will change, and volunteers come and go.

Our health check helps you to view your Children and Families ministry with fresh eyes, to discuss with those who lead and most importantly to hear from those who are active participants – children and parents/carers alike.

Start by gathering a small group that reflects this area of ministry and those who support it, work through each section of the Health Check and allow time to listen to each person's thoughts. Once completed those of you involved in leadership can progress to the Vision and Strategy areas of the app/pdf. This is an important stage in your health check as it ensures that you don't just start programmes for the sake of it, but that it all fits together as a road map grounded in prayer with a clear vision in mind. It will help you to answer very practical questions: What, Where, Who, When & How much.

## Getting Started:

We encourage you to put prayer at the heart of your review. Let it be the bedrock of all you do as a team, committing your journey to God at every stage and seeking Him for his leading and guidance.

## Who?

Form a small, representative group made up of members of your church. We suggest no more than 8 in your group and that it might be helpful to include some of these people:

- Children's worker (paid or voluntary)
- A reader
- A churchwarden
- A young person
- A parent
- A youth leader
- A crèche leader

## What?

This Health Check covers four categories: *Our People, Facilities, Activities and Services*. We have tried to provide you with a selection of questions to help you dig down into what you are currently doing and consider how it is going. These are not intended to 'point the finger' or apportion blame, and the tone of these discussion groups should be positive and constructive. Keep the focus on children and families and how to genuinely welcome and love them rather than on finding faults to bemoan!

## How Long?

There is a lot to think about, so how you work through these sections is up to you. We would recommend meeting twice and taking two sections at a time. This allows time to discuss the questions without rushing, it ensures you keep the momentum going without losing focus, and it also gives space during the week for the group to reflect and consider other ideas. You also need to consider the younger members of the group and their attention spans, so trying to work through this in one afternoon might be too much!

The final question in each category asks how children's and young people's voices are heard in that area. Use this to consider how, or whether, their opinions are sought, gifts are used, contributions welcomed, creativity encouraged, faith disciplined, or comfort considered. This is vital in building your Children and Families ministry – remember you are not creating a product to sell, you are finding ways to journey together in faith, all ages with equal value and thus all ages should have input to the way the Church Family develops.





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# Our Activities

***"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters." Colossians 3:23***

***Use these questions to help you take a closer look at what activities you provide for the discipleship of children and families in your church community. Think too of those children and families in the wider community who are not yet part of your church.***

**List of all the activities your church gets up to. Include Sunday clubs, weekly activities, occasional events and regular annual events. Along side each activity, note who it is for. E.g., families, children only, the whole church, the wider community, 'church children only', etc.**

**Are there activities specifically for families to come along to together? E.g. Messy Church, Intergenerational Services etc.**

**How do people hear about these activities and know they are welcome to come to them?**



**Could any current activities be developed further using the gifts people in your church community possess?**

**How do you equip, resource and support your children and family leaders?**

**How are the voices of children heard in the planning and running of these activities?**

**What conclusions do you draw from your discussions around how Our Activities can have an impact on the welcome and inclusion of children and their families? Are there any areas you can identify where you might want to suggest a new course of action?**



# Our Facilities

*"How happy are those who live in your house!" Psalm 84:4*

Use these questions to help you look at the facilities you have, how accessible they are to children and to families with young children, and how well they are being used. See this as an opportunity to identify areas which can be adapted and improved.

**How comfortable do you feel in your church buildings?**

**How easy is it for small children to enter your church building?  
Are there any hazards or difficulties you can identify?**

**How easy is it for a pram, pushchair or wheel chair to be brought into your church building? Where can they be "parked" during the service?**

**What would a child see from their height as they enter the building?**



**If you have a space for Children's activities / Sunday Club – what is it like: Is it warm, safe, uncluttered? Does it give the message that Children are valued members of the Church family or is it just a place to keep them out of the way until the adults finish their service?**

**Where can a parent change a dirty nappy? What facilities do you offer for this and how do parents get to know about them?**

**How does your church congregation respond to breast feeding during a service or gathering?**

**What are you able to offer a parent with a toddler to help them engage with the service?**

**How easy is it for a newcomer to find the toilets in your church building?**



**Can young children reach the urinal, toilet, sinks, soap, hand dryer/paper towels?**

**How warm is your church in the winter?**

**How often is a risk assessment of your buildings carried out?**

**How are children's voices heard in relation to the facilities you have and how they are used?**

**What conclusions do you draw from your discussions around how Our Activities can have an impact on the welcome and inclusion of children and their families? Are there any areas you can identify where you might want to suggest a new course of action?**



# Our Services

***"What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together... Everything must be done so that the church may be built up.." 1 Corinthians 14.26***

**Use these questions to help you look at your Sunday (or midweek) services and think through what they might be like for children and families. See this as an opportunity to identify areas which can be adapted and improved.**

**Which of the services that are held in your church do children attend?**

**Which of these phrases best describes how children are seen at these services:**

- ***'waiting until they go to their groups'***
- ***'equal worshippers of God'***
- ***'present and with something valuable to contribute'***
- ***'noisy and a distraction'***
- ***'the church of the future'***

**What is there to indicate that children are welcome as worshippers at the services they attend?**

**What support is given to assist parents in engaging their children with the service?**



**How are children with special or additional needs catered for?**

**Are there any times during those services that you identify as being 'difficult' for children, or the adults with them?**

**How much of the service can you access if you cannot read?**

**If liturgy is used, are special instructions given to help children follow it?  
Are communal passages read at speeds which those who struggle to read can keep up?**

**Are some of the hymns or songs chosen specifically with children in mind?**



**How often are children or children's issues used as a topic for prayer?**

**Are there services especially for children and their families?  
How are they different from other services?**

**How are children's voices heard in the planning and delivery of your services  
and how are their gifts used and nurtured?**

**What conclusions do you draw from your discussions around how Our Services  
can have an impact on the welcome and inclusion of children and their families?  
Are there any areas you can identify where you might want to suggest a new  
course of action?**



# Our People

***"Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it." 1 Corinthians 12:27***

***These questions are designed to get you thinking about how people of the church make children and their families feel welcome. See this as an opportunity to identify areas which can be adapted and improved.***

**Can you think of a time when you were made to feel very welcome and wanted somewhere? What were the things that made a difference to you?**

**In your church, who is responsible for welcoming children and their families?**

**Where does the welcome begin?**

**Discuss the reception you think a new family turning up at your church this Sunday would get. How would they know that you were really glad to be welcoming them?**



**What does a good welcome 'look like'?**

**Who do you expect to give an 'official welcome' to children and families, especially if they are new to your church?**

**What training is given to those who provide an 'official welcome'? Think of your Church Wardens at the doors for example.**

**How often are church members reminded and encouraged to be welcoming to children and their families?**



**Does your church have a mission statement? What does it say about children and families?**

**Is there a culture of ensuring that people are not left on their own (or not overwhelmed!) during times of social interaction, for example, tea and coffee time? How is that culture achieved?**

**How are children's voices heard in the area of welcome and connection?**

**What conclusions do you draw from your discussions around how Our People can have an impact on the welcome and inclusion of children and their families? Are there any areas you can identify where you might want to suggest a new course of action?**



***“Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and he will establish your plans.” Proverbs 16: 3***

When you read the word Strategy you might wonder what this has to do with Children and Families, but don't panic this really isn't as scary as it sounds and it is very important!

Whatever activities you run, whether its' Messy Church, Sunday Club, Toddler groups, Intergenerational Services, you need to ensure it will be supported by the whole church, in prayer, finance and people power. You need to be clear WHY you're running this activity, WHO is responsible/involved, and all the practicalities of HOW it will be resourced, promoted, run and reviewed.

At its very basic level a strategy is having in writing what you want your Children and Families Ministry to look like, what is your ultimate aim. It's a bit like typing a destination into Google Maps to see the route from where you are, to where you want to go. At that first stage, you see an overview of the journey ahead, often there'll be a few different routes you could use to get there, but at least you can see clearly the destination you're aiming for and can start to then build in all the details – how often you'll stop, how much petrol you'll need and who's coming with you.

## GOALS:

To create the basis of your strategy choose up to 4 key goals.

As with any planning ensure your goals are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic & Time-bound.

To help, use the grid on the next page, and for each goal explore the:

**What** – explain the specifics of the goal E.g. we want to engage with new parents in the town.

**Why** – In what ways will this impact your ministry with Families and Children E.g. sharing faith, intergenerational relationships etc?;

**When** – set a timeframe of when you will launch & when you will review this goal;

**Who** – ensure these goals are spread out to different people to oversee, this is not all just for the CFM Volunteer / Staff member or the Clergy but that is has the buy in of the whole church body and practical support from volunteers.

See the example below

Goal	What	Why	When	Who
To meet parents / carers in our town. Hear their needs and challenges so we can be a church that is relevant to them.	Toddler group	It enables us to create an informal environment where we can chat and support parents and carers.	Wednesday mornings 9.30am – 11.30 am Advertise from July, Launch 1st week September	Saoirse, Darragh, Rev. Michael Joan Mary



Goal	What	Why	When	Who

Now you have your goals you might choose to write these up as a Strategy document which can be distributed to your congregation. Keep in mind that you want people to be excited by this, so try to make it engaging and not a bland office document! Imagine that you are planning a road trip and you're wanting people to get excited by the journey and the things you will see on the way!



***"In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight" Proverbs 3:6***

## **What is a Vision Statement?**

Vision in your children and families ministry sets the direction that gives clarity on where you're going and what you'll do to get there—the direction and the destination. It is generally 1 – 2 sentences long.

As you develop and evaluate your children's ministry's vision, remember these five things:

- The vision comes from God.
- The vision directs the "why" for your ministry.
- The vision motivates your congregation.
- The Children and Families ministry's vision flows from the vision of the whole church.
- The vision is clear, concise, and memorable.

## **Questions to ask as you're developing your vision statement for Children and Families ministry:**

- What is your church's vision?
- How can your ministry with Children and families go in the same direction as the church?
- How do you envision your ministry with Children and Families in the future?
- What is your ministry's unique calling to meet the needs of its congregation and surrounding community?
- What does God want to accomplish through your ministry with Children and Families?

## **Examples:**

### ***Fath In Kids Vision Statement***

"Confident parents and thriving churches raising children together to trust Jesus eternally."

### ***Parenting For Faith:***

"Our vision is to see families up and down the nation equipped to confidently parent their children into a vibrant, two-way relationship with God, and to see children and teens flourish within their families, in their churches and in their communities."

### ***Jubilee Church:***

"The vision for the Children's Ministry is first and foremost for it to be a place where the children want to be! The children must experience the extraordinary, extravagant love of God and they must have bags of fun"

## **Write down 3 key things you want your ministry with Children and Families to achieve**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

## **Our final Vision Statement for Ministry with Children and Families**