

Faith and Society Files: 1277 Supporting your Church Toddler Group

Just imagine if your church discovered a way to effectively engage with over 50% of the local community. Just imagine if half the young families in your area came along every week. In many churches in the UK they already do! Recent research has found that 52% of under-4s in England (and, of course their adult carers) attend a Church-led Toddler Group. This File, with input from the 1277 group, will help your church develop these opportunities in creative ways.



In 2005, some research was carried out amongst Baptist churches to discover the different ways that churches are involved with pre-school children and their families and to capture and celebrate the diversity and extent of the provision¹. The results of the survey undertaken suggest that Baptist churches are significant providers of 'contexts for young children and their families to receive care and education', and toddler groups are the most common type of provision. Gill Goodliff's report celebrates the breadth of provision they offer and recognises the imaginative ways churches are supporting young children and their parents/carers and seeking to share God's love.

Be aware of the need

Even the smallest of children matter to God. When people were bringing the little children to Jesus he said to them *"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."* Mark 10:14.

With over 3.7 million under-5s currently in the UK² and a rising birth rate there's a massive and growing opportunity for parent and toddler groups. Thankfully, over the last 50 years more and more churches have been responding to this need. In 2009 a report by the Children's Workforce Development Council³ estimated that 55% of all the churches in England were running toddler groups. And the same report showed just how effective they are at providing a crossingplace with pre-schoolers. They found that a whopping 52% of all under-4s were part of a church-based parent and toddler group.

The great thing about toddler groups is that each toddler needs to bring an adult with them. Thus, they don't just reach the pre-schoolers but, through them, they reach their families, extended families and possibly other adult carers such as nannies or childminders. This is a whole family ministry with the potential to either directly or indirectly provide a crossingplace with a huge sector of the population.

But, despite the large numbers of churches running toddler groups, in many areas the demand for places still outstrips the provision. Many churches have responded to this by running several sessions and even then there are often long waiting lists!

Be focussed on the vision

Given that toddler groups have been shown to be capable of attracting over half of the pre-school population, the challenge to those who are running or intending to run a toddler group is to make the most of the opportunities that this affords. There are many valid reasons for running a toddler group, including:

- To bring people in to the church building so that they feel comfortable there
- To enable you to get to know the local preschoolers and their carers, form deeper friendships and show them God's love
- To provide early years education opportunities through play, storytime, songtime or craft sessions
- To provide information and support for families, supporting them in their parenting and other life issues
- To introduce the children (and adults) to simple Biblical truths during the sessions
- To encourage the children (and adults) to engage in other church activities such as Sunday School or equivalent groups
- To reach the wider family including older siblings and dads and introduce them to all the church has to offer them.

Some toddler groups are run as a community service, simply providing somewhere for pre-school children to play whilst their carers can relax and chat. Some have additional educational or social aims, akin to Children's Centres. Some see themselves as an outreach or evangelistic opportunity, bringing people into the church or to Christ. Most groups, however, will have a mixture of these aims and the great thing is that each group can be different!

1 Pre-school Provision in Baptist Churches - A Report for the Baptist Union of Great Britain by Gill Goodliff, Dec 2005

2 Office for National Statistics Monthly Digest of Statistics No770, Feb 2010 www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_compendia/MD-Feb-2010/MD-Feb-2010.pdf

3 Children's Workforce Development Council Report 'More than Sundays' 2009 www.familymatters.org.uk/doc/More_than_Sundays.pdf

Even within the same church one toddler group session may have a different emphasis to another.

If your aims are very specific a specialist toddler group could be the answer. Groups have been set up for new mums, vulnerable families, teenage mums, postnatally depressed mums, mums with twins, mums with special needs and for children with special needs. There are even 'Who let the dads out?' groups for men. If your aim is for deep relationships then a small group with lots of activities such as a pre-school music class or craft club might be preferable to a traditional parent and toddler group. If your aim is to link people into other church activities then you may need to focus on the additional activities that build bridges into the church such as joint outings with the Sunday School or toddler services.

A clear vision will enable you to focus on those areas that make the most difference and prevent you from wasting time on things that, whilst good, might not fulfil your aims.

'Jellytots has been a gateway for a number of families to come back to church.'

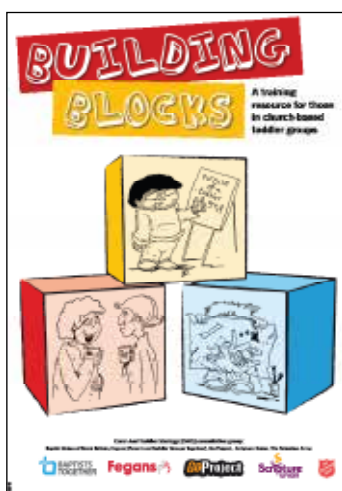
Jellytots meets weekly with a regular attendance of 25-30 families from a wide range of backgrounds. Group leader Belinda is helped by a team of seven volunteers, who try to model good parenting and reflect Jesus' love to the families who come. Mums, dads and childminders are amongst the regulars, and some have gone on to join Alpha groups and come to faith. Jellytots has also enabled families in need of particular support to be linked to the church's community project 'Youth and Families Matter'. This offers a range of activities and events to support children, young people and families in the local community.

Belinda Rhodes

Testwood Baptist Church, Southampton

For help in thinking through your vision for your group then check out the *Building Blocks* training resource for toddler group leaders.

Building Blocks: a training resource for those in church-based Toddler Groups⁴



Building Blocks has been written by members of the Carer And Toddler Strategy (CATS) consultative group which includes members of Christian mission organisations and practitioners from across different denominations, including Baptist

Union of Great Britain, Fegans (Parent and Toddler Groups Together), Go Project, Scripture Union, and The Salvation Army.

Between them, the contributors have a vast array of knowledge, understanding and bright

ideas for running and resourcing toddler groups. More importantly, they share an earnest desire to encourage, equip and support all those who are, or who plan to be, involved in leading such groups. It is their hope and prayer that, under the guidance of God's Holy Spirit, you will be inspired, helped and encouraged.

The complete Building Blocks resource includes the Training Course, along with modules on:

- Mission through carer and toddler groups
- Faith development
- Sample toddler services
- Music time
- Top tips for storytellers
- Learning through play
- Worship, the under-5s way
- Resource bank

⁴ Free download from the Baptist Union website www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/366567/Faith_and_Society.aspx

As a young Baptist Minister, it took Richard Hardy (Director of The Entheos Trust) some years to realise that every week some 50-60 parents with toddlers from the local area gathered in his church. Furthermore, they were not only willing but eager to do Bible Crafts, hear Bible stories, sing Christian songs and even say prayers! Richard explains:

'Of course I knew that the Parent and Toddler Group existed. In fact I was glad it was there... but also very glad I never had to attend! For me it was a scary place. It had that potent cocktail that, as a male church leader, I tended to avoid - young women and small children.

'To my shame, I saw it as unimportant, even trivial. I saw it as just a few mums gathered together to natter about kid's stuff. Somehow I had segregated the group from the rest of the life and mission of the church. That was until I visited as part of a Church Mission Audit. I popped in to ask how many of those present attended church.

'I sort of knew that 80% of them didn't. I also assumed that most of them weren't really interested. But when I asked the question, to my surprise, every single parent put their hand up.



'I was shocked! In my confusion I asked "Which church?"

'They looked at me as if I was mad and said in unison "This one".

'Suddenly and unexpectedly I was forced to change my view of the group. Despite the fact that they were not yet believers, they saw themselves as part of the church I led.

'I began to realise that the Parent and Toddler Group was not some fringe activity but, in the economy of God, a valuable part of his mission to our community. More people from the surrounding area attended this group every week than any other in the life of the church.

'As a church, we began to ask ourselves key questions:

- What is the Parent and Toddler Group for?
- How can we deepen our relationships and draw those who attend further into the life of the church?
- How can we show greater love and support?
- How can we get to know the rest of their friends and families?
- Without a doubt, the most important question we asked was, how can we support, value, encourage and resource the Parent and Toddler Group Leaders to be more effective in their ministry?

'The answers we came up with not only changed the church's attitude to the group and its leaders, but also the whole church strategy for mission.

'It was this final question that made me want to do what I can, not just for the group in my church, but for all the other groups in the UK.



'It is the chief reason why 1277⁵ exists. It aims to bring together all who have a heart to see Toddler Groups make a difference in our society. 1277 seeks to represent the views, concerns and interests of Church-based Toddler Groups with those in authority both in Westminster and around the country.'

By registering your group and receiving information from 1277 you will become part of a movement that together will make a difference to our society; by reaching one parent and one toddler at a time.

www.1277.org.uk

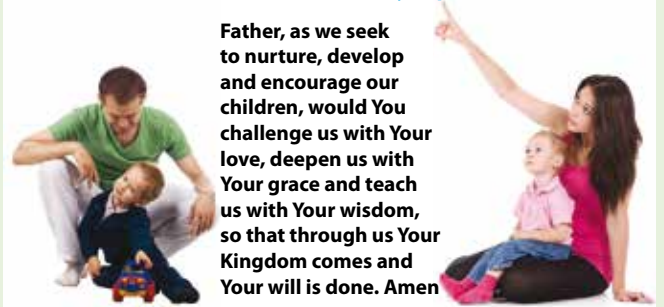


5 A consortium of churches and agencies supporting church toddler groups. The consortium is called 1277 as, on average, a UK child has just 1,277 days between birth and starting nursery education.

Day of Prayer for Toddler Groups

This annual Day, promoted by the 1277 group, takes place at the end of National Family Week. Why not encourage your whole church to pray for all those involved in toddler groups - leaders, volunteers, parents, carers and children - and the opportunities that these contacts bring?

I commit to pray for parent and toddler groups, their leaders and the families and communities they impact.



Father, as we seek to nurture, develop and encourage our children, would You challenge us with Your love, deepen us with Your grace and teach us with Your wisdom, so that through us Your Kingdom comes and Your will is done. Amen

Be the best that you can be

When Paul wrote to the Colossian slaves he said *'Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving'*. Colossians 3:23,24

Running a toddler group is never easy and at times it may feel a bit like slavery in Colossae! However, if we are committed to 'working at it with all our heart' we should be striving for excellence in our groups. This does not necessarily mean more activities, but rather that we aim at best practice in those that we do undertake.

If you are setting up a group then read the *Good Practice Guide for parent and toddler groups*⁶. It contains helpful advice on all aspects of running a toddler group and some sample documents to assist you in getting started. If you are running an established group it is still good to review things from time to time, and Playtime's *Best Practice Questionnaire*⁷ will help you to do this.

- 6 Free download from Care for the Family's Playtime Project at www.engagetoday.org.uk/playtime/good-practice-guide
- 7 Free download from Care for the Family's Playtime Project at www.engagetoday.org.uk/playtime/best-practice-questionnaire

Information on key aspects of running a toddler group

1 Venue and Statutory requirements

Most toddler groups meet in their church or hall and have very little choice over the room that they use. You may need to adapt your plans to fit the space available but remember that toddler groups can operate in many different ways. If you do not have much space you could consider running a 'bumps and babies group' for expectant and new mums. If you have not got anywhere to store toys you could run a toddler music session or a story and craft session. The lack of an ideal room for a traditional toddler group just means you may need to think a little more creatively!

The room needs to be clean, dry and warm. Make it as welcoming as you can. The small touches can make all the difference here. For example an area set aside for pushchairs and buggies will keep the room clear and safe for the children to play in, whilst a proper nappy changing unit in the toilets will send the message that you are equipped for babies.

There are some statutory requirements. Most will be covered by the church if you are meeting in one of their rooms but it is worth checking:

- Fire regulations
- Health and Safety including first aid and accident reporting
- Food hygiene (if you provide snacks)
- Public liability insurance (the Pre-School Learning Alliance (PSLA) offers policies for nurseries)
- Child protection
- Data protection (for any records that you keep)
- Copyright (for any songs that you sing, books that you photocopy or videos that you play)



As yet there is no requirement for toddler groups to be registered or inspected. This is because the children remain the responsibility of the adults who bring them. It is important that you stress this in your literature, including any registration forms, and that you never assume responsibility for any children other than those that belong to you. This also means that there are no staffing ratios although best practice would suggest a minimum team of three for any group.

If you would like to pay your toddler group leader then you will need to comply with additional employment laws. The church may be willing to employ them as a family worker or you can set up the toddler group as a business or charity (the PSLA has information on this). See also the Baptist Union Corporation guidelines L08 on employment⁸.

2 Advertising

Many established groups are bursting at the seams and do not need to formally advertise as their waiting lists are kept full by word of mouth. However, if you are setting up a new group or would like to make contact with new families then you can put up posters in places frequented by local families – the baby clinic, doctor's surgery, library, newsagents or school nursery. It is also worth contacting the health visitors for your area as they are in touch with nearly every family with pre-school children. Finally, you can place details of your group on netmums.com for free.

⁸ Free download from www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/368689/BUC_Guideline_Leaflet.aspx

3 Welcome

The difference between a *good* toddler group and a *great* toddler group is nearly always down to the welcome. However good your advertising is, people will not stay if they do not feel welcome. Conversely, you may feel that you have not got the latest toys, but the families will return if their friends are there.

First impressions count! Newcomers should be welcomed individually, shown around and given an idea of what happens during the session so that they know what to expect. Make it clear what your charges are and whether they are expected to help out in any way as uncertainty in these areas causes unnecessary stress. Try to introduce them to some of the friendlier members of the group or even find someone that they have something in common with. It is good to produce a welcome pack for newcomers so that they have all the information to take home – and something to browse if they do find themselves alone for a while! Later on, if you have a 'circle time', you can welcome any new children (and adults) by name and introduce them to the whole group. Try to find the time to say goodbye as they leave and ask whether they enjoyed the session. And, of course, recognise and welcome them when they return the following week!

It can be difficult to get to know every person if your group is large and volatile. Still, there are things that you can do to make it more manageable. If one of your team is particularly gifted at remembering names and faces then relieve them of other duties and nominate them to be your 'welcomer'. They can take the register as people arrive, identify the newcomers, greet the regulars and spot anyone who is looking lonely or in need of a little tlc. If you have a team of helpers or even church members who attend with their own children you could divide up the room so that they have responsibility for socialising with the people in one particular area. Or you could divide up the names on the register and give them a list of people to pray for and look out for. These will all make the task of getting to know people in a large group more manageable.

Of course, once people feel welcome they should relax and begin chatting to each other. It's a great feeling to look around a busy toddler group and see all the parents chatting away while their children are playing happily because that is when you know that you have got your welcome right.

4 Toys

Your toys should be clean, safe and age-appropriate. It is not necessary to have brand-new toys and in fact some of the more 'retro' items may prove more interesting to the children as they are less likely to have these at home. It is also not necessary to fill the entire room – in fact, if you have a lot of toys you might like to rotate them so that each week there are different things to play with. If you are buying toys then try to buy the sort of items that the children do not have at home, for example, if you have the space and can store them, you could provide the large stuff that they could not fit in their front room.

If you are able to divide up the space, it is nice to have a separate safe area for babies and breast feeding mums, a quiet library corner and an open space for the ride-on toys. You will also need a separate area for any craft activity that you run during the play session.





5 Refreshments

Most toddler groups serve tea and coffee to the adults and squash and biscuits to the children. However, some groups make their families feel really special by treating them to filter coffee, chocolate biscuits, homemade cakes or healthy snack alternatives! It is worth thinking carefully about the safety aspects of hot drinks with small children and perhaps changing the time or the way that you serve them to minimise accidents.

6 Craft time

This can easily turn into the most time-consuming part of running a toddler group so it is worth thinking about whether it actually helps you to fulfil your aims for the group before you launch into making vats of playdough! Having said that, it tends to be one of the most popular activities with both children and adults (who know that someone else will be responsible for clearing up any mess), it has educational benefits and it provides lots of opportunities to chat one-to-one to the parents and carers. And if you choose your crafts carefully you can minimise the amount of time required for preparation, supervision and clearing up.

There are lots of simple craft ideas on these websites:

- www.engagetoday.org.uk/playtime
- www.dltk-kids.com
- www.activityvillage.co.uk

If you want craft ideas that are linked to a bible theme then try *Glitter and Glue*⁹ or *Make and Do*¹⁰. To make life easier you can buy materials and even complete kits from Baker Ross¹¹ or use character printables, for example, from CBeebies shows¹².

7 Music time

In addition to singing nursery rhymes you can use your music time to have fun with action songs, dance and instruments. You can sing unaccompanied or to an instrument or CD. The educational benefits of music for pre-school children are well documented and it is always a popular part of any toddler group!

Many groups also use their music time to introduce well known Christian children's songs alongside the nursery rhymes. These can provide a moral framework, promote Christian values, and even introduce people to God. And when you sing it isn't just the children who are listening – the adults will be learning too! Good ones to start with could be 'The wise man built his house upon the rock' and 'Who made the twinkling stars?' but if you would like some for different themes then look in *Say and Sing*¹³. If you are lacking in confidence, Julia Plaut has some top tips for running a music time in her article in *Building Blocks*¹⁴ - and remember that the under 5's are unlikely to care whether you can hold a tune as long as you sing with enthusiasm!

If you would love to run sessions focussed on music then check out *Baby Song*¹⁵ and *mainly music*¹⁶.

9 Scripture Union (2002) ISBN: 18599 9599 3

10 Scripture Union (2007) ISBN: 18442 7272 9

11 www.bakerross.co.uk

12 www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/makes/shows

13 Scripture Union (2006) ISBN: 18442 7245 1

14 Download from www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/366567/Faith_and_Society.aspx

15 See www.engagetoday.org.uk/playtime/music-time/baby-song

16 See www.engagetoday.org.uk/playtime/music-time/mainly-music and www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/366580/Faith_and_Society.aspx

Music Makers

Sally went to the group Music Makers and her family came to faith through it.

Music Makers runs several times a week in the hall at Cosham Baptist church. It is a group aimed at Mums or Dads, Grandmas or Grandads with their pre-school aged children or grandchildren. A friend introduced Sally to the group in 2005 and she went along with her son aged 4, and twins aged 3.

Music Makers encourages the children to sing and make actions to familiar songs. Babies are often asleep in their prams whilst Mums are able to share time with their older children. Everyone joins in with clapping and skipping, marching and singing, with the children leading from the front. The children quickly learn to help by getting mats and musical instruments out.

After half an hour, the music session finishes with the hokey cokey, which always provides lots of giggles. Following this the children all get to sit up for a juice and fresh fruit. They then enjoy half an hour of play whilst the Mums chat over a hot drink and cake.

“Music Makers was the start of my journey to church and faith”.

Vanessa and Mandy run the groups with a small team of volunteers. Children’s birthdays are always marked by singing ‘Happy Birthday’ and handing out little sweets. Christmas and the end of the summer term are always celebrated by all the groups coming together for a party.

Initially Music Makers provided an opportunity for Sally to meet with other Mums, but ultimately it opened the door into Cosham Baptist Church. Six weeks after first going along to Music Makers, she was given a note about other activities at the church. That Sunday she went along to the family Service with her three sons and older daughter. They were given such a warm welcome. The boys recognized faces from nursery and music Makers and her daughter happily joined her classmates from school.

Since then they have all become more involved in the church. The twins go to C Time, Tom goes to Kidz Klub, Sally goes to a Discipleship Group and daughter Molly has a full social life revolving around church – Energize, Soul Sister and helping at Kidz Klub. “Music Makers was the start of my journey to church and faith”.



8 Story time

Jesus himself often taught through stories. Quite apart from the educational benefits of reading to the children and the social benefits of sitting in a group, this is another fantastic opportunity to introduce some biblical teaching to both the children and adults. You don't have to read a bible story every week – there are some great books out there which give sound moral teaching or instil kingdom values without even mentioning God.

It can be a real challenge to keep the children sitting still during storytime, let alone the adults! However, if you keep the story short (you can always adapt it by skipping a few words or pages), read with expression, use plenty of visual aids and link it to a take-home activity or craft you will be able to develop listening skills that will serve them well once they start school.

Lion Hudson has a series of *My very first BIG Bible stories*¹⁷ for reading to groups, and you may be able to order other large format books for group reading from your local library.

9 Supporting families

Your toddler group could become a source of information for families. Collect leaflets and get to know about local services. Set up a lending library of books and DVDs on parenting, marriage and life issues which families can borrow. You could start with a 'book box' from Care for the Family¹⁸ and add in other titles as they are donated or recommended.

10 Newsletters

These help you to give the group an identity and make the parents feel as if they are part of a well-run group. You will also be able to email or post a copy to those families that you have not seen for a while to keep them in touch with what you are doing and remind them to drop in again sometime. This is good for relationship-building.

¹⁷ Range of titles available from www.lionhudson.com

¹⁸ See www.careforthefamily.org.uk/bookbox

¹⁹ See www.engagetoday.org.uk/playtime/smalltalk/smalltalk-archive



Care for the Family produces newsletters for toddler group mums and dads called *Smalltalk*¹⁹. They contain a little bit of information on a particular topic such as Healthy eating or postnatal depression and some links to relevant organisations. They are designed to initiate discussion and could be printed on the back of your own newsletter.

Other Activities

There are so many other activities that you could offer the families who attend your group that it is vital to prayerfully consider what will be of most value before starting anything. You might like to consider:

- Toddler services
- A second-hand clothes or toys swap-shop
- A children's book, toy or DVD library
- A visit from a professional photographer (this is also a fundraiser)
- Outings and social events for the toddler group
- Family fun days (including older siblings)
- Social events for the mums and/or dads
- Fundraising or charity events eg a Christmas bazaar
- A MOPS (Mothers Of Preschoolers) group (see www.mops.org)
- Parenting discussion groups and courses
- Marriage enhancement courses
- Alpha or other basic Christianity courses
- Visits from outside organisations to provide information and support, for example on baby weighing, baby massage, baby first aid, speech and language development, toilet training, advice for mums on going back to work or dealing with debt.

Be mindful of mission

“But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him.” 2 Corinthians 2:14

The success of toddler groups in attracting people who do not otherwise have anything to do with the church provides an amazing opportunity for us to grow our churches. Through attendance at the group these families will often consider themselves to be a part of the church.

“I remember on one occasion asking the toddler group if they would give me a show of hands if they attended church. I knew that about 80% didn’t attend on a Sunday. When they all put their hands up, it threw me. In the shock of the moment, I asked “Which one?” There was a moment of stunned silence. Then they said, “Well, this one, of course.” It really hit me then - church isn’t restricted to the nice crowd that fill the pews on Sundays. ‘Belonging’ starts right there in the toddler group...”

Richard Hardy, Baptist Minister

They can build positive, supportive relationships with the Christians who run the group. They may begin to explore spiritual issues and be willing to discuss these. They may start to attend other activities, including Sunday services. Finally, they may come to faith and join the congregation. Laurence Singlehurst’s book *Sowing, Reaping, Keeping*²⁰ is an invaluable source of practical advice to help you sow the seed of faith, to reap the harvest and to nurture the faith as it grows. The new resource *Wellsprings*²¹ offering a course of refreshment and pampering is also an ideal way to engage with ladies at your toddler group.



Research conducted by Colin Cartwright in 2004²² showed that over half of the church toddler groups in the Central Baptist Association (CBA) who responded to the questionnaire had seen people making the transition from the group into other church activities in the last five years. The subsequent report *Grow toddler groups, grow churches* listed five factors that increased the evangelistic impact of toddler groups:

- **Longevity** – the longer a toddler group has been established, the more likely it seems that parents and carers will make the transition to other church activities. This is an encouragement for newer toddler groups to persevere.
- **Alpha** (or equivalent introduction to the Christian faith) – two thirds of churches who run a course like this alongside their toddler group have seen a crossover. However, there was a big perception amongst the toddler group leaders that there had not been a big take-up for these courses.
- **Parenting groups** – arguably the second most important factor. Virtually all the churches running parenting groups alongside their toddler groups had seen people making a transition to the wider life of the church.
- **Christian parents** – nearly all of those churches who identified a crossover said that they had Christian parents who either helped to run or were simply attenders of the church toddler group. The impact of friendship evangelism cannot be underestimated. However, a number of churches said they had Christian parents who were part of the toddler group but were not seeing a crossover, which indicates the need for help with personal evangelism.

20 IVP (2006 - 2nd edition) ISBN: 18447 4138 9

21 *Wellsprings* published by the Baptist Union of Great Britain - see: www.baptist.org.uk/wellsprings

22 Appreciating the art of toddling – Exploring the Mission Potential of Church Toddler Groups, Sabbatical research by Colin Cartwright, 2004 - www.centralba.org.uk/toddlers.shtml

- **Size of church** – this does not seem to have been a significant factor. However, the proportion of churches with over 200 members which had seen a current crossover was twice as big as the larger churches that had not witnessed crossover. Smaller churches will not always have the resources to be able to run the most successful combination of both Alpha, or another course that introduces the Christian faith, and parenting groups alongside their toddler group. However, other factors, like the strength of relationships established, the warmth of the welcome, the relevance of the worship at church and the faithfulness of the witness are just as important.

More recent research from Sue Stout²³ revealed similar statistics; over the last five years 60% of her sample groups had seen parents attending enquirers' courses and 52% had seen parents becoming Christians. In addition to the provision of Alpha courses and small group activities such as parenting courses she found three other significant common factors in these groups were:

- **Clarity of aims and objectives** – evangelism was a stated priority.
- **Support from the Church leadership** – there was recognition, value and appreciation by the wider church and particularly the leaders.
- **The importance of prayer** – regular prayer was viewed as a high priority.

She observed that "Encompassing these factors was the all-embracing need for authentic friendship and relationships of integrity, which take time, effort and patience."

Our toddler groups provide a crossingplace with over half of the preschool population and have the potential to be a huge mission field to our churches. Let's 'grow toddler groups, grow churches'!

²³ *Toddling towards faith*, Susan Stout, 2009 www.hmec.org/TG_Survey.html

²⁴ See www.youtube.com/watch?v=--zfl3Lazk8

²⁵ www.bristoldiocesecyp.org/index.php/parishes/resources/item/255-creativeprayerideas

Creative Prayer

These ideas were shared by participants at the Children's Ministry 'Teaching Children to Pray' certification workshops.

Five-Finger Prayers²⁴

- Thumb - pray for those closest to you
- Index - pray for those who is far away
- Third - pray for our leaders
- Fourth - pray for those who are sick
- Smallest - pray for someone who is little

Sweet Prayers

Use coloured sweets to remind children of important things to pray for:

- Blue or purple - thank God for being the king of my life.
- Brown or black - ask God to forgive my sins.
- Red - thank God for the forgiveness he gives for my sins.
- Green - thank God that he is changing my life and helping me grow.
- Yellow - thank God for heaven.
- Pink - tell God I want to follow him.

Bouncy Ball Prayers

You can apply the same principle as the sweet prayers. Purchase inexpensive bouncy balls at a pound store and have the colours represent different types of prayer. When you bounce the ball to the child, whatever colour they catch is the prayer they pray. Let them take the balls home to remind them of the importance of praying.

The following ideas are from Daniel Jones, Youth and Children's Advisor, Diocese of Bristol²⁵

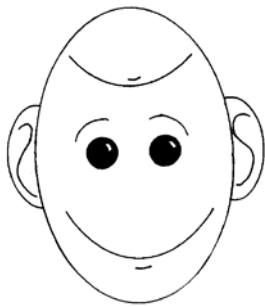




Happy and Sad Face

You will need a large face that looks happy one way up and sad the other way up.

Show the happy face first and ask the children what has made them happy in the last week. Pray about the list or say a one-line thank you prayer for each one.

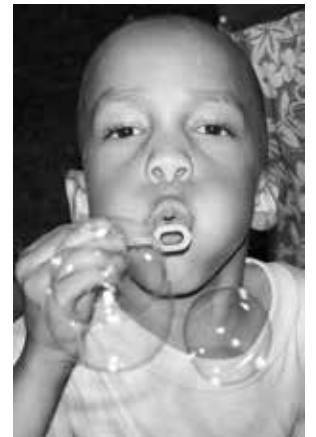


Turn the face upside-down and ask if anything sad has happened in the last week. Perhaps there are people who are ill and need praying for. Pray for this list.

Finish by saying that God always knows how we feel, whether we are happy or sad and thanking him for being just as close to us in the good times as in the bad. Perhaps everyone could take a happy/sad face home to remind them.

Bubble Prayers

Ask the children what/who they would like to pray for. Blow a bubble and say a simple one-line prayer as you watch the bubble, as, just like our prayers, it rises and vanishes.



Other resources

100 Creative Prayer Ideas for Kids: (And Grown Ups Too)

Author: Karen Holford

Publisher: Pacific Press Publishing Association (2010)

ISBN: 978 08163 1968 8

The **HOPE website** includes a number of prayer ideas - see: www.hopetogether.org.uk/Groups/194931/HOPE/Prayer/Prayer_Resources/Prayer_Resources.aspx

Care for the Family's Engage **Playtime** initiative has developed three toddler services for Christmas, Easter and harvest. Download these from: www.engagetoday.org.uk/playtime/resources/toddler-services

Praying with your Toddler Group

Ten top tips for helping children to pray²⁶

Children's age and development affect what and how they pray. Younger ones tend to focus on 'please ...' but as they move on through our age group, they mature and come to understand and say 'thank you ...'. By the time they are about six, they will be able to say 'sorry ...' prayers in a way that is meaningful for them (when they start to have the maturity to distinguish right from wrong and to start to take responsibility for their actions). Select your prayer activities to suit the children in your own group.

- 1 When praying on behalf of very young children, use words and phrases which are appropriate for the children's level of development and understanding.
- 2 Long sentences and complex structure don't work: use short phrases that the children will understand.
- 3 Remember that children enjoy and learn by repetition and can learn by hearing the same words again and again; familiarity also brings a sense of security which adds to the pleasure and confidence of the prayer experience.
- 4 Children enjoy prayers where they repeat a simple phrase.
- 5 They also enjoy repeating each line of a prayer after a leader.
- 6 Children don't have to always be speaking when they pray - sometimes they can be encouraged to pray silently or to listen when a leader prays: if the latter is happening, model the type of prayers you would like the children to use - chatty, relevant and brief! Your example can show the children that they can talk to God anytime and anywhere.
- 7 Prayer doesn't have to be restricted to particular moments in your session.
- 8 Young children have a short concentration span so prayers need to be kept brief but they also like prayers about things they are interested in: include the children's own news and views in the prayers - it doesn't all have to be formal or follow a set pattern.
- 9 Young children often enjoy saying their own prayers and can be encouraged to do this in a way that helps others by looking up and speaking loudly, rather than muttering or putting hands over the mouth; those who are not so confident can be encouraged by using pictures, passing round an object etc.
- 10 Use your own creativity and think about imaginative ways of making prayer not just relevant but also special to our young children.



Welcoming Children with Additional Needs into your group or setting

We have a significant, privileged role to play in sharing the inclusive nature of God's love, including children with additional or special educational needs (SEN) and their parents or carers. It is also important to note that the parent may be the one with Special needs; this practice will be helpful to them too.

- Parents/carers with a child with SEN needs can often feel isolated and alone.
- The child will come before the condition and so we refer to a child with Downs Syndrome or a child with autism not an autistic child.
- For the child who has a condition such as autism any outing or unexpected event can become traumatic for child and parent/carer.
- Inclusive practice is good practice and should be part of the normal running of the group.

Top Tips for an Inclusive Setting

- 1 Listen and talk to the parent/carer about the child and their individual needs then use the information when planning a session.
- 2 Identify a leader who will relate, get to know and support the child/family each session. Be consistent.
- 3 Produce clear notices and signs for equipment – avoid too many words and include a picture. Use a visual time table, a series of pictures showing what is going to happen in a session. Display this so that children and adults can see it. Pre-warn children and families of any changes in the routine.
- 4 Give simple instructions in stages. Keep sentences short and speak clearly and with confidence.
- 5 Use objects or pictures when telling a story or singing a rhyme.
- 6 Keep the structure and layout of a session similar each time so that the children learn the routine and where activities are situated.
- 7 Step back and take time to observe what the children are enjoying most. Include some opportunities for sensory play at each session.
- 8 Include a calm area with cushions and books and puzzles. Use positive phrases such as 'time to calm down'.
- 9 Use simple signing to underpin spoken language. Be consistent and ensure they are used by all leaders. Contact your LEA who may be able to signpost you to courses. The BBC produces excellent DVDs from the series *Something Special*. Display pictures for everyone to see of the signs being learnt.
- 10 Enjoy being with the children and have loads of fun playing together.

Alison Swift

An Early Years SEN inclusion teacher supporting early years children in their homes and settings in early learning through play skills.

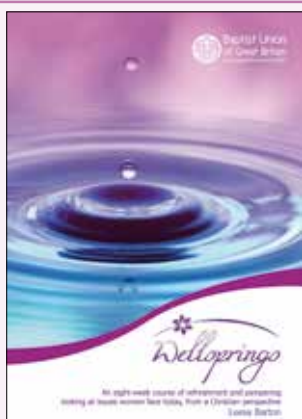
See also:

Top Tips on Welcoming special children - practical pointers for anyone working with children

Published by Scripture Union

ISBN: 1 8442 7126 9

Price: £2.99



Wellsprings is an eight-week course of refreshment and pampering, looking at issues women face today from a Christian perspective. It offers a 'pre-Alpha' evangelism course suitable for single and married women - and might be ideal for those who come to your parent and toddler groups. Developed by Leesa Barton the course aims to strengthen the relationships that have been formed with these women; to explore practical ways to treat and look after themselves; to address key issues that affect women today; and to share relevant Christian truths.

For more more details about the course, and to order the book, see

www.baptist.org.uk/wellsprings



The Hoole Lighthouse Centre is the result of **Hoole Baptist Church's** desire to express God's love within the community. The building plays host to many activities.

Parent and toddler work can transform relationships and strengthen families, yet the church recognised that it is usually the Mums who take part. In March 2003, Hoole Baptist Church in Chester started **Who Let the Dads Out?** (WLTD) - a national initiative about creating space where dads and their young children can have fun together, founded on the Christian principle of wanting to demonstrate God's love to communities.

It comprises:

- ◆ **Who Let The Dads Out? toddler sessions** - toddler sessions are specifically for toddlers and their dads, stepdads, grandads and male carers. They follow the same traditional format as other parent and toddler sessions. There are toys, craft activities, stories and, if you're brave, even song time, but with a few masculine touches, such as bacon butties and newspapers.
- ◆ **SODA sessions** - School's Out, Dad's About, is a special club for dads, stepdads, grandads, male carers and their infant school children. The fun involves a mix of arts, crafts, toys, games and sports.
- ◆ **Daddy Cool!** - a 5 session parenting programme specifically for dads and male carers.
- ◆ **Soul Man?** discussion group - a format through which men can explore basic questions of faith and spirituality.

The aim is to 'turn the hearts of the fathers back to their children, their partners or wives and, most importantly, their heavenly Father'. From its opening in 2003, there are now 18 groups around the country, and the team at Hoole encourage and help Who Let The Dads Out? groups, as they seek to support fathers and their children in the local community.

It is **free to join**, but once a member, churches can use the Who Let The Dads Out? national initiative name and logo, materials, publicity, log on to the forum for ideas and download the 'Daddy Cool!' parenting programme.

Why not consider starting a monthly dads and toddlers group on a Saturday morning to connect with fathers in their communities and turn back the 'tide of fatherlessness'? The group in Chester attracts on average 35 dads and 60 children, and aims to lead them to Alpha-related events and ultimately back to God.

More information is available from
www.wholetthedadsout.org
 or call 01244 342955

Ten top tips for starting a WLTD group

- 1 Look at the world from a child's point of view** How much would you have liked your dad to spend more one to one time with you when you were young? This will also stop you judging the family structure of a 'blended' family because stepfathers can have a hugely important influence on the life of a child which is not his.
- 2 Turn the hearts of the fathers back to their children** Remember that by starting a new WLTD you will be putting into practice the scriptures in Malachi 4: 6 and Luke 1:17 so pat yourself on the back! To help do, this make the most of Fathers' and Mothers' day. Our first session was the day before Mothers' day in 2003. Because the mums got a morning off while the dads, with their child, made Mothers' Day cards at WLTD and over twenty turned up to our first session!
- 3 Register - www.wholetthedadsout.org** It enables us and others to find out about your group and contact you more easily. Furthermore we may be able to give you a small start up grant, but this can only be payable into a joint signatory church or charity account.

- 4 Use our professional looking WLTD0 flyers** Overprint them on the back with your details. You can buy as few as 50 or 100 flyers and give them out at church and your local Parent and Toddler group. Make known your new WLTD0 initiative at different times and in different ways; announce it from the front in of your church and put it in the church notices, use flyers to display in local shops by perhaps laminating the back (the flyer) and front (your overprinted details) on one A4 sheet, give out flyers in your local nursery or playschool because they may have younger siblings who could attend your group, phone, text or personally invite dads you know of and offer to give them a lift. Remember to invite all dads, stepdads and granddads, male carers and older siblings so children from a single parent mum family do not feel left out.
- 5 Advertise through your own Parent and Toddler work and invite the local press to come** About 200,000 men in the UK are now fulltime carers for their children, but on top of this many dads will attend your WLTD0 as a result of being urged by the mums to do so, because the mum can then perhaps have a lie in or a morning off with friends. Perhaps invite the local paper to come to take pictures during your first session. Write a press release either before or after the first session. Alternatively, ask a church member to take pictures, but be careful with how you use them. (Perhaps not on Facebook unless you know the dads and children).
- 6 Rent a crowd** Invite your (preferably male) friends and family to join you at your first session and avoid, at all costs, getting one dad turning up to a mainly empty hall because he probably won't come again. Involve other churches when you start, especially to come and help, because this will broaden your volunteer base, but be careful not to clash with main sporting or community events when you start.
- 7 Run your session on a Saturday morning** We run ours 10 – 12 every first Saturday of each month (except August). This will take the guessing out of 'when is the next session?' Also, the stigma of a dad turning up at a Parent and Toddler session during the week is still really high because most men feel that other people think he should be at work.
- 8 Have someone at the door all the time** Welcoming people as they arrive is so important, especially if you focus on the child/children when they arrive, because most dads will like this. Saying goodbye and inviting them to the next session as they leave can make them want to come again. When registering the dads, leave a space for their mobile numbers; texting is by far the best way to contact them. If you are taking pictures, make the registration form a consent from as well.
- 9 Buy a grill if you want to offer bacon baps** They make life so much easier when you need to grill bacon slices quickly. Don't forget to offer an alternative to vegetarians or dads from a black minority ethnic community. Muslims generally don't eat meat from a pig. Keep raw and fresh meat well apart and read up on your food and hygiene requirements. Charge a one-off amount per adult and child or family unit but don't be too strict about people paying. We have a box with a sign on the tea/ coffee serving hatch.
- 10 Finally, dads are most open to advice around the time of the birth** Make your local antenatal group, community midwife, Children's Centre, and health visitor aware of what you are planning to do. Statistically most dads underestimate the enormous change a baby will bring to their life. There will be less sleep, less time, less privacy, less sex, less money - but of course they will be watching 'the greatest show on earth', their child growing up, so support them by starting the best WLTD0 group you can!

Resources for working with under-5s

Easy Ways to Bible Fun for the Very Young

(out of print)

Author: Vicki Howie

Publisher: BRF Barnabas (2001)

ISBN: 1 84101 135 5

Easy Ways to Seasonal Fun for the Very Young

(out of print)

Author: Vicki Howie

Publisher: BRF Barnabas (2004)

ISBN: 1 84101 342 0

Glitter and Glue

Author: Annette Oliver

Publisher: Scripture Union (2002)

ISBN: 1 85999 599 3

RRP: £9.99

Make and Do

Author: Maggie Barfield

Publisher: Scripture Union (2002)

ISBN: 1 84427 272 9

RRP: £9.99

Parable fun for Little Ones

Author: Renita Boyle

Publisher: BRF Barnabas (2007)

ISBN: 1 84101 491 5

RRP: £11.99

Praise and Play

Author: Alison Harris

Publisher: BRF (2009)

ISBN: 1 84101 563 6

Also available as downloadable pdf from:

www.brf.org.uk/pages/data.asp?layout=products.htm&title.like=Praise+and+play

Pretty much everything you need to know about working with under-5s

Author: Judith Wigley

Publisher: Scripture Union (2005)

ISBN: 1 84427 114 5

Ready Teddy God!

Authors: Leslie Francis, Betty Pedley, Nicola Slee

Publisher: Christian Education Publications (99)

ISBN: 0 71970 899 0

RRP: £10.50

Sharing Jesus with under 5s (out of print)

Author: Janet Gaukroger

Publisher: Crossway Books (1994)

ISBN: 978 18568 4087 3

Sowing, reaping, keeping

Author: Laurence Singlehurst

Publisher: IVP (2006 - 2nd edition)

ISBN: 1 84474 138 9

Teddy's Adventures

Outlines for Toddler Group events (Easter

Christmas more to come)

www.engagetoday.org.uk/playtime/resources/run-a-christmas-event

www.engagetoday.org.uk/playtime/resources/run-an-easter-event

www.engagetoday.org.uk/playtime/resources/run-a-harvest-event

The big red/yellow/blue/orange books

Publisher: Scripture Union Tiddlywinks

www.scriptureunion.org.uk/Shop/Children/Under5s/Groups/10050.id

Toddlerific and More Toddlerific

Author: David C Cook

Publisher: Childrens Ministry

www.familyministry.co.uk/Shop

ISBN: 978 07814 4082 0 (Toddlerific)

ISBN: 978 07814 4561 0 (More Toddlerific)

Tot Zone Year 1 and 2

David C Cook

Publisher: Childrens Ministry

www.familyministry.co.uk/Shop

ISBN: 978 18429 1273 7 (Year 1)

ISBN: 978 18429 1278 2 (Year 2)

Ultimate Craft (3-11s)

This title replaces *Here's one I made earlier*, and *Here's another one I made earlier*

Author: Kathryn Copey and Christine Orme

Publisher: Scripture Union (2008)

ISBN: 1 8442 7364 4

RRP: £12.99

Under fives alive!

Author: Jane Farley
Publisher: Church House Publishing (1997)
ISBN: 0 7151 4886 9
RRP: £13.95

Under fives alive and kicking! (out of print)

Author: Jane Farley
Publisher: Church House Publishing (1999)
ISBN: 0 7151 4918 0
RRP: £13.95

Under 5s and their families (out of print)

Author: Judith Wigley
Publisher: Harper Collins/STL (1990)
ISBN: 978 05510 2264 5

Who Let The Dads Out?

Inspiring ideas for churches to engage with
dads and their pre-school children.
Author: Mark Chester
Publisher: BRF (2012)
ISBN: 978 1 84101 885 0

Bible resources**Beginning with the Bible Books 1 and 2**

Publisher: Christian Focus Publications (1999)
ISBN: 1 85792 454 1 (Old Testament)
ISBN: 1 85792 445 2 (New Testament)

Big Bible Storybook

Author: Maggie Barfield
Publisher: Scripture Union (2007)
ISBN: 1 8442 7228 1
RRP: £12.99

Little Bible Storybook

Author: Maggie Barfield
Publisher: Scripture Union (2007)
ISBN: 1 8442 7318 0
RRP: £5.99

Jesus Bible storybook - More in series

Author: Maggie Barfield
Publisher: Scripture Union (2008)
ISBN: 1 8442 7351 2
RRP: £5.99

My Very First Bible

Author: Lois Rock
Publisher: Lion Hudson (2003)
ISBN: 0 7459 4592 9
RRP: £10.99

My very first Big Bible stories

Series of titles
Author: Lois Rock
Publisher: Lion Hudson (2003)
RRP: £13.99 / £14.99 depending on title

Open the Door

Author: Vicki Howie
Publisher: BRF Barnabas (2005)
ISBN: 978 1 8410 1456 2
RRP: £6.99

Parable fun for little ones

Author: Renita Boyle
Publisher: BRF (2007)
ISBN: 1 84101 491 5

The Beginner's Bible

Author: Catherine DeVries
Publisher: Candle Books (2005)
ISBN: 1 8598 5554 7
RRP: £11.99

Story resources**Christian but not Bible-based****Complete book of First Experiences**

Author: Anne Civardi
Publisher: Usborne (2009)
ISBN: 1 4095 1029 8
RRP: £8.99

My first experiences - starting school

Author: Catherine MacKenzie
Publisher: Christian Focus Publications (2001)
ISBN: 978 1 8579 2663 7
RRP: £2.99

Children's Ministry Guide to storytelling

Author: Ruth Alliston
Publisher: Kingsway Publications (2002)
ISBN: 1 8429 1034 5
RRP: £2.99

Song/rhyme resources

Say and Sing

Author: Maggie Barfield
Publisher: Scripture Union (2006)
ISBN: 1 8442 7245 1
RRP: £9.99

This little Puffin

Author: Elizabeth Matterson
Publisher: Puffin books (re-ssued 2010)
ISBN: 0 1403 4048 3
RRP: £7.99

Little hands finger play and action songs

Authors: Emily Stetson and Vicky Congdon
Publisher: Williamson Publishing Co (2001)
ISBN: 1 8855 9353 8
RRP: \$12.95

Music CDS

Baby song (Boom Chicka Boom)

Simple songs which promote a positive image of God www.frelsesarmeen.no/babysong/

Ishmael

Praise/worship songs for Little Children

God's Wonderful World/Thank you God for snails

Publisher: Kingsway (2003)
ISBN: 5 0192822 4722 0
RRP: £14.99

Jumping for God

Publisher: Kingsway (2007)
ISBN: 5 0192823 0432 9
RRP: £10.00

I will live in your house (CD and Book)

Author: Susie Poole
Publisher: Puffin (2005)
ISBN: 978 19046 3714 1
RRP: £9.99

Little Angels: Real Worship for Pre-Schoolers

Publisher: New Wine (2006)
ISBN: 5 0217760 9633 7
RRP: £8.80

Pre-school Praise series

Series of 5 CDs from Spring Harvest
<https://www.essentialchristian.com/spring-harvest/music/pre-school-praise-1-cd>
RRP: £8.99

Mainly Music

Church based music groups based in Australia, spreading in UK, producing CDs and DVDs etc www.mainlymusic.org.uk
Links to UK church Mainly Music groups are available through this site.

Parenting courses - specifically Christian

Family Caring Trust

Parenting Courses for parents of 0-7s, 5-15s, and for parents of teenagers.
The Pram to Primary School Programme
www.familycaring.co.uk

Family Time

Authors: Lindsay and Mark Melliush
Publisher: Kingsway Publications (2002)
ISBN: 978 18429 1099 3

Parentplay

A 7-week Parenting Course for Parents of Children Under 5
Authors: Rachel Murrill and Rachel Bright
Publisher: Authentic Media (2006)
ISBN: 1 8602 4592 7
RRP: £19.99

Survival skills for Christian parents

Parenting course based on the book *Families with Faith*
www.scriptureunion.org.uk/Families/Parents/SurvivalSkillsforChristianParents/60958.id

Who let the Dads Out?

Daddy Cool - 6 session Christian course especially for dads available as PDF on the members part of the WLTD0 website
www.wholetthedadsout.org

Resources from Care for the Family

Parenting courses:

21st Century parent

8 week DVD-based course

www.careforthefamily.org.uk/resources/product.asp?productid=1143

Asian Parenting Matters

a DVD-based course

www.careforthefamily.org.uk/resources/product.asp?productid=1162&catcode=4

From this step forwards

A unique DVD-based marriage preparation course for stepfamilies.

www.careforthefamily.org.uk/resources/product.asp?productid=1115&catcode=1

How to Drug proof your kids

www.dpyk.org.uk

Positive parenting

Courses including specialised ones for children with special needs etc

www.parenting.org.uk

Quidz in - raising financially aware children

www.quidzin.org.uk facilitator training days

Parenting Books:

The Sixty Minute Mother

Author: Rob Parsons

Publisher: Hodder & Stoughton (2009)

ISBN: 0 3409 9598 X

RRP: £7.99

The Sixty Minute Father

Author: Rob Parsons

Publisher: Hodder & Stoughton (2009)

ISBN: 0 3409 9561 0

RRP: £7.99

Every step counts: building a healthy stepfamily

Authors: Christine Tufnell and Tony Tufnell

Publisher: Lion Hudson (2007)

ISBN: 0 7459 5249 6

RRP: £6.99

All Alone? Help and Hope for Single Parents

Authors: Jill Worth

Publisher: Lion Hudson (November 2010)

ISBN: 0 7459 6246 7

RRP: £5.99

Daddy's working away (for dads in prison)

Author: Inmates and Families at HMP Wolds

Publisher: Care for the Family

ISBN: 0 9538 7941 0

RRP: £6.99

The Book Box

A complete Lending Library of over £100 worth of top quality books on marriage, parenting and life issues, as well as display materials, which Toddler groups can buy, ready to use, from Care for the Family for just £99.

www.careforthefamily.org.uk/resources/product.asp?productid=1264&catcode=30v

Useful Organisations

- Care for the Family - www.careforthefamily.org.uk
- Care for the Family's Playtime Project - www.engagetoday.org.uk/playtime
- 1277 - make them count - A national strategy for Christian Toddler Groups www.1277.org.uk
- mainly music - equips churches to run pre-school music groups with an emphasis on fun and a focus on relationships. www.mainlymusic.org.uk
- Pre-school Learning Alliance (PSLA) - www.pre-school.org.uk
- Who let the dads out? - www.wholetthedadsout.org
- Scripture Union Tiddlywinks - www.scriptureunion.org.uk/Tiddlywinks

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telephone 01235 517700 email faithandsociety@baptist.org.uk website www.baptist.org.uk

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