



## Childcare Impressions

The young couple visiting the church for the first time with their three year old, Sara, and their 6 month old, Abe, are about to agree on whether they will come back to the church to visit a second time. Curiously, their decision will have little to do with worship style or preaching; it will have little to do with the friends that invited them or the hospitality they have been shown since arriving. Neither will the decision have much to do with the inspiring programs and activities available to them at the church.

What then? Their decision will revolve around how well prepared they perceive the church is to provide quality, safe, and loving care to Sara and Abe. That's it!

Here is what will impress them... or not!

- 1) Readiness: Is the childcare ministry ready for them? Last minute or late attention to the details that will insure Sara and Abe have a good experience will quickly reduce the confidence of Mom and Dad. Be early; be prepared with materials, workers, supplies, and plans. When the time comes for Sara and Abe to be introduced, be ready!
- 2) Staffing: Is there an appropriate number of workers and do they demonstrate maturity and training for the childcare task? Mom and Dad want to know that there are enough of the right people to properly care for the children left to them.
- 3) Security... Are children protected from outside interference? It is not too much to expect that Mom and Dad would like Sara and Abe to be exactly where they left them, upon their return. Secure areas will preclude the entrance of unauthorized personnel and exclude the possibility of a child wandering off on their own.
- 4) Cleanliness... Is the environment clean and healthy? Last Sunday's messes should be removed, vacuumed, wiped down, deodorized, and whatever else needs to happen so that every child enters a spic and span space. Furnishings, floor, wall, toys, tables --- all clean.
- 5) Check in/out procedures... Is information gathered carefully and systematically and quickly that will provide for the wellbeing of the child? Sara has allergies to peanut butter. Gathering appropriate child and parent information will assure Mom and Dad that Sara is safe. In addition, procedures must insure that no one is able to check out Sara and Abe without proper identification to do it.
- 6) Notification.... Are Mom and Dad going to be notified if there is a problem needing their attention? Is there a means by which childcare workers can notify parents that are off in another part of the building for worship? Mom and Dad want to know that in case of emergency they can be alerted and called back to the childcare area in a timely manner.
- 7) Location... Is the location of childcare consistent with the traffic pattern of first time attenders? Is the location of the childcare readily identifiable to first time attenders? Is the location of childcare sufficient for good security? Mom and Dad want the few minutes that they have allotted for handing over Sara and Abe to not be lost trying to find the place to do it and then having to make another long walk back to the worship area, only to be late. Keep the roundtrip as short as possible and still be safe.

- 8) Environment...Does this look like a place kids will enjoy? Is there plenty of space to move around and play? Lighting, color, graphics, equipment that make a kids eyes open wide will also make Mom and Dad's eyes open wide. It will say, "this church puts value on my kids."
- 9) Signage...Is directional signage to childcare big enough and clear enough that Mom and Dad can't miss it? Insider language on signs (Kingdom Kids with an arrow) will not help if the first timer doesn't know what or to whom Kingdom Kids refers. Make it simple with signs that simply address the question on the mind of Mom and Dad, "Where is childcare? Where is the nursery?"
- 10) Posted Safety Program...has the church prepared itself to receive children properly? Does the church have a well thought out and enforceable plan and procedure to handle the various issues that any childcare service faces? Staffing requirements, background checks, discipline and behavioral issues, physical contact, first aid, snacks, security, emergency, age grading, etc. Mom and Dad will feel more confident if the childcare ministry demonstrates readiness in these and other areas related to Sara and Abe's experience. A pamphlet providing this information to parents assures them that the church is on its game.

Finally, it is important that every Greeter be trained to effectively address childcare with Mom and Dad. How Sara and Abe are met by the Greeters will signal that they are valued and welcomed. Is there eye contact with the children? Are they spoken to? Does the Greeter exude confidence in the childcare arrangements? Does he/she mention the name of a worker to meet when they arrive in the childcare area? Does he know what they are learning that Sunday? Can he provide simple instructions or a map to the childcare area?

Every parent that wants the best for their children will take notice of how the church received and cared for their child. It is not like they will have a checklist but they will come away with general impressions and those general impressions will play a large role in determining whether or not they will come back.

If Mom and Dad came to your church with Sara and Abe, what would their general impressions be? Do you think they would be back?