

GET SET!

Creating a Welcoming Parent and Toddler Group



**Family
Ministries**
Having faith in the family

GET SET!

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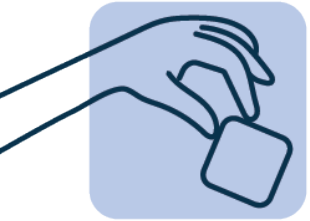
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Laying the Foundations



1.1 Why Start a Parent and Toddler Group?

Parent and toddler groups are the second most attended activity across the United Kingdom and Ireland Territory of The Salvation Army (after Sunday worship services) with around half of all corps offering one.

It's understandable, then, to wonder whether a corps without such a group is missing a mission opportunity. Yet faith-filled mission is not about copying what works elsewhere, but about prayerfully discerning where God is already at work in your own community. **See Section 1.2**

What matters most is choosing ministries that:

- Reflects your corps' unique calling, gifts and capacity.
- Genuinely responds to the needs of the people you are called to serve.

So here are some things to think about if you are considering starting this ministry.

1.1.1 Where has this idea come from?

Reflect on your motivation to start a parent and toddler group.

Has the idea come from what is happening around you?

- Was it suggested by someone in the corps?
- Do you have families connected with your church who need a place to meet?
- Is the whole corps family excited by the prospect?
- What inspired the idea?



Or is the motivation more internal?

- Have parent and toddler groups always been something you are passionate about?
- Has your experience from being a part of a group changed you?
- Has it come to you in answer to prayer?
- Have you always been searching for the 'right time' to start a group?

1.1.2 Where does it fit with what you already do?

A parent and toddler group is not a stand-alone activity; it needs to be connected to the whole mission of your corps. **See Section 1.3**

What are the mission priorities for your corps and community, and which established activities support them? It is important that the mission priorities are explored, perhaps through the *Corps Mission Journal*.

Consider:

- Are families and children a mission priority already?
- What else could they link to, to keep connected to your church once the children go to school?

Your corps leader will be able to help you explore the idea of setting up a group in the *Corps Mission Journal*.

A parent and toddler group might be seen as a possible way to increase the Sunday congregation or to attract more children to your church. However, it is more important that families see Jesus through the care and compassion offered - whether they attend worship or not.

1.1.3 Is there a need for a new group?

See Section 2.1

In some areas the closure of local family centres has left a big gap in early years provision. This includes affordable spaces for families to meet and learn from each other in their parenting journey. New parents can feel isolated from existing friendships, as life with a new little one brings new routines.

Before you go any further:

- Research other local parent and toddler groups.
- Explore if another group is needed.



- Consider how will your group be different from others.
- Assess the needs of local families, eg research online, consult local healthcare professionals and talk to families you know.

This will help you determine what you hope to achieve in your group.

Supporting every need

Think about the need to build relationships and community - how will your group foster inclusiveness and friendships so that parents don't go away feeling the group was not very friendly.

If you discover lots of families in your area who are struggling with the rising cost of living, how will your group signpost to food support and specialised provision?

How will your group support families who speak other languages or who have additional needs? Or families that are navigating adoption, fostering or have moved to a new location?

What other organisations or signposting will you need to be aware of to support families who are in trauma, eg experiencing grief, domestic abuse, modern slavery or have been trafficked.

1.1.4 Who will be your team and supporters?

Who is going to run the parent and toddler group? Guidelines in **Section 2.3** will help you consider how to create and train an effective team, but initial questions need to be asked to find out if there are enough people to run a new group.

Having people to cover the practical tasks is important, but there is a significant role for those who will talk to and build relationships with those who attend.

Who will be your supporters and prayer warriors? Are there people who are passionate about family ministry but cannot physically help? Can they pray with you and for you; can they take an interest and mentor your team? **See Section 1.2**



1.1.5 What do we really want to achieve for the Kingdom of God?

Ministry with families is not simply about running an activity, but about journeying alongside people and sharing life together.

Rather than offering a functional weekly activity with little ongoing connection, the purpose of a good parent and toddler group is to **build a supportive community where relationships can grow.**

This means creating spaces where families feel they belong, can connect with leaders and one another, and know how to reach out for support when needed. **See Sections 1.1.3, 2.1 and 4.1**

The Salvation Army's own research into parent and toddler groups currently being undertaken highlights that:

- pastoral care,
- a sense of belonging, and
- Christian values that are meaningful in everyday life,

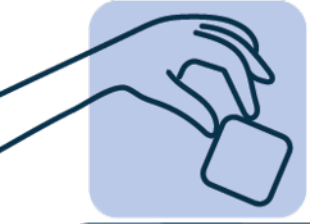
are among the most significant experiences reported by families who attend a parent and toddler group.



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1.2 Pray and Plan

When preparing to start a new parent and toddler group, it is important to take time to think prayerfully about why you feel led to start this new ministry and how it reflects the purposes of God and the heart of your mission.

Here are a few ideas of ways to pray and plan together with your team as you begin this exciting journey.

1.2.1 Go on a prayer walk around your community

Even if you are very familiar with your community, it is good to take a prayerful walk and see what you notice; especially look out for families with young children out for walks or on the school/nursery run.

How could your provision of a safe and welcoming space for babies, toddlers and their carers be a source of hope and transformation and an expression of God's Kingdom?

1.2.2 Conversations with your corps council or leadership team

See Sections 1:3, 2:1 and 4:4

It is essential that the parent and toddler group is seen as an integral part of the church's mission. In line with your *Corps Mission Journal*, present the vision, ideas and plans to the corps leadership team and take time to pray about this together.

- Share statistics and stories about the impact of church parent and toddler groups.
- Explore Bible passages which speak of welcoming children, caring for our neighbours and being a light in our communities.



- Encourage others to share their experiences, ask questions and make suggestions of ways the group could connect with the wider life of the church and community.

Useful links

- **Talking toddlers research** (hopetogether.org.uk)
- **children everywhere.com**

It is also helpful, when starting a new group or reviewing an existing group, to do this in conversation with your divisional intergenerational officer/worker, territorial community engagement lead, divisional safeguarding officer and safe mission adviser, to ensure we are doing all we can to keep people safe.

1.2.3 Invite the whole corps to pray

When the whole corps prays, the ministry becomes part of the whole corps' mission - not just one team's responsibility. Here are some ways to get your corps family involved.

Pray through the challenges and opportunities

Make a list of potential opportunities and challenges to help you and your church to pray. For example, you might pray about:

- Creating a team of enthusiastic volunteers who work well together.
- Helping new families build friendship and support.
- Building confidence for new leaders.

These could be the focus of a prayer time within Sunday worship, added to a prayer newsletter or used in a specific prayer meeting about the potential new group.

Pray creatively

Seed planting is a great way to visualise the love and Kingdom values you want to share and grow within the families who come to your new group. Each seed planted could represent a family. The congregation could each take a seed pot home to remind them to pray for one of the families you hope to reach out to.

Alternatively, use different toddler toys to pray creatively for your new initiative. Each toy could represent something you want to pray for. Eg:



- Building blocks for building your team.
- Soft toys for providing a place of care.
- Toy trains for staying on track in your planning.

Create a prayer team or prayer partners

People who do not feel able to volunteer may be keen to support as part of a parent and toddler group prayer team. Perhaps new families joining your group could be offered a prayer partner within the church who pray regularly for them as a family - consult your corps leadership for guidelines on this.

National month of prayer for parent and toddler groups

June is designated as the National Month of Prayer for church-based parent and toddler groups. Churches are encouraged to make it a specific prayer focus during this month each year.

Further information about this is shared on Family Ministries Social Media pages throughout June.

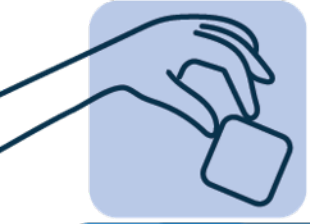
- Facebook: **@sarmyfm** and **SA P&T groups UKI**
- Instagram: **safamily_ministries**



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1.3 Aligning with the Wider Corps Mission

Children naturally ask ‘Why?’ - and it is an equally important question for us too. Starting a parent and toddler group should always be rooted in purpose, not just activity.

Young children are constantly learning and forming their understanding of the world. A parent and toddler group provides a safe and welcoming space where they can experience kindness, friendship and acceptance, while being gently introduced to faith through stories, songs and relationships. For parents and carers, it offers vital connection and support.

Within The Salvation Army, each corps is on a mission journey - seeking where God is at work, recognising local needs, and responding with the love of Jesus. A parent and toddler group can play a vital role in this by helping to bring about the vision of **‘fullness of life for all with Jesus’**.

1.3.1 Missional impact

A parent and toddler group is more than a weekly gathering; it is a space for intentional mission and relationship-building.

Through consistent welcome and care, groups can:

- Demonstrate God’s love in practical ways.
- Reduce isolation for parents and carers.
- Provide emotional and relational support.
- Build friendships and community networks.
- Create a safe and inclusive environment.

Over time, trust grows. Families begin to share more of their lives, creating natural opportunities to talk about faith and invite them into wider expressions of church life.



1.3.2 Understanding local need

See Sections 1.1 and 2.1

Before starting a parent and toddler group, it is essential to explore what already exists in your area.

- What toddler groups are already running locally?
- When do they meet, and who do they reach?
- Is there an unmet need?

By visiting other groups, you can learn what works well and where gaps may exist. It may also open opportunities for partnership rather than competition.

If a gap in provision is identified, be clear about how your group will respond. This might involve:

- Serving a different age group.
- Running at an alternative time.
- Meeting a specific need within the community.

A clear purpose ensures the group is both needed and effective.

1.3.3 Connecting with the wider corps

Parent and toddler groups thrive when they exist as part of the wider life and mission of the corps; they should not exist in isolation.

What next steps might families take with your corps?

- What other opportunities are there for them? What else could they be invited to?
- Are any of the group's leaders or volunteers involved in other areas of ministry? Might families be able to participate and see a familiar face?
- How can relationships be built beyond the weekly session?

Accessible and informal opportunities - such as Messy Church, social events, or intergenerational gatherings - can provide natural pathways for deeper engagement.

For some, the parent and toddler group will be their main connection to church, and this is the right step for their family, so it is important to value and nurture this space fully.



1.3.4 Aligning with the corps mission strategy

The parent and toddler group needs to connect clearly with wider mission planning, including using and incorporating other tools available such as the *Corps Missional Journal*, UKI Mission Priorities and *Blueprint for better choices*.

A key question to reflect on is:

- How will everyone who attends encounter and have the opportunity to respond to God's love through this work?

Also consider:

- How does this support our corps mission priorities?
- What does 'fullness of life in Jesus' look like for the families we serve?
- Why is this the right time to begin?

Intentional alignment ensures the group contributes meaningfully to the corps' overall mission.

Further reading

- **Our vision and identity** (salvationist.org.uk)
- **Our identity** (OurHub)
- **Blueprint for better choices** (OurHub)

1.3.5 Measuring outcomes - what is the fruit of this ministry?

It is important to define what we hope to achieve by running a parent and toddler group and to identify what the fruit of this ministry looks like from the beginning.

- What outcomes are we hoping to see?
- How will we know the group is making an impact?
- When will we pause to review and reflect together?

Regular evaluation helps ensure the group remains effective, healthy, responsive and aligned with its purpose and within the purpose of the whole corps.



1.3.6 The opportunity

A parent and toddler group creates opportunities to experience connection, belonging and faith.

For many families, it becomes a place where they feel supported, valued and accepted without judgement. From these relationships, deeper engagement and spiritual exploration can grow.

Ultimately, whatever the motivation for starting a group, the impact can be significant - for children, for families, and for the wider community. **It is worth it.**



‘We love coming to your group every week as we feel relaxed, supported, and loved in a non-judgemental environment with hospitality and generosity at its heart.’

Parent, Hackney, Mare Street





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Finding Your Space and Place



2.1 Understanding Community Needs

Before moving on to any planning, take time to understand your local community. Listening and observing will help you meet real needs rather than duplicating existing provision.

2.1.1 Assessing the need

There are many ways to understand what your community needs. Why not try the following ...

Observe your local area

Sit on the wall outside the corps or in a window at different times of the day; notice who passes by and consider:

- Are there young families in the area?
- Are there parents with prams and pushchairs?
- Do you see people walking past on the school run?

Explore the wider community

If the corps location has limited footfall, try exploring the wider community.

- Walk around the local supermarket or town centre-during the day.
- Visit a local park and engage in conversation with young families.
- Speak to young families you already know and ask what they feel is needed. Listen carefully to their responses.
- Take note of posters, notice boards and community displays as they are often good sources of information.
- Contact and maybe visit local groups and organisations to understand what provision is already available, eg:
 - Local parent and toddler groups
 - Local schools
 - Local authority family hubs/centres
 - Public library



- ☐ Local churches
- ☐ GP surgeries
- ☐ Community centres
- ☐ Leisure centre

Some services, especially those that charge, may see you as potential competition, so approach conversations thoughtfully and respectfully.

Use social media

Local social media is a useful way to see what's happening in your community. If you're unsure how to access this, ask someone in your corps to help gather information this way.

Understanding the bigger picture

Once you have gathered all this information, you will start to see:

- What services already exist.
- If these groups are oversubscribed.
- Where there may be gaps in provision.
- What families in your area truly need.

If you need support in undertaking a *Community Needs Assessment*, contact the territorial community engagement lead (TCEL) for your division.

2.1.2 What is your unique offer?

Use your findings to shape what makes your parent and toddler group special. Reflect on the following questions:

- Who are the other services providing for?
- What is unique about the other groups in your area?
- What times and days of the week are other services available?
- What skills/passions do my volunteers have?
- What experience could be built upon further?
- How many volunteers are available?
- When are my volunteers available?
- What space and facilities do I have?



2.1.3 Plan carefully

Many parents like to attend several sessions a week, as parent and toddler groups provide valuable opportunities for social interaction. Where possible avoid running your group on the same days and times as other providers in the area. **See Section 2.2**



‘I attend Tots three mornings a week as it is often the only adult interaction I get in a day.’

Paige, Darlaston

2.1.4 Final reflection

Before moving forward, the final question to ask is:

- How does what we are able to offer match the needs of our local community?



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2.2 Finding the Best Venue and Time

Choosing the right **location, timing and session structure** will make your group more accessible, sustainable and enjoyable for families and volunteers alike. Careful planning in these areas will help your group run smoothly and meet the needs of families in your community.

Use the information you have gleaned from your work in **Section 2.1** to inform your decision making.

2.2.1 Choosing the right venue

A suitable venue doesn't need to be large, but it does need to be practical and welcoming. Consider the following:

- Is there easy access for pushchairs?
- Are baby-changing facilities available?
- Is there adequate storage for toys and equipment?
- Is there free/accessible parking nearby?

If not, how might you manage these issues?

Exploring other venue options

If your Salvation Army hall is not ideal, consider exploring other local venues:

- Other Salvation Army premises
- Schools
- Community centres
- Soft play venues
- Other churches

Some spaces may be underused but perfectly suited to a parent and toddler group.



2.2.2 Choosing the right time

Timing that works for families is key to ensuring good attendance and a settled group environment. Consider scheduling around:

- School drop-off and pick-up times
- Babies' nap and feeding times

2.2.3 Deciding the length of the session

Most parent and toddler groups run for one-and-a-half to two hours. See **Section 5**. Within this time, aim to include a balanced routine:

- Free play
- Snack time
- Craft activities
- Song and story time

Things to think about

- Two hours can feel long, so consider what works best locally.
- School timings and proximity may affect your session length.
- Volunteer availability and capacity is crucial.

Remember, volunteers will need additional time for:

- Setting up (approx 30 minutes)
- Packing away (approx 30 minutes)

Choosing the right location, timing and session structure will make your group more accessible, sustainable and enjoyable for families and volunteers alike.

Real-life examples

At Londonderry Corps there is no on-site parking and only one hour of free parking is available locally. As a result, many attendees have to pay for parking and walk to the hall. The group therefore operates on a donation basis rather than a fixed fee, to offset the cost of parking.



‘When looking for a group, it’s important to have good free parking.’

Childminder, Londonderry Corps Stay and Play



‘An early start helps that accommodates the school run.’

Parent, Londonderry Corps Stay and Play

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2.3 Building the Right Team

A strong, supportive, creative and well-prepared team is essential for creating a safe, welcoming and effective parent and toddler group. This section will guide you through recruiting, building and supporting your team.

2.3.1 Define what you need from your team

Before you start recruiting, take time to consider what values your team members will need to represent. These may include the Family Ministry values of:

- Christ-centredness
- Justice
- Creativity
- Diversity
- Celebration
- Intergenerational
- Hospitality

You can learn more about the Family Ministry values through a set of colouring sheets, exploring the different characteristics.

Useful link

- [Family Ministry values colouring sheets \(salvationist.org.uk\)](https://salvationist.org.uk)

Roles

Consider what roles team members will take on. These may include:

- Leading (criminal background check required) **See Section 3.5.5**
- Hosting (criminal background check may be required) **See Section 3.5.5**
- Administration
- Set up and pack down



- Registration
- Connecting with families
- Preparation of resources
- Circle time
- Story time
- Song time
- Prayer time
- Refreshments

Salvation Army parent and toddler groups are great places to share the good news of Jesus within the team and with the families attending, so make sure your team includes committed Christians who are willing to join in with this mission and ministry.

Volunteers

How many volunteers you will need will depend on the size of your group and the space you will be working in. Ensure that the space enables parents/carers to be able to see their children and that the space doesn't feel too busy or crowded.

2.3.2 Employees

Parent and toddler group leaders can be employees and the Human Resources team are available to support you through the process.

Salvation Army Policies, resources and the Human Resource team will assist you with the following activities:

- Creating a new post or advertising an existing position.
- Creating a compelling advert.
- Assessing applications.
- Interviewing.
- Making the offer and ensuring all pre-employment checks are gathered in line with policy and legislation, including undertaking criminal record background checks as appropriate. **See Section 3.5.5**
- Providing guidance on managing and supporting employees.
- Ensuring safer recruitment practices are followed and maintained throughout the process.

Always refer to the **Human Resources** (HR) section on OurHub to ensure you are working to the most up-to-date guidance.



Consulting with your HR business partner and your territorial community engagement lead (TCEL) will also help with policies and processes as you build your team.

Further guidance

- **HR Policies and *HR04 Recruitment Policy*** (OurHub)
- Appendices 1 and 2 have examples of parent and toddler group leader and team member job/role descriptions, to help you through advertising and recruitment processes.

2.3.3 Volunteers

Parent and toddler group leaders can be employees, though most members of the team will be volunteers.

Salvation Army Policies and resources will assist you in undertaking the following activities:

- Creating a job/role advert and deciding where to advertise.
- Creating an application form and application process including requesting references.
- Ensuring safer recruitment practices are followed.
- Assessing applications.
- Interviewing.
- Undertaking criminal record background checks as appropriate. **See Section 3.5.5**
- Managing and supporting volunteers.

Always refer to the **Volunteering** section on OurHub to ensure you are working to the most up-to-date guidance.

Consulting with your HR business partner and your territorial community engagement lead (TCEL) will also help with policies and processes as you build your team.

Further guidance

- **HR Policies** (OurHub)
- **Volunteer information** (OurHub)
- ***Volunteer parent and toddler group leader*** job/role description (OurHub)



- **Appendices 1 and 2** have examples of parent and toddler group leader and team member job/role descriptions, to help you through advertising and recruitment processes.
- **Volunteering resources** (salvationist.org.uk)

For any questions concerning this section, please contact:
volunteering@salvationarmy.org.uk

2.3.4 Building and supporting your team

Once your team is in place you will need to consider the following:

Required learning and development

This may include:

- Safeguarding at the level relevant to the role. Consult your relevant safeguarding lead and **Safeguarding Policies and information** (OurHub)
- **Safe Mission** (OurHub)
- First aid
- Food hygiene
- Fire safety
- Emergency procedures
- Parent and toddler training

Ongoing support

Ongoing bespoke support for different roles including ensuring team members know how to contact the leader and how to raise concerns. HR and volunteer policies give advice on this.

Team meetings

Regular team meetings help to:

- build relationships within the team,
- set culture and vision,
- share information, and
- encourage and engage team members.

You may need to have team meetings more frequently in the initial stages of the group.



2.3.5 Valuing and celebrating volunteers

Celebrating and valuing volunteers is essential, as these individuals give their time, care and energy to create welcoming spaces where families can connect, feel supported and grow in community. Recognising their contributions not only affirms their worth but also strengthens their sense of belonging and encourages continued service.

You can do this in a number of meaningful ways:

- Publicly thanking volunteers during sessions or Sunday meetings.
- Hosting an appreciation event.
- Giving small, personalised gifts.
- Regularly praying for and with them.

Simple acts of gratitude and encouragement can help volunteers feel seen, valued and deeply connected to the mission of The Salvation Army.





GET SET!

Behind the Scenes



3.1 Spreading the Word

As with any group, an essential part of creating a welcoming and inviting parent and toddler group is to make sure that people know you are there.

Communicating clearly, thoughtfully and consistently on different platforms and using different media makes people feel informed and reassured - even before they have walked through the door of your building. It is a way of showing the love of God right from the word go!

3.1.1 Marketing and social media

Ensure you use warm friendly language as this may be the first contact someone has with your group, so you want it to reflect the atmosphere and welcome they will receive in person.

Essential info

Details include:

- Group name, day, time and location.
- Age range and who the group is for.
- What to expect at the group (free play, craft, songs, snack, faith element, story)
- Booking information
- Contact details.

Church-based

See Sections 4.1 and 5.4

When advertising your parent and toddler group, don't shy away from the faith element. Families attending need to know what to expect. This section is entitled spreading the word - yes, we want to spread the news of your brilliant group, but we also want to spread the good news of Jesus Christ



through our relationships and the embodiment of God's love, and through stories, songs, crafts and other activities.

Posters and leaflets

See Section 3.3.2

Handing out leaflets is still a powerful way of reaching families in your community.

- Make sure posters are colourful, bright and eye-catching.
- Keep designs simple and easy to read.
- If possible, include photos of your group - with consent.
- At the end of your sessions, make sure there are leaflets available for people to take and give away.

Social media

This is an accessible and great way to build awareness, community and presence. If your expression doesn't already have a social media account, it would be good to set one up with the appropriate help. See links below for guidance on taking and presenting images for social media.

You could set up a dedicated private page for your parent and toddler group, to regularly share specific and relevant information. This could include updates, reminders and photos - with consent, celebrations, stories, milestones and special events.

It may also be helpful to post a walk-through video or set of photos of the group set-up. This would mean that anyone new can see what the group looks like before they come and may also support those with additional needs in accessing the group.

Consideration needs to be given to:

- who will be posting content and on what social media platform
- verifying consent has been given for images
- ensuring the Social Media Policy has been followed
- checking there will be no risks, eg reputational damage or safeguarding breach

Useful links

- **Guidance on protecting your setting's images from AI manipulation and abuse** (saferinternet.org.uk)
- ***Guidance on filming and photography*** (OurHub)



- **Social Media Policy** for guidance on setting up a social media account and usage (OurHub)

3.1.2 Who to connect with

Strong local relationships will help reach those in the community who need your group most, for example:

- Health visitors and GP surgeries
- Social services and family support workers
- Local nurseries and schools
- Local council family hubs

Once families are attending your group, one of the best ways of connecting and sharing is through word of mouth. Families who have attended your group and have positive, welcoming experiences will go and share with others. These relationships are key in building the community and encouraging more people to come along.

3.1.3 Where to promote

Think about where families, parents and carers are already spending their time and find a way to spread the word there:

- Libraries, swimming pools and community hubs
- Noticeboards at nurseries, supermarkets, community areas, cafés and play parks
- Local online parenting groups

3.1.4 Sharing real stories

Lived experience is one of the most powerful tools, so it is worth sharing these stories, with consent, on social media or leaflets:

- Photos/testimonials/quotes from families, carers and your team.
- The difference the group has made in the community.

Consent to take photographs and to share on social media will also be needed. **Image Consent** forms are available on OurHub. Also, consider changing names to protect privacy.



3

GET SET! Behind the Scenes



3.2 Budgeting and Fundraising

Starting a parent and toddler group within a church requires thoughtful planning around budgeting and fundraising. The aim is not to generate profit, but to ensure sustainability, accessibility, and alignment with the church's mission.

3.2.1 Budgeting with purpose

Before making financial decisions, it is important to discuss with your corps leader and/or finance team about how the group will be funded. Some churches choose to subsidise parent and toddler groups as part of their ministry, meaning the group may not need to fully cover its costs. Clarifying this early will help guide decisions about spending, fees, and fundraising expectations.

3.2.2 Understanding your costs

A clear budget should distinguish between start-up and ongoing costs.

Start-up costs

These include essential items needed to begin the group, such as:

- Toys - check for appropriate safety marks
- Mats
- Tables and chairs suitable for smaller children
- Highchairs and bouncy chairs
- Tuff trays
- Storage boxes
- Safety equipment, eg door or stair gates, lidded travel mugs and baby cups
- Other basic kitchen equipment, eg plastic bowls, plates, spoons



Ongoing costs

This ensures the group remains welcoming and sustainable. These typically include:

- Refreshments
- Craft materials
- Replacement toys
- Contribution to overheads - the contribution made to the corps towards use of the building
- Salaries, expenses, training costs - include small thank you gestures for volunteers as well - see ***Volunteers Management Manual*** (OurHub)
- Celebrating special occasions, eg birthdays, Christmas, Easter, end of term **See Section 5.3**

When planning, practise good stewardship by buying only what is necessary at the start. Consider sourcing second-hand items through charity shops, local marketplaces, nurseries, or donations from parents.

Talk with your corps leader / finance team to see if there are any funds available within the corps that can be used to help with set-up costs. For new mission initiatives, support may also be available through small grants from divisional headquarters or local organisations, and advice can be obtained from the territorial community engagement lead (TCEL) for your division.

TIP: Contact the manager of your local Salvation Army-run or SATCOL charity shop to see if they can help.

Asset inventory

Maintain an asset inventory of your purchases for insurance purposes. All toys should be insured on a 'new-for-old' basis and covered under the corps' insured content through SAGIC.

Useful link

- **BA06 *Care of Monies, Moveable Assets* Policy**

3.2.3 Setting accessible income

The income for most parent and toddler groups comes from small weekly contributions. Common approaches include:

- A suggested donation, eg £1 per child or £3 per family, based on what is typical locally.



- A ‘pay-what-you-can’ model, which often ensures inclusivity and balances out overall.
- Optional contributions for snacks.

The priority should always be accessibility. Avoid any system that could exclude families in financial difficulty. Encouraging regular attendance and building relationships is more important than maximising income.

3.2.4 Fundraising thoughtfully

Always refer to the **Fundraising** section on OurHub to ensure you are working to the most up-to-date guidance.

While some parent and toddler groups gradually build modest reserves, fundraising can help with start-up costs or developments. However, it should never feel like a burden or distract from the group’s main purpose.

Before organising fundraising, consider:

- Is it essential, or simply enhancing the offer?
- Could the need be met by corps members or grants instead?

Fundraising should be low-pressure, inclusive, and community-focused.

Fundraising ideas

Effective ideas include:

- Weekly donation jar - a simple, reliable and inclusive option.
- Corps support - one-off offerings or donation of specific goods from the congregation.
- Seasonal events - simple Christmas or summer celebrations with small ticket costs.
- Nearly-new sales - practical, popular and outreach-friendly.
- Coffee mornings or cake sales - easy to organise and sociable, creating space for relationships with corps congregations and families attending the group.

These activities not only raise funds but also build community and relationships. However, it is important to be realistic about the time and energy required to do them. Over-committing to events can lead to volunteer burnout, so a simple plan, such as weekly giving alongside one or two events per year, is often sufficient.

Useful link

- [Community, membership and events page](#) (OurHub)



Communicating the purpose

Clear communication around any fundraising is important. When people understand how their donations support families and create a welcoming environment, they are more likely to give generously. Fundraising should always reflect corps values of generosity, inclusion and integrity.

3.2.5 Fundraising for others

If the group is self-financing, then there may be opportunity to fundraise for other good causes.

The Family Ministries Department encourages parent and toddler groups to fundraise for the Helping-Hand Appeal, which each year supports an international Salvation Army project responding to poverty and injustice. This is an excellent way for groups to learn something about the worldwide Salvation Army, and resources, including a Jump IN! session, are provided to support this.

Fundraising for local projects, or concerns that are important to members of the group, should be discussed with the corps leader.

Useful links

- **Helping-Hand Appeal** (salvationist.org.uk)
- **Jump IN!** (salvationist.org.uk)
- **Fundraising guidance** (OurHub)

3.2.6 Final thoughts

A healthy parent and toddler group budget balances faith, stewardship and hospitality. The guiding question should always be:

- Are our financial decisions helping us create a warm, welcoming and accessible space for every family?

If the answer is yes, then your budgeting and fundraising are fulfilling their purpose.





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Behind the Scenes



3.3 Administrative Essentials

When planning a parent and toddler group, it's natural to focus first on creating a welcoming atmosphere - choosing toys, arranging the space and deciding on refreshments. However, it's equally important to ensure that the group is safe and well organised behind the scenes. When this happens, it enables the group to offer genuine care and hospitality, reflecting God's love in practical ways.

To help do this, it is important to consider three key areas:

- What information we need from attending families.
- What information families need from us.
- What financial records and compliance documentation is required by The Salvation Army. See Sections 3.4, 3.5 and 3.6

3.3.1 Information to collect

Registering a child

See Section 3.6.2 and Appendix 3

It is important to know something about the people who attend the group. We should only collect and store essential personal data and other information needed to run the group, such as:

- Child's full name and date of birth.
- Parent or carer's name, address and contact details.
- Details of any allergies, medical needs or additional support requirements.
- Preferred method of communication, eg email or phone

Other sensitive information - related to ethnicity or religious belief, for example - may be useful to have but is not usually essential. You should only collect this data if you feel it is necessary to the provision of service, or if there is another reason for collecting it (for example, if you are working



under contract to a local authority to provide a service and they require this information from you).

Consent to take photographs and to share on social media will also be needed. **Image consent** forms are available on OurHub. Also, consider changing names to protect privacy.

A simple registration form enables the gathering of all the information required. This can be done using a printed form, **see Appendix 3**, or using an electronic method such as **ChurchSuite**. **See Section 3.4.3**

The registration form should also include a short data protection notice, to tell parents and carers how their personal data will be used and why.

It is helpful if all registration forms are renewed each September to ensure all information is up to date. Old forms should be securely disposed of according to the Retention Policy.

Useful link

- ***Records Retention and Disposal Schedule*** (OurHub)

3.3.2 Information to provide

People will want to know specific details about the parent and toddler group - see information to include below. This information can be included in a simple leaflet, **see Appendix 4**, and in places where the group is advertised. **See Section 3.1**

Appendices 5 and 6 have an editable *Expectations for Parent and toddler Groups* document and an example.

Information leaflet

Information to include:

- Who the group leaders are and how to identify them.
- How the session runs and what activities are available.
- Details of session payment/donation - what this includes and how to pay.
- Contact details.
- Data protection and photography policies.
- The name of the safeguarding and the deputy safeguarding lead.
- Expectations for behaviour, such as:
 - ☐ Parents and carers being responsible for their own children
 - ☐ Nappy changing in designated area



It is very important that a group information leaflet should also include a clear statement that the group is church-based, and therefore will include Christian songs, prayers and Bible stories, and that invitations will be shared to other church events.

Welcome packs

A welcome pack is an excellent way of showing hospitality to new members. If you choose to provide one it can be a helpful way to share key further information, resources and some small gifts. To manage costs, you may wish to give this on their second visit rather than immediately.

Possible contents include:

- Registration form
- Welcome card/leaflet
- Information about other activities, eg Messy Church, welcome spaces and coffee mornings, special interest groups and worship services
- Information about Dedication/Thanksgiving services, and the *Cradle Roll*
- A small treat for the child such as a healthy snack pack
- A simple treat for the parent or carer, eg hot chocolate sachet, tea bag, or tissues





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Behind the Scenes



3.4 Finance Compliance Documents

These documents are required by The Salvation Army. Your field finance team and audit team, corps finance team and corps leader will be able to help you.

It is important that you keep a good record of all income paid to you and a record of any outstanding payments due from parents.

Always refer to the **Finance** section on OurHub to ensure you are working to the most up-to-date guidance.

All documentation containing sensitive or personal data, eg card data, should be kept in a locked cupboard or filing cabinet and only accessed by managers for the purpose of running the group. Records kept on computer systems should be access controlled by password or saved to a secure shared drive with access based on role.

The following financial procedures are mandatory and records need to be kept, to comply with the audit process.

3.4.1 Section codes

A new parent and toddler group, or one being re-started, requires the allocation of a new section code, GM1, to ensure income and expenditure are assigned to the group correctly. If more than one session is run per week, all groups can be assigned to GM1 which will enable corps leadership to have full visibility of the cost of running the groups.

3.4.2 Subscriptions/donations

Any subscription or suggested donation should be clearly stated on posters/advertisements and communicated to parents and carers at the point of registration.



3.4.3 Sectional registers and alternatives

See Appendix 7

A *Sectional Register* (available from **Salvationist Publishing and Supplies** - stock number 60920) should be maintained to record any amounts paid or donated. Distinction should also be made where monies are paid by cash or card. Ensure any card data collected is kept securely.

Alternatively, some groups use the *Session Registration* form to record any amounts paid or donated, filing it with the *Safeguarding Leaders in Attendance* forms. Where a family attends but does not pay, their attendance should still be recorded, with a clear distinction that no payment was received. These adapted forms are acceptable, as long as they contain records of attendance and monies paid.

However, as printed registration sheets are more prone to damage or loss, this may make reconciliation and audit verification more difficult. Maintaining a consistent, durable record helps reduce the risk of error or misappropriation.

Ensure all data from the *Sectional Registers* and the *Session Registration* form are kept safe at all times, always locked away and destroyed safely when no longer needed.

3.4.4 Reconciliation

The *Sectional Register* (or *Session Registration* form - see above) should be totalled for each session and reconciled to the cash collected. While one individual may maintain the register, this should be reviewed by the group leader for accountability - providing oversight and evidence the segregation of duties.

3.4.5 Cash handling expectations

Cash should be transferred to the corps finance team along with an income slip detailing the session date, total funds, and the initials of both the individual counting the money and the group leader. The register itself can act as the primary record if completed clearly and accurately.

3.4.6 Expenditure

All expenditure should be processed through the corps leader or corps finance team, in line with local arrangements. Where petty cash or reimbursement are used, receipts must be retained, legible, and clearly



itemised with the section code. This is also true for expenditure on purchase cards or with an expenses claim.

Further guidance

- Expenses Complete Guidance (OurHub)

3.4.7 Accounting and monitoring

All income and expenditure should be recorded against the relevant parent and toddler group section code GM1 in the Accounting System. This is the responsibility of the corps finance team.

The field finance team distributes the corps monthly reports to the corps leaders. The parent and toddler group leader will need to contact the corps leaders or corps treasurer for a copy of the monthly reports, to enable reconciliation of income to the register and review of expenditure. Any discrepancies should be investigated promptly.

- Financial records should be retained in line with policy (current year plus six financial years).
- If further guidance is required over any financial matter, this is available from your regional finance team, via your corps leader / finance team.

Corps : XXX Section : GM1 Community Activity - Parent & Toddlers 1		Senior Corps Detailed Income and Expenditure From April 2025 to March 2026		Current Year To Date			March 2026
Account	Description	March 2026 Budget	Actual	Actual	Budget	Variance (adverse)	Budget
£		£	£	£	£	£	£
General Funds							
Income							
<i>Cartridge & Other Member Giving</i>							
11033	Personal/Cartridge Giving/Section Subscriptions	(71)	(450)	(1,550)	(850)	710	(7)
		(71)	(450)	(1,550)	(850)	710	(7)
<i>Other Income</i>							
11000	Donations & Gifts from the General Public	-	-	(1)	-	1	
		-	-	(1)	-	1	
Total Income		(71)	(450)	(1,551)	(850)	711	(7)
Expenditure							
<i>Officer & Employee Costs</i>							
		-	-	-	-	-	
<i>Other Expenditure</i>							
31000	Purchase of Furniture & Fittings (incl shop)	-	-	33	-	(33)	
35310	Household Provisions (excl food)	4	-	-	50	50	
33410	Teaching/Meeting Resource Materials	17	-	7	200	193	
35300	Food costs (zero rated purchases)	10	18	75	120	45	
35305	Food costs (standard rated purchases)	-	-	4	-	(4)	
39905	Incidentals	3	-	-	40	40	

Example of an *Income and Expenditure* form.





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3.5 Safe Mission Compliance Documents

See Section 4.2

It is advisable to consider health and safety in collaboration with corps leaders, as they will have oversight of risks in your specific building. It is also useful to ask members of your team to contribute as this allows for different perspectives and helps volunteers take ownership and responsibility during the group.

Always refer to the **Safe Mission** section on OurHub to ensure you are working to the most up-to-date guidance.

All documentation containing personal data, eg registration forms, should be kept in a locked cupboard or filing cabinet and only accessed by managers for the purpose of running the group. Records kept on computer systems should be access-controlled by password or saved to a secure shared drive with access based on role.

3.5.1 Risk Assessment

A risk assessment must be completed, covering factors such as toy safety and accessibility of hazards.

Useful links

- **Risk Assessment** form (OurHub)
- **Example of a Risk Assessment** (OurHub)
- **Children's outdoor play area and equipment checklist** (OurHub)
- **Vulnerable persons health and safety checklist** (OurHub)



3.5.2 Accident records

Accidents involving children must be assessed to determine whether they require reporting. Minor accidents to children should not be reported using The Salvation Army accident reporting system. Instead, keep a record locally and ensure the child's parent/guardian is informed.

Further guidance

- *Health and Safety Manual* page 13 (OurHub)

3.5.3 Recording incidents

See Sections 4.2.2 and 6.1

Health and safety incidents (events that caused or could have caused harm, including accidents, near misses, dangerous occurrences or occupational diseases) must be reported appropriately. If a paper form has been used, it is mandatory for the incident to be entered online as soon as possible.

Useful link

- *Incident reporting* (OurHub)

3.5.4 Volunteers

See Sections 2.3.3 and 3.5.5

Volunteers operate under the group leader's supervision and should be recruited as per the volunteer recruitment process, including references and criminal records background checks where required.

Leaders must ensure that volunteers watch the short video *Why is Health and Safety so Important?* to understand key health and safety behaviours within The Salvation Army.

Useful links

- *How to recruit volunteers* (OurHub)
- *Why is Health and Safety so Important?* video (OurHub)

For any questions concerning this section, please contact:
volunteering@salvationarmy.org.uk



3.5.5 Criminal record background checks

The group leader, and one other person who deputises in their absence, should be subject to a criminal record background check.

The level of criminal record will depend on where the individual is based, what they are doing and the level of interaction with the children.

England, Wales, Channel Islands and IOM - DBS Checks

- Parent and toddler leaders and deputies will require an Enhanced Child DBS check with the Children's Barred List
- Parent and toddler workers/volunteers will require an Enhanced with Barred list, Enhanced or no check at all depending on the level of interaction with children.

Useful link

- **Corps DBS Guidance - Children** - page 3 and 4 (scenarios E, F and H) (OurHub)

Scotland - Disclosure Scotland check

- All roles require membership in the Protecting Vulnerable Groups (PVG) Scheme.

Northern Ireland - Access NI check

- Parent and toddler leaders, deputies, volunteers and workers will require an Enhanced Access NI check with the Children's Barred List
- Parent and toddler kitchen helpers that have no interaction with the children do not require an Access NI.

Republic of Ireland - Garda Vetting checks

- Schedule 1 Section 7 and Schedule 2 Section 15 check

If there is a 'disclosure with content' (blemished disclosure), a *Risk Assessment Management Plan* will need to be used.

For any questions concerning this section, please contact:
DisclosuresDBS@salvationarmy.org.uk





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Behind the Scenes



3.6 Safeguarding Compliance Documents

See Section 4.2.3

Safeguarding is integral to all we do and is everyone's responsibility.

Always refer to the **Safeguarding** section on OurHub to ensure you are working to the most up-to-date guidance.

All documentation containing sensitive, data eg registration forms, should be kept in a locked cupboard or filing cabinet and only accessed by managers for the purpose of running the group. Records kept on computer systems should be access-controlled by password or saved to a secure shared drive with access based on role.

3.6.1 Safeguarding training

Everyone who helps the parent and toddler group should complete the *Safeguarding for Everyone* training to support recognising, responding, recording and reporting concerns. All leaders must complete *Safeguarding for Leaders* training and work closely with the safeguarding leads.

Useful links

- **Safeguarding for Everyone** (Salvationist.org.uk)
- **Safeguarding for leaders** (OurHub)

3.6.2 Safeguarding the group

Safeguarding the group is about creating a safe, caring and well-managed space where children, families, leaders and volunteers know what to do if a concern arises.

- A named safeguarding lead must be displayed at sessions.



- There should be a clear reporting route for concerns.
- After each session, leaders must complete the *Session Recording Sheet - Leaders in Attendance* note any incidents or concerns and share these with the safeguarding lead promptly. See Sections 3.4.3 and 3.6.3.
- *Safe and Sound Procedures* must always be followed.
- Establish appropriate ratios for supervising the group.
- Clarify parent responsibilities and leader responsibilities. See Appendices 5 and 6.

3.6.3 Attendance and welfare

The following forms must be kept, securely managed, and safely destroyed, in line with the retention schedule.

Useful link

- *Records Retention and Disposal Schedule* (OurHub)

Registration form

See Section 3.3.1 and Appendix 3

This is the essential information taken when registering a child.

Session Recording Sheet - Leaders in Attendance

See 3.6.2

A *Session Recording Sheet - Leaders in Attendance* should be completed each week. These are printed and filed indefinitely.

Useful links

- *Leaders in attendance session* (OurHub)
- *Safeguarding* (OurHub)



Session Registration form

See Appendix 7

Parents and carers sign a *Session Registration* form when they arrive for a session. It is essential for health and safety and safeguarding. This also serves as a record for fire/emergency purposes as they state who is on the premises. These forms also help leaders notice when a family has been absent for some time, allowing for appropriate follow-up or pastoral care.

The *Session Registration* form will need to be managed and not left unattended at any point. Ensure that the form does not include excessive or non-essential data like phone numbers or addresses; if it does, it will need to be securely managed to ensure privacy. The form should be locked away after use and safely destroyed when no longer needed.

These forms will need to comply with the Retention Policy. See above.

3.6.4 Support

For further information or support regarding all areas of safeguarding, please contact your corps safeguarding lead / corps leader, or divisional safeguarding officer. The *Safeguarding Contacts* poster in your corps should contain all the contact details for your area.

Useful link

- [Safeguarding poster \(OurHub\)](#)

3.6.5 Safeguarding concerns

We need to recognise, respond, record and report anything that might make people feel uncomfortable or unsafe. This includes behaviour from other parents and volunteers.

Any safeguarding concerns should be reported to the safeguarding lead, or, if this is not possible, use the details on the *Safeguarding Contacts* poster in your corps which should contain all the contact details for your area. See above.





GET SET!

Welcoming Everyone



4.1 Inclusivity and Community Building

Creating a parent and toddler group that is truly welcoming and inclusive requires intentional planning, care, and a strong sense of community. At its heart, the aim is to provide a warm, safe and open environment where everyone can feel valued, supported and connected.

4.1.1 Creating a warm and friendly welcome

A positive experience begins from the moment families arrive. A clearly visible welcome area with friendly volunteers helps establish a sense of safety and belonging straight away. Having someone at the door to greet people with a smile, alongside a registration desk staffed by approachable team members, reassures newcomers and helps regular attendees feel recognised. **See Section 2.3**

Simple additions, such as displaying volunteer names and photos or wearing name badges, can help build familiarity and trust. It is also important to use inclusive language and ensure that all carers - whether parents, grandparents, childminders or friends - feel equally welcomed and acknowledged.

Comfortable seating, engaging toys and gentle background music can help create a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere. Offering simple refreshments such as tea, coffee or toast demonstrates warm hospitality, particularly for families who may have had a busy or challenging morning. **See Sections 4.2.2 and 5.2**

4.1.2 Building community and connection

See Section 6.1.4

Beyond the initial welcome, creating a strong sense of community is essential. Parent and toddler groups provide a unique opportunity to bring



together people from diverse backgrounds, cultures, experiences and generations.

A thoughtfully arranged space allows parents to socialise while still supervising their children, promoting both connection and ease. Encouraging interaction between families helps relationships grow and reduces isolation. Volunteers can support this by introducing newcomers to others or helping them connect with familiar faces.

Intergenerational interaction is especially valuable; older adults and experienced parents can offer encouragement and wisdom to those new to parenting, while children benefit from engaging with a wide range of adults. **See Section 4.3**

Extending relationships beyond the session through communication platforms such as WhatsApp or a private Facebook group can further strengthen community bonds. The *Social Media Policy* provides guidance on how to do this safely and responsibly. **See Section 3.1.1**

Useful link

- ***Social Media Policy***

4.1.3 Embedding inclusivity and diversity

Inclusivity should be at the core of every aspect of the group. This means embracing and celebrating diversity in culture, faith, language and background.

Activities, music and food can reflect different cultural celebrations and traditions, helping families learn from one another and feel represented. In addition to celebrating the major Christian festivals, groups might also mark other important occasions such as the Chinese New Year and Ramadan. **See Sections 5.2 and 5.3**

Where possible, there are benefits in having a team that reflects the diversity of the local community. This can enhance the sense of belonging and provide broader understanding within the group. **See Section 2.3**

Always refer to the **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion** section on OurHub to ensure you are working to the most up-to-date guidance.



Useful link

- **Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Calendar**

4.1.4 Practical support and accessibility

See Section 6.1.4

Providing practical support is another key element of a welcoming parent and toddler group. Small acts of care - such as offering to hold a baby, helping with coats, or simply taking time to listen - can make a significant difference to families.

There will be times when people will need meaningful support in areas that touch the heart of family life, like bereavement, pregnancy and domestic abuse. Consider what signposting to provide for other support services, as well as how to walk alongside families with compassion and care.

Accessibility is also very important. Using visual aids, simple schedules, and tools such as Makaton signing can help ensure that everyone can engage fully, regardless of language or communication needs. Accessible facilities, such as suitable nappy-changing areas, and seating for those who cannot sit on the floor, should also be considered, as these further reinforce an inclusive environment.

Remember that not all disabilities or needs are visible. Consider ways that you can make your space supportive, accessible and inclusive.

Additional support may be needed for children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND). Some families may benefit from quieter areas or a sensory tent, with toys and activities to support regulation and provide a calm space for children who feel overwhelmed.

Useful links

- **Family support - resource links and advice** (salvationist.org.uk)
- **The Makaton Charity** (makaton.org)
- **Widget communication tool** (widgitonline.com)
- **Disability and Inclusion** (OurHub)
- **Supporting people with disabilities** (salvationist.org.uk)
- **Hidden disabilities** (hdsunflowercom/uk)



4.1.5 Establishing structure and routine

See Section 5.1

Structure and routine provide consistency and reassurance. A clear and predictable schedule, such as free play, tidy-up time, snacks, story time and singing, gives both children and adults a sense of flow and security. Displaying this routine visually makes it more accessible and easier to follow for everyone. **See Section 4.1.4**

Bringing the session to a close with a shared ‘together time’ is particularly valuable. This provides an opportunity for everyone to gather, connect and feel part of the wider group, strengthening a sense of belonging and community.

4.1.6 A place where everyone belongs

Ultimately a successful parent and toddler group is one where everyone feels they belong. This is so important as people, especially from different ethnic groups or communities, may have different experiences or expectations of engaging with formal groups or people they consider to represent authority.

By prioritising welcome, inclusion, practical support and meaningful community-building, these groups can become places where children grow in confidence and social skills, and where adults find friendship, encouragement and connection.



‘A wonderful space for both children and parents. The children flourish and learn new skills, making new friends and getting ready for nursery. Parents enjoy the environment and make friends with diverse groups of people. I love the welcoming atmosphere we enjoy and share.’

Team member and former attendee, Gateshead Corps



‘From the first day I arrived, we felt genuinely welcomed and included. It is a safe, friendly space, where everyone can be themselves. It’s more than just a toddler group - it’s a place where you feel connected.’

Parent, Gateshead Corps





GET SET!

Welcoming Everyone



4.2 Safety first

See Section 3.5



The Salvation Army believes that every human being, created and valued by God, deserves respect, dignity and neighbourly love. As such, The Salvation Army is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare and wellbeing of children, young people and adults within all its programmes.



‘We went to a group where the set-up was so confusing; a child nearly escaped on to the road. Kids were trying to play with broken toys and were acting out in frustration. One child was nearly scalded by hot tea. No one knew where the first-aid kit was. No one knew if there were nuts in the cake - and I have an allergy. My toddler became overwhelmed with all the noise and bright lights.’

‘I thought groups weren’t for us, till we came here - calm, organised and welcoming. We feel safe and can really enjoy coming here.’

Parent, Morley Corps

4.2.1 Who can help?

It is advisable to consider health and safety in collaboration with church leaders, as they will have oversight of risks in your specific building. Encourage members of your team to contribute, as this allows for different perspectives and helps volunteers take ownership and responsibility during the group.

When starting a new group or reviewing an existing group, it is always helpful to do this in conversation with your intergenerational officer/worker, territorial community engagement lead, divisional safeguarding officer and safe mission adviser to ensure we are doing all we can to keep people safe.



4.2.2 Safe Mission

See Sections 3.5 and 5.2.3

When creating a safe parent and toddler group, here are some Safe Mission questions to consider:

Access doors around the building

- What are the exits points of the rooms?
- Do doors present a finger entrapment hazard for young children, and if yes, how will this be managed?
- How easily can a child leave the room unsupervised?
- Do any routes around the building need to be blocked off / locked, and if so, how will the route be used in an emergency?
- What precautions can be made at the beginning/end of the group to prevent a child leaving the building unsupervised?
- Is there CCTV on site, and if so, are there signs in place telling parents why it is there?

Allergens

See Section 5.2

- Who will be responsible for recording the allergens and how will they be communicated to parents and carers?
- How will you collect dietary information for children and parents and carers?
- Where will this information be stored and who will have access to it - remembering it needs to be kept secure at all times but also easy to access?
- How will you ensure children with allergies are not put at risk during your group?

Communicating risks and responsibilities

- How will you communicate risks with parents and carers, eg Policy and practice documents, leaflets, welcome sessions?
- Who is responsible for reviewing the *Risk Assessment*?

Documentation

- How will Safe Mission documents and forms be managed?
- Who will have access to them?
- What will be their retention period?
- How will they be securely destroyed?



Fire safety

See Section 3.5

- Who will be responsible for the group in the event of a fire?
- Do they know the fire evacuation procedures for the building?
- How often will you provide fire drills to ensure the group is confident in evacuating the building?
- What will be used as the fire evacuation roll call, eg the *Session Registration* form?

First-aid

- Who is responsible for first aid during the group?
- Who is responsible for checking the first-aid kit?
- Does the person have training in our incident reporting procedures and know when and how to submit the new incident forms online?

Food hygiene

- Who will be food hygiene trained?
- Who will complete the food hygiene paperwork in the *Health and Safety Manual*? See Sections 3.5 and 5:2

Group size and ratios

See Section 6

- What is your room occupancy?
- How many families can you safely have in the room playing?
- How many volunteers do you have to support building relationships and ensuring safety, providing refreshments and any other jobs you may need? (Quality over quantity!)

Hot drinks

- What lidded cups will you use?
- Where do parents have to place down their lidded cups?

Illness

- How will you ensure that adults or children do not attend while ill? Or during their recovery period?
- What will happen if the group leader or other volunteers are ill?



Incidents

See Sections 3.5.1, 3.5.2 and 6.1

- Who will record all incidents?
- Who will ensure the child's parent/carer is informed?

Moving and handling and slips, trips or falls

- Who will move the furniture/chairs and equipment for the group?
- Do they need any additional training to do this safely?
- Are there any spaces in your room that could cause injury?
- How will you block off areas that could pose a risk, eg stacked chairs, large bookcases ...

Toilets / hand washing

- Is there sufficient access to toilets and baby changing?
- Is there access to adequate handwashing facilities and tissues?
- Do your toilets need to be made more accessible for young families, eg potties, toddler seats, spare nappies/wipes and sanitary products?

Toys and equipment

- Who will check toys regularly for damage?
- How often will the toys be cleaned?

4.2.3 Safeguarding

See Sections 3.6

When creating a safe parent and toddler group, here are some safeguarding questions to consider:

Additional support

See Section 4.1

- Who has or could have additional training to understand how best to support children and parents and carers with additional needs?
- Are there people in your group who may need a *Personal Evacuation Plan*? Are there people in your group who would benefit from reasonable adjustments to make the group more accessible?
- Do you have a breakout space that can be used?
- What additional training may your volunteers need for the needs that may present in your groups, eg domestic abuse awareness?



- What signposting can you provide to other support services?

Building access

- What is the plan if an unknown individual enters the room or building?
- Who else will be in the building when your group is there?

Concerning behaviour

See Section 6.1.5

- Who is your local SA safeguarding lead?
- How will you report any concerning behaviour from parents or volunteers?
- How will you de-escalate conflict between parents or volunteers? And how will this be reported?

Data protection and privacy

See Sections 3.3.1, 3.6.2 and Appendix 3

- How will you ensure people's information and identity are protected?
- How will their information be stored? Who will have access to this and how long will the data be kept before being safely destroyed?
- How will you ensure privacy, eg on *Session Registration* forms or on social media?





GET SET!

Welcoming Everyone



4.3 Creating Intergenerational Spaces

Parent and toddler groups are naturally intergenerational spaces - for the benefit of all involved. Without intentional planning, groups involve people across the generations who bring a rich mix of ages, experiences and perspectives.

4.3.1 Why intergenerational groups matter

Intergenerational parent and toddler groups are important because they create space for fictive kinship - an extended, chosen family.

The early Church, in the first century AD, embraced fictive kinship - where family was defined not primarily by blood relationship but by shared community. It was a call to mutual care, treating the poor, widows, orphans and the socially vulnerable with the same responsibility and dignity as one's own blood family. This radical, relational way of living offered people something deeper than obligation - it offered belonging - and it helped Christianity spread so deeply and widely.

Intergenerational groups still echo this practice today. They are multigenerational spaces where children, parents, carers and older adults can become 'family' to one another. For those who are isolated, who lack extended family or feel disconnected from community, these groups offer stability. By bringing generations together, groups widen the foundations on which individuals and families can grow.

4.3.2 Embedding the foundational beliefs of intergenerational Church

The Family Ministries Department is encouraging corps to consider how four foundational beliefs of intergenerational Church are mirrored in their way of being the Body of Christ together. These are:



- I belong
- I am needed
- I can learn from everyone
- Life is fuller when we journey together with people of different generations

Here are some ways to embed these values into your group:

Belonging to the group

Who is in your mind when you are planning your group? Knowing what kind of snacks people like, even allergies, or a person's specific favourite toy, can increase a sense of belonging both in adults and children.

Needed at the group

How do you offer out jobs? Can children help pack away, or adults help lead a song? Letting go of leading and increasing everyone's responsibility allows people to find purpose in the group.

Learning from everyone

Whose voices are important? Who has input into the decision-making process? Who is the one welcoming people? Who gives advice? Ask others and empower the answer to be - lots of people.

Journeying together

Parent and toddler groups naturally bring together different generations. Their strength lies in recognising and valuing each person present, not just the children. Every individual contributes something unique, and together they form a richer, more meaningful community, where life is shared and experienced collectively rather than in isolation.

4.3.3 Who can help create this space?

Creating this culture begins with those already in the room. It starts with you - by choosing presence over busyness, sitting with parents and carers, listening well, and gently initiating conversation. When leaders model curiosity and care, other volunteers quickly catch what matters and follow that example.

When parents and carers are invited into small, meaningful roles, they move from being consumers to contributors, and purpose becomes a powerful pathway to belonging.



Beyond those already present, consider who else might be invited into the room. You know your people:

- older adults with time and wisdom to share;
- young people seeking work experience;
- students with an hour between lectures; or
- others longing for connection.

Intentionally inviting a variety of ages and life stages helps diversify the family, enriching the space with different perspectives and gifts, and deepening the sense that this is a community where everyone has a place and a part to play.

For further help and support to think about what intergenerational Church looks like in your corps, please contact your divisional intergenerational officer/worker or the Family Ministries outreach mission partner.





GET SET!

Welcoming Everyone



4.4 Connecting Families to the Wider Church Congregation

Parent and toddler groups are often a family's first experience of church. They provide a unique opportunity to help parents, carers and children feel part of a wider community of faith. The key is to naturally build connections through relationships, a warm welcome and shared experiences.

Connecting families to the wider church is less about programmes and more about belonging. Through strong relationships, personal invitations, intergenerational connections and ongoing support, groups can become an important bridge into the life of the church community.

4.4.1 Build relationships first

Strong connections begin with trust. Take time to get to know families, listen to their stories and celebrate important milestones such as birthdays, starting school or other family achievements. Families are more likely to engage with wider church life when they feel known, valued and supported.

4.4.2 Introduce to the wider church naturally

Help families see that the group is part of a larger church family. Involve volunteers and congregation members in the group so that parents and children become familiar with trusted faces from across the church. Intergenerational relationships can develop through simple conversations, shared refreshments and special events.

4.4.3 Use the power of invitation

Use a variety of communication methods to ensure families know what is available, for example:

- Face-to-face conversations
- Social media



- Email updates
- Posters and flyers
- Welcome packs

Clear communication helps families understand what activities are available and how they can get involved.

Personal invitations are often the most effective way to encourage participation. Rather than relying solely on posters or announcements, invite families individually to activities that may interest them. Invitations should always be warm and genuine, helping families feel welcome without feeling pressured.

4.4.4 Create opportunities to connect

Offer activities that provide a natural next step into church life, such as:

- Family-friendly and intergenerational services
- Messy Church
- Sensory groups
- Family fun days
- Shared lunches and picnics
- Women's or men's ministry groups or parent-focused events

Many families feel more comfortable attending events when they already know the venue, leaders and other attendees. Messy Church can be particularly effective because families explore faith together through crafts, stories, worship and shared meals in a relaxed environment.

4.4.5 Celebrate seasonal events together

Church festivals provide excellent opportunities for families to connect with the wider congregation.

Examples include:

- Easter trails or stay-and-play sessions
- Summer community gatherings such as picnics
- Harvest celebrations and foodbank collections
- Light Parties
- Christmas Nativities, outdoor carol services or parties

These events bring different generations together and create shared experiences within the church family.



4.4.6 Encourage families to serve

Families are not only recipients of support; they also have gifts and skills to offer. Providing opportunities to serve helps build ownership and belonging.

Examples include:

- Supporting food banks
- Helping with Christmas Present Appeals
- Organising fundraising activities
- Baking or volunteering at events
- Taking part in community projects

Families can also become involved in initiatives such as the Helping-Hand Appeal, sponsored toddles or Harvest collections, helping them learn about generosity and community involvement.

4.4.7 Dedication and thanksgiving services and the Cradle Roll

Dedication and Thanksgiving services can provide valuable opportunities for deeper engagement with church life. Information about these services can be shared as appropriate.

A *Cradle Roll* or similar keeping-in-touch system can help maintain connections by:

- Sending birthday cards
- Marking special milestones
- Inviting families to events
- Offering prayer support
- Sharing information about church activities

All documentation containing sensitive data, eg *Cradle Roll*, should be kept in a locked cupboard or filing cabinet and only accessed by leaders for the purpose of running the group. Records kept on computer systems should be access-controlled by password or saved to a secure shared drive with access based on role. All data collected will need to comply with the Retention Policy.

Useful link

- ***Records Retention and Disposal Schedule*** (OurHub)



4.4.8 Staying connected beyond the group

See Section 5.3.5

As parent and toddler groups only cover a specific stage in a family's journey, it is important to plan for continued engagement when children move on.

Consider:

- Graduation celebrations or gifts such as children's Bibles
- A monthly after-school club to bring families back together
- Signposting to other children's clubs and family activities
- Messy Church, Café Church and Worship Together services
- Offering uniformed groups such as Beavers and Rainbows
- Creating an alumni social media group
- Sending birthday cards and seasonal greetings using the *Cradle Roll*

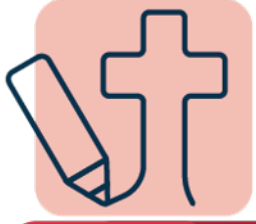
These simple steps remind families that they remain part of the church community as their children grow.





GET SET!

Playing With Purpose



5.1 Activities: Play with Purpose and Routines

Playing with purpose means being intentional about everything that is offered. This approach can be communicated to everyone, for example through posters, invitations and info sheets. Each activity, interaction and moment contributes to a wider goal: supporting children's development, nurturing relationships and reflecting God's love.

When these elements come together, the group becomes more than just a place to play - it becomes a space where families can grow, connect and feel truly valued.

5.1.1 Create a welcoming, faith-filled environment

At the heart of every parent and toddler group should be a sense of warmth, welcome and belonging. Each session is an opportunity to reflect God's love in a practical way, helping everyone feel that they are part of the big family of God. Creating this kind of environment doesn't happen by accident; it grows through thoughtful planning, consistent routines and meaningful interaction.

5.1.2 Building structure and routine

A strong sense of structure plays an important role in helping families feel secure. Just like within any family, clear routines and gentle boundaries give children confidence and help them understand what to expect.

A session that follows a familiar rhythm - perhaps moving from free play to snack time, then story, singing and finally tidy-up - builds this sense of stability. When children and adults know what comes next, they are able to relax and fully engage. A visual timetable with pictures or symbols can be very helpful for everyone. **See Section 4.1.4**



Help with school readiness

Parent and toddler groups support young children's preparedness for school by helping them develop social, emotional and communication skills in a safe and supportive environment. Through play, routines, group activities and interaction with other children and adults, children learn to share, take turns, follow simple instructions and build confidence away from home. These early experiences help ease the transition into a school setting, fostering independence, curiosity and a positive attitude towards learning.

Useful link

- **12 top tips for school readiness** (notjustaparentandtoddler.group)

5.1.3 Communication

Communication is another key element of purposeful play. Families learn and engage in different ways, so it's important to share messages in a variety of forms.

Visual displays, simple signage, songs with actions and spoken reminders all work together to reinforce the same ideas. When the same message is seen, heard and experienced in multiple ways, it becomes more meaningful and easier to understand.

Useful links

- **Disability and Inclusion** (OurHub)
- **The Makaton Charity** (makaton.org)
- **Widget communication tool** (widgitonline.com)

5.1.4 Know your group

Getting to know the children and families who attend is essential for creating sessions that feel relevant and enjoyable. Every group is different, and activities should reflect the interests and needs of those who come. If children are drawn to creative play, it makes sense to provide more opportunities for crafts. If they prefer active or imaginative play, then those areas should be developed while still offering a balanced play experience.
See Section 5.1.5



A role for one of the team from time to time might include stepping back for a couple of minutes and really noticing/observing what is happening in the room and feeding back at the end of the session.

Purposeful play is not about filling time but about offering meaningful experiences that engage the group.

5.1.5 Offering a balanced play experience

A well-balanced environment should offer a range of play opportunities to meet the needs of all children. While some children may enjoy active, energetic play, others may prefer quieter areas where they can read, explore books or engage in other calm activities. But it is also important to encourage children to engage with many different types of activities. Providing this balance helps ensure that every child feels comfortable, valued and included - while broadening their experiences in a safe and supportive environment.

5.1.6 Essential toys and equipment

See Section 3.2.2

Starting a group doesn't require huge amounts of expensive equipment, but it does benefit from a thoughtful selection that supports different types of play and development - active, creative, imaginative and quiet. A smaller, well-used selection of toys is far more effective than a large, overwhelming one.

Physical play and ride-ons

To support movement, coordination and confidence:

- Push-along toys and cars
- Ride-on bikes and scooters depending on space available (no pedals for younger children)
- Soft play shapes (blocks, wedges, tunnels)
- Play mats or foam flooring

Building and construction

To help develop fine motor skills and problem-solving:

- Duplo or large building blocks
- Wooden blocks
- Stackable cups or rings



Imaginative play

To encourage creativity, language and social interaction:

- Toy kitchen, food, and utensils
- Dolls and accessories
- Dressing-up clothes (simple and easy to put on)
- Small world toys (people, animals, cars, farms)

Creative activities

To allow for self-expression and creativity:

- Crayons, washable pens, chalk
- Paper, colouring sheets
- Glue sticks and simple craft materials (stickers, foam shapes)
- Play-dough and tools

Books and quiet area

To provide a calming space and support early literacy:

- Board books and picture books
- Soft cushions, rugs or a small book corner

Helpful extras

To add variety and excitement to sessions:

- Baby sensory toys (soft rattles, mirrors, textured toys)
- Ball pit or pop-up tunnel
- Outdoor toys (balls, bubbles, ride-ons)
- Seasonal or themed resources (eg Christmas Nativity toys)

5.1.7 Sensory play

Sensory play provides rich opportunities for learning, and it doesn't need to be messy or complicated to be effective. The key is providing opportunities for exploration, interaction and conversation. This will support brain and language development, fine and gross motor skills and provide opportunities for interaction; it will also bring a calm, purposeful balance to your group. A few simple, well-chosen resources can go a long way.

Tactile (touch-based) materials

- Dry rice, pasta or lentils
- Sand



- Shaving foam or foam soap
- Play-dough
- Trays or shallow containers
- Scoops, cups, spoons and funnels
- Different textures (furry, smooth, bubbly)

Water play

- Plastic tubs or bowls
- Cups, jugs and pouring toys
- Floating toys (boats, ducks)
- Sponges
- Ice blocks (small toy frozen inside or part frozen)

Visual stimulation

- Coloured scarves or fabric
- Bubble tubes or lava lamps (if available)
- Light-up toys
- Mirrors (unbreakable)

Sound and music

- Shakers, bells, tambourines
- Homemade instruments (rice in bottles, tins)
- Musical toys

Natural materials

- Leaves, pine cones, sticks
- Flowers or herbs (lavender, mint for smell)
- Smooth stones

Practical set-up items

- Wipeable mats or table covers
- Aprons or old shirts
- Baby wipes and towels
- Clearly defined area (to try and contain any mess!)



5.1.8 Encourage parent-child interaction and shared responsibility

Parents and carers play a vital role in the session; encouraging them to engage with their children can make a lasting difference. Not all parents will feel confident in playing or interacting, especially if they have not experienced positive examples themselves. By modelling simple ways of engaging - sitting alongside a child, joining in a game, or offering encouragement - team members can help build confidence and strengthen these relationships.

The session should also include shared responsibility. Inviting children and parents to help tidy away toys at the end not only teaches practical skills but also creates a clear sense of transition. This simple act helps signal that one part of the session has ended, reinforcing the routine and bringing a sense of order.

5.1.9 Sharing faith through play

See Section 5.3.2

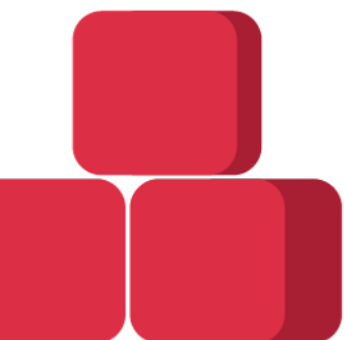
Within the group, sharing the Christian faith should feel natural and woven into the session rather than added on. Simple Bible stories, songs and activities can all point towards God's love through Jesus.

When these elements connect, perhaps a story that links to a craft or a song, it helps children and carers engage with the message in a deeper, more memorable way. The aim is to gently and consistently reflect faith throughout everything that happens. **See Section 5.4**

To help create engaging, shared moments and reinforce Christian teaching, you may need:

- Use of IT equipment, song sheets, visual prompts
- Musical instruments (shakers, tambourines, bells)
- Bible story books (age-appropriate)
- Simple props for storytelling (soft toys, puppets)
- Parachute for group play

As they leave, give attendees a sheet with a story you shared together and some craft or activity ideas, so they can remember the story and continue to engage with it, if they want to, when they are home.





GET SET!

Playing With Purpose



5.2 Hospitality and Snack Time

See Section 4

Good hospitality is vital at a parent and toddler group because it creates a warm, safe and welcoming environment where both children and adults feel valued and comfortable. This encourages families to return, helps build trust and supportive relationships, and allows parents - many of whom may feel isolated - to connect with others. Ultimately, good hospitality helps the group become a caring community where everyone can flourish.

5.2.1 Hospitality

Hospitality is about creating a culture where every family is noticed, welcomed, supported and invited to belong. Here are some key areas to consider.

A good welcome

Hospitality begins at the door. Families will have gone through many challenges just to get to the parent and toddler group! So make sure that they are made welcome when they arrive. Have a volunteer ready to introduce new families to those who attend regularly.

Remember to greet the adults as well as the children - and try to use names; this comes with practice, but name stickers can be helpful too. Organise a calm, welcoming entrance with clear areas to store coats and prams or buggies, easy access to the *Session registration* form and clear signage on where to go next. A calm, welcoming beginning is a good start to a session!



Practical kindness

Help families with simple acts of kindness like carrying bags, holding doors open or helping with their child. Offering drinks and snacks and other types of practical care help people feel noticed and valued.

Time to chat

Create opportunities for conversation and take the time to get to know people; remembering names and details from previous conversations helps to build rapport.

Notice the small things

Try and notice the small things. Who seems withdrawn, overwhelmed or shows a change in behaviour? Who would benefit from some gentle encouragement or support?

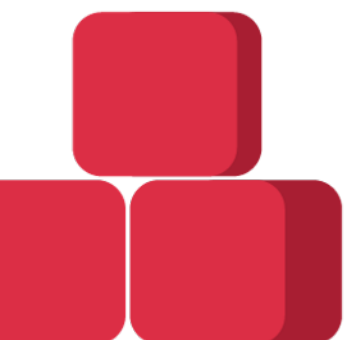
Equally, take time to celebrate small positive things too, like a child proudly bringing a toy or an adult with a new hairstyle. Small, sincere compliments and genuine interest show people that they are seen and valued.

Saying goodbye

Saying farewell is important, as this might be the last interaction they might have with you till the next group. A gentle, friendly goodbye, a thanks-for-coming, a hope-to-see-you-next-time, and a reminder of upcoming events, all help to reinforce the positive experiences of being part of the group.

5.2.2 Why snack time matters

Snack time is an important part of the session, providing opportunities for children and adults to enjoy fellowship, develop social skills and practise sharing and turn-taking. Aim to create a welcoming and inclusive environment where everyone is respected and considered, asking families to help ensure snacks are shared fairly, dietary needs are respected, and all children are supported to participate safely and confidently.



5.2.3 Safety first

See Sections 3.5 and 4.2.2

Safety must underpin every aspect of snack provision.

Allergies and dietary needs

Keep an up-to-date, accessible record of allergies for both children and parents and ensure all leaders and helpers are aware of these.

Common considerations include:

- Dairy intolerance
- Gluten sensitivity or coeliac disease
- Fruit allergies (eg strawberries are a common trigger)
- Peanuts and tree-nuts
- Vegan/vegetarian requirements

Ensure to avoid cross-contamination (eg separate preparation areas or utensils if needed).

Remember that in some cases allergies can be life-threatening. Remind parents not to give food to other children without parental consent

5.2.4 Choosing suitable snacks

Keep it simple, inclusive and budget-friendly.

Fruit and fresh options

- Bananas, satsumas, blueberries, raspberries
- Tomatoes and cucumber
- Grapes (always sliced lengthways)

Dry/package snacks

- Mini biscuits (chocolate and plain options)
- Rice cakes, breadsticks
- Plain crisps (eg Pom Bears, Skips)
- Veggie snack sticks

Hot options (where possible)

- Toast, crumpets, pancakes



It is good practice always to offer vegan/vegetarian options as standard and to use small portion sizes (eg mini packs) to reduce waste.

5.2.5 Drinks

Cold drinks

- Provide water, milk, or diluted juice
- Use beakers or feeder cups for very young children
- Only half-fill open-top cups to help reduce inevitable spills

Hot drinks (adults)

- Provide coffee, tea, hot chocolate, fruit teas - remember some people need decaffeinated options
- Use lidded cups or flasks, or create a designated safe area away from the children to prevent spills, scalds and burns

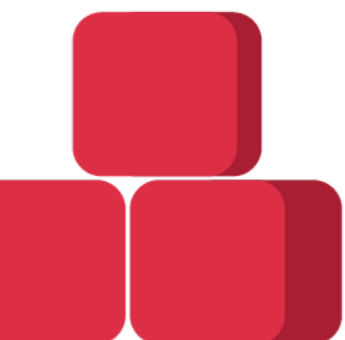
5.2.6 Managing snack time practically

If you don't have sufficient team members to prepare the snacks and drinks, you can set up a rota and request parents and carers to help.

If families bring snacks for sharing, then use a sign-up list for voluntary contributions. Have a clear list of items you are asking for. This is a good way to encourage shared ownership within the group.

Through kindness, patience and consideration for others, we can make snack time a positive experience for everyone by ensuring the following:

- Snacks are shared fairly, so that every child has the opportunity to enjoy them.
- Parents and carers should supervise their children closely.
- Try to encourage children to wait their turn, say 'please' and 'thank you' and practise good table manners appropriate to their age.
- Be mindful that some children may be shy, younger or need extra support. Help them to access snacks and feel included.
- As already outlined, respect the different needs of families, including allergies, dietary requirements, cultural practices and personal preferences.
- Food should not be taken from another child's plate or shared between children without parental agreement, helping to reduce allergy risks.
- Encourage children to sit while eating and drinking to promote safety.



- Encourage families to help with simple tasks such as tidying away cups and plates, fostering a sense of shared responsibility and community.
- Remember snack time is an opportunity for conversation, relationship-building and modelling positive behaviour.
- If snack supplies are limited, encourage everyone to take a moderate amount initially so that all children can be served before seconds are offered.
- A spirit of kindness, patience and generosity should underpin all interactions during snack time.

5.2.7 Special occasions and celebrations

See Section 5.3

When celebrating special occasions, snack times can be expanded, eg birthdays, Christmas, Easter, Eid, Hannukah, end-of-term parties. Where needed, provide a suggested food list for parents using a sign-up sheet to avoid duplication. The group can then fill in any gaps rather than supplying everything.





GET SET!

Playing With Purpose



5.3 Celebrations

For a parent and toddler group, celebrating special occasions and milestones helps build community. It marks important moments in children's and family's lives, and creates opportunities to share faith and culture. This will help to support families, strengthen relationships and nurture a sense of belonging within the group. They can often open the door for more personal conversations and connection and can help create lasting memories and affirm the value of every child and family.

There are many ways the group can celebrate - through activities, stories, food (see Section 5.2.7) or by giving treats and gifts. There is no requirement as to when and how special occasions are celebrated - it is completely up to the group to decide. However, here are some special events you might like to consider.

5.3.1 Birthdays and anniversaries

Birthdays

This can be done for children and adults.

- Sing a birthday song during the session.
- Give a birthday sticker, badge, card or certificate.
- Include a special prayer of thanks for them and their family.
- Allow the child to choose a favourite song, story or activity.
- Create a birthday crown for them to wear.

Group anniversaries

- Celebrate the anniversary of the group with a special party.
- Display photos and memories from previous years.
- Invite former families to join the celebration.
- Thank volunteers and leaders publicly.
- Share stories of how the group has supported families over time.



5.3.2 Christian festivals

See Section 5.1.9

As a treat, giving party bags at Christmas or Easter can be an ideal time to include a faith-based gift like a Bible story or sticker book. Or for adults a Bible verse gift like pens, bookmarks, coasters or fridge magnets.

Christmas

- Explore the Nativity through storytelling or role play.
- Offer Christmas crafts and carol singing.
- Advent activities and countdowns.
- Collect gifts or donations for local charities.

Easter

- Tell the Easter story in age-appropriate ways.
- Create an Easter garden and plan Resurrection-themed crafts.
- Set up Easter egg hunts.
- Sing celebratory songs about new life and hope.

Harvest

- Collect food donations for a food bank.
- Discuss thankfulness and God's provision.
- Provide Harvest-themed crafts and songs.

Pentecost and other festivals

- Set up activities involving colour, wind and flames.
- Give simple teachings about the Holy Spirit.
- Offer prayer and celebration of the church family.

Useful link

Jump IN! resources are available to help with celebrating all the Christian Festivals and some other national holidays.

- **Jump IN!** (Salvationist.org.uk)



5.3.3 National and international holidays

These can provide opportunities to celebrate community, diversity and awareness of important causes.

Examples include:

- St George's Day, St David's Day, St Patrick's Day and St Andrew's Day.
- Remembrance Day with simple acts of remembrance and peace-themed activities.
- Mother's Day and Father's Day with a small gift or craft activity - while being sensitive to different family circumstances.
- Valentine's Day with a small gift or treat for parents.
- World Book Day with dressing up and storytelling.
- International Day of Play, Children's Day, Day of the Family or Earth Day with themed activities.
- Local community celebrations and civic events.

When celebrating these occasions, ensure activities are inclusive and appropriate for all families.

5.3.4 Other religious festivals

Many parent and toddler groups welcome families from different faith backgrounds. Recognising other religious festivals demonstrates hospitality, respect and inclusion.

Examples:

- Diwali
- Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha
- Hanukkah
- Vaisakhi
- Chinese New Year / Lunar New Year

Some simple ways to celebrate can be to:

- Share stories, foods, music or crafts connected with the festival.
- Invite families to explain how they celebrate at home.
- Display greetings and decorations.
- Emphasise respect, friendship and learning from one another.

As a Christian group, it may be helpful to explain that recognising these festivals is about welcoming and valuing all families rather than adopting the religious practices themselves.



5.3.5 Moving on

See Section 4.4.8

Moving on to nursery or school is a significant milestone for both children and parents.

Ideas to celebrate this may include:

- Hold a special 'graduation' celebration at the end of the summer term.
- Present children with certificates, a Bible story book, lunchbox or school bag.
- Create memory books or photo displays.
- Pray for the children as they begin school.
- Invite children to wear their new school uniforms.
- Give parents a card with encouraging words and a blessing.
- Mark the occasion with a special snack or party.
- Maintain connections by inviting families back to special events. **See Section 4.4.**
- Invite families to a 'back to school with God' Sunday at the corps; to wear school uniform and celebrate with other children at the corps.

If a family is moving away from the area and will no longer be able to attend, consider celebrating their time with you with some of the ideas above.

5.3.6 God loves celebrations

As a Christian parent and toddler group, celebrations should reflect God's love, faithfulness and care for all people. By ensuring that celebrations are welcoming, inclusive and sensitive to the needs of those attending, it can foster a community where families feel supported, respected and encouraged. Through the giving of gifts and treats we model that God is always generous in his giving to us.

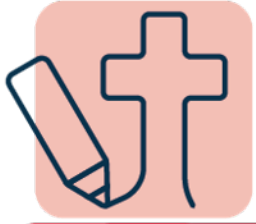
The thoughtful celebration of milestones can become an important part of the group's ministry, helping children and adults alike to experience joy, gratitude, friendship and a deeper sense of connection with one another, with the corps and with God.





GET SET!

Playing With Purpose



5.4 Toddler Church: Sharing Faith Through Story, Song and Activities

For many leaders, including Christian content in a parent and toddler group can feel like one of the trickiest things to get right. You want to be welcoming and inclusive, you want families to feel comfortable - and yet at the same time, your group is rooted in faith.

The encouraging truth is that many families already expect an opportunity to discover faith to be part of the offer. After all, they have chosen to step into a church building. For some, this group may even become ‘their church’ - a place of belonging and gentle exploration of faith. **See Section 1.1.5**

Research reflects this too, showing that attending Toddler Church often prompts parents to begin exploring their own beliefs. That’s a powerful reminder that what you offer matters - even in small, simple ways.

Toddler Church within a parent and toddler group is one way of creating space for this faith expression in a way that feels natural, accessible and appropriate for both children and their parents/carers.

Useful link

- **Talking toddlers** (hopetogether.co.uk)

5.4.1 A gentle approach to sharing faith

At its heart, Toddler Church is not about doing something complicated or formal. It is about being intentional - creating moments where children and adults can encounter something of God through story, song and shared experience.

It’s important to be open about who you are as a church group. Clear communication helps families feel at ease and gives them the opportunity to



choose what feels right for them. When expectations are understood, people are far more likely to feel relaxed and receptive.

The aim is not to overwhelm, but to weave faith naturally into what you already do. A simple song, a short story or a quiet moment of prayer can speak volumes. And if you're just starting out, that is more than enough. Starting small and building confidence over time is often the best way forward.

5.4.2 What Toddler Church might look like

Every group is different, and that's something to embrace. What works beautifully in one setting may not feel right in another. You know your families, your space and your team - and that insight is invaluable.

For some groups, Toddler Church may be a slightly adapted version of what already happens, perhaps once a month. For others, it may be a more defined part of each session, or even a separate event.

However it takes shape, the key ingredients tend to remain the same:

- Bible stories with time to wonder
- Christian songs (often with actions or musical instruments)
- Prayer
- Creative or sensory activities that connect with the theme

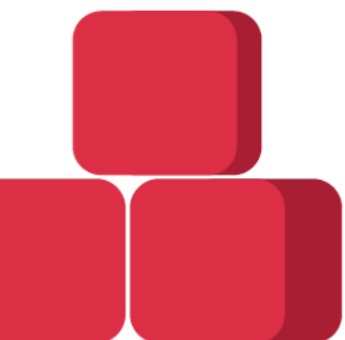
Children - and adults too! - respond well to repetition and routine, so keeping things familiar and predictable helps everyone feel comfortable and able to join in.

5.4.3 Finding a rhythm that works

As you think about shaping Toddler Church in your setting, it can help to gently reflect on a few practical things.

Consider who might lead this time, someone who can connect warmly with both children and adults and who feels able to communicate simply and clearly.

Think about where it might take place. A slightly quieter, more defined space can help children focus, even if it's just a cleared area of the room.



And timing matters too. Some groups find it works well at the beginning as a welcoming moment, others in the middle of the session, and some at the end, allowing families to stay or step out if they prefer.

There is no single 'right' way - only what works best for your community.

5.4.4 A sample session

It can be helpful to picture how this might look in practice. Here is one example of a gentle, toddler-friendly flow:

Arrival

The session begins with everyone arriving and a few simple toys, giving everyone time to settle in. Before long, a welcome song gathers the group together - something cheerful and familiar, perhaps even greeting each child and adult by name.

Bible story

A short Bible story follows. The key here is simplicity: keeping it brief, engaging and interactive enough to hold the attention of both toddlers and grown-ups. A song linked to the theme, and a short, accessible prayer, can help bring the story to life.

Craft activity

From there, a craft activity offers a hands-on way to explore what's been heard, before everyone moves naturally into snack time.

Free play

Later, free play gives space to relax and chat, before coming back together again for songs - favourite nursery rhymes alongside a gentle goodbye - marking the end of the session.

It's simple, but it is enough.

5.4.5 Supporting your journey

Good news - there are lots of resources to help you; you don't need to come up with everything from scratch. There is a wealth of creative and thoughtful material already available.



Family Ministries resources

- **Jump IN!** (salvationist.org.uk)
A flexible, Bible-based curriculum.
- **Get OWT!** (salvationist.org.uk)
A family-focused programme using nature-based activities.
- **Baby Song** (salvationist.org.uk)
An exciting opportunity to connect with parents, carers and their little ones through music and movement.
- **Dance Fit Tots** (salvationist.org.uk)
A parent and toddler resource incorporating movement, music and worship.

Facebook communities

These online communities offer ideas, encouragement and peer support. Sharing ideas, successes, and even challenges, reminds us that we are not doing this alone.

- **Family Ministries** ([facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com/familyministries))
Building relationships, carrying out research and provide resources to support frontline expressions of Family Ministry.
- **SA P and T groups UKI** ([facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com/sapandtgroups))
A group to empower, equip and enable mission and ministry within SA parent and toddler groups.
- **Scramblers Network** ([facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com/scramblersnetwork))
A network for leaders of church-led toddler groups or any family/under-fives groups.
- **1277 - Make Them Count!** ([facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com/1277makethemcount))
For people who are passionate about church-based toddler groups and provides the opportunity for people to share ideas, good practice and support.

For support and guidance and for help to train your team with Toddler Church email: familyministries@salvationarmy.org.uk

5.4.6 Creating space for everyone

Perhaps the most important thing to remember is that Toddler Church is for parents and carers as much as it is for children.

While little ones are listening, singing and crafting, adults are often watching, reflecting and quietly taking things in. A familiar song, a simple prayer or a moment of stillness can resonate more deeply than we realise.



Over time, these small moments can open the door to meaningful conversations and growing curiosity about faith.

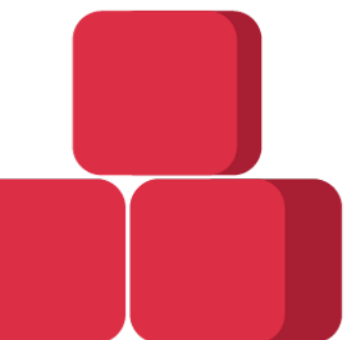
5.4.7 A final encouragement

Toddler Church doesn't need to be perfect. It doesn't need to be polished or elaborate. What matters most is the heart behind it, a desire to:

- welcome families;
- share something of God's love; and
- create a space where faith can be explored gently and joyfully.

In the laughter, the songs, the snacks, and the stories of God at work - it's often in the smallest moments that the biggest seeds are planted.

For further help or training around Toddler Church, please contact Family Ministries outreach mission partner at familyministries@salvationarmy.org.uk





GET SET!

Growing Together



6.1 Handling the Hiccups: Troubleshooting Common Challenges

See Sections 3.5.2 and 4.2.2

Inevitably, every parent and toddler group will experience moments that don't go according to plan. These 'hiccups' are a natural part of what happens when different people come together, and when handled well, they can become opportunities for learning and growth, both for the group team and for those attending.

Communicating expectations and boundaries clearly and in a timely way can help pre-empt challenges that might occur. It will be helpful to consider how you might work through the following:

6.1.1 Setting expectations that feel safe and supportive

See Section 3.3.2 and Appendix 6

Clear and respectful expectations, underpinned by The Salvation Army's values, help everyone understand:

- how the group operates,
- what behaviours are valued, and
- what the desired culture is.

Expectations should be communicated appropriately, shared regularly and modelled by all team members. Expectations are likely to include the following as a minimum:

- Parents are responsible for their children at all times.
- Everyone is treated with kindness and respect.
- Toys, resources and buildings are shared and cared for by everyone.
- Tidying up is an activity that everyone can be involved in.



Keep expectations simple and flexible enough to respond to real-life situations. Make these expectations visible, and when challenges arise, gently refer to these.

Useful link

- **Our values** (salvationist.org.uk)

6.1.2 Responding with love and respect

At the heart of every human interaction is the call for churches and Christians to treat people as Jesus does - with patience, dignity and compassion. This is especially important when addressing:

- Conflicts between children, eg grabbing or pushing
- Challenging child behaviour, eg biting or hitting
- Differences in parenting styles, creating tension
- Tired or overwhelmed parents

Practical responses to such situations should include:

- Speaking calmly and privately where possible
- Avoiding judgement or embarrassment
- Offering support rather than instruction, eg 'Would it help if ...?'
- Modelling positive behaviour to both adults and toddlers

6.1.3 Responding to challenging toddler behaviour

Always remember that toddlers are very young and are growing and learning how to express feelings. Here are some tips:

Acknowledge their emotions

Naming what a toddler may be feeling helps them feel seen and reassured. It supports early emotional development by giving children simple words for big feelings, helping them gradually learn to recognise, express and manage those feelings in safer ways.

Eg: 'I can see you may be feeling sad because you wanted that toy.' This does not mean giving in; it shows the child that their feelings are understood while the adult calmly holds the boundary.



Encourage parents/carers to handle the situation without stepping in too quickly

Where it is safe to do so, giving parents and carers a moment to respond allows them to support their own child in a way that feels familiar and appropriate for their family. It protects their dignity, avoids making them feel judged or undermined, and helps build confidence in handling everyday toddler challenges.

Provide distractions or alternative activities

Toddlers are still developing impulse control, patience and the ability to cope when something does not go their way. Offering a simple distraction or an alternative activity can help shift their attention before frustration escalates, while still guiding them towards a safer or more appropriate choice.

Eg: ‘That toy is being used at the moment. Shall we try the blocks while we wait?’ This helps the child move forward and gives parents and carers a gentle model they can use again. Knowing your families and having built relationships is helpful, to know when to do this and when to step back.

6.1.4 Responding to parents and carers feeling isolated

See Section 4.1.2 and 4.1.4

Some parents and carers may find it hard to engage within the group or may feel excluded for a number of different reasons. It will help to:

- Intentionally welcome and introduce people.
- Ask individuals if there is anything that helps them settle into new situations.
- Create simple and easy opportunities for conversation.
- Notice and include those who seem to be on the edge of the group.

6.1.5 Responding to disruptive situations

See Sections 3.5.3, 4.2.2 and 4.2.3

If any behaviour impacts the group:

- Address it early and gently.
- Focus on safety and shared respect.
- Work alongside the parent or carer rather than taking over, in order to support their dignity.



6.1.6 Offering pastoral care

See Section 4.1.4

Families don't arrive at the group empty-handed. They bring their joys, challenges and personal experiences. A parent and toddler group can be a place of quiet support and gentle encouragement.

Pastoral care may look like:

- Taking time to listen
- Remembering names and important details
- Checking in when someone hasn't attended for a while
- Offering prayer when appropriate and welcomed
- Signposting to further support where needed

Small, consistent acts of care build trust and can open the door for meaningful conversations to take place, and can provide opportunities to share God's love.

Useful link

- Family support - resource links and advice (salvationist.org.uk)

6.1.7 Keeping perspective

Remember, challenges are inevitable and will contribute to building authentic community within the group. When handled with grace and consistency, they strengthen relationships and demonstrate God's love in action.

TIP: Stay calm, stay kind, stay consistent. The responses from the team will set the culture for the whole group.





GET SET!

Growing Together



6.2 Adapting and Expanding

As your parent and toddler group grows, it is important to review how the group can continue to provide a safe, welcoming and supportive environment for children and their parents and carers.

Healthy growth is about more than increasing attendance. The success of the group is best measured, for example, by:

- the quality of relationships,
- the support offered to families, and
- the opportunities created for community and belonging.

By regularly reviewing capacity, managing demand thoughtfully and remaining responsive to local needs, groups can continue to flourish while maintaining a safe, welcoming and caring environment.

Whether through additional sessions, targeted provision for babies or childminders, or entirely new initiatives, adapting wisely can enable the church to serve more families effectively and deepen its ministry within the community.

6.2.1 Group size and capacity

There is no ideal group size that suits every setting. Capacity should be determined by factors such as:

- The size of the venue
- The number of volunteers available
- The equipment and resources provided
- Safeguarding and fire safety requirements
- The overall experience of families attending

The size of the group is not linked with how successful or unsuccessful it is.



Smaller groups often foster stronger relationships, provide a more personal welcome for new families and allow volunteers to give greater individual attention. They can also create a calmer environment with lower noise levels and make it easier to identify families who may need additional support. However, smaller groups may sometimes struggle with lower energy levels, fewer opportunities for peer friendships and, in some cases, financial sustainability.

Larger groups can create a lively atmosphere, offer more friendship opportunities and provide greater resilience when attendance fluctuates. They may also be able to offer a wider range of activities. However, excessive numbers can present challenges. New families may feel overwhelmed, relationships can become more difficult to maintain, and safeguarding, registration and pastoral support become increasingly demanding. Facilities such as parking, toilets and refreshments can become stretched, and some families may stop attending if the environment feels crowded or unsafe.

As a simple guide, parents and carers should always be able to locate and supervise their children easily. If this becomes difficult due to attendance levels, it may be time to review the group's provision.

6.2.2 Reviewing places and attendance

Attendance often varies from week to week, so it is helpful to review attendance regularly, especially when demand is high. Groups should communicate clearly that places may be reviewed and that a place could be considered inactive if a family has not attended for several weeks and does not respond to contact attempts. This helps ensure that places remain available for families who wish to attend regularly.

6.2.3 Waiting lists

If demand consistently exceeds capacity, a waiting list may be necessary. Before introducing one, however, it is worth considering whether the issue is temporary or whether there are alternative solutions - such as reconfiguring the space, recruiting additional volunteers, creating a second session or developing a different type of provision that better meets local needs.

Where a waiting list is required, it should be simple, fair and transparent. Collect only essential information, such as parent or carer details, the child's name and age, contact information and the date of application.



Families should be informed about how the waiting list operates, how they will be contacted and, where practical, how often places become available. Places may be allocated on a first-come first-served basis, or according to agreed priorities such as local families, church-connected families or vulnerable families referred by professionals. Whatever approach is chosen, it should be clearly communicated and applied consistently.

Waiting lists should be viewed as a temporary measure wherever possible while leaders explore ways of meeting increased demand.

6.2.4 When is it time to start another group?

If demand continues to grow, it may be worth considering an additional session or a different form of provision.

Before doing so, ask:

- Is the need short-term or long-term?
- Do we have sufficient leadership and volunteer capacity?
- Will another session affect the quality of existing provision?
- Will smaller groups allow for better relationships and support?
- Are there particular groups of families whose needs are not currently being met?

Reviewing the needs of the local community may reveal opportunities to offer more targeted support rather than simply duplicating an existing group. **See section 2.1**

6.2.5 A baby group or first-time parent group

In many communities, provision for babies and first-time parents has reduced in recent years. A dedicated baby group for children aged 0-12 months, or a group specifically for first-time parents, may help meet an important local need.

Such groups are particularly valuable when new parents feel overwhelmed in a busy toddler environment or are looking for support, discussion and confidence-building opportunities. Partnerships with health visitors and family support services may also be possible.

Benefits include:

- A quieter and more relaxed atmosphere
- Strong peer support among parents at a similar stage of life
- Greater opportunities for discussion and friendship



- Early intervention and pastoral support where needed

Resources such as *Baby Song* may provide a useful framework for this type of provision. Thought should also be given to how families will transition into a wider parent and toddler group as their children grow.

Useful link

- **Baby Song** (salvationist.org.uk)

6.2.6 A childminders' group

If childminders attend in significant numbers, a dedicated childminders' group may be worth considering. Such groups can provide professional networking, peer support and opportunities to exchange ideas, resources and good practice.

A dedicated session can help address practical issues that sometimes arise when childminders bring several children to a general group, while also enabling activities to be tailored more appropriately to their needs. Childminders may develop a greater sense of ownership and commitment to a group specifically designed for them.

For the church, this can also be a valuable outreach opportunity. By recognising and supporting the important role childminders play in family and community life, the church can build meaningful relationships, offer pastoral support and create natural opportunities to invite childminders and the families they work with to wider church activities and events.

6.2.7 Other possibilities

As communities change, other forms of provision may become appropriate, such as:

- Stay-and-play sessions
- Outdoor groups
- Dads and children groups
- Saturday family sessions
- Additional groups in other neighbourhoods
- Groups for children with additional needs

If help is required when considering new possibilities, please contact familyministries@salvationarmy.org.uk

