



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





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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?





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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.





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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.

