

Children's Faith: A Whole Church Approach to Family Ministry

kitchen
table
project



Inspire a faith that lasts



Introduction

Welcome to this new resource designed to help you review and refresh your church activities in a way that builds a lasting faith in children and young people.

You may have hundreds of children in your church, or none at all; a thriving children's ministry, or what feels like a constant struggle for volunteers, budget and creativity. Whatever your situation, we want to come alongside you and bring actionable ideas and inspiration that will work in your context.

As church leaders ourselves, we know just how pressurised life can be, and how many different ministries are crying out for your time and attention. We've walked this path ourselves, and we've also had the privilege of talking with other church leaders across the country, who are on a similar journey of developing children and family ministry. We find that it's in those conversations and interactions that motivation and further ideas are sparked.

And so this booklet and the corresponding videos and development tools have been created with that in mind. We want this material to enable you as church leaders to create conversations within your leadership teams and congregations that will help you to develop children and family ministry in a way that works for you.

We recognise that change doesn't happen overnight, and it can help to hear how other churches are implementing change. To support you in this, we'd like to provide opportunities for church leaders or network leads to meet with one of our team. If that interests you, or if you'd like to let us know how you've used this resource, then we'd love to hear from you. You can contact us by emailing [**mail@cff.org.uk**](mailto:mail@cff.org.uk).

Thank you for joining the journey!

The Kitchen Table Project Team

How to use this resource

We recognise every situation will be different, so we've designed this resource to be flexible. We want to enable you to use it in a way that works best for your setting.

Who could you get involved?

We recognise the church leadership need to be on board to implement cultural change. But if you're a church leader how can you draw on the experience and expertise of those who are already working with children and/or families? This could be salaried staff, volunteers or key parents. Or if you're a children and family worker, how can you engage your church leadership?

How can you get started?

We recommend initially reading the booklet and watching the videos alone or with one or two others. Then introduce the session content and development tools to the rest of your leadership team. We've made the video content short, so you have more time for discussion. Setting time aside between sessions will also enable you to pray and complete any actions.

When could you discuss this?

You may want to put a short slot in your regular leadership meetings over a few months to look at each of the three questions (the *Why*, the *What*, and the *How*). Or if you're involving others who are not on the leadership team, you may prefer to set aside a specific time to work through all three questions, perhaps on a Saturday morning for example.

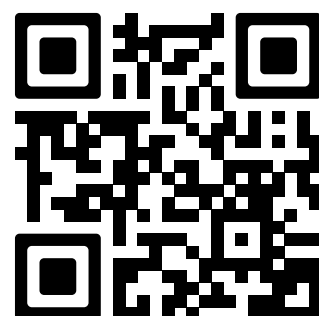
How could you work through this material together?

You might choose to watch the videos and answer the discussion questions together. Or you may find it helpful to provide an overview of the video content to your team, and just use the development tools together. We have included a 'Journey map' (page 36), which provides one way of using the material. Do whatever works for you!

Remember that this isn't about entirely changing your existing children's ministry. Rather, it is about using the development tools to identify what you currently do to disciple children. Then explore what small changes you could make so your focus is on encouraging parents and carers as they share faith at home.

Scan the QR code or use the link below to get the most out of this resource and access all the videos and additional resources. Then bookmark this online dashboard for future access.

cff.org.uk/cf-stream



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Our presenter – Andy Frost

Andy is the Director of Share Jesus International and heads up the London Mission Collective. He is a popular speaker and author of books including *52 Faith Adventures for Dads and Their Kids* and *Raising Faith*. He has an MA in Applied Theology. He is married to Jo and they have two young daughters.

Why does this matter?

Did you know the vast majority of Christians come to faith before the age of 19¹, yet just 50% of children growing up in Christian homes will keep their faith as adults². The research is eye-opening.

Traditionally, the church has sought to develop structured programmes to disciple children and there is something powerful about children learning from one another and doing activities they enjoy together. However, when we consider how many children and young people are leaving the church before adulthood, it is clear that solely relying on children's work to develop children's faith isn't enough.

It's not all about church programmes.

Children spend considerably more time with their parents or carers than anyone else. In fact, it would take 421 years for the church to spend the same amount of time a parent or carer has with a child before the age of 10. An hour on a Sunday will never be enough. We realise that not every child we have contact with will have Christian parents or carers, but when they do, the biggest influence on them growing up with a lasting faith will be their parents or carers.

So, how can we shift our focus? How can we equip parents and carers so that children's faith is nurtured at home as well as at church? In this booklet we will explore some possible solutions together.

Whether the families we are in contact with have been Christians for years, are beginning to explore faith or

have no faith at all, building relationships with them will help them to know they and their children are a valuable part of our church community.

Why a 'whole church' approach?

The good news is that this is not about adding even more activities to an already-busy church schedule. But it does involve a change of culture and mindset. We've discovered that the most effective family ministry takes place where we:

- Intentionally put parents at the centre of children's faith development
- Create an environment where intergenerational relationships can develop
- Build a culture where there's a place for children to serve and belong

And that involves everyone!

Every church is different, and there isn't a 'one size fits all' formula. The aim of this booklet and the corresponding videos and development tools are to:

- Help you to assess where you are as a church in your context, and
- Identify steps you can easily take to develop an approach to family ministry where the whole church is involved

1. 72% of UK Christians surveyed said they came to faith before the age of 19 (Christian Research, 2010, Faith Journeys).

2. Voas and Wyatt, The Church Growth Research Programme Report.



Getting started

The Why

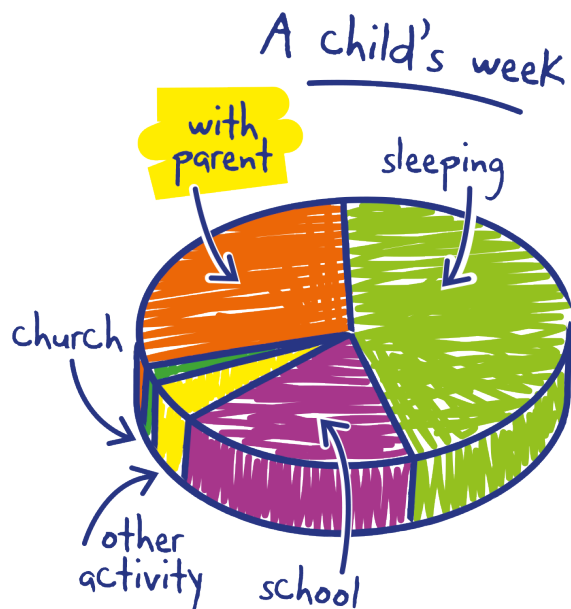
If you desire to see children become flourishing disciples, then it's important to think about how you can partner with their parents. But before you think about the practicalities of how you can come alongside parents, it's helpful to determine why this is so important to you. Understanding the *why* behind what you do is foundational. It helps you to stay focused on what you want to achieve, even when some steps you make may prove challenging or may not generate the response you would have liked.

Watch 'Session 1: The Why', as Andy Frost explores three myths we've encountered in church life that can hold us back. Then use the following pages for reflection and to guide your conversation with your team.



Myth 1:

It's all about Sunday



Take a look at this pie chart, which shows the typical breakdown of a child's week.

There is a huge difference in the influence a child's parent or carer has compared with a children's or family worker. One hour a week just isn't enough. Parents and carers have the biggest influence on their children as they explore faith through everyday life.

Myth 2:

It's all down to me

Sometimes as church leaders and children's workers we can believe that making sure children are growing in faith is all down to us. But when we realise that parents have the biggest influence on their children developing faith, we can see that clearly this is a myth.

Recent research shows that 91% of parents do not want the church to be the sole provider of spiritual support for their child. A staggering 99% also want the church to work in partnership with them to nurture faith together.³

So how do we do this together?

Moses' words to the newly formed people of God in Deuteronomy 11:18-19 offer us great insight:

'Fix these words of mine on your hearts and minds; teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.'

As parents intentionally weave faith into everyday activities, this will build firm foundations where faith can grow. As you think beyond your children's work programmes, you could also focus on how you can empower parents and carers, and how you can mobilise your wider church community to support faith within family life.



3. NICER and Liverpool Hope University, UK, 2022, *What is the Place of Families in Church Post-COVID?*

Myth 3:

It's all too much



Church leadership is challenging, and this might feel like one more thing to add to the load. You may doubt that parents will want to respond, or you may not feel personally called to working with children and families. You may be concerned that parents already have so much on and you don't want to add more to their busy to-do list. It might all just feel too much.

It is challenging to change the way that something has always been done. If we are honest, children's ministry is easier when we only have to plan a session for children in our main gatherings.

This is where it's important to establish your **why**. It not only helps you to remember the reasons you want to change your approach. It also helps you to determine the small changes you can make to your terminology and culture that will make a huge difference to children and parents feeling valued. This is a long-term strategy for cultural change, not a quick fix activity, event or programme. Even small changes have the potential to make a massive difference and can inspire further development over time.

Questions for reflection or to discuss together as a team:

- 1 Why is it important that the children in your church develop their faith into adulthood?
- 2 In what ways have you seen the three myths influence how you lead in this area?
- 3 Define any other myths or hurdles that your church could face when looking to develop your family ministry, and discuss how you could overcome them.

It may be helpful at this stage to look at pages 29-30 and consider some of the hurdles parents face when it comes to nurturing their children's faith at home. How could your vision encourage and support parents in overcoming these hurdles? After your discussion, take a moment to define '*your why*'. Maybe start by thinking about why it is important to you that you see children's faith flourishing and why you need to involve parents and the wider church in that.

Journeying together

The What



Having determined your vision for why you want to make a difference in children and families' lives, the next step is to look at where you are now. What are you doing as a church to disciple children with the resources you have available? This will not just include the children and families who attend your Sunday services. You might also host parent and toddler groups, summer or after-school clubs or seasonal activities. There is so much that falls into this category and you are probably doing more than you realise.

Watch 'Session 2: The What', as Andy Frost presents the **Children and the Local Church scale (page 11)**. This will help you to determine where you are as a church. It will also help you to identify what small changes you can make to start fulfilling your vision of equipping parents and carers.



The development tool on the following pages will help you to plot where you are on the scale. You may see that you are further along in some areas than others. The important thing is to be honest about where you are now. If you have salaried or volunteer children and family workers that are already working with children and families, draw on their experience and perspective. It will also be good to ask some of your engaged parents and children where they would plot the church on the scale.

Don't be disheartened if you feel you have a long way to go – starting to think about this is one step further in getting to where you would like to be. It doesn't necessarily mean changing what you do completely, but rather adjusting what you do over time so that parents and carers feel supported by the wider church.

This scale shows us what is possible and broadens our vision to see how children and families can be integrated into all areas of church life. The diagram can also provoke helpful conversation between church leaders, children's and family workers, parents and those in the wider church community.

It may be useful to look at the key elements that help build children's faith on pages 31-33. Are there any small changes you could make to what you already do that would help support and encourage parents in these areas?

The content on the following pages will help coach you from where you are on the scale to where you would like to be. You may not work through this scale sequentially. You may jump from Level 2 to Level 4 just by changing a few small things and altering the terminology you use in front of the church. It's not necessarily about doing more, but being more intentional about how you do what you do, and how you frame that for those in your church community.

Questions for reflection or to discuss together as a team:

- 1 Where would you put your church on this scale?
- 2 Where would you like to be? (Don't be afraid to dream!)
- 3 What is your church doing now to disciple children?
- 4 In what ways are you connecting with and working with parents within the church?
- 5 What small changes could be made to what you're already doing to involve parents more? (see pages 12-17)

Development tool



Children and the Local Church scale

Coaching you along the *Children and the Local Church scale*

Take a look at the scale with your team and determine where your church is currently. There are plenty of opportunities to develop, regardless of where you have placed your church on the scale.

The coaching guide on the following pages will help you and your team to identify how you could develop.



Nothing
to see
here

**No children's
work**

- ⦿ May or may not be a desire to do anything

**Children might
not be seen as
part of church life**

Seen but
not heard

Children present

- ⦿ Nothing specifically for children
- ⦿ Expectation that children sit quietly through the church service

**Children seen as
needing distraction**

Let me
entertain
you

Children entertained

- ⦿ Some provision for children so that adults can grow spiritually
- ⦿ Little to no Jesus content for the children

**Children might be
seen as too young to
be disciples**

It's all
about
church

**Children learning
about Jesus is focused
on the gathered
setting**

- ⦿ The church disciples children for the parents
- ⦿ A children's programme that may be excellent but is solely focused on the event

**Children seen as
learners**

Let's
do this
together

**Children learn about Jesus
at home *and* as the church
gathers**

- ⦿ Parents and carers are equipped to disciple at home
- ⦿ A children's programme that intentionally helps discipleship in the home flourish, acting as a springboard into the week
- ⦿ The programming is church-centric but the church disciples children with the parents and carers

**Children seen as disciples
who learn holistically**

Helping
them
thrive

**Children thriving as the
whole church recognises the
importance of them**

- ⦿ Parents are seen as the lead disciplers of children and the church is the support. Parents and carers are equipped to disciple at home and are actively doing it
- ⦿ A church programme that celebrates children and invites them to participate regularly in various aspects of church life
- ⦿ The church culture encourages inter-generational discipleship of children
- ⦿ The whole church supports parents and families

**Children seen as an integral
part of church life**

1

2

3

4

5

6



Level 1: Nothing to see here

You have a clean slate if you are starting from scratch! Don't just think through how to move along to the next stage on the chart. Instead, prayerfully think through how you could really come alongside families and children.



Begin with prayer

Finding families and children may be the hardest part of the puzzle. Start by asking God to open doors into the community for you to connect with families and children.



Questions to ask in your context

What do you already have?

If you have no or very few families connected to your church, you may not even know where or how to start. Take time to think about what you do have. Are there one or two families who attend now and again? Are there grandparents in the church who would love to bring their grandchildren along? Is there someone in the church who has the skills and experience (or simply the heart) to come alongside families? Or could you look at what is already happening for children and families in your community?

What small steps could you make?

If you have any families in your church community – start by building the relationship with them and create an environment where children and families are valued. Maybe you could link them with others in the church who could practically support them, perhaps by inviting them for a meal or regularly asking them how they could pray for them.

You might want to put on a seasonal event such as a Light Party in October, a family-friendly Christmas carol concert or an Easter treasure hunt and encourage members of the congregation to invite their family and neighbours along.

Or if you don't know who to invite, rather than hosting an event and hoping people come along, it may be more beneficial if you start serving families and children in the community and build relationships that way. You could perhaps help with school assemblies or volunteer at the local football club.

Starting small may be a longer process but as we serve our community, we will be able to ask families questions such as:

- What could our local church do to serve you?
- If we started a group exploring Bible stories on a Sunday morning, would you want to come?
- If we did a football-themed church service, would the football club kids like to help us?

Rather than doing things 'to' and 'for' families and children, we want to create activities 'with' them. As you are doing this, keep in mind that seeing children thrive in their relationship with God needs to be in partnership with their parents and others within the local church.



Level 2: Seen but not heard

You have children at your events or weekly church service but no structured provision for them. Often, the challenge for churches that fit in this category is that children attend irregularly and you are never sure who will turn up. Perhaps nobody in the congregation has been empowered to take the initiative to engage with them.



Begin with prayer

Start by thanking God for the children who already come along. Could you commit to praying for them and their families regularly? Ask God for insight as to who might be able to serve these families and children and how you might be able to mobilise them.



Questions to ask in your context

What do you already have?

Think through which families and children have attended over the last six months. Can you make a list and contact them?

Consider why there is no provision for children at the moment. What might be some of the barriers stopping people from wanting to be involved?

They may include:

- People not knowing or understanding the need
- Volunteers being wary about taking on children's work indefinitely
- People not feeling qualified to lead children's activities

What small steps could you make?

You might like to try and bring a small group of people together to pray for families and children and to think through what is possible in the life of the church. What would be sustainable?

It might be as simple as having an activity box with some pre-planned Bible content and activities for children to use during the service. You could also provide parents with resources that they could use with their children at home. Take a look at the free leaflets from the Kitchen Table Project, 'Things we can easily do to nurture faith at home' or 'Where it all begins' (see resources on page 35). Could a small team of people intentionally look out for families and children and find ways to come alongside them – perhaps by inviting them for lunch after church.

You might like to make contact with those who have come over the last six months to find out what life is like for them and what the church could do to support them.



Level 3: Let me entertain you

Each week children come along to church events and are well looked after. They have fun and leave church gatherings having had a positive experience, but they have been entertained rather than had any spiritual input to help them on their faith journey.



Begin with prayer

Thank God for each and every child that attends church and for their parents and carers. Thank God for those who look after the children each week.

Now pray that as a congregation, God would help you better see the children as disciples of Jesus rather than just children who need to be entertained. It's challenging to remember that most of the disciples were probably teenagers!



Questions to ask in your context

What do you already have?

So you already have volunteers who are entertaining the children. The big question is, 'why is there no or little faith content?' It could just be that this is how children's work has always been done, or it could be that the volunteers feel ill-equipped to talk about the Christian faith with children.

If you want to move this forward, you could start by talking to the volunteers about ways they could bring more faith content into the children's provision. Thank them for the part they are playing in volunteering and find out how you can best support them in introducing faith content.

Many churches also run parent and toddler groups that provide excellent provision for parents and children during the week. Recent research has shown the unique opportunity that churches have to share Christian content as they come alongside young families in that setting.⁴

What small steps could you make?

There are two main steps to help move the children's work beyond simply entertaining them. The first is helping the church consider the following concepts:

- Children can be disciples of Jesus
- Parents, carers and families play a key role in faith development
- The whole church has a responsibility to pass on faith to the next generation.

This could be done through a sermon series or vision-casting session in one go, or it could be drip-fed through the life of the church from the notices and the newsletter to the prayer meetings and small groups.

The second step is looking at what needs to happen practically. How can you help to upskill those leading the children's work? Are there some resources you can purchase, some webinars that can be watched or some other churches that might share best practice?

It may also be helpful to gather the children's team ahead of each term to explore what could be covered from a faith perspective and how this will be done. As you are doing this, it's great to ask the question, how can we involve the immediate family and the wider church as we do this?

4. <https://www.eauk.org/assets/files/downloads/Talking-Toddlers-Booklet.pdf>



Level 4: It's all about church

The children enjoy the children's provision, have a good experience and learn new things about the Christian faith. Maybe they have engaged with a Bible story, learnt to pray or sung action praise and worship songs.

As volunteers, we can think our work here is done but the challenge is that children are being shaped by what they watch and engage with all through the week.

It's important therefore to think beyond just what it looks like for children and families when we meet together as a church. This level is about us supporting parents to encourage their children in their faith journey and empowering them to weave faith into everyday life.



Begin with prayer

Thank God for the team who serve the children when the church community gathers. Thank God for each of the children who are connected to the church and ask God to guide you as you support their wider families in nurturing their faith.



Questions to ask in your context

What do you already have?

The children who attend your church gatherings will come from all sorts of different families. Some parents might be very passionate about helping their children learn more about Jesus, and others may drop off their children at church and leave again because they have no Christian faith themselves.

To go beyond 'It's all about church', it's good to consider how we can instigate better connections between church and home.

What small steps could you make?

- 1 Ask parents why they would like their children to have a Christian faith.** Verbalising why this is important to parents can help them to be more intentional in nurturing their children's faith.
- 2 Help parents to understand why nurturing faith can't be delegated solely to the church.** You might like to draw on biblical examples like Timothy's grandmother Lois and mother Eunice who helped Timothy to have a sincere faith (2 Timothy 1:5) or Philip who had four daughters who were in ministry (Acts 21:9). Let them know you want to partner with them in this.
- 3 Provide opportunities for parents to talk with others about how they nurture their children's faith at home.**
 - Run the *Inspire* session or *Raising Faith* course for parents (see resources on page 35).
 - Actively engage parents by asking them about the faith conversations they are having at home and what topics they would like the children's work to address? Offer to pray for them as a family unit.
 - Set up a WhatsApp group for parents where they can share ideas, successes and failures around nurturing faith.
 - Address child discipleship in the main services, perhaps by praying for parents, distributing age-appropriate resources at calendar moments (e.g. Father's Day) and giving space to share testimonies.
 - If a child's parent doesn't attend church, look for opportunities to build relationships with them and find out why they want their child to connect with the church.



Level 5: Let's do this together

You have a children's work programme and the parents and carers are also involved. Discipleship happens on a Sunday and at home. But is there more?

Moving towards 'Helping them thrive' is about helping the whole church to recognise and celebrate the role children play in the church community. Children are more than recipients, they are participants and contributors to the life of the church.



Begin with prayer

Thank God for all that he is doing in the lives of the children and the families within your church community. Are there specific testimonies that you can share with the congregation to celebrate this?

Ask God to help you to see the potential of the children you are working with. Throughout scripture, children are used powerfully by God. What might God want to teach you and do through the children in your church?



Questions to ask in your context

What do you already have?

Your children's church is thriving and you are actively encouraging parents to nurture their children's faith. Moving towards 'Helping them thrive' is about engaging the whole church in recognising the role children can play in the church community.

What small steps could you make?

Start by listing all the activities you do as a church – from small groups and prayer meetings, to social action projects and seasonal celebrations.

Go through each one asking:

- Is it appropriate for children to be involved?
- If so, how are children currently involved?
- How could they be more significantly involved?

Could you give children an opportunity to serve on the welcome team, hand out the notices, or have them pray for the adults?

Find ways to involve the children by asking them for their ideas. This will help them to feel valued and included in decision making. They may suggest things that no one else has considered!



Level 6: Helping them thrive

Your church celebrates children and invites them to participate in various aspects of church life. The whole church is involved in discipling children and there are inter-generational activities and relationships that encourage children to get involved in the life of the church.



Begin with prayer

Thank God for all that he is doing in your church community. Celebrate the good news stories and how children are being empowered as disciples of Jesus.



Questions to ask in your context

What do you already have?

Things are good right now, but mission drift is a reality. How will you safeguard the changes you have made and nurture the culture you have created?

A significant challenge to what you have achieved could be a change in personnel. When a new church leader is appointed or a new children's worker, how will you pass on the baton well? How will you explain why your church does what it does when it comes to children and their families?

What small steps could you make?

Very simply, to keep things on track, it would be helpful to revisit the development tools regularly to keep assessing where you are at as a church. Perhaps once a term you could put it on the agenda for your church leadership team to check you are continuing to be a church that helps families to thrive.



Moving forwards

The How

You have looked at your vision, evaluated the structure of what you currently do and determined some small steps you can make towards supporting parents. Now you can move on to think about how you might bring about cultural change within your church community, so the whole church is involved in encouraging and supporting children and their parents. You are moving beyond what you do, to who you are and the way you do things.

Watch 'Session 3: The How', as Andy Frost presents the **Encouraging Children's Faith matrix (page 21)**. This will assist you in evaluating what you do in different areas of ministry and help you to identify the areas you would like to develop that will reinforce your vision.



Andy shared four key questions to consider:

1 Is your whole church leadership team on board?

Stretched capacity and lack of clarity about what you're trying to achieve, can be some of the limitations when bringing about cultural change. How can you be clear about your vision and expectations, so that you bring your whole team on the journey with you?

- Share your 'vision or why statement' regularly as a team to help everyone understand why this cultural change is important.
- Let your leadership team know they don't all need to be involved in facilitating activities for families. Simply agreeing how you will talk about children and family ministry in front of the church community will show the leadership team is behind this.
- Determine who are the 'family ministry ambassadors'. It's not necessarily about the senior minister running the family ministry. But more about ensuring those who have experience in engaging with families are able to speak into leadership decision making.

2 Are there any activities you discovered from the previous session that actually limit the cultural change you want to see?

You may have an incredible programme for children (on a Sunday) but because it is on a separate site (or different area of the building) there is little opportunity for parents and the children's workers to connect more meaningfully.

Maybe you have created opportunities for children to help in children's church, but not integrated them into the life of the main church service. This could limit the opportunities for intergenerational relationships to form, but it also removes the opportunity to show parents and children how much you value them in front of the whole congregation.

3 How will you measure cultural change?

It's relatively easy to count how many children and families attend our church gatherings but measuring cultural change can be much harder. It naturally takes time to develop and can be seen through changes in actions and relationships (which are known as soft outcomes), rather than in measurable statistics.

The best way to measure cultural change is to use the same evaluation method over a long period of time. As you continue to use the **Encouraging Children's Faith matrix**, the familiarity with the scale will help the team as you revisit it and talk about further development. It will provide the opportunity for celebration as you realise where you have grown and give accountability in areas that need further work.

4 How will you model these cultural changes?

We are all familiar with the phrase, 'culture is caught, not taught'. We will have experienced how culture is shaped through our shared habits – the things we do subconsciously without thinking.

A habit is essentially three things: a cue, an action, and a reward. How can you and your team develop rewarding actions that will help model these cultural changes, based on cues within the life of the church? For example:

The cue – you're planning an event for your church community.

The action – create space for the family ministry ambassadors on your team to discuss how children can serve and be actively involved in the event.

The reward – seeing children and families engaged which reinforces their value and sense of belonging in the church.

Further questions for reflection can be found on the Journey Map (page 36).

Development tool

Encouraging Children's Faith Matrix

We have identified **seven cultural values** that help children thrive in their faith.

1. Welcoming church

2. Empowered parents

3. Celebrated parents

4. Connected community

5. Holistic mission

6. Purposeful prayer

7. Valued children

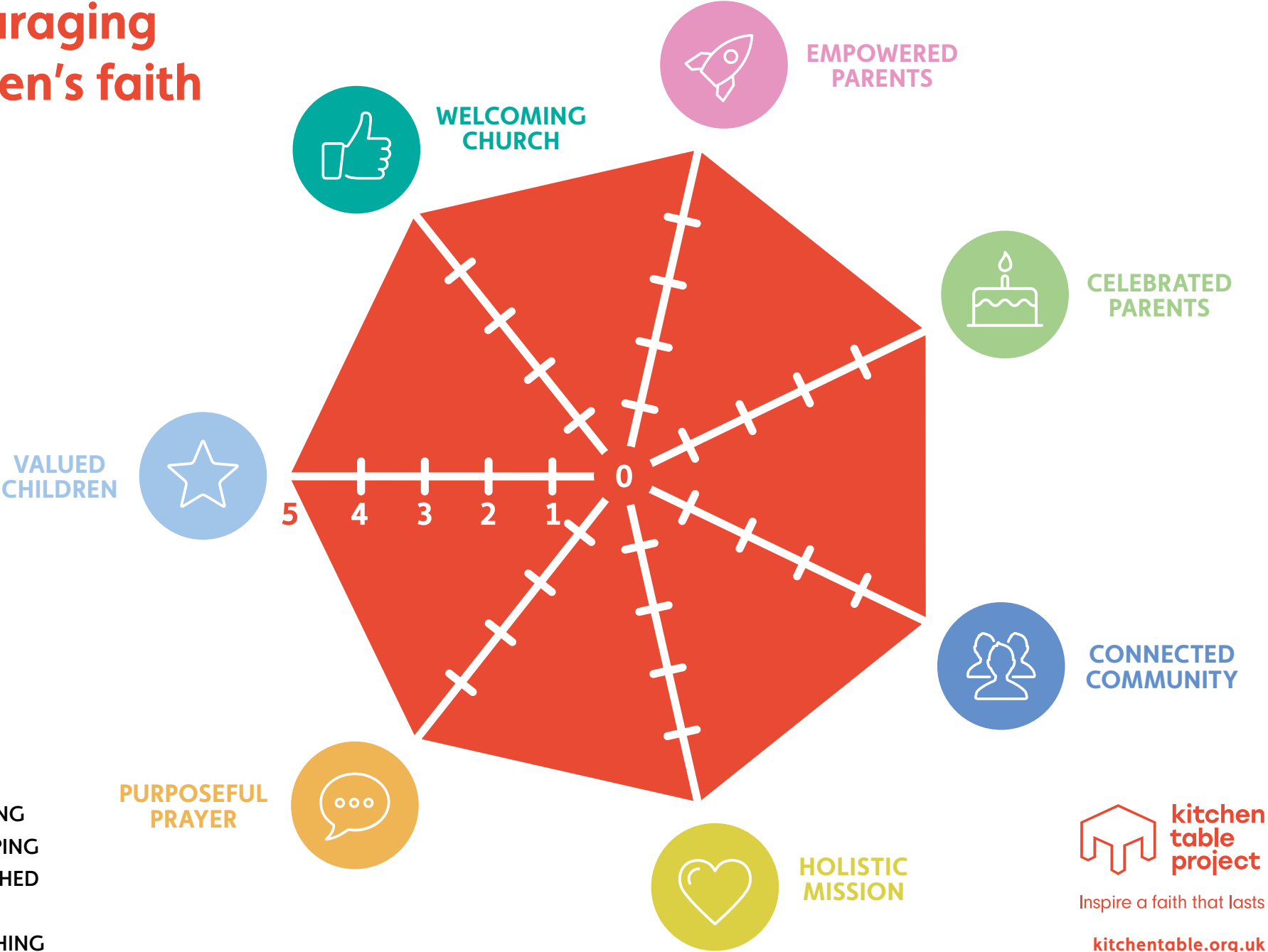
Cultural change takes time, and church leaders can't do everything – but there is an opportunity to get people who are passionate about children's faith development around the leadership table to keep us on track.

The **Encouraging Children's Faith matrix** (page 21-28) will provide you with an initial starting point for your discussions around the culture in your church. It will also work as a helpful reminder as you journey through the months and years ahead.

Consider each cultural value on the matrix. Where would you plot yourself as a church in relation to each one? Use the ideas from other churches for inspiration as you develop in these areas.



Encouraging children's faith



Coaching you through the Encouraging Children's Faith matrix

We have been journeying with churches over the years to find out what works in different contexts and congregations. The ideas below have been shared by church leaders in the seven areas of church culture.

Welcoming church



The aim

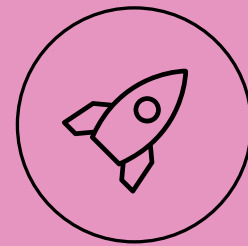
The whole church welcomes children and time is spent thinking through their needs and creating opportunities for them to be an integral part of the community. As part of this, there are specific opportunities to help children learn and grow as disciples within church life.

We often do a great job in welcoming adults – whether that be through a booklet, a free coffee or a 'new to church lunch', but do we think about specific ways we could welcome children and families?

Ideas from churches:

- Give children a smartphone to film themselves coming into the church building at their head level, so that you can see what the children see. Then decide what you can change so that children can more easily engage with what is going on.
- Include children on the welcome team – younger children serving with a family member (parent or grandparent), older youth taking part on their own.
- Encourage the whole church to know and welcome children by name as well as their parents or carers.

Empowered parents



The aim

Parents are supported in their personal faith development. They are able to regularly share the needs of their children with leadership. There are opportunities for them to be discipled and equipped to be authentic in the way they disciple their children. Not all the children you engage with will have parents who share the Christian faith or attend church. Think of ways to develop relationships with their parents, so they feel welcomed into the life of your church. This will not only help them to understand more about what their children are experiencing but also help them to feel part of your church community.

Ideas from churches:

- Give parents the language to explain the various elements of a church service, for example, singing worship songs, taking communion, reading the Bible. Don't assume children automatically understand what's going on.
- Find things that parents enjoy doing with their children and help them to bring God into those everyday moments. Maybe have an ideas evening with parents and gather creative thinkers to help provide inspiration.
- Use something like the free **Ages and Stages** leaflet from the Kitchen Table Project to help parents feel confident to nurture their child's faith at every age (see resources on page 35).
- Encourage relationships between children's workers and parents. Could you partner people up to intentionally contact or meet up during the week?
- Create opportunities for parents to develop relationships with each other. Could you host a general parenting course or some family events? These can be great ways to help parents who are active in the life of the church to develop friendships with those parents who are not so involved.

Celebrated parents



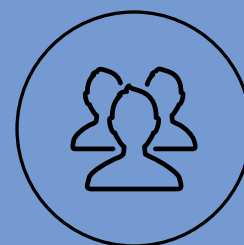
The aim

Parenting is recognised as a ministry within the local church with an understanding that parents are the greatest influence on their children. Parents are encouraged in this role throughout the life of the church.

Ideas from churches:

- Christenings or dedications are ideal times to come alongside parents and carers and not only celebrate them but talk about how parenting is a ministry.
- In the sermon, give examples of parents nurturing faith at home.
- Pray for the children and parents during the service.
- Ask the children to pray for the adults.
- Encourage church members to find ways to practically support families at home, maybe through babysitting support, cooking them a meal, or offering lifts to and from church activities.
- Model from the front that we are not perfect at discipleship, but that we work together within community to become more like Jesus to those around us.

Connected community



The aim

Links are intentionally made across the church community to help faith in families thrive. These relationships are intergenerational. You may have families who engage with your mid-week activities but who wouldn't describe themselves as having faith. Creating opportunities for them to develop intergenerational relationships may help them to feel more connected with your church community.

Ideas from churches:

- Make prayer meetings or small groups more accessible to families – maybe holding a child-friendly prayer meeting once a month or term.
- Arrange a family-friendly small group that occurs earlier in an evening, or on a weekend, where families share quality time together and parents learn about topics alongside their children.
- Run a coffee morning or community lunch during the school holidays to give opportunities for the parents and children across the church to get to know one another better.
- Host a 'whole church walk' in a local park to encourage intergenerational friendships to form. You could utilise a **Scavenger Hunt** resource from the Kitchen Table Project (see resources on page 35) and pair up people from different generations into groups.
- Host a **Big Scrumptious Faith-Filled Feast** (see resources on page 35) with your church each season. If you already host an all-age service in your calendar, these feast activities can work well.
- Offer prayer partnerships between parents and other members of the church – this can work well when you connect younger parents with those who are further along their parenting journey. There will also be lots of people who don't have children who would welcome the opportunity to pray for families.
- Organise a termly family evening, where parents are invited to find out what their children have been learning about in the different programmes. Could you involve the children in welcoming the parents, showcasing what they have learnt and serving refreshments?

Holistic mission



The aim

Children are invited to join God in his mission. This may mean children being given opportunities to work alongside others in the community, but it also involves resourcing children to serve others and share faith with their friends.

Ideas from churches:

- At Christmas or Easter, encourage families to engage with their neighbours. For example they could take mince pies or small Easter eggs with invites to church events to the school yard or neighbourhood.
- Host a seasonal scavenger hunt for the community and ask the children to write the clues.
- Arrange a family fun day and let the children in your church decide what activities they would like to do.
- Ask the children in your church to come to your planning meeting when you're deciding what missional activities you want to do as a church.
- Run a community 'Acts of kindness day' where you help people in need within the community. You could offer car washes, gardening, tidying up, or shopping assistance for the older generation.
- Visit a local care home with the children to play board games, do crafts or sing carols at Christmas.
- Model how to and encourage children to share their testimony in children's church or as part of an intergenerational service, so that they feel confident to talk to others about Jesus.

Purposeful prayer



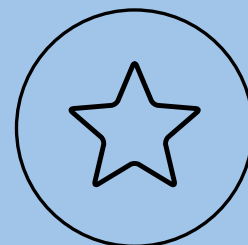
The aim

Children and families are prayed for regularly as part of church life. There are opportunities for children to pray for adults and there are specific occasions when children are prayed for publicly.

Ideas from churches:

- Pray for the children before they leave for children's church. Or get the children to pray for the adults. Maybe you could also invite a child to share from the front what they have been learning before you pray.
- Offer creative ways for children to be connected to praying for the church by using images or photos to remind them to pray, for example print a picture of the church building and encourage them to memorise a short prayer to say each day.
- Have a 'prayer tree' in your church building and encourage families to write down their prayers on tags and hook them to the tree. Use this prayer tree to encourage people to pray for others by taking home a prayer request from the tree.
- Organise prayer partners between children and other trusted adults within the church community. Remember safeguarding practices and find appropriate ways for these partners to communicate.
- Host a 'Prayer Sunday' event, where you create prayer zones for everyone in the church to visit. 24-7 Prayer have many ideas to mobilise creative family prayer.
- Arrange a family-centric prayer meeting every month or term to create opportunities for children to see how other adults pray. Having children around during a prayer meeting is one of the best ways of modelling prayer to the younger generation.

Valued children



The aim

The church actively listens to the voices of children so that they help shape what the church does. There are specific opportunities to help children learn and grow as disciples within church life. The gifts of children are recognised and celebrated in the wider church and there is an opportunity for children to be involved in ministry, serve the community and share what they are learning about God.

Ideas from churches:

- Create opportunities for your leadership team to be a part of your children's church each term – so they can join in with the games, help share the stories and do a craft with the children. This shows children they are valued and seen by those they see as 'important' within the life of the church.
- Celebrate children from the front during a church service – for example before, during and after exam season, when they have achieved something important to them, or when you've seen them model something Jesus would do to others.
- Find ways for children to take part in the service. Perhaps they could read from the Bible or do one of the announcements. Maybe they could join the leader at the front to send the children out to children's church, or pray for something that's important to them.
- Provide opportunities for children to share their ideas and feedback their experiences of church with the leadership team. Involve them in decision making.
- Encourage the older children and young people to join a ministry team. Could they help with the computer, join the worship team, help out in Sunday school, serve squash and biscuits, or hand out the notices?

Empowering parents by understanding how they *feel*

One of the ways we can empower parents is by recognising parenting as a ministry. This may simply mean changing the language we use as a church leadership in front of our church community. As we invest in this area of ministry, in the same way we would invest in other areas of ministry, we value the important role parents play in their children's faith development.

Rachel Turner, author of *Parenting for Faith* and *It Takes a Church to Raise a Parent* explains it like this:

It's a big leap for parents to understand that, though they may be less skilled, less sure, less theologically trained; they actually are more effective and more impactful than 'experts' in the church. It takes a lot of courage for parents to believe they are the foundation

of God's plan for the spiritual lives of their children. It takes confidence for parents to believe that, in their imperfection and busyness they are still crucial in God's plan for their children's spiritual journey – it turns the culture of expertise on its head.⁵

So how can we best encourage parents in this ministry at home? It's not as straightforward as just telling parents, 'You should do this!'.

Our research shows that there are four main hurdles parents struggle with:

1. I don't have enough time
2. I don't know where to start
3. I don't think I'm a good enough example
4. I don't feel qualified

1

I don't have enough time

Family life is busy! It's filled with work, school, homework, church and many other daily pressures. In lots of families both parents are working and many work unsociable hours, so time together as a family is squeezed. The number of mums or dads parenting alone also continues to rise. No wonder many parents are feeling overwhelmed.

We can help by reassuring parents that sharing their faith with their children isn't about adding another thing to their already busy-to-do lists. It's about looking for little opportunities to show their faith during normal, everyday life.

5. *It Takes a Church to Raise a Parent*, Rachel Turner, BRF, 2018

2**I don't know where to start**

Sometimes, the biggest hurdle is simply not knowing where to start. Nurturing faith can seem daunting. If parents haven't been doing much to nurture their children's faith they might not know how they can get their children interested.

We can encourage parents to focus on making small changes that over time will have a lasting impact. It's our great privilege to be able to journey alongside and champion parents in this faith adventure with their kids. The Kitchen Table Project has created lots of resources to equip parents to build faith in the busyness of everyday family life. Take a look at our *Resource Map* (see resources on page 35) to explore what could work for you and the parents in your community.

3**I don't think I'm a good enough example**

Most parents are all too aware of their failings and how they don't get it right all the time. Family life can be challenging at the best of times, and it's easy for parents to feel that they're not the best example. They may have a past they're not proud of, feel that their lifestyle disqualifies them or worry that they're not handling their emotions well as they face the pressures of family life.

We can encourage parents that God has entrusted their children to them and they are good enough. We can help them to realise that they can use their mistakes as well as their victories to demonstrate God's grace and forgiveness. Modelling messing up and saying sorry allows parents to talk about God's grace and forgiveness and shows children what real faith looks like in the challenges as well as the good times.

4**I don't feel qualified**

For some parents the idea of talking about God with their child feels daunting because they worry they won't know the answers to the questions their children might ask. We can all be tempted to think that nurturing faith should be left to those who have a deep understanding of the Bible – maybe even a degree in theology! Parents may also feel that the church children's work is so good that they can't do anything as engaging or professional.

The truth is most of us will find ourselves out of our depth at some point when we are trying to answer some of our children's questions. Our role as church leaders is to disciple and equip parents to feel confident in their own faith. We can also help them to see that they don't always have to have the answers, but that they can explore faith together with their children and learn from each other.⁶

By understanding how parents are feeling, you are in a great position to show empathy as you help them to overcome some of these hurdles and grow in confidence as they nurture their children's faith at home.

6. It Takes a Church to Raise a Parent, Rachel Turner, BRF, 2018

Empowering the church



Our role as leaders is to inspire and motivate the whole church to get on board with this vision to create a community where children's faith thrives. There are so many opportunities for the whole church to model these values and adopt this culture, many of which are included in the Encouraging Children's Faith matrix.

Through research and speaking to parents over the years we recognise that there are significant elements which help to build children's faith at home. The church is also best placed to support parents in developing these different elements.



Home

A warm, affirming family where children feel safe, loved and accepted gives a secure foundation for their faith to grow.

How can you support parents as they create and uphold this warm, affirming family environment, where their children feel secure and loved? Practical help might not seem like our primary concern, but a mum recently told her church that without the practical help she had received in a difficult season, she wouldn't have had the time or energy to spend time with God or pray with her children.

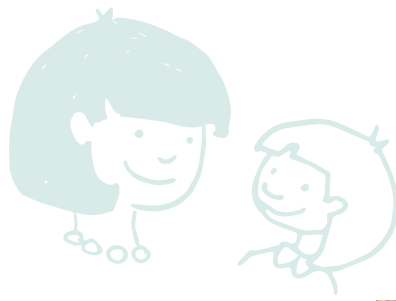
Cooking a meal, babysitting, supporting financially or helping with shopping, DIY or gardening can have a very real impact on a family's spiritual journey. The whole church community can be involved in supporting families at home.

Be real

It's not about expertise. We're not perfect, but living out our faith in a genuine way can encourage children to want this for themselves.

How can you reassure parents that they don't need to have all the answers? Going for a walk or having a chat on the phone about the honest ups and downs of spiritual life could be really helpful. Members of your church community are perfectly positioned to be role models and a rich and diverse source of encouragement and wisdom. Is there space for parents to explore things that are challenging, as well as the wins?

Connecting parents with one another and encouraging intentional conversations about parenting and sharing faith with children can be a great way to help parents feel confident about being real.



Be intentional

Finding simple ways to involve God naturally in everyday life encourages our children to know and love him.

Taking those everyday opportunities to point their children to God is one of the most important ways that parents can share faith. How could you encourage them to do this with their children? How could you teach, model, equip and resource parents to find simple ways to involve God in their natural daily routine?

Is weaving faith into the everyday moments something that's understood within the church community or do you need to regularly share simple examples and ideas? Could you ask families to share what they have been doing at home during your church gatherings?

This might be a great way of connecting what families are doing at home with what's happening in your services, as well as encouraging other families and individuals as they hear from others.



Belong

Involving children at church and building relationships with others helps our children to feel they belong in God's family. Being creative in developing relationships will be a blessing to all involved.

The church community is one of the biggest assets that you have to disciple parents and encourage faith at home. How could you encourage connections across the whole church family? Maybe some families could link up with older members of your church community and regularly connect with each other.

Building relationships with other church members can have a lasting impact on children's lives. Are there creative ways that you can involve children in church activities, mission, and parts of your church service?



Prayer

Praying for our children and asking God to guide us as we parent is so important. We can look for opportunities to help them connect with God, but ultimately they are his children and he wants that relationship with them even more than we want it for them.

Who is praying for the children and families in your church?
Can you find ways to pray with parents for their children?

'I (Paul) planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow'
1 Corinthians 3:6

We can do as much planting and watering as we like – and there are so many things we can do – but at the end of the day the thing that will make the most difference in the lives of our children is the power of prayer.



Further coaching

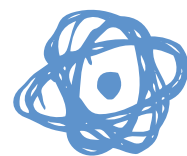
Nobody starts a journey intending to get lost, distracted or demotivated along the way. The best way to stay focused, motivated and mobilised for the mission is to utilise the following principles.

Vision: Keep your 'Why' in front of you – write it on everything, put it up and around you and help people remember it. You want it to become an anchor point for people to connect to, which is especially important as time goes on.



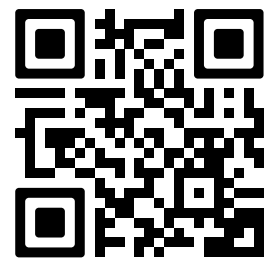
People: Build up, strengthen and encourage those within your church who are passionate about family ministry. This helps to keep the people focused on the vision.

Connection: Join with others for inspiration and ideas. Stay connected to the Kitchen Table Project for support, or create your own group of passionate, like-minded leaders to further your coaching together. There's no better way of staying motivated than being around people who are chasing a similar vision.



Connect with the Kitchen Table Project

Our heart is to join you in this journey as you seek to disciple children with your whole church. We hope that this resource continues to inspire you as you take your next steps.



Take a look at our
Resource Map booklet
for more information.

Resources



Website full of resources

The Kitchen Table Project has developed a vast library of resources to encourage parents and assist churches in this mission. Whether you're looking for courses to run, sermons to share, all-age services for your congregation, or books, leaflets and even a daily calendar for parents – we've done a lot of the hard work for you!

kitchentable.org.uk/resources



Regular emails

One of the best ways to stay motivated and inspired is knowing you are a part of something bigger. Our bi-monthly emails to church leaders and children and family workers offer insight, encouragement and relevant talking topics and resources that can be used in your context. It's also the best place to find out about any future events we'll be running specifically for you!

kitchentable.org.uk/join



Chat to us

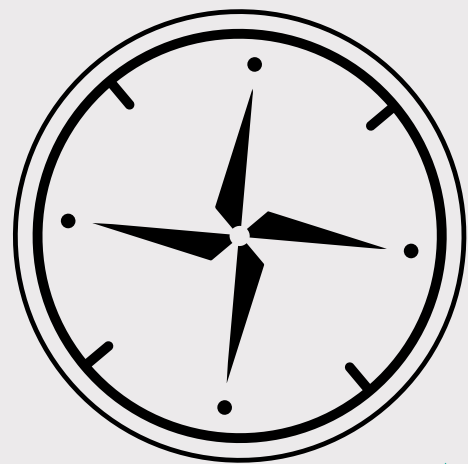
We would love to help you think through what the next steps could be for your church. Connect to a member of our team to see what support we can offer.

mail@cff.org.uk

Your journey map

There is so much potential within these coaching sessions to take you and your team on a journey of **establishing a whole church approach to discipling children**. We all want to see children's faith flourish and thrive into adulthood, and the development tools and ideas in this booklet will provide you with plenty of easy wins.

This journey map is a tool to help you to visualise where you are in the process. It includes many of the key questions covered in these coaching sessions, which will help you to structure helpful discussions with your team and whole church community.



Start with your 'why' and tick off stages on the journey as you action them. You may want to use the QR code to watch the video for each section alongside the discussion questions.

Why?

Vision – The Why

Understanding the why behind what you do is foundational. It helps you to stay focused on what you want to achieve and informs how you will journey forwards.

- ☐ Why is it important that the children in your church develop their faith into adulthood?
- ☐ Why is it important that you develop a whole church approach to discipling children?
- ☐ In what ways have you seen the three myths influence how you lead in this area?
- ☐ Are there any other myths or hurdles that you could face when looking to develop family ministry? How could you overcome them?



Scan the QR code or use the link to get the most out of this resource and access all the videos and additional resources. Then bookmark this online dashboard for future access. cff.org.uk/cf-stream



What?

Structure and activities – The What

Use the Children and the Local Church scale (page 11) as you consider the following questions:

- ☐ Where would you put your church on this scale?
- ☐ Where would you like to be? (Don't be afraid to dream!)
- ☐ What is your church doing now to disciple children?
- ☐ In what ways are you connecting with and working with parents within the church?
- ☐ What small changes could be made to what you're already doing to involve parents more? (see pages 12-17)

How?

Culture and values – The How

Use the Encouraging Children's Faith matrix (page 21) as you consider the following questions:

- ☐ How will you share the vision and the why behind it with the whole church?
- ☐ How can you let the wider church community know you recognise parenting as a ministry?
- ☐ How can you empower everyone to play a part in championing and supporting parents?
- ☐ What small changes could you make, to grow in the seven cultural values? (page 21)
- ☐ How can you use some of the ideas from other churches? (pages 22-28)
- ☐ How can your church equip parents in the five elements that build faith? (pages 31-33)

Remember that change takes time. We've been working with churches that are several years into their vision to see cultural change. This journey map has become a useful evaluation tool to revisit at key points along the way.

The Kitchen Table Project is a faith-based initiative for Christian parents, carers, church leaders and children's workers from Care for the Family.

About Care for the Family

Established in 1988, Care for the Family is a charity based in the UK, but with an increasing reach internationally. Our aim is to support families whatever their circumstances. We provide this support, online and in person, for parents, couples and those who are bereaved, through events, courses, podcasts, volunteer befrienders, books and other evidence-based, accessible resources. We also train those who work with families whether in a professional or informal capacity.

For more information

cff.org.uk

