

A PROCESS FOR SESSION PLANNING

1. CHOOSE YOUR TOPIC

How do you go about choosing the topics you cover with the children? How would you *like* to go about it? Perhaps you meet as a team of children's leaders to discuss the work you are going to do in the weeks or even months ahead. But your ministry with the children is part of the teaching ministry of the whole parish – how does your programme relate to the parish teaching programme as a whole? Do you ever meet with the other ministers to discuss a whole parish programme? Do the ordained ministers and lay readers in your parish meet to discuss their teaching? A review of the way that the teaching ministry with children is planned could inspire a look at teaching with all ages in the parish!

Some things to bear in mind when choosing a new topic for your work with children

- Is it relevant to the children's lives and concerns?
- How does it fit in to the long term programme for the children?
- How does it relate to the adult teaching programme?

2. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO YOU?

We can often make assumptions in the Church – about what other people think and believe, but also about our *own* thoughts and beliefs. How often do we have time or *make* time to reflect on the major issues of our faith and its relationship to the world? To grow in our faith we need to continually revisit issues throughout our lives and review our thoughts and feelings about them in the light of the experiences God has given us. But how do we find the time?

Preparing to explore a topic with children could provide just the impetus we need to look at issues afresh. Before planning a session on any topic with children, take time to reflect honestly on what it means to you. Don't automatically reach for 'stock responses' – try to be open to new insights, and be prepared to be surprised. Don't be worried if you come up with difficult questions, and don't be afraid of showing the children that you have unanswered questions.

It is often said that because children's leaders are rarely able to be in church they miss out on spiritual nurture. But if we view our work with children as a shared search for a deeper knowledge of God – a search in which we are as actively involved as the children – then our work with them will feed us spiritually too.

3. WHAT TO EXPLORE WITH THE CHILDREN

For a variety of reasons not all the issues raised by a topic for an adult will be appropriate for exploration with a group of children. When you have reflected on

your chosen topic at your own level, you can consider which of the issues you have thought about would be suitable to explore in a session with children.

Some things to bear in mind when choosing what to cover with children

- strike a balance between factual things you think it's important that they should 'know' about an issue, and more open material that you think it is important they reflect on;
- consider what is appropriate for the ages and maturity of your children, bearing in mind faith development and child development in general;
- will the children be able to relate the material to their own experience?

4. LOOK FOR RESOURCES

Now that you have an idea of what aspects of a particular issue you want to explore with your group, draw together the resources in scripture, our faith tradition, and other expressions of human experience that will throw light on the subject. Remember, words that can have a deep and rich meaning for an adult will not necessarily have the same meaning for a child!

5. PLAN THE SESSION

Now, finally, you can get down to the practicalities of what you are actually going to do with the children. Which aspects of the topic will you focus on? How will you present the material? What will you need to get ready? Who will do what?

The list of things to bear in mind when planning the session is a long one!

- Have you arrived at a clearly stated aim for the session, that everyone can understand? Could the children understand it?
- Is the language you plan to use throughout the session meaningful for the children?
- Are you remembering the practical parameters within which you will have to work: number and ages of children; groupings; premises; available resources, both physical and in personnel; duration of session?
- What structure will the session have?
- Do all the elements contribute to achieving the overall aim?
- Will you provide some alternative activities? Will they be differentiated to cover a range of ages and abilities? Will the children be able to choose?
- Is there a balance of hear/see/say/do activities across the session?
- Will there be a variety of different groupings during the session (eg pairs, small groups, whole group)?
- Are there 'open' activities that will encourage children to wonder and discuss?
- Are the activities achievable yet still challenging?
- How will you evaluate the success of the individual activities and the session as a whole?

SESSION PLANNING – JOTTING SHEET (1)

WHAT ELEMENTS COULD YOU INCLUDE IN A SESSION?

SESSION PLANNING – JOTTING SHEET

WHAT DIFFERENT TYPES OF ACTIVITY COULD BE USED?

'BIG ISSUES' SESSION PLAN

CONTRIBUTORS: **Name** **Church**

AGE RANGE:

LENGTH OF SESSION:

TOPIC:

OVERALL AIM:

SESSION OUTLINE

(Use section headings [eg 'Introduction' 'Opening Activity'] to indicate the elements in the structure, and under each heading describe what you intend to happen in sufficient detail for someone else to follow! Show estimated timings for each section. End by listing any resources needed.)