

They've asked me to be a **children's work volunteer**

Introduction

God calls children to be a blessing and a gift! Their spirits are filled with innocence, joy and laughter which can be a blessing to us all. In our ministry with children we are called to release this blessing on the world around us.

This booklet has been primarily written for those who have been asked to consider becoming a children's work volunteer in their local United Reformed church; it aims to give an overview of the role's scope and core responsibilities as well as the necessary skills and abilities of post holders.

The information herein applies equally to all volunteer children's workers, including those working with Pilots and the uniformed organisations such as Guides, Scouts, Boys' Brigade and Girls' Brigade – but these latter groups will provide their volunteers with specific training and guidance.

'Teach your children right from wrong, and when they are grown, they will still do right.'

Defining the age range

For the purposes of this booklet, children are defined as being aged from birth up to age 11 (Year 6).

Most churches divide the children into at least two groups – 0-5 and 6-11 – and where numbers of both children and workers allow, it's good practice to further split both groups, so the church would have:

- a creche for the very youngest children (birth to two years)
- a group for the three to five-year olds
- a group for the five to seven-year olds and;
- a group for the eight to eleven-year olds

All groups can run at the same time with different activities and workers.

Children's work covers a wide age range and while all age ranges benefit from dedicated 'specialist workers' – some skills are interchangeable. Very often individuals have skills best suited to working in a particular age group – not to mention a preference for a particular age range.

Don't hesitate to be clear about any age-related preferences you do have – you will almost certainly be more effective if you enjoy the work! Likewise, if you have been asked to consider becoming a children's work volunteer and

Safeguarding responsibilities

You'll have a duty of care to protect children in any activity or event within the church or other church-led activities; and you'll need to have (or commit to gaining) a good working knowledge of relevant child protection

procedures, particularly how to recognise abuse and what to do if you are concerned about a child and come across any disclosure of abuse or neglect. Familiarise yourself with the relevant sections of **Good Practice 6**, the URC's handbook on safeguarding policy and procedures – and speak to your church's/your synod's safeguarding coordinator if you have any questions. You will also be required to attend basic and intermediate safeguarding training – and renew it – every three years. Your local church and synod will arrange this training for you. If you volunteer with Scouts, Guides, Boys' Brigade, Girls' Brigade or another similar group, you will have to attend that organisation's safeguarding training unless a different arrangement has agreed between the Church and the partnered organisation.

More general safeguarding issues include:

- Ensuring the programmes you're running are appropriate to the age of the child
- Making sure the activities are risk assessed and;
- Ensure the collection of children is done in a safe way (a passwords or similar system is recommended).

And remember, no children's worker should ever be asked/to look after a group on their own. If you are asked to do this, or to cover duties you are uncomfortable with, speak with a responsible person in your church, preferably the Children's and Youth Work Elder. You are entitled to the church's support.

Necessary skills include:

- **Communication skills** – not only in communicating with the children, but being able to talk with parents and other children's workers about the children in your care. This includes both sharing information clearly and listening to the parents attentively.
- **Decision-making skills** – good judgment when responding to emergencies or difficult situations.
- **Instructional skills** – you need to be able to explain things in terms young children can understand.
- **Interpersonal skills** – you need to work well with people and be able to develop good relationships with parents, children, and other leaders.
- **A working understanding of the development stages of children** – this is knowledge that all group leaders must possess and is extremely useful, but not essential, for other volunteers.
- **Patience** – working with children can be frustrating, so you need to be able to respond to overwhelming and difficult situations calmly.
- **Being playful** – working with children and understanding how play develops their learning, can require physical stamina and sometimes, if you are able, you'll need to get down to their level.

What is the time commitment?

There are two angles to look at here – how long will you be expected to volunteer for, and what is the average weekly time commitment.

In terms of the length of service it's good practice for churches to be clear that these roles are undertaken for a period of three years and then reviewed. (If this is not the system that operates in your church you might like to suggest it.) It's also sensible to set a probationary period – perhaps of three months – for all children's work volunteers. This provides an opportunity for both parties to try out the role and see if it works for both you, the volunteer, and the group.

The ongoing weekly time commitment will obviously vary depending on the role taken on and how much preparation work is required for the group. The younger age groups often require more preparation work. A good rule of

Other resources

There is an absolute wealth of children's work resources – particular recommendations include:

- The URC's [children and youth work webpages](#) – include plenty of resources which are downloadable with ideas, books and activities as well as pertinent information for the age groups. Investigate the resources for children under 11 (being aware that sometimes groups lose the eleven-year-olds as they are ready for, and have moved up into the youth group).
- You may like to [subscribe](#) to the URC Children's & Youth Work bi-monthly newsletter. It's free and full of helpful, up-to-date, information including book recommendations.
- 'Core skills in children's ministry' is an excellent six-module course that the United Reformed Church recommends and includes material on the stages of child development, alongside information on planning and programming, how to develop faith and how to work with others. Within the URC this course is most often delivered by the CYDO+ team – if you are interested in taking this course please speak to your CYDO+.
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- ***Families on Faith Adventures @ Home*** – designed during lockdown to promote faith at home and a link between church and families, this resource provides lots of ideas, with an easy-to-search Bible index to help you find what you're looking for.

A service of commissioning or dedication

