



TWO MINUTE TRAINER

THE ULTIMATE TRAINING GUIDE
FOR CHILDREN'S MINISTRY



SMALL GROUP LEADERS

DAVID RAUSCH



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INTRO

ONE SMALL STEP AT A TIME



*Kent stands below the summit of Mt. Rainier in Washington, USA.
Photo credit: David Rausch*



LEAPING TALL BUILDINGS IN A SINGLE BOUND IS THE STUFF OF COMIC BOOKS. MOUNTAINS, REAL OR FIGURATIVE, ARE CLIMBED ONE SMALL STEP AT A TIME.

“This is gonna hurt.” That’s what I said to my friend Kent as we stood looking up at the summit of Mt. Rainier from more than 9,000 feet below. We had been preparing for this climb for almost a year, pouring over maps and route descriptions, lugging a full pack up and down the hills of Missouri, and imagining what it would be like to test ourselves against this 14,411 foot tall ice-clad behemoth. But this wasn’t Missouri anymore and imagination had been replaced with reality. “The Mountain,” as it’s simply referred to by the locals, towered menacingly above us. It looked both beautiful and angry. It begged us to climb it, but swore that it would crush us.

After a relatively pedestrian climb to our high camp and a few hours of disturbed, high-altitude sleep, we donned our mountaineering gear, clipped into our rope and began a 1 a.m. ascent toward the summit. Our “lowlander” lungs labored to breath the thin air. Darkness and silence enveloped the mountain, torn open by only the light from our headlamps and the rhythmic *crunch...crunch...crunch* of our crampons slicing into the snow and ice with each step. Despite the frozen landscape, time melted away and before we knew it, the sun was rising. For the first time we could see the fruit of our labor; the seemingly impossible summit was within reach. With one more hard push, we stood like conquerors on top of Mt. Rainier. We couldn’t believe it! As we looked down from the cratered summit, we thought, “How in the world did we get up here?”

The answer to that question is fairly simple. Here’s the secret: leaping tall buildings in a single bound is the stuff of comic books. Mountains, real or figurative, are climbed one small step at a time.

If you’ve ever tried to wrangle a horde of squirrely 3rd graders, you already know that becoming a dynamic small group leader for kids can seem like climbing a mountain—overwhelming. But there are few mountains more worthy of climbing! And just like any mountain, it’s climbed one small step at a time.

The following resource is meant to help you do just that—become a dynamic small group leader one small step at a time. It’s filled with what I call “two minute trainers.” They’re bite-sized skill building tips designed to help you become a better leader for kids. Don’t feel like you have to read and implement the whole thing at one time. Let the first one soak in...*crunch*. Give it a try with your small group...*crunch*. Move on to the next one...*crunch*. Before you know it, you’ll be approaching the summit and leading kids to the greatest life-changing adventure ever—becoming a forever follower of Jesus!

A NOTE TO CHILDREN'S MINISTRY LEADERS

You're not just a mountain climber, you're a mountain guide! You're leading a group of volunteers to the summit. You're roped up with your team and encouraging them toward becoming the best small group leaders they can be. This resource is a labor of love, meant to help you do that. Use it in whatever way serves you best, but here are some suggestions.

Give it to your volunteers. Alright—that one is kind of a no-brainer! But seriously, this is a resource meant for them, so print it out for them or give them a digital copy. Give it to your current large group teachers and ask them to read it. More than that, give it to every new teacher as a way to help them get started with a bang!

Establish a “Team Time.” If your volunteers show up at the same time as the kids, it's next to impossible to connect with them. If you don't already, ask your volunteers to arrive 15 minutes before the kids are allowed into the room. Use that time to catch up with one another, pray for each other and the ministry, and for training. You'll be amazed at what this little bit of time will do for your team!

Feed them some training nuggets. Spend part of your Team Time talking through one of the two minute trainers. These training pieces are intentionally broken up into bite-sizes so that you can quickly train volunteers during times like this. Maybe choose just one topic for the month. Ask your volunteers to do a self-assessment. Ask them how they're doing with that topic. Ask them if they have anything to add to the topic. As a team, come up with a game plan for improving.

Take advantage of the free coaching. The “Two Minute Trainer: Large Group Leader Edition” is going to be extremely helpful for you and your teaching volunteers, but you can't ask it questions. (Go ahead, I dare you to try!) That's why we're also offering you a free 1-hour coaching session. Seriously—it's free as in zero dollars! It's your chance to pick my brain about volunteer training, large group programming, curriculum selection, leadership development, or whatever you want. See the end of the book to schedule the coaching session.



CHAPTER ONE

IN THE BEGINNING

“THE THING THAT DRAWS MOST KIDS BACK WEEK AFTER WEEK ISN'T THE INCREDIBLE LESSONS. IT'S THE FEELING OF BEING LOVED AND KNOWN.”



Climbing a mountain requires a lot of planning and effort before you even show up. It's the same with becoming a dynamic small group leader for kids. There are some things you can do to train before you ever step foot in the room. The following two minute trainers are designed to prepare you for what happens before it all happens:

- HOW TO PREPARE LIKE A CHAMP FOR SMALL GROUP
- 4 “BE’s” OF BEING A GREAT SMALL GROUP LEADER
- UNDERSTANDING A KID’S WORLD
- USING KID-FRIENDLY LANGUAGE

4 “BE’S” OF BEING A GREAT SMALL GROUP LEADER

Sometimes we see people who lead and relate to kids with such effortless talent that we say of them, “They’re such a natural!” Make no mistake, though, great small group leaders aren’t born—they’re made! If you watch the most successful small group leaders closely, you’ll see that many of them have a method to their madness. And best of all, it’s something that anyone can learn. Follow these 4 “Be’s” to be the “bees knees” to your group of kids.

Be relational. For most kids, the thing that draws them back week after week isn’t the incredible lessons, it’s the feeling of being loved and known. It’s easy to think that your primary role is to *teach* the kids in your group, when in fact, the most important thing you could do is to *know* the kids. Not just their names, but their likes, their fears and the silly things that make them laugh.

Be consistent. Developing deep, life-changing relationships with kids takes time and trust. They need to see your face on a regular basis. They need to trust that you’ll be there for them. Great small group leaders make serving with kids a priority and show up consistently. The more your group sees you, the quicker and deeper your relationship with them will grow.

Be involved. Great small group leaders are involved with the kids from the time they arrive to the time they leave. Be a part of their world. If you have kids worship, stand among the kids and sing. If there are motions to the songs, roll up your sleeves and jump in. Instead of sitting in the back of the room during large group, sit with the kids. Let them see you be silly sometimes. They’ll notice and love you for it! Better yet, be involved even after they leave. Give them a call or send them a note during the week.

Be quiet. Great small group leaders are great listeners. Kids have so much to say and too few people in their lives who take the time to listen. If kids know that you genuinely care about what they have to say, they’ll pour out their lives to you. Moreover, great small group leaders are masters at facilitating discussion. During small group time, be slow to talk and quick to listen.

HOW TO PREPARE LIKE A CHAMP FOR SMALL GROUP

Picture this scene: moments before children’s church is scheduled to begin a leader stands in the corner of the room with his face buried in some papers labeled “Small Group Lesson.” He seems oblivious to the kids moving quickly and loudly all around him. A bead of sweat rolls down his face. The clock ticks loudly as he reads at a fevered pace. Have you seen this leader? *Are you* this leader? There’s no judgment here! We get it—life is often times *really* busy and finding the time to lead a small group, much less prepare for one, can be tough. But by investing just a small amount of time into preparation, you can go from being a good small group leader to a great one. Here’s how:

Read your lesson ahead of time. You saw that one coming, didn’t you? When the kids arrive, it’s game time. When you’ve read the lesson ahead of time, the kids get your full attention from the moment they arrive. When small group begins, you’ll be able to lead much more effectively if you’re not trying to figure the lesson out for yourself at the same time you’re explaining it to your group.

Familiarize yourself with the materials. Sometimes small group activities have materials that go with it. When you read the lesson at home, you might have a picture of what the materials look like, but double check to make sure what you imagined matches reality when you arrive at church.

Prepare your own heart. The best way to lead the kids in your group is through example. Consider reading the Bible story ahead of time and asking yourself how it applies to your own life. Spend some time in prayer asking the Holy Spirit to show you how you need to change in light of this story.

UNDERSTANDING A KID'S WORLD

One of the best ways to connect with kids is to understand the world they live in. Unfortunately, relying on our memories of being a kid won't cut it. Newsflash: kids don't know who "Captain Caveman" is and your "Speak and Spell" is a technological dinosaur to them. Even if you were a kid just a short while ago, the culture has already shifted considerably. Communicating with kids effectively, whether as a small group leader or a large group teacher, requires you to engage them at *their* level and in *their* world. Don't let the task sound daunting, though—you're surrounded by experts who would be happy to teach you!

Ask the experts: Who's the best person to ask about today's kid culture? (*Warning: obvious answer approaching*) Kids! Ask the kids in your ministry what their favorites are—movies, TV shows, music, board games, video games, apps, toys, etc. Be ready, though. Just like experts in any area, when you get them talking, they might not be able to stop!

Do some research: Who said research has to be boring? Once you know what your kids are watching, playing, and hearing, you should watch it, play it, and listen to it yourself! You'll be surprised how much you learn about kids when you visit their world.

Report your findings immediately: The next time you see the kids, tell them what you listened to, watched, or played. Their faces will most likely light up. You'll be able to reference things that are relevant and interesting to them. Best of all, you'll have an instant connection with them and they'll see you in a whole new light.

USING KID-FRIENDLY LANGUAGE

It may be true that we've been washed in the blood of Jesus for the atonement of our sins and the redemption of our souls, but you might want to pause before telling that to a kid. The Christian faith is rich with imagery and vocabulary! To a kid, though, some of it might be confusing, overwhelming and even frightening at times. If you don't want your kids to look at you like you're speaking Klingon, consider the following advice:

Be mindful of your language. The biggest part of solving a problem is recognizing that it exists. For some of us, we don't even realize that the words we're using with kids are a little advanced.

Develop a kid-thesaurus. No—that's not a dinosaur! Begin developing kid-friendly language to replace some of the bigger words you might use. For example, instead of saying "redeemed," you might say "set free." Instead of saying, "washed in the blood," you might say, "forgiven of our sins."

Be intentional with new words. Not only is it okay to introduce new words to kids, it's instrumental. Part of developing kids into functioning members of the church is helping them understand the language, but be purposeful with your new words instead of just using them haphazardly.

Don't introduce too many new words too quickly. It can take kids a little bit of time to understand and absorb new words and concepts. If you throw too many new words at them too quickly, they may not remember any of them.

Use the word, define the word, use the word. When you introduce kids to a new word, first use it in its right context. Next, define the word using simple and clear language. Finally, use the word multiple times so kids can really digest it. You may even want to have the kids repeat the word after you so they can really familiarize themselves with it.



CHAPTER TWO

BASICALLY THE BASICS



“ONE OF YOUR GOALS AS A SMALL GROUP LEADER IS TO CAPTURE, RATHER THAN DEMAND, THE ATTENTION OF YOUR GROUP SO THAT LIFE CHANGE CAN HAPPEN.”

It can be overwhelming when you stand at the base of a monumental task. You might have a long way to climb before reaching your full potential as a small group leader, but don't let that overwhelm you. Start with the basics from this chapter. Put one foot in front of the other. You can do it—so what are you waiting for? That mountain is not going to climb itself!

- KEEPING KIDS ENGAGED DURING SMALL GROUP
- THE MAGIC CIRCLE
- MANAGING SMALL GROUP MATERIALS
- KEEPING KIDS SAFE

KEEPING KIDS ENGAGED DURING SMALL GROUP

Eyes can tell you a lot about the engagement level of a kid. Is the kid staring off into the distance? Is the kid looking at the ceiling? Are the kid's eyes closed? Is the kid snoring and does he have a bit of drool seeping from the corner of his mouth? If so, there's a decent chance you may have lost his attention! No worries, though—this can be fixed! One of your goals as a small group leader is to capture (rather than demand) the attention of your group so that life changing conversation can happen. Here are a few suggestions to help you make that happen:

Be prepared. Your eyes are a tell all. Are they buried in your small group lesson during group time? It probably means you didn't read the lesson carefully enough ahead of time. Read the lesson and be familiar with its activities before arriving to church. It's okay to reference the lesson during group time, but if you're reading the lesson and trying to make sense of it for the first time, it's easy to lose your group's attention.

Facilitate! Don't dominate. Learn how to facilitate conversation as opposed to dominating it. When kids don't feel like they get to talk or participate enough, they eventually begin to lose interest.

Seat the kids in a circle. When kids are seated in a clump, the kids in the back often times lose interest because they feel like they are on the outside of the group (which they are quite literally). However, when kids are seated in a circle, everyone has equal access to the conversation and activities.

Keep it moving. As a wise man once said, "You've got to know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em." If it appears that your group is totally into the conversation or activity, keep it going. If, on the other hand, they're becoming restless or bored, move on. Even the best small group lessons can be driven into the ground.

THE MAGIC CIRCLE

When it comes time for you to sit down with your small group, there is no better configuration than a circle. If you have a group of younger kids who find it difficult to seat themselves in a nice circle, have them first hold hands in a circle and then sit down. The benefits of sitting in a circle are well worth the time it takes to organize your kids in the beginning. Here's why:

Everybody feels like they are a part of the group. When your group is arranged in a big clump, the kids sitting toward the outside often times don't feel like they're a part of what's going on and their attention goes elsewhere. In a circle, no one is on the outside.

The kids will talk to one another, not just you. You are the facilitator of conversation, not the center of it. If you organize your group like a miniature classroom, kids will become accustomed to talking and listening to only you. A circle allows kids to feel like they're connected to everyone in the group.

It's easier to manage. When there's a direct line of site between you and all of the kids, they're more apt to behave. You can quickly and easily address interruptions. Are there two kids distracting each other? Separate them in the circle. Is there a kid who is more difficult to manage? Seat him next to you in the circle.

You can use eye contact to your advantage. Eye contact invites participation. If you have a kid who seldom participates, consider placing him across from you in the circle where he'll get more eye contact. Conversely, you can place kids who dominate conversation next to you.

MANAGING SMALL GROUP MATERIALS

Often times, small group activities utilize a variety of materials. From paper to ping pong balls, there's any number of items that you might have to juggle while keeping your kids engaged. Here are some tips to keep you from dropping the ball:

Be prepared. If you're reading the small group lesson for the first time while seated with a group of wide-eyed kids, you might be in for a wild ride. Always read the lesson before arriving and have a plan for when and how you'll incorporate the accompanying materials.

Take inventory of your materials when you arrive. No one's perfect and occasionally you might be missing a material or there might not be enough materials for the number of kids you have. Take inventory as soon as you arrive so that you can prepare accordingly.

Familiarize yourself with the materials. Sometimes the materials might look slightly different than how you imagined when you were reading the lesson at home. Take a look at the materials when you first arrive so there are no surprises during group time.

Don't reveal the materials too early. Kids can be easily distracted. Often times, if you reveal or hand out materials too soon, the kids will become more interested in the material and miss your instructions. Fully deliver your instructions before handing out the materials. If necessary, pull out just one set of materials for demonstration purposes.

Let the kids help you. If there are papers or other materials that need to be given to each kid in the group, put the kids to work. They love helping! Choose one or two kids and let them hand materials to the rest of the group.

KEEPING KIDS SAFE

Repeat this with me: “There is nothing more important than the safety of the kids.” Period. End of sentence. An unsafe children’s ministry environment can have a profoundly negative impact on a kid’s physical, emotional, and spiritual life. It can also put the leaders and ministry at large in legal jeopardy. The purpose of this is not to make you fearful, but to make you diligent. The following is not intended to be a thorough safety policy, but rather a general set of guidelines to help you create a safe place for kids.

Be familiar with the child protection policies of your church. Your church most likely already has policies and guidelines in place for the protection of you and the kids. If you’re not already familiar with them, ask your ministry leader to give you a copy. Simply put: know them and follow them.

Follow the 2-person rule. As much as possible, don’t be alone with kids. Always have a second leader with you. Additionally, try to occupy spaces that are visible to public areas. This is as much for your protection as it is for the kids.

Use appropriate touch. Use only positive and appropriate forms of physical contact while avoiding anything that is or appears as inappropriate or unsafe. Examples of appropriate touch may include: side hugs, high-fives, fist bumps, and pats on the back. For younger kids, ask your ministry leader if sitting on laps and brief front hugs are permissible.

Emergency evacuation and shelter. Do you know where to go or what to do in case of a fire? How about a tornado, an earthquake, or an active shooter? If you’re not sure about any of these, ask your ministry leader about the plan. Walk the routes and familiarize yourself with the spaces.

If you see something, say something. Trust your instincts. If you notice anything that is unsafe, careless, or suspicious, say something. If you notice any signs that a child has been abused or neglected, let your ministry leader know.



CHAPTER THREE

LET'S HEAR IT FOR THE SPIRIT

“BECOMING A FOLLOWER OF JESUS IS THE GREATEST DECISION A KID COULD EVER MAKE AND IT’S WORTH CELEBRATING. LET KIDS KNOW THAT ALL OF HEAVEN IS REJOICING OVER THEIR DECISION.”



In Matthew 19:14, Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me. Don’t keep them away. The kingdom of heaven belongs to people like them.” (NIRV) Sometimes grown-ups underestimate what the Holy Spirit can do in the life of a kid. They’re not just followers-of-Jesus-in-waiting. In fact, not only can kids walk with Jesus, they can run. And you can help them!

- LEADING A CHILD TO CHRIST
- HELPING KIDS NAVIGATE THE BIBLE
- HOW TO LEAD KIDS IN PRAYER
- HELPING KIDS REFLECT AND RESPOND TO GOD

LEADING A CHILD TO CHRIST

There are few things as amazing as praying with a kid to become a Christian, but for some people, the thought of it is terrifying. Questions might swirl through your head. How do I do it? What should I avoid? Is it possible I could mess this thing up? It's understandable that some people might feel nervous about walking a kid through such a huge spiritual milestone, but fear not! By the grace of God, *you can do it!* Here's a few suggestions to help you along the way:

Avoid coercion. Most kids have the desire to please adults. Avoid language that might pressure a kid into a disingenuous decision to follow Jesus. It's okay to present opportunities by asking questions like, "Do you ever think about asking Jesus to be your Savior?" But allow them to reach a conclusion on their own. In other words, lead them towards a decision; don't push them towards one.

Use the ABC's. If a kid has already heard the Gospel and has expressed a desire to become a Christian, explain to them the ABC's of prayer. "A"—Admit you have sinned and ask God for forgiveness. "B"—Believe that God has sent His son, Jesus, to die for your sins. "C"—Choose to follow Jesus and make Him the leader of your life.

Prompt the child in prayer. It's important that the salvation prayer comes from the heart of the child. Instead of having a kid repeat the prayer after you, provide prompts and let them do the praying. For example, begin by opening the prayer, but then prompt the kid to "admit" he's sinned and ask God for forgiveness. Pause for the kid to say his own prayer and then prompt him through "believe" and "choose."

Celebrate! This is the greatest decision anyone could ever make and it's worth celebrating! Let kids know that all of heaven is rejoicing over their decision. If the kid doesn't have a Bible yet, you might consider buying one for them as a celebration gift. Be sure to share the news with the leaders in your room or any other people who are important in the life of the child.

HELPING KIDS NAVIGATE THE BIBLE

“The B-I-B-L-E, Yes that’s the book for me! *Unless you don’t know how to navigate it, in which case it just sits on your shelf collecting dust.*” I like to imagine that these were the original lyrics to the famous Bible song. (Whatever it lacks in singability, it makes up for with raw honesty.) The Bible is the greatest book ever written—it’s a book that has the power to not only change our lives, but our eternities as well. But how can God’s Word truly plant itself in a kid’s heart if they don’t know how to read it for themselves? Helping kids navigate the Bible is one of the most important things we can do. Here are a few tips to help you do that:

Show them the bones. Teaching kids about the basic “bones” of the Bible will help them get around on their own. Show them how the Bible is broken into 2 sections (Old and New Testament) and 66 books. Show them how each book is broken into chapters (the big numbers) and verses (the little numbers).

Teach them about the Table of Contents. Some kids are Bible whizzes. They can recite the 66 books in order and flip to them like lightning. For the rest of the kids, though, the Table of Contents can be a valuable tool. Point your kids to the Table of Contents and show them how to find a book quickly.

Let them see you do it. Flip through your own Bible as you explain. Let the kids see you navigate the Bible as you illustrate each step.

Don’t be a Bible hog. Instead of just reading to the kids, challenge them to look up the verses for themselves. It will take more time for the kids to find it, but it’s worth the investment.

Give space, give hints, give answers. When you give the kids a verse to look up, first give them space to find it on their own. After a moment, give them hints on where to find it. *“It’s in the Old Testament.” “It’s close to the middle of the Bible.” “Look for the big number 28.”* Finally, when enough time has passed, help the kids who are struggling. If there are kids who are new to the Bible or continually struggle, spend some extra time with them afterwards.

HOW TO LEAD KIDS IN PRAYER

If a kid's prayer life consists of shouting, "God's neat, let's eat" before dinner, they might need your help! One of your most fundamental jobs as a small group leader is to help kids connect with God. And one of the most fundamental ways of connecting with God is through prayer. With a little bit of direction from you, the kids in your group can become pros at prayer. The following suggestions are intended to help you do that:

Consider your own prayer life. Never mind the kids for a minute, if *your* prayer life consist of shouting, "God's neat, let's eat," you might need to work on yourself first. You can't model what you're not practicing.

Tell them what prayer is. Some kids might have misunderstandings as to what prayer is. They might think it's something mystical or magical. They might think it's repeating rote lines. Let them know that prayer is simply talking to God.

Model it. Instead of just telling the kids how to pray, show them. During group prayers, let the kids hear how you talk to God. Go beyond the surface—tell God about your feelings and your fears. Praise Him for His goodness. Thank Him for specific blessings in your life. On an appropriate level, tell Him how you've messed up and ask for forgiveness.

Don't be a prayer hog. Kids can say the most amazing, heart-felt prayers—if you give them a chance, that is. Get them started, then get out of the way. Tell the kids that you'll open the group in prayer, then let them own it from there. You'll be amazed by the depth and sincerity with which kids can pray!

Consider using different prayer postures. Bowing your heads, closing your eyes and folding your hands works great, but there are some other postures that can create unity within your group while praying. For example: stand in a circle and hold hands or link arms. Stand or kneel in a huddle and put your arms around each other or place your hands in the middle.

HELPING KIDS REFLECT AND RESPOND TO GOD

When ministering to kids, it's easy to spend all of your time on two endeavors: getting the Bible into a kid's head and teaching them how to apply it with their hands. That's great, but it's missing a key component. God doesn't just want our head and our hands, He wants our heart too! But teaching a kid to develop a heart-felt relationship with God can feel kind of squishy—it's not as concrete as teaching Biblical truth or application. That doesn't mean it's impossible, though. Here are some tips for helping kids develop a relationship with God through reflection and response.

Ask reflective questions. Instead of asking kids comprehension questions, in other words, what they remember from a story, ask them reflective questions like, "What do you think God is telling you through that verse or story?" or "How does that verse or story make you feel? Why?"

Tap into their inner artist. Art is a great way for kids to respond to God. Instead of having kids pray verbally, consider having them draw their prayers. Or carve out some time to allow kids to draw praise pictures to God.

Pray on the spot. If a kid shares something prayer-worthy, don't just tell them, "I'll be praying for you." Instead, tell them, "Let's pray about that right now." Pray for that kid on the spot, but encourage them to pray aloud as well.

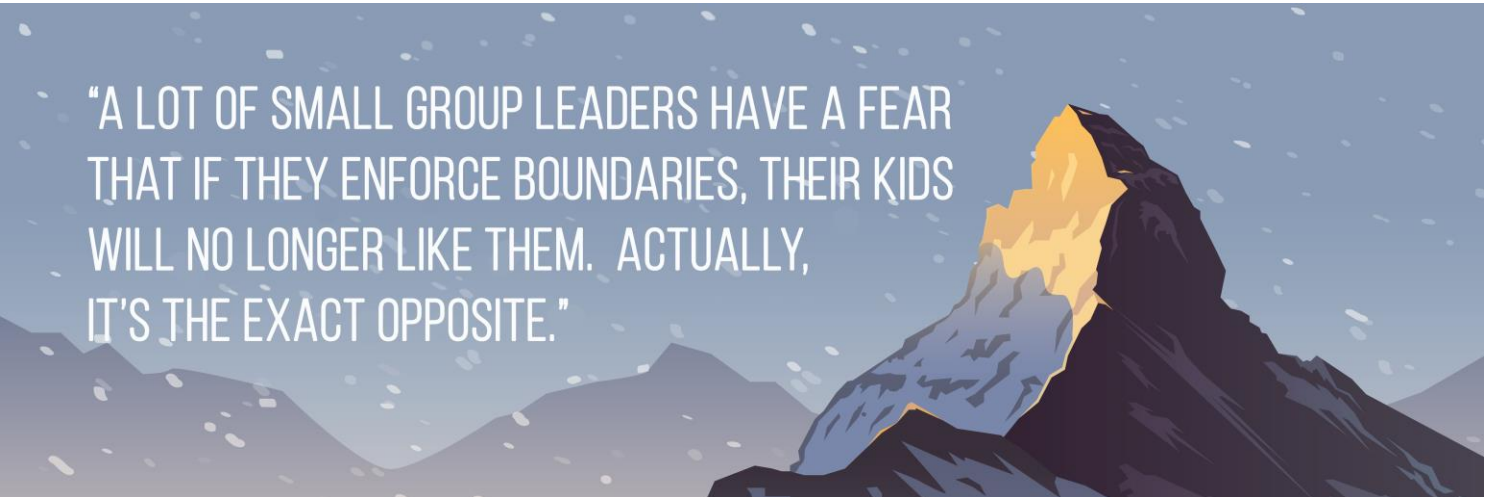
Get them into God's Word. Often times, when kids are at church, they'll have a Bible story told to them. But you can help them take it further by encouraging the kids to read the story from the Bible at home too. If they're still learning to read, have them ask their parents for help. When you see them next, ask them, "What did you learn about God from that story?" or "What do you want to say to God after reading that story?"

Letters to God. Some kids love to write. Get them into journaling by telling them to write a letter to God. They could tell God about something they learned from the Bible story that week or they could write out their prayers to God.



CHAPTER FOUR

IT'S COMPLICATED



“A LOT OF SMALL GROUP LEADERS HAVE A FEAR THAT IF THEY ENFORCE BOUNDARIES, THEIR KIDS WILL NO LONGER LIKE THEM. ACTUALLY, IT’S THE EXACT OPPOSITE.”

Wouldn’t it be great if kids always followed the script? If they talked when they were supposed to talk, listened when they were supposed to listen, and sang “Kumbaya, My Lord” in perfect harmony? Yeah—that would be great, but that’s not always reality. Sometimes being a small group leader is a breeze and sometimes it’s...well...complicated! But don’t fret. The following two minute trainers are here to help you deal with some of the inevitable difficulties of small group leadership.

- DEALING WITH DIFFICULT KIDS
- ESTABLISHING RULES AND CONSEQUENCES
- HELPING QUIET KIDS OPEN UP
- BEING PART OF A KID’S PIT CREW

DEALING WITH DIFFICULT KIDS

If you're like a lot of other small group leaders, when you signed up for the job, you may have imagined yourself pouring out wisdom to a group of kids as they sat in wide-eyed wonder of everything you said. But if you've been on the job for any length of time, you know that's pure fantasy. The truth is that most kids are very well behaved most of the time, but there's always one! You know the one I'm talking about. If your heart rate is beginning to rise, take a deep breath. Here are a few tips to help you keep difficult kids from wreaking havoc on your group:

Don't hesitate to separate kids. If you have two kids in your group nicknamed "Dynamite" and "Fire," don't sit them next to each other! Some kids just make lethal combinations and when put together, they lose all ability to control their behavior. Simply ask one of the kids to move so they're no longer seated together.

Have a consistent set of consequences. Having consequences for misbehavior is a way of creating boundaries. Kids love boundaries. In fact, they thrive when trusted adults create and enforce boundaries. State the consequences ahead of time so that all of the kids are aware of them. You might use something like the "3 Strike" rule. Work with your ministry leaders to determine what the different strikes mean or find out if there's already an established set of consequences for your ministry.

Include the parents in the problem. No one knows the kids in your group better than their parents. Not only can parents give you insight into the problem, they can probably help you fix it as well. Talk to your ministry leader ahead of time to find out if there's any way they can assist you with that conversation.

Don't be afraid they'll stop liking you. A lot of small group leaders have a fear that if they enforce boundaries, their kids will no longer like them. Actually, it's the exact opposite. When you create and enforce boundaries, kids will respect you. And the more they respect you, the more they'll like you. You might be surprised to find out that the kids you are closest to are often the ones you've had to discipline the most.

ESTABLISHING RULES AND CONSEQUENCES

“Houston...we have a problem!” If you’ve been leading small group for any length of time, you’ve probably wanted to say something like this. Unfortunately, most of us are flying solo and don’t have a ground control to call into. Kids are great and well behaved most of the time, but problems still occur. Here are some things you can do to help prevent or address problems:

Establish rules for your group. If you haven’t already, work with your leaders to come up with a short list of rules for small group. It might be something as simple as “Be Kind” (listen quietly and treat others with respect) and “Be Safe” (keep your hands to yourself and follow instructions carefully).

Communicate the rules to your kids. Kids can’t abide by your expectations if they don’t know what they are. For younger kids, you may want to go over the rules with your group weekly. For older kids, you might visit them once a month.

Have consequences. What good are rules if there aren’t any consequences for breaking them? An example of consequences might be something like “3 strikes.” Strike 1 is a warning. Strike 2 is a time-out on the wall. Strike 3 involves calling the parents out of service to pick up their kid. Again, if you haven’t already, work with your leaders to establish the consequences that work best for your ministry.

Don’t be afraid to enforce the rules. Inevitably, there will be kids who test the boundaries. When you enforce the rules, most kids will see that you mean business and quickly comply.

Call out the best in kids. Whenever you apply consequences to a kid, it’s a good idea to have a follow-up conversation with him. Make sure he understands what behavior led to his consequences. Be sure to do it with grace, though. Always end by calling out the best in that kid. Tell him you know he can do better and that you look forward to seeing him again.

HELPING QUIET KIDS OPEN UP

Cricket. Cricket. Cricket. This is the sound that emanates from a group filled with quiet kids. Fortunately, it's not often that you'll have a group made up entirely of kids who are "vocally challenged." Quiet kids are often deep thinkers with quiet spirits. That's not a bad thing at all! Nevertheless, it's important that you create a safe environment where (with a little bit of encouragement) they'll be willing to share their thoughts and feelings with others. This gives them the opportunity to voice their struggles, challenges, fears, hopes and dreams. You never want to force a kid to share, so here are a few tips that will help encourage them to share.

Engage them outside of group: Some kids need to know and trust you before they're willing to open up in a group. Take some time during drop-off or pick-up time to talk one-on-one with your quiet kids. As they become more comfortable with you, they'll be more likely to share during group time.

Seat the kids in a circle: When kids are seated in a clump rather than a circle, it's easy for kids with less inclination for sharing to hide or get lost in the back of the cluster.

Call on quiet kids directly: Sometimes quiet kids need to feel invited into a conversation. When you call on a kid directly, it communicates that you want them to be a part of the group and that you're interested in what they have to say.

Be okay with silence. It might take some kids a moment to put words to their thoughts. That's okay! Don't feel the need to "rescue" them too quickly. If they can't or don't want to join the conversation just yet, that's okay too. But don't let that be the last time you call on them.

Affirm them after sharing: For some kids, sharing aloud in a group is a huge emotional and social risk. If you affirm them after sharing, it *greatly* increases the chance they'll share again. A simple, "Wow! I love the way you think!" or "Great answer—thanks for sharing!" will often do the trick.

BEING PART OF A KID'S PIT CREW

Life can be rough sometimes. We all get our fair share of bumps and bruises along the way, but wouldn't it be nice if life had a pit stop for banging out dents. As rough as we think we have it, kids have it just as bad (and sometimes worse). And for a lot of them, their time with you at church is the closest thing they'll get to a pit stop. Every week they do a lap around life's track, enduring emotional and spiritual bumps, before they come screeching into your presence. This is your chance to bang out some dents and refuel those kids for another lap. One of the best ways to do that is through encouragement. Give this a try:

Call out the truth in them. How often do you notice or think something positive about someone, but fail to share it with them? If all you did was to give voice to the wonderful things you notice or think about the kids in your group, you would light up their week.

I'm glad to see you. If kids know that their presence brings joy to people, they'll want to come back over and over again. A simple "I'm glad to see you" reinforces that they are someone worth knowing.

I missed you last time. If one of the kids in your group was gone the last time you served, let them know you noticed. This will help your kids realize they're an integral part of the community.

Great answer! I like how you think! Unfortunately, kids are far more prone to hearing someone tell them they're "dumb" than they are to have someone call out their brilliance. When you bring positive attention to a kid's answer and thought process, it encourages them to participate all the more in the future.

Develop an arsenal of encouragement. Have some "go to" words of encouragement that will brighten your kid's day. Like these...God thinks you're awesome! Way to go! You're a really cool kid! Great idea! You're the best! That was awesome! Nice try! You're a lot of fun! You make me smile! I can't wait to see you again!



CHAPTER FIVE

APPROACHING THE
SUMMIT



“WHEN CHILDREN’S MINISTRY VOLUNTEERS AND PARENTS WORK TOGETHER, IT MAKES FOR A POWERFUL PARTNERSHIP THAT HAS TWICE THE IMPACT AS WHEN THEY WORK SEPARATELY.”

If you’ve begun to absorb and implement the previous two minute trainers, then you’re well on your way to becoming a dynamic small group leader. There’s just a little ways to go before you stand on top. The following training topics will help you in your final push to the summit.

- CONNECTING WITH PARENTS DURING PICK-UP TIME
- PLAYING A ROLE DURING LARGE GROUP TIME
- HELPING NEW KIDS TRANSITION
- HELPING KIDS FEEL WELCOMED

CONNECTING WITH PARENTS DURING PICK-UP TIME

The Titanic was pretty cool, but the best ship is a partnership. (Worst opening line ever!) When children's ministry volunteers and parents work together, it makes for a powerful partnership that has twice the impact as when they work separately. Here's a few ways that you can reach out to the parents of the kids in your group and make a connection.

Require the parents to come all the way to your small group before releasing their kid. Connecting with the parents requires you to have contact with them and you can't do that if they beckon their kids from across the room. If this differs from your normal pick-up protocol, talk to your leaders about making a change.

Choose one or two parents to connect with during pick-up time. If you throw a dozen balls in the air and try to catch them all, you probably won't catch any. It's kind of the same with parents. (Note: do not throw parents in the air.) If you try to connect with all of the parents, you'll most likely drop the ball. Instead, choose one or two parents every week to make a significant connection with.

Share something positive about their kid. Parents love hearing positive reports about their kids! Better yet, do it in front of the kid and watch his face light up.

Ask the parents if there is any way you can pray for them. This is a great way to find out what's going on in the life of their family and to support and encourage them. Show them that you're truly committed to supporting them by following up with them in the coming weeks.

PLAYING A ROLE DURING LARGE GROUP

The kids are seated and the Large Group Leader has taken the reigns—time for a break, right? Not so fast! Although small group is your time to shine, you still have some huge roles to play during the large group lesson. If you assume these roles successfully, you'll be a hero to your Large Group Leader (wearing a mask and cape is optional). Here's just a handful of those roles:

The Watcher. If the large group lessons are as engaging as they should be, you'll probably enjoy watching as much as the kids and that's okay; but try to keep at least one eye on the kids so that you can watch for possible problems.

The Interceptor. It's very difficult for the Large Group Leader to address behavior problems while teaching the lesson. It interrupts their train of thought as well as the flow of the program. It's incredibly helpful when you, the small group leader, intercept any behavior issues. As a rule of thumb, if a kid is doing something that's distracting you, it's probably distracting others too.

The Separator. Sometimes kids feed off each other. If you see two or more kids who are continually distracting each other during the lesson, swoop in and separate them.

The Presence. Make your presence known during Large Group. Instead of sitting in the back of the room, sit up close with and among the kids. When the kids are within arms reach of you, it's much easier to address issues. If there are multiple small groups within the room, you may want to consider keeping all of the kids from your small group together and sitting with them.

The Helper. Often times the Large Group Leader can use an extra set of hands during the lesson. She may need your help managing materials or volunteering for an activity or illustration. Ask your leader if she needs any help before the large group lesson begins.

HELPING NEW KIDS TRANSITION

Unless you're an extreme extrovert, you probably know the terror of walking into a room filled with people you don't know. It's the same for kids. Unfamiliar places, filled with unfamiliar faces can be downright scary for them! You can help, though. If you follow a few simple steps, you can put new kids (and therefore their parents) at ease. In fact, you might be the difference between a family sticking with your church or bouncing to another one.

Greet new kids right away: The most awkward moment for new kids is the moment they walk through the door. Strike fast! If they're younger and smaller, get down on your knee at eye level. Introduce yourself to the new kid, ask him his name and engage him in conversation. You'll probably see the anxiety draining from his face.

Show new kids around the room: If a kid is familiar with her environment, she'll feel much more at ease. Show her around. Point out the different areas of the room and tell her what they're for. More than that, tell her what's going to happen over the course of the hour.

Introduce new kids to others: New kids will be happy to have a leader who connects with them, but at some point, they'll want to feel like they have a friend their own age. Personally introduce him to other kids. During small group time, introduce him to the whole group.

Give new kids a good sendoff: A good sendoff can go a long way in encouraging a kid to return. Try any or all of these: "It was nice meeting you," "You're a lot of fun," or "I hope to see you again."

HELPING KIDS FEEL WELCOMED

Hands down, one of the greatest desires of any kid is to feel they belong—like they're a welcomed and important part of the group. If you can help kids feel welcome at church, they'll want to come back over and over. Additionally, it helps with behavior and participation. Feeling welcome at a young age can even help kids develop life-long positive views of the church and of God. There's a lot at stake! Fortunately, helping kids feel welcomed isn't rocket science! Here's a few simple tips to help:

Greet them warmly. One of the easiest and most important ways of helping a kid feel like they belong is to look them in the eyes, smile, and greet them by name. With just this small gesture, you'll say to a kid that you know them and you're glad they came.

Ask and listen. Knowing a kid's name is just the beginning. Ask kids questions about their life and take time to listen carefully. Remember what they say and ask them about it again at a later time. This shows that you genuinely care about their life.

Connect kids to each other. Being known and loved by their leader is important to a kid, but it's just as important that they feel that from other kids as well. Take time to connect kids with each other. This is especially important for new kids.

Let them know they were missed. If a kid has been absent for a week or more, let them know you noticed and that you missed them.



CONCLUSION

THE WRONG GUY

A few years back I was beginning to feel an unsettled stirring in my heart. After many months of thought and prayer, I was starting to feel like God had a new adventure for me. I felt like it was big, but I really had no idea what it could be. So I said a prayer—one of those dangerous sorts of prayers. In retrospect, I only suggest you say this prayer if you're seriously ready to have God rock your world! I said to God, "What's next?"

Later that night I was working on a home project when God said very loudly and clearly, "Quit what you're doing and start the GO! curriculum!" How do I know it was God's voice and not my own? I knew it because the voice was big and bold and it was telling me to do scary and exciting and Kingdom rocking things. My voice doesn't do that. My voice tells me to do small and safe and comfort preserving things. In fact, my small, safe voice was quick to answer God by saying, "You've got the wrong guy!" And I wasn't just being modest. I really believed God had actually dialed the wrong number. But here is how I heard God answer me back, "I know you're the wrong guy. That's why I picked you." BAM! In my face! How do I argue with that?

Shortly thereafter, God reminded me of all the other "wrong guys" He had picked. David was the wrong guy. His dad thought the idea of David leading the nation of Israel was so laughable, he forgot to even mention him in the list of his sons. Jonah was the wrong guy. He pleaded with God to send someone else to Nineveh. And then there was Moses. When God spoke to Moses through the burning bush, He told Moses to lead his people out of Egypt. Moses replied back in Exodus 3:11, "Who am I that I should bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" Seriously! Who was he? Who was David? Who was Jonah? Who am I? I tell you who we are—we're the wrong guys!

The truth is that God picks the wrong guys like it's His job! Why? Maybe it's because God's glory shines the brightest when He works through our weakness. How could I possibly take credit for anything good that comes out of this adventure? I can't. It would be undeserved.

Chances are that many of you might feel unworthy or unqualified to do great things for God. You may even feel unworthy to lead a small group of kids. Good! God is looking for someone like you. If you haven't already, I hope you find the courage to ask God a crazy question like, "What's next?" I hope you hear God calling you to do some hair-raising, white-knuckled, monumentally big and bold things. And when you're finished hyperventilating, I hope you find the courage to say, "Yes."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Rausch is the founder and President of Mooblio, a dynamic organization devoted to developing resources for children’s ministries. He’s also the creator of GO!—a new, interactive curriculum designed to help kids “Join God’s Story.” For many years prior to that, David was the Programming Director with Promiseland, the children’s ministry at Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago. David has also served as the Children’s Director at The Crossing, a multi-site church in St. Louis. His passion is for resourcing and training people to plant the Word of God in the hearts of children. When he’s not pursuing that passion, you might find David climbing a mountain or trekking through the wild places on earth.





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