

Starting a Sunday morning crèche

A guide for churches

‘...Train up a child in the way he should go, and when
he is old, he will not depart from it.’

Proverbs 22:6



DIocese of
Down & Dromore

How to use this guide

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This guide is designed to help churches to start a crèche group during their Sunday service. Providing a crèche is a practical way to help parents and carers to access your Sunday service, by providing a safe, learning experience for the littlest members of your congregation. A crèche is also important because it enables children to feel part of the church family, and learn together through play. To start a crèche, you will need a warm and safe space somewhere in your church. It could be a separate room or just a designated space at the back or side of the church. It needs to be big enough to allow the children to play and should have access to toilets.

This guide is available to download digitally, so that you can edit the examples to suit your own context.

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The ‘What’ and the ‘Where’

What’s the Benefit... For Children

No matter how exciting your Sunday service is, it’s likely that babies and preschoolers will prefer an environment tailored to their needs and interests. Being in a crèche gives them the chance to develop personal, social, and emotional skills through interacting meaningfully with other children their age in a different environment. Furthermore, through age-appropriate songs, bible verses, prayers and games, children might have their first interaction with the Gospel.

What’s the Benefit... For Parents/Carers

Providing crèche facilities is an important way to help parents and carers to attend church services. Without a crèche, parents might have to take their child out of the service repeatedly which can be frustrating for them and result in them missing large portions of the service. Hosting a crèche also provides an opportunity for parents and carers to have an hour or so to themselves, without having to worry about their child.

What’s the Benefit... For the Church

Some parents and carers find attending church daunting with a baby or a toddler. Regardless of how the congregation actually feels, many parents feel that they will be judged if their child makes noises or becomes unsettled during the service. A crèche group is a great way for churches to support and get to know families in their congregation; “as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10).

Where would we hold it?

It’s important that you think about the space available and how best to use it. For example, there needs to be access to toilet facilities, preferably changing facilities, and you’ll need to set up a registration area close to the door. To make the space appealing for children, you should lay out the room with toys, safety mats, barriers, activity tables, chairs and so on appropriate to the size and activity of the group. The provision of child-friendly background music can also help to create atmosphere. There should be a health and safety walk through before each session to include toy checks, access, hazards and cleanliness.



Team

Who will support your creche and what size of a team should you have?

While the support of the church minister is essential most crèche groups are volunteer led. You will need a minimum of two team members for each session, and this will increase with the number of children attending. Numbers for safeguarding ratios are provided later in this guide.

Key leadership roles on your team should include:

- **Overall responsibility:** A key leader who will liaise with church leadership, ensure the group takes place in a responsible manner and co-ordinate and support the leadership team.
- **Health and Safety:** Completion of and an adherence to an appropriate risk assessment (see example attached) that includes consideration of hazardous areas/items, fire safety, food hygiene, first aid, toys & equipment, cleanliness, changing facilities and so on.
- **Registration:** You will need to coordinate a register of attendees, dietary information, relevant health information, and an optional contact email or phone that you should store under GDPR guidelines. A sample registration form is attached later.

There are a few responsibilities which will need to be managed at each session and you can either oversee these yourself or delegate to a team member. For instance, you will need someone to organise:

- Setting up and tidying away toys and equipment.
- Registration/welcome and providing new people with information on the group.
- Organisation of any special activities for the day such as crafts, messy play, music and so on.



A Typical Session

Depending on the size of group and ages of the children, a typical session could be very informal or involve more structure. A more informal group will generally consist of free play whereas a more structured group may include a story time, songs, and crafts.

Set-up and Prayer

Usually, the set-up up time before the group starts is around 15-20 minutes. This is to allow for the toys to be laid out, welcome table put out and a health and safety check. Remember the importance of prayer as part of this process and the team should meet for 5 mins each week to pray for those attending.

Registration

Every parent/carer should complete a registration form, and there is a sample version at the end of this booklet. Once this has been done you will need to record attendance for the child each week. Usually registration opens slightly before the service starts, to give parents a chance to drop their children before going to church. However, registration should be a little flexible, because some children will arrive during the service.



Free Play

Most crèche groups involve Free Play. This means that the toys are made available for the children to play with and they can choose what they want to do. You can find more information about the types of toys to include later in this booklet. Try to keep the toys laid out in a consistent place each week, so that the children know where their favourite things are.

Snack

Not all crèche groups provide a snack, but some do. If you decide to provide some kind of refreshment, choose something simple like buttered toast and water. Make sure you check your registration forms for any dietary information in advance, and be aware of foods that pose a choking hazard. Remember that some children in your group might be too young for a snack, and others could have a snack provided by a parent.

Sample Session

Songs, Stories, and Sessions

At some point in your session, you may want to bring everyone together for songs. You can either use YouTube, find a musical volunteer, or go 'acapella'! Choose two or three songs to start with in your main session time, but you may want to increase this over time. If you can, provide musical instruments for the children so they can join in.

It's a good idea to have some organised activities, such as a game or a craft activity and try to think of activities that are fun but not too complicated - that children can drop in and out of. Some church crèches will link their songs and activities with the bible passage for that day. If you are including a story, make sure it's short, engaging, and Christ-centred. Get in touch with Millie at the Diocese Office for more information about how to do this or for recommendations of age-appropriate content.

Time	Activity	Leader in Charge
9:30am	Set up and prayer	Millie
9:55am	Registration opens / Free Play starts	Holly
10:00am	Main service begins	N/A
10:20am	Snack time	Holly
10:30am	Song time	Millie
10:45am	Story time	Millie
11:00am	Session finishes and parents arrive for collection	N/A
11:05am	Tidy up	All

Checklist for starting a Crèche

Leaders and Leadership	Have you prayed and talked to the church leadership about the need for a crèche and potential to run one? Do you have people that will pray for this?	
	Do you have the potential for a core team of 2-3 people who have the vision for this and will organise and ensure the group takes place?	
	Are your leaders Safeguarding trained and Access:NI checked?	
	Do you have other leaders that could help on a semi-regular basis to form a rota?	
Organisation	What age limits are you going to have for the children?	
	Is there a registration form available that will include contact details and dietary/health information?	
	Do you have some basic guidelines in place concerning behaviour, sickness, incidents and first aid?	
Finance	Is there financial support available (grants/donations/fees etc) for snacks, toys, and so on?	
	Has the church agreed pay out expenses?	
	Who will handle the finances including receipts/expenses and banking?	
Venue	Is there a risk assessment in place that will cover the venue and type of activity going on?	
	How will you source suitable toys, materials and equipment (play mats, baby changing, Sippy cups, chairs etc) and is there storage available?	

Ongoing checklist for each session

Leaders	Will you have enough leaders to cover all aspects of the session?	
	Have your leadership team gathered for prayer?	
	Do all your leaders know their roles for the session?	
Set-up	Are all the toys set out?	
	Is the venue warm enough? Is there a child gate on the room to prevent children from leaving without their parent?	
	Is the entrance securely manned?	
	Have you done a health and safety walk through of the venue to check toys, hazards, access, cleanliness of the hall/bathrooms etc.?	
	Are there going to be any structured activities at this session such as singing, craft, stories etc?	
Resources	Have you got blank registration forms available for new attendees?	
	Is the first aid kit stocked and accident forms available?	
	Are there spare wipes and nappies available?	

What happens if...

... There are issues with a child's behaviour

It's good to keep a record of any incidents which seem 'noteworthy.' For example, if a child is persistently fighting with the other children or damaging property, keep a record of what has happened and how it was resolved. If incidents continue to occur and you worry about the child's own safety or the safety of others, it might be necessary to take their parent/guardian to the side and explain the situation. Make it clear that although the behaviour cannot continue, you are keen to work with them to resolve any issues.



... A child has an accident

If a child has an accident while at the crèche, it must be recorded in an accident book. Keep the accident book somewhere safe, in a place that can be easily accessed by your team. If you don't have an accident book already, it's easy to make one. The key details to record are:

- The time of the injury
- Any first aid administered
- Whether the person needed to see a doctor
- A parent/guardian signature, to confirm they agree with what has been said.

... You are worried about a child who attends

There are a number of reasons why you might become concerned about a child who is attending the crèche. If it's appropriate, you might want to raise these concerns with the child's parent or carer. However, it's important to note that you are not responsible for investigating any concerns you have. In addition, there might be local services which can provide guidance and practical help for families, so talk to your minister (or, if you are the minister, you can chat to the Diocesan Office) about support on offer in your area. Any safeguarding concerns should be reported to your Parish Safeguarding Panel.



Toys

Most Creche groups start with a session of Free Play. This means that the toys are made available for the children to play with, and they can choose what they want to do. Here are some suggestions for creating a welcoming free-play session environment. This isn't an exhaustive list though, so be creative!

Toys for babies - Black and white books, stacking toys, soft mats, squeaky toys, push-pull toys, baby mirrors, crib mobiles, natural treasure baskets, bubbles, stuffed animals or soft toys. Where possible it's important to have a separate area for babies, with a washable rug, cushions and baby toys. Make sure the toddlers know not to run through this area.

Toys for toddlers - Push-pull toys, musical instruments, balls, beanbags, musical instruments, puppets, picture cards, jigsaws, books with simple stories, shape-sorters, play dough, sand pit, cash register and pretend foods, toy telephone. Avoiding ride-on toys often helps to keep a calmer atmosphere.

Toys for pre-schoolers - Cars, jumping sacks, skipping, tea sets, dress-up clothes, small model vehicles, blocks, paints, water tray, small model figures such as animals and people, musical instruments.

Factors for Consideration

Make sure toys are checked regularly for cleanliness and safety. In particular, check that toys are suitable for the age group intended, carry the CE mark (as appropriate), don't fit into the mouth, don't have sharp edges, have well-sewn seams and securely fixed eyes (for soft toys), and aren't broken.

When choosing toys for the group, consider the following factors;

- Is it age appropriate?
- Is the toy durable?
- Is it safe?
- Can it be kept clean easily and stored safely?



Safeguarding

All volunteers interacting with children should undertake Safeguarding Training through the Church of Ireland. Volunteers will also need an Access NI check. This can be facilitated through the diocese. For more information, contact Millie at the Diocesan Office

Safeguarding, Child Protection, and General Safety

Everyone involved in running the group must adhere to the Church of Ireland Safeguarding Policy. This should be available for reference, and can be found by visiting www.safeguarding.ireland.anglican.org. In addition, there are some basic principles volunteers must adhere to in order to promote a safe environment.

- As a minimum, there should be two adults present at all times, with a ratio of 1:3 for children aged 0-4 years. Babies and young toddlers will require constant supervision and might need a ratio of 1:1. Parents who choose to stay with their children are not included in these ratios.
- Any broken toys will be removed from play and equipment should be checked regularly for cleanliness and safety.
- There should be a consistent policy on how children will be collected their parents, and whether parents will be allowed to stay with their children. There should also be a consistent policy regarding nappies and potty training.
- A risk assessment must be undertaken of the facilities and equipment.
- Children who are unwell should be discouraged from attending the group until they are fully recovered.
- A first aid kit should be available for any minor injuries.
- A sign-in sheet will be taken so that everyone present is accounted for. This can be used to monitor attendance as well as for fire safety.
- All child protection concerns should be passed onto the group leader, and there should be one 'group leader' identified for every session.
- All volunteers should be informed of the fire safety procedure.
- A photographs taken for the purposes of publicity should happen with the parent/carer's permission.
- All attendees should be asked for their contact details. These details are taken with the adults' consent and free will, and must be stored securely. When they leave the group, these details should be destroyed. Details collected cannot be shared with any third parties, and are only held for the benefit of communication about the group and information that may be relevant to the group.

Sample Registration Form

Below is an example registration form. Electronic versions are available to download and edit.

Parent/Carer's name:.....

Child's name:.....

Child's date of birth:.....

Address:.....

Postcode:.....

Mobile Number:.....

Email address:.....

Main language spoken:.....

Does your child have any medical conditions that we should know about?

.....

Does your child have any dietary restrictions or allergies?

.....

.....

Is your child toilet trained? Would you like us to contact you if your child requires a nappy change, or would you like our leaders to change them?

.....

Permission to take photographs (for our social media only): Yes [] No []

Parent/Carer's Signature:.....

Date of Registration:

Please note that the information on this form will be stored electronically so that our records can be easily accessed and updated. Information will only be shared with those directly responsible for the creche. Please contact _____ if you would prefer us not to store details in this way.

Risk Assessment for(parish)

Those responsible for organisations using our premises need to complete a Risk Assessment, identifying hazards that could result in harm to users. They must then decide on the action(s) required to avoid this harm and appoint suitable persons to ensure action is taken. To assist you with this process the table below lists hazards that have already been identified in the Parish Risk Assessment. However if your organisation identifies any further risks then please include these in the blank rows provided at the end of the template.

Organisation(s) name:

Assessment carried out by:

Date:

Date of next review:

Activity or Area	What are the hazards? (cross out if not applicable)	Who might be harmed and how?	What are we already doing? (cross out if not applicable)	What further action is necessary? (cross out if not applicable)	Who needs to carry out the action?	When is the action needed by?	Done (if applicable)
Church building, halls/parish centre, other buildings and grounds.	Slips, trips, falls, knocks, cuts both indoors and outdoors. Weather conditions. Uneven surfaces. Electricity systems	Visitors may be harmed if they slip, fall, knock into something or are struck by vehicles in the car park. Children may be at risk where the parish grounds are close to public roads. Users risk of electric shock, burns, asphyxiation from faulty equipment or incorrect usage.	Corridors and work areas kept clear of items and furniture that could be tripped over. Steps and ramps made clearly visible. All users required to clear spillages and know how to access mops and cloths. Adequate warning signs placed in areas that could provide a hazard (such as spills and cleaning areas, low clearance, snow/ice). Cold weather ice/snow/rain precautions in place. Mats at entrances to reduce rain water carry-in. Parents/leaders/users warned to take care in the car park and where the grounds are close to public roads. Electrical equipment removed from children areas.	Floors checked regularly for spillages and cleaned. Corridors and halls checked regularly for trip hazards. Electrical equipment and trailing leads regularly checked. Check if support rails needed at steps. Regular detailed checks on electrical/oil/gas systems through qualified experts if necessary.	Staff + volunteers	Continuous vigilance As required Ongoing	

Activity or Area	What are the hazards? (cross out if not applicable)	Who might be harmed and how?	What are we already doing? (cross out if not applicable)	What further action is necessary? (cross out if not applicable)	Who needs to carry out the action?	When is the action needed by?	Done (if applicable)
Kitchens	Burns, scalds, electric shock, cuts, trips, slips, falls. Food hygiene lapses	Kitchen staff/volunteers/other users Parishioners/visitors and others who could suffer illness if food hygiene regulations are breached	First Aid box, fire blanket and instructions available in the kitchen. Kitchen supervisor(s) trained in Level 2 Health and Hygiene. Volunteers supervised when preparing and cooking food. Those aged under 16 restricted from the kitchen and food preparation areas unless supervised by a leader.	Further training on food safety and hygiene encouraged for new kitchen supervisors. Kitchen use of equipment procedures displayed. Parish informed that under 16's not allowed into the kitchen unless supervised by a leader.	Staff + volunteers	On-going/ As required Next 3 mths On-going	
Church building, halls, other buildings and grounds	Moving and lifting equipment	Users may suffer back or other injury if they try to lift or move heavy or awkward objects	Trolleys available to move chairs. Where no trolleys available chairs only permitted to be moved up to 3 at a time.	Ongoing vigilance	Staff + volunteers	On-going	
Children and Youth Groups in church halls	Lack of supervision	C & YP may come to harm if inadequately supervised. C & YP wandering off Running or walking into windows or glass doors.	Child Protection Policy guidelines followed with regard to supervision levels. Ensuring a responsible adult is at the door and that children who need to be accompanied leave with a known adult. Ensuring small children cannot wander off. Ensuring small children are always accompanied up and down stairs.	Refresher training for all staff and volunteers periodically on Safeguarding Trust. Fit clear doors with labelling or design to ensure they can be seen. Ensure leaders cover exits	The Parish Panel Staff + volunteers	On-going On-going	

Children and Youth Groups in church halls	Toys	Children choking on bits of toys, getting hurt on damaged toys. Toy tripping hazard.	Only use toys that carry the safety marking. Inspect toys regularly & dispose of any that are damaged/unsafe. Ensuring that young children do not have access to toys unsuitable for their age; that may, for example, pose a choking risk. Ensure changing equipment is in good repair and there are adequate facilities for disposal of nappies. Bins emptied on a regular basis.	Ensure that there is a designated play area. Ensure suitable training for leaders in regard to risk. Ongoing vigilance	Staff + volunteers	ASAP and on-going
Children and Youth Groups in church halls	Changing Facilities	Unclean facilities and nappies not disposed of properly. Falls from the changing station.			Staff, volunteers + parents	On-going
Church grounds car park and lanes	Vehicle movement	Pedestrians could suffer serious injury if struck by cars	Entrance and exit to car park clearly marked. All users required to keep a 5mph speed limit on the church grounds.	Review if lighting in the car park is adequate. Put up car park speed limit and safety signs	Staff + volunteers	On-going

Other Risks and Hazards identified in addition to those above:

Activity or Area	What are the hazards? (cross out if not applicable)	Who might be harmed and how?	What are we already doing? (cross out if not applicable)	What further action is necessary? (cross out if not applicable)	Who needs to carry out the action?	When is the action needed by?	Done (if applicable)

We hope you find this resource useful. Should you have any comments, questions or feedback, we would love to hear from you. Please get in touch using the details below;

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We look forward to hearing from you!



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