

## WHAT ABOUT CHILDREN IN A SMALL GROUP?

Caring for children is often a concern for small groups. Our children grew up attending small groups their whole life and loved it! Even though our groups tended to have less structured times with the kids, they still developed community with the other children in our small group. Just as we were walking in community type relationships with the adults, our kids experienced much of the same thing as well. We often did things together as a small group that included whole families or went out with other families in our group. I believe there are tremendous benefits in including children in small groups, but there are numerous ways of doing this. Let me highlight some of the main ones:

1. **Meet on Wednesday night and enroll your children in Awana** – This is the plan used by many New Life small groups and it works well if you have children 3 years and up and can meet near the building. It's a great way to avoid another night out as a family. However, I'd encourage you to consider other options especially during times when Awana is not meeting. (Summer, breaks, etc.)
2. **Hire a sitter to oversee the children** – Often this can be a teenager. It's important to explain expectations to them and make clear any house rules. *EVERYONE* should help finance this – even those without kids because we are all making this possible through passing a jar each week that is used to pay your sitters a pre-determined amount. If there isn't enough cash coming in then bring it up and challenge the group (not just those with children) to do more. If you have more than enough, just keep the extra in the jar for future weeks.
3. **Ask a responsible older brother or sister from the group** - Everything from option #2 usually applies, though you might pay them less. This can lead to tension if there are problems with their performance but deal with it directly.
4. **Take turns caring for the children** – It is important that this be the agreed responsibility of *EVERYONE* in the group – not just the women or not just the ones with children. If someone is not especially good with kids be sure to team them up with someone who's experienced, but everyone needs to shoulder the responsibility.
5. **Don't do *any* childcare** – Some groups don't do childcare because everyone in the group has children that are older or perhaps the group is made up of single adults without children or young married couples with no children yet. But once children are involved it is important that you make a plan that makes it possible for these people to be involved with your small group.
6. **Take an offering** – If just 1 or 2 families in your small group have children you can decide to pass an offering plate each week to help them care for the expense of hiring a sitter at their home. It's unrealistic for most families to absorb the full expense on their own – but in some cases this is a good option as long as you are dealing with just 1 or maybe 2 families.

7. **Include the children** – Some groups I've seen effectively include the children for part of their small group time. If you are following the 5 "W's", include the children in the Welcome (letting them answer the icebreaker too) and the worship (I've often seen children genuinely worshipping in this setting – plus they learn from seeing their parents model authentically singing praises to God). The children will then need a plan for the remainder of the small group meeting, perhaps utilizing one of the other options mentioned, though it is for a shorter time period.
8. **Do a "kid's slot"** – This will look differently depending on the ages of the children in your small group, the variety of ages, and the number of children. Most groups will merely provide childcare or child-oversight (perhaps an occasional video), but for some groups this can be an exciting option. The idea is to include the children in actually doing some of the things that are being done by the adults – only on their age level (this will take some pre-planning but again will be different depending on ages). Using the 5 W's as your pattern, the idea is to actually gather the children in a circle for at least some of the time and do the following:
  - Welcome – Do an icebreaker that allows them all to share something.
  - Worship – Sing a song or 2 that gets them to express praises to God.
  - Win – Have them talk about and pray for their friends who don't know Jesus.
  - Word – Discuss with the children a Bible lesson, story, or section of Scripture.
  - Works – Share real prayer concerns and let the children pray for each other.
9. **Have childcare in a different home nearby** – This can often be a good option if you can arrange it for children that have trouble leaving their parents alone or if you have a *LOT* of kids. Give the sitters everyone's cell numbers or the number for the host home and if there's a problem Mom or Dad are just a call away! This can really work well with 2 groups that might share a sitting home.
10. **Rotate men & women meeting on alternate weeks** – This works for groups consisting of lots of families with lots of kids (especially younger ones). Men meet one week while the wives stay home and watch the children. Women meet the next week while the husbands stay home with the kids. It's important you regularly do whole family times (men, women, children) to maintain connection with everyone.

#### **Some helpful tips:**

1. Select a willing childcare coordinator. Usually this is a Mom who's really organized! It's not her (or his) job to do all the childcare, just to keep it organized and communicated. The goal is always for the entire group to be sharing the load of caring well for the children.
2. Make HOUSE RULES wherever you meet. Talk with the host regularly about this. If you rotate homes then each new home has new house rules. Some people don't want children in the bedrooms, while others don't care. Communicate clearly the expectations to all the children and parents as well as whoever is caring for the kids.
3. **Having children in your small group will bring tension!** That's OK! The goal of a group is not to avoid conflict but to work through conflict! This brings about community!!! So expect problems and expect to work through them. This will bring you closer together as a small group.