

# Designing A CM Survey

Steve Alley

No matter how long the children's ministry (CM) has existed, it is a good practice to evaluate its fruitfulness periodically. You can do this too often and too infrequently. It is good to conduct a CM survey every two years. The survey should sample the views and ideas from the children, their parents, and those serving on the CM team. Conducting a survey of the CM team is a very different challenge. The questions you ask for that survey are not covered in this document. Here are some principles about conducting a parent/family survey:



1. A survey should be as focused as possible. Limit your questions to a specific program or event if possible. The broader the survey, the less usable the information.
2. A survey should seek to understand the feelings, opinions, needs, and hopes of those surveyed.
3. A survey should be designed to communicate a positive message despite new changes being considered. "Between the lines" implications must be considered.
4. A survey should be conducted on site, "live," instead of mailed, emailed, or online to increase the number of surveys submitted.
5. If surveys are mailed, emailed, or conducted online, a clear deadline for survey submissions should be set.
6. The senior pastor, or other direct supervisors, must be involved in the creation, editing, and executing of the survey.
7. A survey should take less than 10 minutes to complete.
8. If the survey is printed, the survey's questions should be short and composed of multiple-choice answer options. Space for "comments" or short answers may be provided.
9. The results of the survey should be shared with the senior pastor or direct supervisor within two or three days from the end of the survey deadline.
10. The results of the survey should be shared, on a limited basis, with those who participated in the survey. Caution should be taken in the sharing of the results if the results tend to be negative.
11. Plans for improvement or the implications for new ideas, based on the survey results, should be shared with the senior pastor, direct supervisors, and the rest of the church, within a week or two after the survey deadline.
12. The detailed results of the survey should be kept in a secure place. Access to the results may be limited (determined by church leadership).

## Designing The Survey

1. Determine your basic question. This question is one that you might ask to one person. The question is the foundational question upon which your other questions will be based. Example: "What do families want from the Sunday morning children's ministry program?" or "What should a summer VBS program include?"



2. Identify the significant factors involved in the decisions you will make because of the survey. Specifically seek to understand the needs of the parents and families. Here are some possibilities:

- a. The needs of single parents
- b. The needs of multiple-child families
- c. The needs of dual-income homes
- d. The differences between the days of the week for a mid-week program
- e. Transportation needs
- f. The financial needs for poorest families of your church
- g. The spiritual needs of the families or children
- h. The schedules of children's ministry programs
- i. The effects on training, budgets, or policies
- j. Outreach possibilities to the community



3. Isolate what you want to know. Don't ask questions about things that either don't relate to your "basic question," or things that relate to other programs or needs. You should make a list of less than 10 specific things you want to know. Some examples might be:
- a. What would attract parents and children to this program?
  - b. What are the "hot topics" to address in the program?
  - c. What is a good time to hold the program (dates and times of day)?
  - d. How can we involve the whole family in the program?
4. Using the questions that you listed in #3 above, make general categories for the survey questions. There should be around 3-5 categories. The categories could include:
- a. Needs/interests of families
  - b. Schedules
  - c. Topics
  - d. Family involvement
  - e. Activities
5. For each category, list specific things you want to know. These specific things will become the actual questions of the survey. Be careful not to have overlapping questions. You may see questions that relate to each other, and whose focus is similar, but the questions address the issue from a different perspective. That's ok, but if the people taking the survey get a sense that you have asked this question before, that may affect their answers.
6. Write the questions. Writing survey questions is a "dangerous" step because you could write a question that implies something that you don't mean to imply. For instance, if you ask a question about a new program as it compares to a current or old program, you may imply that the current or old program is "bad." Here's a "bad" example: "How can we make this new program better than the 'Whistle Stop' program?" This comparison implies that there is something wrong with the current program. A better way to say it would be, "What could the new program include?" There is no comparison, just an open door for ideas. As you write the questions, decide whether they will be multiple-choice/fill-in-the-bubble questions, or short answer questions. Surveys with fill-in-the-bubble options are more "pleasant" to take. The short answers take longer to write, and you may not get as many surveys back because of the time they take to complete. A combination of the two types of questions is better, or space at the bottom of the survey to write short answers or comments is good too. Remember to let your questions be positive and always focused on **improving, growing, and advancing** rather than "fixing."

## Conducting The Survey

1. **Decide how to conduct the survey.**
  - a. **At home** – If the surveys are given to people to complete at home and then to bring back later, you probably won't get many back.
  - b. **In person** – It is always better to conduct the survey while people are in a room or on the church campus anyway.
  - c. **During a service** – You may devote time in the adult service or during another program to complete the survey.
  - d. **Exit surveys** – A quick way to conduct a survey is to ask survey questions of parents, children, or CM team members as they exit after a service. These surveys are conducted with the use of a tablet or smartphone. They are quick and the results are compiled by the software. A good app to use is Quicktapsurvey.com – <https://www.quicktapsurvey.com/>
2. **Compile the results** of the survey and “publish” the information within a couple of weeks. Those who took the survey will be interested in the results. The longer you wait to publicize the results, the less value they will be. The sooner you publish the results, the more you will create a momentum toward the new program or change. Make sure you share the results of the survey with the senior pastor or supervisor as soon as possible (before others in the church know).