

## A “Hybrid” Large Group / Small Group Setting Utilizing Classrooms

Steve Alley

The growing use of large group experiences for children’s ministry (CM) might be due to the lack of volunteers to support the use of age-group classrooms setting. There are those who celebrate the use of large group ministry settings because of the “corporate” energy that is enjoyed by the children. The large group setting also provides a platform for a “show” presentation that today’s children enjoy.



Those churches who utilize the large group style of CM do report that developing consistent relationships with the children is a challenge. Most churches who use the large group setting also incorporate small group gatherings within the large group gathering. Since it is difficult to “guarantee” which small group the children will attend each week, and which CM team member will supervise that particular group, the children may not be able to build relationships with consistent Christian mentors.

It is possible for a CM to enjoy “the best of both worlds,” by presenting the foundational lesson in the large group setting, and then releasing the children to go to their age-based classrooms for the small group activities, discussions, and application challenge.

### **Overview of A Service (with check in and out in classrooms)**

1. Children are checked in at their age-based classrooms – there is a pre-lesson “attention-getter” or “set-up” for the lesson in the classroom during check-in.
2. The children come to the large group room for worship, the lesson introduction, and prayer time.
3. The children return to their classrooms for small group discussions, lesson-related activities, and application challenges.
4. The parents check-out the children at the same classrooms where they were checked in.

#### **Time – Checked in and out at classrooms**

1. Check-in at classroom and pre-lesson activities	10 minutes
2. Walk to large group room	5 minutes
3. Worship in large group	9 minutes
4. Lesson introduction and prayer	10 minutes
5. Walk back to classroom	5 minutes
6. Small group activities and discussions in classroom	20 minutes
<b>TOTAL MINUTES</b>	<b>59 minutes</b>

### **Overview of A Service (with check in at large room and check out in classrooms)**

1. Children are checked in at the large group room – there is a pre-lesson “attention-getter” or “set-up” for the lesson during check-in.
2. After check-in, the children enjoy worship, the lesson introduction, and prayer time.
3. The children walk to their classrooms for small group discussions, lesson-related activities, and application challenges.
4. The parents check-out the children in the classrooms.

#### **Time – Checked in at large room, checked out at classrooms**

1. Check in at large group room and pre-lesson challenges	10 minutes
2. Worship in large group	9 minutes
3. Lesson introduction and prayer	10 minutes
4. Walk to classroom	5 minutes
5. Small group activities and discussions in classroom	20 minutes
<b>TOTAL MINUTES</b>	<b>54 minutes</b>

## Questions To Consider Before Adopting This “Hybrid” Plan

1. **Why** – Why would you consider adopting this “hybrid” approach? Is your current program lacking something that this plan would satisfy? Would it be “worth it” to do what is needed to make this change? How would this effect the current CM team and the children?
2. **Team** – Do you have enough CM team members to operate this “hybrid” program? If so, how would moving the lesson introduction to the large group room effect the classroom CM team? Would they feel “cheated” out of those many minutes in the large group room?
3. **Time** – Can you accomplish all you hope to accomplish in the time that you have during an average service? Will travel back and forth from the classrooms be too much “wasted time”? Will the CM team members have enough time to accomplish what they need to accomplish in the small groups?
4. **Check-in / Check-out** – Is it mandatory to check the children in and out in the same location? Can you check the children in at the large group room and out at the classrooms?
5. **Curriculum** – Would you have to search for a new curriculum? Does your current curriculum lend itself to a large group introduction and small group interactions? Would you have to adjust or supplement your current curriculum? If so, who does that? There are many good curriculum sources for large group / small group settings (“252 Basics” by “Think Orange,” “Tru Story” by David C. Cook, SKITuations, “Summit” by Discipleland, and “Living Inside Out” by Group Publishing).

## Possible Components For Large Group Time

1. **Entry Video** – As the children enter, they enjoy a humorous or unusual video that ideally introduces the lesson topic. If a video can’t be found that directly introduces the lesson topic, the person who presents the lesson introduction should connect the video to the lesson in some way. A funny or unusual video without any connection might simply waste those minutes.
2. **Greeting** – A lively greeting to the whole group by an animated, fun, respectful person. The greeting can also introduce the lesson topic in a few short comments about the video the children have seen and how that video connects to the lesson topic. The greeter segues into the worship time.
3. **Worship** – A group of songs that are a blend of “high” and “low” energy. Since the audience will include children of various ages, it is important to choose songs that aren’t “too old,” or “too young.” When worshipping with a mixed age group, it is better to lean more to songs that are suited more to the older ages than to songs that are suited to the younger ages. The younger children will “reach up” to the older songs, but the older children will be insulted by songs that are for “little kids.” Make sure to verbally connect the songs to the lesson topic.
4. **Lesson Introduction** – Since this is just an introduction to the lesson, the person who does this must be careful not to “steal” everything from what the small group CM team members will do. The goal of this introduction is to lay the foundation for the small group experiences and interactions. The short introduction should make the children want more! This is an “appetizer” for what they will experience in the small groups. The lesson introduction can include the use of these “tools”:
  - a. A video clip
  - b. A skit
  - c. A science experiment or an object lesson
  - d. A guest
  - e. A simple game show



5. **Prayer Time** – The person who presents the lesson introduction also leads the children in prayer about the lesson topic.
6. **Application Challenge** – Before the children are released to their small groups, they are presented with a lesson-related challenge. This should be a simple, short, interesting challenge that prepares them for what they will experience in their small groups. An example might be a simple question like, “Do you think it will be hard for you to treat every student you see at school this week the same way you would want them to treat you? You’re going to explore this challenge more in your small groups.”
7. **Controlled Exit** – Instead of simply ending the large group gathering, the children should be released by ages or by groups. Ask the small group leaders to stand in the aisles and lead their classes out when they are able to do so.



### **Possible Components For The Small Group Time**

*All of these are lesson topic focused*

1. **Interactive activity** – interacting with each other about the lesson topic and its challenges.
2. **Craft or art project** – age-appropriate art piece related to the lesson topic.
3. **Discussion** – talking about the challenges of the lesson topic (fears, dreams, hopes, needs).
4. **“Shocking” statements** to debate or discuss – opposite to the lesson or fabricated statements.
5. **Role plays** – letting the children feel and react to lesson-related settings.
6. **“What would you do?” scenarios** – challenging the children to personalize the lesson topic.
7. **Printed parent ideas** – for the parents to engage their children about the lesson and its challenges.
8. **“Walk out” items** – related to the lesson and to stir conversations with parents.

