

Developing The Children's Ministry Facility

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In a perfect, Christian world parents and children would overlook the facility problems and only see the joys and fruit of your ministry that happens inside the facility; but we don't serve in a perfect world. I've learned that there is no such thing as a perfect facility. No matter what we do, there will always be those who complain about our facility. The best thing to do is to dress up our facility to make it as clean, efficient, and friendly as possible.



Your Facility's First Impression

Here's an idea that will help you see your facility with "fresh" eyes. This Sunday, walk around your facility as if you were a first-time visitor. Pretend that you have never been to your children's facilities before. Here is a process to follow:

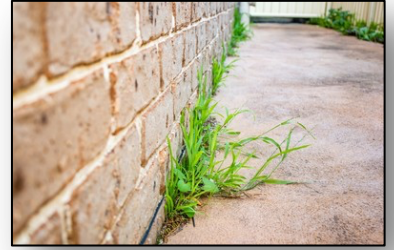
1. Arrive at the church, park your car and get out. Look around for where to take your children. Are there any signs? How do you know where the children's ministry is located?
2. If you have to ask someone where to find the children's ministry, was it easy to find someone to ask, and were they helpful?
3. Once you arrive at the children's ministry facility, what is your first impression? What catches your eye first? Do you see trash, peeling paint, dirt, or signs of disorganization? What does the facility "say" about the quality of care your children will receive?
4. Now that you have found the children's ministry area, do you know where to take your child? Are there signs for the various age group areas?
5. If you have to ask someone where to take your children, was it easy to find someone to ask, and were they helpful?
6. What do you hear, smell, and see as you walk to your child's area?
7. Once you arrive at your child's area, what is your first impression? What catches your eye first? What does the room or area say about the quality of care your children will receive here?
8. Are you greeted by a member of the children's ministry team? (Obviously, this will happen because of who you are. If you can, observe the arrival of real visitors to get a sense of their welcome.)
9. If you can look into the room, do so. What is your first impression? What catches your eye first? What does the room say about the quality of care your children will receive? Can you get an idea of what the topic of study for the morning will be based on the decorations of the room?
10. Walk away, as if you were going to the adult service, and think as a first-time visitor. Do you feel free to worship in peace? Would you consider returning next week? (Obviously, the answer to that question is based on more complex factors than just a first impression, but your first impression is valuable.)



Take some mental notes as you conduct this "First Time Visitor" experience. Ask God to help you do whatever you can to increase the value of your facility.

Evaluate Your Facility's Use

One of the greatest threats to your ministry could be your facility. This seems silly, but it's true. The parents are the ones who bring the children to your ministry. If the parents are offended or bothered by the facility (too cramped, dirty, needing repair, disorganized, etc.), they may decide not to bring their children to you. It is possible that a smelly nursery could stop you from being able to minister to a child's sixth grade sibling!



Most people in children's ministry are stuck with their current facility for a very long time. Some people get to be a part of designing a new facility, but that doesn't happen too often. We are all challenged to be good stewards of the facility the Lord has given us.

Do you know your facility? You can get very comfortable with the status quo of your facility. You can get used to the crowded hallways, underused rooms, or piles of storage, and not even notice them anymore.

Creating Creative Learning Environments

Your buildings should be pleasant to look at and express your ministry vision, but don't forget that your rooms are the "greenhouses" of learning and spiritual inspiration. What happens inside the rooms and how that affects the children is the real focus of your facilities.



Making your learning environments creative is critical. Your classrooms or large assembly areas may be the first attraction your children experience. Children should be attracted by what they see and experience in your facilities. If your environments attract them, they may mentally stick around for deeper things. If your environments are cold and sterile, the children may mentally leave before you even begin your lesson. Here are some ways to make your rooms creative:

Creative Walls

When the parents or children first see the room, they should be attracted to your lesson topic. A good teacher makes the walls a part of the lesson. Fight the temptation to just stick a picture from your curriculum on the wall! That doesn't interest anyone! You don't have to produce a piece of art each week, just ask God to help you create a word, a statement, or something that intrigues the children or makes them ask, "What's that for?" as they walk in. For instance, if your lesson topic is about controlling your anger, you might write the question "Is it ever right to fight?" on the board. As the parents or children see that question, they will begin to think about the answer, or even talk about the question among themselves. You've attracted them to the lesson topic without even saying a thing! You can also put up a picture or series of pictures that pertain to the topic without any explanation. Then ask the children to figure out what your lesson topic is for the day.

Creative Ceilings

A creative classroom includes things that are unusual, or that don't normally show up at church or in the room. Hanging things from the ceiling is a good technique to capture the children's attention and attract them to the lesson. Writing things on paper that is taped to the ceiling is also a good use of the ceiling. Make sure that what you hang from the ceiling isn't heavy and won't fall on the children. Don't leave the items on the ceiling after the class session. If a creative item is left up for more than one session, it is no longer creative.

Creative Lighting and Sounds

Changing the lighting of a room attracts attention! The average classroom has florescent lighting. Florescent lights are efficient, but very unattractive. The use of floor or table lamps from home, spot or flood lights, black lights, Christmas lights, a color wheel, colored gels on lights, flashlights, or glow sticks will all send the attraction factor through the roof!

Sounds can also be very powerful tools in making your classroom a creative environment. Adding sound effects, background music, recorded songs, audio stories, or children's television theme songs adds to the attraction factor of your room or lesson. Make sure the sounds connect with the lesson topic somehow, or you could be training your children not to listen to the sounds for any connection with the lesson.

Doorways

If you think about it, the doorway is the first thing the parents or children see as they approach your room (unless you are standing outside greeting them). There are things you can do to the doorway that make it a tool of your lesson as well. You can decorate it with some lesson-related decoration. You can build a puppet stage in the doorway and perform a short introductory show either before the children enter the room, or right after they come in. You can hang things from the doorway, so the children must walk in through something that introduces the lesson topic. You can also make a doorway cut-out that the children walk through. Think of your doorway as the entrance to the learning environment!

Creative Scenery and Sets

This is a next step up from the simple use of your walls. You can build a set in your room that is a scene that relates to your lesson topic. This can be a biblical scene, but it would be more interesting if it wasn't. You can also build a puppet stage in your room. The goal is to transform the room into something else (like the belly of Jonah's whale).

Creative Floors

Floors are perhaps the most under-appreciated surface in your room. Floors can be fun. You can draw on them with masking tape, tape messages on them, or transform them into a game board. You can also place unusual, lesson-related objects on the floor. You can create a "lesson treasure trail" that the children follow and experience lesson centers along the way. You can also rearrange, or remove, the furniture to suit your lesson topic.

The bottom line of transforming your room into a creative learning environment is to think outside the box of your own habits or preconceptions. If you get an idea and you react with a thought of, "That can't be done," I would encourage you to try it. It is usually those "can't be done" ideas that the children will never forget!

14 Ways to Communicate Your Vision With Your Facility

1. Professionally-created posters or banners
2. Vision statements painted on exterior walls
3. Vision statements painted on sidewalks
4. Clean, well-landscaped grounds
5. Freshly painted facilities
6. Vision messages playing on video monitors

7. Music played in hallways
8. Vision messages heard in hallway speakers
9. Testimonials (children, parents, team members) displayed on walls
10. Vision statement summarized in framed displays on walls
11. Vision messages displayed in classrooms
12. Tables and chairs that are clean and not needing repair
13. Clean carpet in all areas
14. Deodorizers in rest rooms and nursery

Creating A Friendly Nursery

Anyone who has ever served in the nursery knows that there are two “ingredients” of that ministry area that could possibly be offensive: the smell and the sound.

First-time parents who are finally prepared to leave their little baby in the church nursery may misinterpret both the smell and the sounds of the nursery. To a new mother, the smell of the nursery might be misinterpreted as being “dirty.” To another first-time visitor, the noise of babies crying might indicate that those babies are not being cared for adequately.

Both the noise and the smell of the nursery might actually drive new people away from visiting the church! There is a way to shield the parents in the hallway or in the check-in area from those two “dangerous” factors of the nursery. It involves creating a noise and smell-free zone. Here is a drawing that illustrates this design:

