

Balancing “Slime” and The Gospel In Children’s Ministry

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Kids just want to have fun!

- “Fun” is described as something that feels good or produces pleasure.
- “Fun” experiences satisfy some known, or unknown need or desire
- “Fun” experiences cause laughter or good memories

“With the Internet explosion and a proliferation of youth-targeted media and activities, kids have become more multi-focused. In today’s kids are involved in a wide range of activities, none of which really dominate their lives. This is a generation that has grown up with smartphones, cable television and computers. Not only have they been conditioned to absorb the multitude of messages forced upon them, they expect it...A message not relevant and credible to them is lost in the clutter of thousands of other advertisements and not given a second thought.”

(Timothy Mask, “The Power of Multi-messaging,” Kidscreen magazine)

A product or service is appealing to kids when it is:

- *fun* to do
- *stimulating* (generates sensory experiences)
- creates *excitement* or tension
- elicits *surprise* or ‘magic’
- *funny* (makes me laugh)
- *relaxing* (physical (sports))
- *emotional* (imaginary escape)
- *satisfying* (offers resolution)
- allows me to make *decisions* (gives me choices)
- is able to be *customized*
- allows me to *do it myself*
- allows me *ownership*
- allows me to *aspire* (feel grown up)
- allows me to *break the rules* (take charge)
- builds *skills* (reinforces my competency)
- provides outlets for *creativity* and self-expression
- offers *ego-boosting* promises (make me better, etc.)
- recognizes my *importance*
- establishes my unique *identity*
- it allows me to be *interactive* with others
- helps me *fit in* (family or peer approved)
- makes me *feel special*

(“Predicting Tomorrow” survey, C&R Research Services Inc.)

The Challenge

1. Today’s society (church) defines success as being “popular” or producing a large response.
2. Compete with soccer games, other churches
3. “Bigger and Better” trend in churches
4. People today, including kids, want to **experience** life and God’s principles

“Edutainment” is the new way of learning-

“(there is) ...a growing emphasis on what Talbot theology professor Robert Saucy terms the more “therapeutic” teachings, such as how to live a good life, have a good marriage, and be a good parent...Perhaps most disturbing is the Barna statistic that – although two out of three teenagers are involved in church youth programs – only one out of three plans to attend church when they move away from home.”

(Holly Peters “Evangelicalism on the Decline,” Biola Connections)

“They (today’s postmodern kids) want life to explode all around them. Postmodern kids don’t want their information straight. They want it laced with experience (hence ‘edutainment’). Postmodern kids want interactive, immersive, ‘in your face’ participation in the mysteries of God...The role of the spectacle in worship is only beginning to be understood.”

(Leonard Sweet, Post Modern Pilgrims, (Broadman & Holman: Nashville, TN)

5. Kids today are accustomed to fast-paced, visual stimulation

“The children you and I minister to are part of the visual generation. Christian apologist, Ravi Zacharias, says that this postmodern culture ‘hears with its eyes and thinks with its feelings.’

“What kids see, they remember. We do seven things to touch this visual generation for God:”

- Train teachers to constantly use visual aids
- Use presentation software to the maximum
- Play Christian music videos
- Illustrate lessons with video clips
- Capture kids attention with rapid visual changes
- Use highly interactive on-screen review games
- Reach out to the world through the internet”

(Dale Hudson, “Just Push Play,” Children’s Ministry magazine)



6. Disconnectedness

“Relationship issues stand at the heart of today’s culture...The more impersonal the transactions, the deeper the hunger for relationships and community...The more connected we become electronically, the more disconnected we can become personally.”

(Leonard Sweet, Post Modern Pilgrims, (Broadman & Holman: Nashville, TN)

7. Today’s parents want depth without sacrificing fun! They want their kids to want to go to church, but they will leave rapidly if there is no depth to the ministry!

Children’s Ministry Trends

1. Large group experiences

- a. **Cause** = A decline in adult volunteers; therefore, must create large group ministry with fewer adult supervisors.
- b. **Possible Effects** = Shallow depth in spiritual impact on children; fewer, if any, deep, life-changing relationships.



2. “Plug in and play” programs (visual-based, online or DVD)

- a. **Cause** = The need for “curriculum” or programming tools to satisfy the large-group trend
- b. **Possible Effects** = The children become passive observers of a “show”; adults become passive observers of the program; shallow relationships, if any, with adult supervisors or mentors

3. High-energy, wild programs

- a. **Cause** = The worldwide need to feel something new; to be thrilled by visual input; to be noisy, rather than quiet; to experience deeply, rather than think or contemplate.
- b. **Possible Effects** = The children aren’t given opportunities to think or meditate in a quiet environment; thoughts are shallow, feelings are excited; meaningful connections with adult mentors are few, if any; times of prayer are lost.

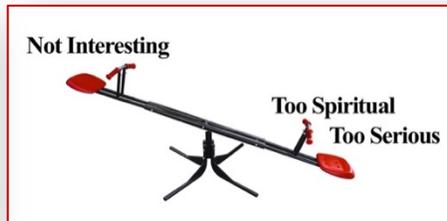


The Solution: A Balanced Ministry

1. We, in children’s ministry, need to create environments that are exciting and kid-focused!
2. There is nothing wrong with attracting kids to church with exciting programs and experiences.
3. There IS something wrong with attracting kids to church with exciting programs **at the expense of the “higher calling.”** (The Great Commission)
4. Jesus was a master example in balancing attraction and teaching! (Matthew 9:35)
5. **Focus on individuals!** (Matthew 9: 36)



No Depth And Challenging To Maintain



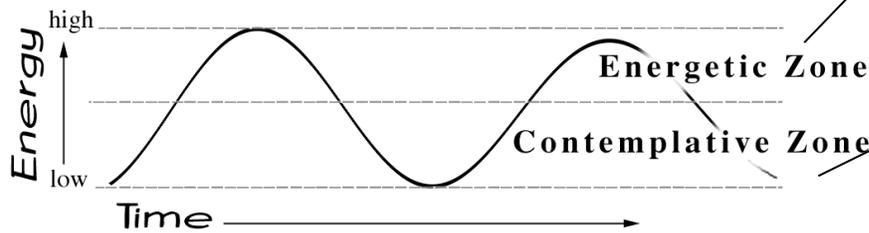
Boring, No Fun



Balanced - Deeply Meaningful And Fun

The Ministry Energy Scale

There should be a balanced “energy” in the program as well!



High energy, activity and fast-paced movement with rapid, shallow interaction

Low energy, thoughtful, time with high levels of personal interaction

Steps To Building A Balanced Children’s Ministry

1. Become aware of today’s kids (their needs, interests, fears, etc.)
 2. Clarify your own ministry vision (The Great Commission in your specific town)
 3. Ask God for creative wisdom in connecting #1 with #2 above
 4. Design clear objectives (for each program) that include the following:
 - a. Kids’ feelings (during and after the program)
 - b. Kids’ spiritual development (relationship with God)
 - c. Kids’ knowledge (Bible knowledge)
 - d. Kids’ real-life choices (after the program)
- Example:** “When parents ask their kids about the program, we want them to say, ‘I had so much fun! I learned a lot about how to ____! I can’t wait to go back next week!’”
5. Plan time realistically! (When time is short you may be tempted to sacrifice the spiritual.)
 6. Teach, rehearse, reinforce, monitor and evaluate **GUIDED CONVERSATION**
 - a. During a large group “show,” sit with the children and talk with them.
 - b. During any experience, “season” the experience with conversation that focuses the children’s thoughts on the spiritual connection.
 7. Make small group experiences a **critical necessity** in any program!

8. Continue active, invasive, strategic, on-going recruiting!
 - a. Involve the senior pastor
 - b. Share testimonies on stage during adult worship hour
 - c. Personally approach people who are “people people” to join the team
 - d. Rotate, team, apprentice, train, reward!
9. Display the fruit! Share success stories and testimonies!

A Balanced Children’s Ministry Program Filter

Directions: For each of “Program Qualities,” of your program, ask yourself the ten questions on the right-hand side of the grid. For each “yes” answer, place a check mark in the box for that quality.

“Scoring”: Total the total check marks for the entire question (horizontally) and put the total for that question in the “Totals” box on the far-right column. This is your “Activity Score” for the program. A “low” score here (under 3) means that your program may need to be “spiced up” a bit by adding more “qualities” to the program. Also, total the scores for each activity (vertically) and put the total for that “quality” in the box at the bottom of the vertical column. This is your “Spiritual Score” for the program. A “low” score here (under 3) means that your program may be lacking spiritual focus or content.

	Program Qualities														TOTALS (Activity)		
	Fun	Exciting	Unusual	Cool	Active	Kid-focused	Messy	Interactive	Competitive	High-tech	Wild	Visual	Risky	New		Trendy	Personal
1. Have they experienced something new about God?																	
2. Have they been drawn closer to God?																	
3. Have they read from the Bible?																	
4. Do they understand the Bible more deeply than before?																	
5. Are they more prepared to make Godly choices tomorrow?																	
6. Will they be able to tell their parent what they learned?																	
7. Are they challenged to study God’s Word for themselves?																	
8. Will their personal prayer life be richer?																	
9. Will they be more willing to obey God’s commands?																	
10. Will their relationships with others be deepened?																	
TOTALS (Spiritual)																	