

# Helping Small Group Leaders Get Started



CHILDREN'S MINISTRY





## Helping Small Group Leaders Get Started

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adapted from  
“How to Help Small Group Leaders Get Started”  
at “Children’s Ministry in High Definition,”  
the 2007 Promiseland Conference Workshop

It’s always exciting to get new volunteers, but if you don’t have a plan in place to train them, they might fall through the cracks. This material will walk you through the process of training and equipping new leaders in hands-on, practical ways that will prepare them to be successful leaders in your ministry.

### Goal:

To learn how to train and apply practical skills that will help a new children’s ministry small group leader get started



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## How to Use “Helping Small Group Leaders Get Started”

Welcome to BUILDING CHILDREN'S MINISTRY. You've purchased a resource that draws from the experience of children's ministry leaders at Willow Creek Community Church. Through these materials, your ministry team will gain insight and practical tips gleaned from years of innovation and experience in children's ministry.

BUILDING CHILDREN'S MINISTRY works when you want, where you want, and the way you want. Whether you want to inform your ministry's leadership or to train your volunteers, BUILDING CHILDREN'S MINISTRY materials are completely flexible and easy to use.

You probably already have regularly scheduled meetings or training huddles with your children's ministry team. BUILDING CHILDREN'S MINISTRY fits easily into what you're already doing. Here's how to use BUILDING CHILDREN'S MINISTRY at the beginning of such a meeting:

1. **Select a handout.** Suppose, for example, you simply want to know where to start. Select “Phase 1: Assimilation.” Or suppose you want to know how to conduct hands-on training. Select “Phase 3: Apprenticeship.”
2. **Print and photocopy the handout.** Let's say you selected “Phase 3: Apprenticeship.” Photocopy as many copies as you need—you do *not* need to ask for permission to photocopy any material from Building Children's Ministry (as long as you are using the material in a church or educational setting and are not charging for it).
3. **Prepare for discussion.** We recommend you read the material and any relevant Scripture passages listed on the material.
4. **Lead the discussion.** Most handouts can be read within five minutes. After you have allowed time for reading, begin the discussion by asking one of the provided questions, or move your team through the following questions:
  - “Why are these principles important for successful ministry?”
  - “How well does our ministry currently incorporate these principles?”
  - “What one or two practical things could we do in the next year to improve in this area?”

### Pray

Pray that God will give you guidance and wisdom as you equip and train the leaders in your ministry.

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## Phase 1: Assimilation

*Get to know your volunteers.*

1 Timothy 5:22a

*Before you begin to train and equip people to serve in your ministry, you need to find out important information about your volunteers.*

### Application

Every volunteer should fill out an application to serve in your ministry. Make sure to ask for and check personal references for each volunteer. In addition, complete a background check on everyone who desires to serve in your ministry. If someone has a criminal background, use wisdom and discernment to decide if or how that person can be used in the children's ministry. You may need to steer the person in the direction of another ministry in your church.

### Interview

For your full-time volunteers, you should also conduct an interview. The interview is a time where you can discuss the volunteer's passions and giftedness to make sure he or she gets placed in the right role in your ministry. This step is critical in making sure your volunteers are happy and will stay with you in the years to come.

### Child Protection Training

It is important to train all volunteers in how to keep the kids safe and how to protect themselves from claims of abuse. Specifically tell them what they can and can't do. Some of your safety policies might include: only hugging when the child initiates it, always keeping yourself in the line of sight of an open door, and never being alone with just one child.

### Discuss

1. *What is our church's policy on background checks and how convicted criminals can serve in our children's ministry?*
2. *What might we need to add to our interview process?*
3. *How can we make our Child Protection Training more effective?*

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## Phase 2: Orientation

*Provide all pertinent information.*

Proverbs 19:20

*Instead of just dumping your leaders straight into a classroom setting, give them information about why you do what you do in your ministry.*

### Vision and Values

Let volunteers know up front what the vision and values for your ministry are. This will help them understand why the training process is important and it will help them be more successful as a leader. How you present this information is up to you. You might also want to send leaders home with a pocket-sized version of your mission statement or core values. That way they can carry it around with them as a reminder of why they are investing in your ministry.

### Guidelines and Procedures

This may not sound very exciting, but leaders need to know the guidelines and procedures for every aspect of the ministry. You don't have to go through all of this in an orientation meeting, but provide the information for them to go over at home. Some important things to include: check-in procedures, evacuation procedures, explanations of terminology you use in your ministry, dress codes, food restrictions, weekly schedules, and job descriptions.

### Identification

If your church is big enough that all of your leaders don't know each other, you may want to provide picture identification cards for each leader. This will help protect the kids from harm, the leaders from deception, and the church administration from lawsuits. We all like to think that nothing bad will happen in our churches, but it's better to be safe than sorry.

### Discuss

1. *How do we communicate our vision and values to our volunteers?*
2. *How can we improve our presentation of guidelines and procedures?*
3. *In what areas do we need volunteers to provide identification to protect our children?*

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## Phase 3: Apprenticeship

*Model what you want leaders to do.*

Luke 6:40

*Give your leaders several weeks to acclimate to their roles while working alongside a veteran leader. For an example of an apprenticeship process, see Willow Creek's Promiseland Blue Book on the following pages.*

### Week 1

During the first week of apprenticeship, the new leader should learn what to do before, during, and after a service. Orient them to all physical areas they will encounter—supply room, small group classroom, large group room, registration area, bathrooms, and so on. Show them how and where to pick up supplies and future curriculum. Go through the lesson preparation process. Escort them to any pre-service meetings you have. The trainer will actually teach the lesson, and the new leader should observe what happens, take notes, and write down any questions.

### Week 2

The second week of apprenticeship is when the new leader starts to get involved with the kids and begins leading some aspects of the lesson. Exactly what they lead should be up to the new leader and his or her trainer. The trainer will observe and take notes and will give feedback to the new leader after the session.

### Weeks 3 & 4 (and Beyond)

This is when the new leader has the opportunity to lead the entire session. The trainer will again observe and give feedback. If the trainer or new leader feel like they need a few more weeks of apprenticeship, give them the freedom to do that. Make sure all new leaders feel completely comfortable leading on their own before ending the apprenticeship process. Also let new leaders know the trainer will be there as a mentor even after the apprenticeship period is over.

### Apprenticeship Tips

Not all apprenticeship programs will look the same, but here are a few tips to keep in mind:

- One-on-one situations are generally better than group apprenticeships.
- Substitute teachers need just as much training as full-time leaders.
- Choose your trainers wisely—they should be seasoned, successful leaders.
- Make sure leaders know that the end of apprenticeship doesn't mean the end of training.

### Discuss

1. *How could we implement or improve the apprenticeship process in our ministry?*
2. *What are three new ideas we can try from Willow Creek's Blue Book?*
3. *What tips could we add to the list?*

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## TRAINING MATERIALS

# Promiseland Blue Book

Promiseland Apprenticeship Training  
New Small Group Leaders & Substitutes  
(Serving kids ages two - fifth grade)

*PURPOSE: To have an interactive experience that is practical, on-the-job, and replication oriented. Leaders will learn how to connect with kids so that they can apply Biblical lessons in their everyday lives.*

## Requirements Of A New Leader

Small Group Leader (SGL) – CPT3\* & Participating Member  
Substitute Small Group Leader – CPT3\*  
Adult Helper – CPT2\* (Assists SGL once every 6 weeks)  
\* CPT1 – Approved application  
\* CPT2 – Application, reference check & CPT  
\* CPT3 – Application, reference check,  
CPT & personal interview  
(CPT = CHILD PROTECTION TRAINING)

## Orientation to the room (Room Coach)

- Show where to put personal belongings (coat, purse, etc.)
- Introduce various roles in the room and other volunteers (e.g., Coach, Administrator)
- Show and give overview of registration system and information on nametags.
- Explain group colors (especially gold and gold star stickers).
- Show first aid supplies and explain the use of accident forms.
- Show large and small group areas and information board.
- Show where restrooms are and discuss bathroom procedure.
- Show and explain bin barges – Bibles, supplies (where applicable)
- Show where and explain how to use the Shepherding List.
- Show where to pick-up curriculum – current and next week's.
- Show how to restock bins (where applicable).
- Show evacuation procedures.
- Explain & give Promiseland curriculum website & password
- Give Promiseland Central's phone number for immediate contact during weekend service hours: (222) 222-2200.

## Observations/Questions:

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### Preparing for your lesson:

- Read lesson plan twice before huddle.
- Highlight** and underline. Pay attention to the objectives on the first page.
- Read Leader's Prep and **think** and **pray** about how this lesson applies to your life.
- Invite** God to give you the wisdom of how the application in your life might be helpful for your kids.
- Be ready to share** in kid language one of your own stories. Modeling is one of the key essentials of a Small Group Leader.

### Attend pre-huddle 15 minutes prior to kids arriving

(1 hour prior to service starting).  
Please arrive at \_\_\_\_\_.

#### Purpose of huddle time:

- Familiarize yourself with the supplies in your bin.
- Receive information about the lesson, explanation of Small Group activity and details of Large Group.
- Gives time for adults to connect with one another **BEFORE** Activity Station time
- Share stories from the prior week as it relates to your small group (ah-ha's, answer questions, celebrations, prayer requests, learn from one another: e.g., "How do you handle a kid who...?")  
Gather ideas from other people in the group.
- Team Business: Get-togethers, Promiseland/Church happenings, and prayer

### Understand what to do during the hour:

#### Activity Stations, Kid Connection, Large Group, Small Group IV.

#### Activity Stations

##### Purpose:

- To welcome and connect with kids so that they experience Promiseland as a fun and safe place.
- For kids to reconnect with one another and with Promiseland. Identify new kids with gold stars on their name tags. Work the area. You are the host.
- A place where intentional shepherding begins. This is one of the times you can connect with a child in your small group. Spend extra time with children who have behaviors that distract from the learning and community environment.

##### What to Do:

- Pick a station by looking for any of your kids and or kids that seem alone and connect with them, or look for a station that does not have a leader.
- Relate to kids by:
  - Asking questions or talking about last week's lesson
  - Talking about relevant topics or celebrations
  - Using provided activities, play a game with them or do a craft
- Model "Good Stewardship" and responsibility by leading all **KIDS** to clean up and put away their station prior to large or small group.

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### Kid Connection (Does not apply to two year olds)

#### Purpose:

- Personally connect with your own group
- Kids connect with one another
- The Kid Connection question sets up the lesson of the day and prepares the kids for what they are going to hear in large group and gives them a compelling why. The answers give you, the leader, insights into each child.

#### What to Do:

- Arrange group for optimal use of space. When it comes to seating arrangements, kids need continuity, so as much as possible have the kids in the same area. Be sensitive to sound levels.
- Have a clear line of sight so that you can see every child. Notice your position. Check to see if what is behind you could be a distraction. You may need to reposition yourself in the circle.
- The bin is your property. Children do not need to touch it unless you make a request.
- Answer the Kid Connection question first to initiate the discussion and model what you are asking. Listen to their answers. Notate what you learn about each child. This is part of “knowing and being known.”
- Introduce the lesson in order to transition and prepare them for large group.

### Large Group

**Purpose:** For kids and leaders to worship together, hear God’s truths, and see how it applies to their lives.

#### What to Do:

- Model:
  - What to do during teaching, drama, worship. Do actions or hand motions when asked during the program (i.e., singing, saying the key concepts).
  - Being present at all times. (Please turn off all cell phones during Promiseland)
- What to listen and look for during Large Group:
  - Watch your group. Make sure they are sitting behind the yellow line. Arrange your group by having all group members within your **frontal** eyesight.
  - Invite the kids in your group to participate in music or whatever asked.
  - For Early Childhood - during music, if possible stay on knees so that kids from behind can see and remove any disruptive child to the back, or from the room where appropriate.
  - Listen for content to bring back to small group for discussion
  - Watch behaviors of your group: Who is engaged, interested, asking questions, singing their hearts out, going to the bathroom. Encourage use of bathrooms during activity stations or after large group.

**Important Reminders:** Early Childhood kids can only sit on one of the leader’s legs. Kindergarten through 5th grade kids must sit on the floor. Keep all kids in front of you. Hugs can only be initiated from kids, no kissing. Remember to apply all bathroom rules.

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### Small Group

**Purpose:** CONNECTING with kids so that they can understand how to APPLY the lesson to their real lives. (Intentional Shepherding)

#### What to Do:

- Prepare the Environment: Physically and Intellectually
  - Seating Arrangement: Circle/semicircle facing you and away from traffic patterns, leave sufficient distance between groups. When you are preparing your lesson, picture how you will set up the activity so that EVERY child can see.
  - Get kids focused by reviewing the large group question, in order to check for understanding.
  - Explain that the purpose of the activity is to have kids think critically about what they are learning.
- Lead discussion questions
  - Listen for comprehension and ability to apply the lesson to their own lives.
  - Challenge their ideas in a safe and kind way.
  - Listen to what they say and note specific answers that help you get to know each child individually.
- Wrap-Up and review the verse, (Age 4/5-5th – pass out verse cards)
- Closing
  - Receive requests and include sharing from the day. Note their requests and ask them about it next week, when appropriate.
  - Pray and thank God for children by name, if possible. Bless them. As you pray, include the application from the lesson.
  - Early Childhood: Clean hands, check for allergies and pass out snacks, pass out the coloring sheet and key concept sticker.
- Kid Connection Continues: This is the time for you and the group to continue building community on a personal level (e.g., celebrating birthdays, asking questions, talking about vacations).
- Dismissal – Connect with parent by:
  - Greeting as many parents as possible.
  - Share as many specific positive observations about each child when possible. If it is a behavioral issue, talk to your coach or Division Leader first.
  - Remind parents and kids to pick up their take home craft or coloring sheet.
  - Where applicable, check parent ID# with the child's name tag#.

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### Promiseland Apprentice Trainee Schedule

**Week 1: Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

- Receive training on: I. Orientation to room; II. Preparing your lesson; III. Huddle time; IV. During the hour
- Observe throughout the hour and log observations and questions.
- Trainer will introduce apprentice to the kids in the group.
- Homework: Read section "Important Information" and next week's lesson.
- Initials - Trainee: \_\_\_\_\_ Trainer: \_\_\_\_\_

**Week 2: Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

- Apprentice will lead the Activity Station, Kid Connection & Small Group if okay with both trainee and trainer.
- Observe throughout the hour and log observations and questions in the "Notes" section.
- Trainee will receive feedback at the end of the hour from the trainer.
- Homework: Read and prepare for next week's lesson.
- Initials - Trainee: \_\_\_\_\_ Trainer: \_\_\_\_\_

**Week 3 & 4: Dates:** \_\_\_\_\_

- Apprentice will do Activity Station, Kid Connection, Large Group & Small Group. Get feedback for each area.
- Initials - Trainee: \_\_\_\_\_ Trainer: \_\_\_\_\_
- Homework: Read and prepare for next week's lesson.

**Week 5 & 6: Dates:** \_\_\_\_\_

- Apprentice will be given his or her own group close to the trainer if possible. Trainer will continue to mentor the new leader.
- After 6 weeks of serving, the Division Leader will have a conversation with the new Small Group Leader to confirm his or her role. Fill out reverse side and hand in to the Division Leader. This will then be passed on to the Director of Training.

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# I have completed 4-6 weeks of Promiseland's Apprentice Training Program.

I understand the responsibilities and will uphold the  
Promiseland values and procedures.

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE #: \_\_\_\_\_

AGE GROUP AND HOUR: \_\_\_\_\_

Trainer: \_\_\_\_\_

Trainee: \_\_\_\_\_

Division Leader: \_\_\_\_\_

When All Is Completed And Signed, Please Send To Director Of Training

Read Ages and Stages Handout

✦ **Dress Code:**

Due to the nature of working with kids in Promiseland, you will be: bending, sitting on the floor, jumping, and participating in music and motions. Please follow the appropriate attire guidelines below for a distraction free environment.

Shirts and tops should cover the top of shoulders and the waistline when standing, bending, jumping, and or stretching arms overhead. No low-neck tops. All waistbands should cover the waistline and underwear during all stretching or bending activities. Length of shorts and skirts should be halfway between the waist and knees.

✦ **Ways to Correspond with Kids:**

**Postcards:** We encourage the use of **approved** postcards as much as possible.

**E-Mail requirements for anyone under the age of 18:** Any e-mails going to Promiseland kids must use the parent's e-mail address. All e-mails must be copied (cc) to the Division Leader on the distribution list. This is to hold up our safety value and protect all kids. NO instant messaging allowed.

✦ **Food, Rewards, and Gifts:**

Promiseland discourages the use of any candy to reward behavior. Discuss other options with your coach and or other small group leaders.

**Easter/Christmas/End of the Year Small Group Celebration/Birthday:** Candy is limited to these occasions. As much as possible use nutritious snacks. No peanut products allowed.

**Gift Giving:** Inform your Division Leader prior to purchasing any gifts. All gifts must be pre-wrapped and opened at home.

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## Phase 4: Ongoing Training

*Keep leaders equipped.*

Hebrews 10:25

*In order to keep your small group leaders fully equipped, offer various ongoing training sessions throughout the year for all leaders. The trick is to offer multiple options in multiple ways and times.*

### 5-Minute Training

A simple way to keep leaders equipped is by holding five minute trainings just before the kids arrive. Focus on one small aspect of leading or teaching, such as what to do when you have extra time, how to communicate positively, or tips to improve the way they ask questions. This is a great time for leaders to be able to learn from each other, as well.

### 30-Minute Training

The best time to do a 30-minute training is right after your service. Let people know up front that it will be short and sweet—and make sure it really is! These trainings are a great time to talk about the “ages and stages” of kids. It’s always good for leaders to get a brush-up on what makes the kids in their age group unique and how they learn. Just before Easter you might want to do a 30-minute training that will help leaders learn how to lead a child to Christ.

### 60+ Minute Training

On occasion, you may want to do a longer training session to go more in-depth on a subject such as communicating with parents, effective discipline, or creative teaching methods. The key to getting people to come to these trainings? Food! If you feed them, they will come. It also helps if the training is held before or after a church service and childcare is provided. On the following pages is an example of a handout from a Willow Creek 60-minute training.

### Magazine Articles

There are several magazines available that have great ideas for children’s ministry and church leadership. Take advantage of these magazines and their articles by providing them for your leaders on an ongoing basis. Just make sure to check with the publisher before making copies!

### Discuss

1. *What are some training topics that we need to address in our ministry?*
2. *What can we do to increase attendance at our training sessions?*
3. *How can we best promote training sessions to our leaders?*

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# Secrets To Leading a Great Small Group

*(Handout example of a 60-minute training)*

## Preparation + Connection = Life Change

### I. Preparation Factor

#### A. Personal Preparation

1. Spending time listening (solitude/silence) and praying to God
2. Be authentic and transparent

#### B. Lesson Preparation

1. Read carefully and know your lesson by:
  - Underlining and highlighting your lesson
  - Reading it again with your particular small group in mind
  - Thinking about how you will set up the activity: utilize your space with your kids in mind
2. Memorize the Key Concept

### II. Connecting Factor

#### A. Establish Clear Expectations and Guidelines

1. Arrange where and how your kids will sit.
2. Give clear and concise expectations. Communicate expectations and commitment. Use positive phrasing.
3. Make sure you have a support system.

#### B. Create a Dynamic Environment for Kids to Connect

- Continually build a sense of belonging.
- Watch, listen, and ask questions for critical thinking.
- Create an emotionally safe environment.
- Be present and approachable.
- Make it fun.
- Be mindful of their ages and stages.

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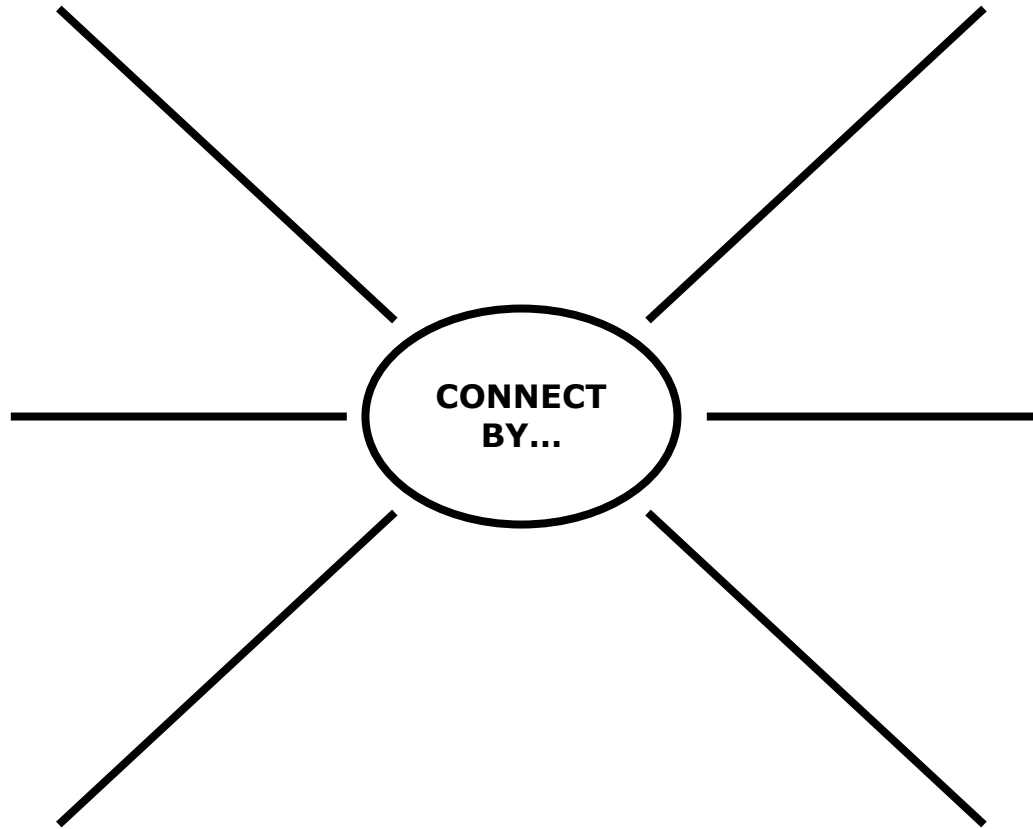
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### C. Connecting with Families and Kids Outside of the Weekend

#### 1. Communicating with parents at the end of the hour

- Tell parents one good thing you observed about their child.
- If you do not have time to do this weekly, choose beforehand 2-3 sets of parents that you plan on connecting with each week, until you get them all.
- If available, inform parents of the take-home sheet.
- Use language that communicates partnership: for example, “Let me know if I can serve you in any other way.”

#### 2. Connecting with kids outside of the weekend

- Phone Calls
- Post-Cards

**Reflection: Star one or two things you might want to try next weekend**

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**Promiseland:** Children's ministry curriculum from Willow Creek Association

📄 [www.PromiselandOnline.com](http://www.PromiselandOnline.com)

**Building Church Leaders:** Leadership training resources from Christianity Today

📄 [www.BuildingChurchLeaders.com](http://www.BuildingChurchLeaders.com)

**Almost Every Answer for Practically Any Teacher**, by *Bruce Wilkinson*. A collection of 100 articles about how to be a more effective teacher of God's Word. (Multnomah, 2005; ISBN 978-1590524534)

**Children's Ministry Volunteers That Stick**, by *Jim Wideman*. How to get and keep workers in your ministry. (Group, 2004; ISBN 978-0764426735)

**The Equipping Church**, by *Sue Mallory*. How to equip people according to their gifts and abilities. (Zondervan, 2001; ISBN 978-0310240679)

**Simply Strategic Volunteers: Empowering People for Ministry**, by *Tony Morgan and Tim Stevens*. How to give people the tools they need for ministry. (Group, 2005; ISBN 978-0764427565)

**Super Teaching**, by *Eric P. Jensen*. Countless strategies to help teachers make lessons more powerful. (Corwin, 1995; ISBN 978-1890460020)

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