

Games That Teach



CHILDREN'S MINISTRY





Games That Teach

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Kids love to play games of all kinds—physical games, thinking games, board games, the list could go on and on. They think of games as being fun, but we think of games as being not only fun, but also educational and potentially life-changing. Don't let games just be a time-filler or energy-waster in your ministry. Use games to teach kids ... without them even realizing it!

GOAL:

To give leaders the understanding and tools they need to effectively teach through games.

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Leader's Guide: How to use this download with your children's ministry team.

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

TODAY'S 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, TODAY'S 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. TODAY'S CHILDREN'S MINISTRY fits easily into what you're already doing. Here's how to use TODAY'S CHILDREN'S MINISTRY at the beginning of such a meeting:

- 1. Select a handout.** Suppose, for example, you want to know how to create your own game. You would select “Putting It Together.”
- 2. Print and photocopy the handout.** Photocopy as many copies of “Putting It Together” as you need—you do *not* need to ask for permission to photocopy any material from TODAY'S 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 guide you as you seek to use games to teach kids his truths and to live in ways that honor him.

Why Play Games?

Discover the reasons we should use games to teach.

Proverbs 3:13

Have you ever heard anyone say, “Church shouldn’t be about fun and games”? While we agree that church shouldn’t be all fun and games, games definitely have a place in children’s ministry. To find out why it’s important to play games at church, keep reading!

To Keep Kids Active

Anyone who has spent five minutes with a group of kids knows most of them don’t like to sit still for long periods of time. So don’t make them! Give them opportunities to move around and get some of that energy out. “But games don’t always include physical movement,” you say? Even thinking games or board games can be adapted to include some minor amount of physical activity. But don’t just have kids move for the sake of moving—give the action a purpose and you kill two birds with one stone.

To Keep Kids Engaged

Kids learn in different ways. Different styles of teaching will better engage kids with various learning styles. Some kids will simply be more engaged in an activity if they’re moving around and interacting with the whole group.

To Help Kids Have Fun

Think back on some of your most cherished memories. Is there a common denominator in them? It’s likely that many of those memories revolve around having fun. Do we want kids to remember their time with us? Yes! And the key to that just might include having fun.

To Help Kids Understand

You’ve probably heard the saying, “Tell me and I’ll forget. Show me and I’ll remember. Involve me and I’ll understand.” One way we can involve kids and help them understand is by playing games that teach. They actually get a chance to experience the biblical concept—or key point—you want them to understand and apply to their lives.

Consider

1. *In the past, why have we used games?*
2. *Can we think of other reasons it's good to teach using games?*
3. *Do we focus on kids remembering key points or on understanding them? What might we need to change?*

The Basics of Teaching with Games

Learn what you need to keep in mind as you create games.

Proverbs 3:21–22

If you're going to teach with games—and we hope you do—make sure they really teach something. And make sure that they communicate the intended message.

Tie into the Key Point

Make sure that what kids will learn from each game ties into the key point of the day's lesson. You may play several games to get the point across, but make sure they all get the point across.

Focus on One Point

It's tempting to teach kids as much as you can in the short time you have with them each week. But if you try to teach too many things, they won't remember anything. Just stick with one point and hammer it home with your game or games.

Beware of Unintended Lessons

So you have your one point you want kids to learn. But sometimes games will also teach implicit points that you don't want kids to take away from the game. For example: Let's say you play a game in such a way that it's difficult for kids to look up Bible verses. While they may learn your point, they may also think that it's hard to find things in the Bible and not want to try. Make sure to consider aspects of your games that might teach something you never intended.

Don't Make It About Competition

Some games will have winners and losers, simply by nature of the game. But don't focus on the competition and who won the game. That's not the point you want to get across or what you want kids to take away from the game. It's not about who wins or loses, and it's not even necessarily how they play the game; it's about what you lead kids to learn from the game.

Consider

1. *Do we focus on one key point or do we try to teach too much? What might we need to change?*
2. *Do we consider the implicit points we may be teaching through games? What steps do we need to take to make sure we aren't teaching things we don't intend to teach?*
3. *What is our view on competition? Is it healthy? Is it helpful?*

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Putting It Together

Practice creating your own games.

Proverbs 14:23

Now that you know why you should use games and why you should use them to teach one—and only one—point, it's time to practice creating games. It might sound daunting at first but just take it step-by-step.

Start with the Key Point

When coming up with a game from scratch, you need to start with the key point. The point we want to teach through the game we're creating here is: "God wants us to treat others with respect."

Brainstorm Options

Once you know the point you want to get across, take a few minutes to brainstorm ideas. You could make a list, use an idea map, or use whatever method works for your group. Here are a few ideas for the point at hand.

- Show respect for a breakable object, like an egg, by passing it over-under down a line of kids; then compare to showing respect for people.
- Teams come up with cheers that combine respectful actions with words.
- Play any game, and the respect issue comes in the debriefing section; discuss the ways kids respected the leader and each other as they played.

Choose an Option

After you've brainstormed, choose the option that best fits with the overall lesson, time constraints, space constraints, and supplies you can easily pull together.

Write It Out

It may be tempting to lead the kids in playing the game based on a loosely formed idea without writing it out. Please don't do that. Write down the details of every step that needs to be done: gathering supplies, explaining the game, leading the game, and asking debriefing questions. Go ahead! This is your chance to practice. You can use one of the ideas above or brainstorm some more of your own. Take some time by yourself or as a group to write out a game based on the point, "God wants us to treat others with respect."

Consider

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1. *What aspects of creating a game from scratch were hard? Were easy?*
2. *How might we need to change or improve the way we create games in our ministry?*
3. *Which leaders in our ministry are gifted at creating new games?*

Adapting Classic Games

Use other people's ideas and change them to fit your needs.

Ecclesiastes 1:9

If the thought of coming up with all of your own games makes you want to quit ministering to children, please don't! You don't have to make up games. While creating your own games is a great option, there are also plenty of games out there that you can easily adapt to suit your needs.

Active Games

The old staple “Simon Says” can be used to teach so many things, such as obedience or discerning good actions from bad ones. For instance, you might only say “Simon says” for the good actions. Of course, there is always, “Follow the Leader”—adapt this game to teach kids about following Jesus or doing the things he would do. And what about charades? It's adaptable to any theme you can come up with.

Thinking Games

Don't forget thinking games! “Going on a Picnic” is a great game to use to help kids think about how to apply the point they're learning. For instance, instead of saying, “I'm going on a picnic,” kids say, “I want to encourage others, so I'll say ...” and then they'll fill in the blank with an actual sentence they could say that would encourage someone else.

Board Games

You can change the rules of many board games to suit the point you want to get across. To teach the concept of grace using the game “Chutes and Ladders,” simply don't make kids slide back down the chutes if they land on those spaces. You can teach kids about stewardship or responsibility by playing “Monopoly.” The board game “Sorry!” can help kids learn about forgiveness.

Card Games

To teach kids about going the extra mile, adapt the card game “Go Fish” so that kids not only give away the cards they're asked for, but they also offer cards they're not asked for. Use “Old Maid” to teach kids about something they don't want to have, be, or do. Use “UNO” to help kids practice not complaining (because who *doesn't* complain when a “Draw Four” gets played on them?).

Consider

1. *What other classic active game could you use to teach kids something? How?*
2. *How could you use “Candy Land” to teach kids a biblical concept?*
3. *Think of two other ways to adapt “Go Fish” to teach something.*

Additional Resources

Want to explore this topic further? Check out these great books:

Todays Children's Ministry: Children's ministry training resources from Christianity Today International

 www.TodaysChildrensMinistry.com

Building Church Leaders: Leadership training resources from Christianity Today International

 www.BuildingChurchLeaders.com

101 Great Games for Kids: Active, Bible-Based Fun for Christian Education by Jolene L Roehlkepartain (Abingdon, 2000; ISBN 978-0687087952)

The Encyclopedia of Bible Games for Children's Ministry (Group, 2004; ISBN 978-0764426964)

The Humongous Book of Games for Children's Ministry (Group, 2001; ISBN 978-0764423550)