



The
United
Reformed
Church

They've asked me to be a

**children's
work
volunteer**

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Introduction

God calls children to be a blessing and a gift! Their spirits are filled with innocence, joy and laughter which can be a blessing to us all. In our ministry with children we are called to release this blessing on the world around us.

This booklet has been primarily written for those who have been asked to consider becoming a children's work volunteer in their local United

'God calls children to be a blessing and a gift!'

Reformed church; it aims to give an overview of the role's scope and core responsibilities as well as the necessary skills and abilities of post holders.

The information herein applies equally to all volunteer children's workers, including those working with Pilots and the uniformed organisations such as Guides, Scouts, Boys' Brigade and Girls' Brigade – but these latter groups will provide their volunteers with specific training and guidance.

'Teach your children right from wrong, and when they are grown, they will still do right.'

(Proverbs 22:6; Contemporary English Version)

Defining the age range

For the purposes of this booklet, children are defined as being aged from birth up to age 11 (Year 6).

Most churches divide the children into at least two groups – 0-5 and 6-11 – and where numbers of both children and workers allow, it's good practice to further split both groups, so the church would have:

- a creche for the very youngest children (birth to two years)
- a group for the three to five-year olds
- a group for the five to seven-year olds and;
- a group for the eight to eleven-year olds

All groups can run at the same time with different activities and workers.

Children's work covers a wide age range and while all age ranges benefit from dedicated 'specialist workers' – some skills are interchangeable. Very often individuals have skills best suited to working in a particular age group – not to mention a preference for a particular age range.



Don't hesitate to be clear about any age-related preferences you do have – you will almost certainly be more effective if you enjoy the work! Likewise, if you have been asked to consider becoming a children's work volunteer and absolutely know it's not for you, just be honest and say so – it really would be the best outcome for everyone!

What do children's work volunteers do?

Children's workers are privileged to share in the blessing of spending time with children, learning from them and developing relationships with them as co-disciples walking the way together.

Children's workers could be helping in a creche, toddler group or one of the older groups and obviously their responsibilities depend on the age of the children they are working with – there is a huge variation in the work/activities of those who work with very young children, and those who work with eleven-year olds.

Typical tasks could include:

- Helping children keep good hygiene¹ (including changing the nappies of infants and toddlers in a creche environment) and ensuring the toys and equipment are clean, and suitable for use.
- Supervising and monitoring the safety of children in the group.
- Enabling the children to grow in faith and encouraging them to share their faith within their family.
- Talking to and playing with children in a way suitable to their age, while always maintaining the adult/child relationship. It's essential for children's workers to talk to children on their level, but always avoiding being patronising – we are called to be childlike, but are never called to be childish.

Organise activities that allow children to learn about the world and explore their interests – always being aware of their development stage.²

1 Assisting with the personal care of babies and toddlers (indeed anyone under the age of 16) requires consent from parents/carers and anyone assisting with personal care must ensure that this consent has been given.

2 See the 'Other resources' section on page 10 for more information on child development.



- Develop activities to ensure that children have a balance between physical activity, rest, and playtime based on their developmental stage.
- Speaking with confidence to parents/carers.

In addition, children's workers should help children understand concepts around good manners including how to share and take turns by playing games with their peers. Young children learn from playing, solving problems, questioning, and experimenting and effective children's workers use play and other techniques to help children's development – for example, they use storytelling and rhyming games to teach language and vocabulary, and team activities such as building something may help improve children's social skills as they work with others. Creative pursuits such as art, drama and dance are also a recommended part of the activity mix.

We strongly recommend reading the [Children's work volunteer helper](#) and/or the [Children's work volunteer leader](#) role descriptions. Obviously, they're not specific to your church but will provide a good starting point for you.

Safeguarding responsibilities

You'll have a duty of care to protect children in any activity or event within the church or other church-led activities; and you'll need to have (or commit to gaining) a good working knowledge of relevant child protection

procedures, particularly how to recognise abuse and what to do if you are concerned about a child and come across any disclosure of abuse or neglect. Familiarise yourself with the relevant sections of **Good Practice 6**, the URC's handbook on safeguarding policy and procedures – and speak to your church's/your synod's safeguarding coordinator if you have any questions. You will also be required to attend basic and intermediate safeguarding training – and renew it – every three years. Your local church and synod will arrange this training for you. If you volunteer with Scouts, Guides, Boys' Brigade, Girls' Brigade or another similar group, you will have to attend that organisation's safeguarding training unless a different arrangement has agreed between the Church and the partnered organisation.

More general safeguarding issues include:

- Ensuring the programmes you're running are appropriate to the age of the child
- Making sure the activities are risk assessed and;
- Ensure the collection of children is done in a safe way (a passwords or similar system is recommended).



And remember, no children's worker should ever be asked/to look after a group on their own. If you are asked to do this, or to cover duties you are uncomfortable with, speak with a responsible person in your church, preferably the Children's and Youth Work Elder. You are entitled to the church's support.

As a children's work volunteer involved in regulated activities with children, you will be required to agree to, and sign, the URC's **Code of Conduct for working with children or young people**, attend mandatory safeguarding training and undertake a free of charge Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check (England and Wales) or, if you are in Scotland, be registered with the Protecting Vulnerable Groups (PVG) scheme to have a check. The DBS/PVG verifier in your church will be in contact with you once you have agreed to become a children's work volunteer; you will not be able to start working with the children until you completed your safeguarding training at the appropriate level and your DBS or PVG check has been received and reviewed by the church. As part of your safer recruitment process you will also need to provide two referees.



Expected skills and characteristics of children's work volunteers

You have been asked to consider being an children's work volunteer because those who have asked you have already recognised in you many of the expected traits and characteristics – and don't forget that resources and training are also available, so you can learn/improve on the specific skills once in role.

Necessary skills include:

- **Communication skills** – not only in communicating with the children, but being able to talk with parents and other children’s workers about the children in your care. This includes both sharing information clearly and listening to the parents attentively.
- **Decision-making skills** – good judgment when responding to emergencies or difficult situations.
- **Instructional skills** – you need to be able to explain things in terms young children can understand.
- **Interpersonal skills** – you need to work well with people and be able to develop good relationships with parents, children, and other leaders.
- **A working understanding of the development stages of children** – this is knowledge that all group leaders must possess and is extremely useful, but not essential, for other volunteers.
- **Patience** – working with children can be frustrating, so you need to be able to respond to overwhelming and difficult situations calmly.
- **Being playful** – working with children and understanding how play develops their learning, can require physical stamina and sometimes, if you are able, you’ll need to get down to their level.

What is the time commitment?

There are two angles to look at here – how long will you be expected to volunteer for, and what is the average weekly time commitment.

In terms of the length of service it’s good practice for churches to be clear that these roles are undertaken for a period of three years and then reviewed. (If this is not the system that operates in your church you might like to suggest it.) It’s also sensible to set a probationary period – perhaps of three months – for all children’s work volunteers. This provides an opportunity for both parties to try out the role and see if it works for both you, the volunteer, and the group.

The ongoing weekly time commitment will obviously vary depending on the role taken on and how much preparation work is required for the group. The younger age groups often require more preparation work. A good rule of

thumb is an hour's preparation time for an hour's group, but volunteers will also be expected to set up and tidy up after groups, and this could include wiping down of toys. Talk to existing group volunteers or the leader to get a better idea of the weekly time commitment.



What preparation and development will I receive?

All synods have a children's & youth work specialist on their staff – in many, but not all, synods these are known as the Children's & Youth Development Officer (CYDO) and in this booklet CYDO+ is shorthand for the synod C&YW specialist, whatever their job title. Collectively this group of people is known as the CYDO+ team.

Your synod's CYDO+ is a core resource and can provide training for all children's workers – talk to them as soon as you can. They'll run training workshops, arrange your safeguarding training with the synod safeguarding officer, may provide bespoke training and will also be able to guide you towards other recommended training/training providers, possibly including your local authority. They may also be able to help with funding for some courses.

Other resources

There is an absolute wealth of children's work resources – particular recommendations include:

- The URC's **children and youth work webpages** – include plenty of resources which are downloadable with ideas, books and activities as well as pertinent information for the age groups. Investigate the resources for children under 11 (being aware that sometimes groups lose the eleven-year-olds as they are ready for, and have moved up into the youth group).
- You may like to **subscribe** to the URC Children's & Youth Work bi-monthly newsletter. It's free and full of helpful, up-to-date, information including book recommendations.
- 'Core skills in children's ministry' is an excellent six-module course that the United Reformed Church recommends and includes material on the stages of child development, alongside information on planning and programming, how to develop faith and how to work with others. Within the URC this course is most often delivered by the CYDO+ team – if you are interested in taking this course please speak to your CYDO+.
- **1277.org.uk** support church-based toddler groups and offer some very useful resources with information and ideas on everything from how to set up a room to how to run activities.
- **The Scramblers Network** has some useful information – they don't have a website but you'll find them on Facebook.
- **Messy Church** has some good resources too. Their training is excellent for those who work/plan to work with children and families.
- **The Bible Reading Fellowship** has some good materials including *The Essential Guide to Family Ministry*.
- **Godly Play** focuses on developing children's spirituality and is good for all age groups. If you're interested, you'll need to do their training – talk to your CYDO+ first.
- **Faith Adventures: Children Together** is a free weekly resource from the URC to help you plan and deliver Bible-based, child-centred, engaging sessions for ages 12 and under. Session outlines provide ways to experience, explore and express faith together through Bible readings, stories, prayers, activities, and wondering together, with a postcard home to enable children and families to nurture their faith in daily life.

- **Families on Faith Adventures @ Home** – designed during lockdown to promote faith at home and a link between church and families, this resource provides lots of ideas, with an easy-to-search Bible index to help you find what you're looking for.

A service of commissioning or dedication

Many churches offer a service of commissioning or dedication for children's work volunteers. A **sample service** is available.

The last word

Please don't be overly daunted by the content of these pages!

Looking after the children connected to the church is both a privilege and a responsibility. Doing it well can be challenging – but remember, someone in your church who knows you well has seen in you the qualities and characteristics that are needed to be an effective children's worker. It's unlikely that you'll arrive at the first session as a fully formed and completely fabulous children's worker but, if you are interested and thinking of saying yes, there are plenty of people, training opportunities and resources – both printed and online – to help you become one!



This is one in a series of booklets designed to give information to those who have been asked to consider taking on a role in the United Reformed Church.

The booklets can be read and downloaded at www.urc.org.uk/ask



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