



Giving a Voice to Children & Young People

“Children participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously.”

- Child Safe Standard 2

Those leading children’s and youth ministries need to intentionally cultivate a culture where young people are encouraged to speak up about matters affecting them. This should be something that allows children the opportunity to see their opinions heard and acted upon. By consistently demonstrating that they will be taken seriously in all matters, leaders can help empower children and young people to speak up about their concerns.

START AND END THE YEAR LISTENING TO THE CHILDREN & YOUTH

- **At the beginning of the year** take the time to ask the children for their input to the program. Put aside some time to ask the children what sort of events and activities they might like to have planned for the coming year.
- Encourage the children to speak to a leader if they have additional ideas or suggestions throughout the year. It could be as simple as children identifying their favourite games or as complex as children identifying biblical questions and topics they would like to learn more about.
- Document these ideas and take them to the next kids ministry team meeting for discussion. Try to find ways to incorporate the suggestions into your planning.
- A good way to establish behaviour expectations is to ask the kids to come up with rules that they think are important for making sure everyone is safe and respected. As a group, come up with some key rules for your time together and display these somewhere as a reminder.
- **At the end of the year**, make time to get feedback from the children. Ask: what did you learn from/enjoy most this year? What would you like to see more of next year? What would you like to see less of next year? What new ideas do you have for this ministry? If possible, ask one of the children to write down these ideas on paper or a whiteboard.
- Remember to thank the children for their feedback and ideas. Encourage them to continue to contribute and participate in the ministry.

HELPING CHILDREN TO SPEAK UP ABOUT THEIR CONCERNS

- At the start of the year, make a time to tell the children that their wellbeing and safety are important to the church and to the leaders. Explain to the children that the leaders want to make sure that nothing stops them being able to know and love God more. Remind them they can talk to their leaders at any time and ask for their help or tell them about something that is worrying or upsetting them. Tell them that the leaders are here to help.
- Identify which leaders the children can talk to. This can be done by introducing the leaders to the children at the beginning of the year and displaying photos of the leaders on a child-friendly poster or noticeboard on church premises so even the littlest children know who to talk to. The photos should be displayed at child height in spaces where ministries to younger children occur.
- If any new children join the ministry during the year make sure to tell them the above information and encourage them to speak up if they need help or have a wellbeing or safety concern.
- In camping ministries, always commence the camp with an introduction of all the leaders, and let the children know they can speak to them at any time if they have any questions or concerns. Wearing a coloured t-shirt or lanyard is a great way of making it easy for children to identify the leaders so they know who to talk to.

CHILDREN'S MINISTRY POSTERS

The Breaking the Silence website has a set of posters that help to reinforce all of these ideas. They are available for download in the Resources section. You might like to print and display some or all of these posters in your children's ministry spaces.

