



How to run a group for dads and children

Why fathers and their children?

'If we want to see faith passed down through the generations of families, as churches we must make a more conscious and determined effort to reach out and support the relationships between fathers and children'.

Mark Chester
Who Let The Dads Out? (BRF, 2012)

There is both social and spiritual significance in the relationship between fathers and father figures and the children that they care for (for example,

see Psalm 78:1–7, Malachi 4:6 and Luke 1:17). Consequently, in the context of a holistic approach to family ministry, Care for the Family's Who Let The Dads Out? project aims to inspire, resource and support churches to run activities that will specifically appeal to dads and which they can attend with their kids.

In this guide, we have focused on running a monthly Saturday morning group aimed at dads with preschool and/or primary school-aged children, but we are happy also to share ideas on how to engage dads with older children.

Who Let The Dads Out? is an initiative from Care for the Family, focused on ministry to fathers for the UK church and beyond.

You can find out more at cff.org.uk/wltdo

Setting up a dads' and kids' group

Step 1:

Research the need—we believe that every community would benefit from such a group, but it's worth undertaking some analysis of the needs within the community you serve. If there is a parent and toddler group in your church, then talk to the people who come to that (perhaps mostly mums) and see what they think about a group that they could 'send' their partners and children along to. Use any links you have with local primary schools to explore the idea. Speak to your local children's centre, if you have one, and/or other family/community centres. Chat to the other churches in the area. Convinced of the need? Then it's time to move to step 2.

Step 2:

Present your proposal—at this early stage, whether you're one person with a vision or the A-team, it's worth setting out your proposal to the church leadership and to the wider congregation. It's important that this ministry is valued by the church as a whole. If it is, and if it has the backing of church leaders, then the chances of the group being successful and sustainable are much higher.

Step 3:

Begin to build your team—so, let's assume you're not the A-team, at least not yet. You're going to need a team of volunteers. Many groups are run by just a couple of heroic, multitasking people, but the more volunteers you can source, the better, especially as the number of attendees grows.

Men, women and teenagers all make great team members. Don't forget that you need to adhere to your church's policies on safeguarding, health and safety, and data protection. Also think about the training needs of your team.

Here are some of the roles you may want to consider:

- **The doorman**—your group needs someone to sign the dads and kids in, to help them step over that scary threshold for the first time and to make sure no little people escape when they shouldn't. A man is ideal but a good welcome is more important than gender.
- **The cook**—feed a man and you'll make him happy. So, think about what food you want to provide and how. Perhaps you could give them a bacon or breakfast roll in a napkin, so that dads (and kids) can 'graze' on the move. Think about food hygiene requirements and specific training needs for your volunteer cook(s).
- **The entertainer**—depending on the children's ages and how much structure you want to bring to your sessions, you could provide: an activity (otherwise called a 'craft', but 'activity' sounds more manly!), some organised games (for dads and kids to 'compete' in) and/or a story time. There are people, both men and women, who have particular talent for these sort of things.
- **The chatty man**—a lot of what this group is about is the relationships that can be built. So it's great to have people (ideally men), who enjoy meeting and talking with other men.

Step 4:

Beg, steal and borrow—you'll need some toys, so why not 'beg' to share the parent and toddler group's resources? Alternatively, visit another group in action and 'steal' what works well. Everyone wants a good turnout for the first session, so try and 'borrow' some dads from another group nearby, or from the churches across your locality. Kingdom values to the fore!

Step 5:

Pick a date—perhaps start with a one-off to see if the appetite is really there. If it is, then it's important to establish a routine, perhaps quarterly or, as most groups do, go for monthly. Many groups run on a Saturday morning but our advice is to choose the day and the time that suits you best. So, you are two months away from your launch. It's time to...

Step 6:

Publicise, publicise, publicise—use every means open to you: flyers, posters, social media, articles in the local newspaper, shop windows, the local children's centre, the local hospital, the local schools, the parent and toddler groups. Above all, speak to mums, because they will often get their men there, delivering them to the door if need be!

Step 7:

Join up—in the rush to get going, don't forget to belong. Care for the Family will happily register any church-led dads and children's group, whether using the Who Let The Dads Out? name or their own. Registering will help you access ideas, resources and a worldwide network of groups, sharing experiences and offering prayerful support through social media and the like, and it doesn't cost a penny. Registration may also give you the opportunity to apply for a start-up micro-grant through our link with the Cinnamon Network (subject to grant availability at the time).

Step 8:

Congratulate yourselves... and breathe!



Further information

To find out more about setting up a group and running ministries aimed at dads and their children, or to sign up for our newsletter...

visit cff.org.uk/wltdo

Join the Who Let The Dads Out? community:



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