



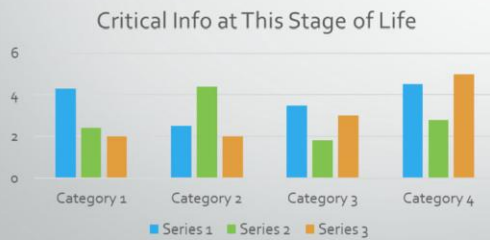
# Laying the Groundwork

Planting the Seeds of Faith  
During the Earliest Years

Give a brief thanks to everyone for coming and explain that you're going to continue...

### 3. Build on what we started with!

Remember the stats shared



Where we head with that



(The goal here is to present as if everyone knows what the first two points were, despite never actually telling them. Feel free to ad lib a little here.)

Point 3 reminds us that we should build on what we started with, especially considering the data presented and considering the factors introduced in parts 1 and 2. With that in mind, does anyone have any highlights they want to share specifically with what they discovered in parts 1 and 2?

(Pause only for a moment.)

If not, no worries...there actually wasn't a part 1 or 2. To start, I wanted to see how you'd react when it felt like you were missing the first part of the training.



# Missing the Point?

What was it like starting a training at the mid-way point?

How can a rushed or missing foundation cause issues later on? Can you think of any examples of this happening?

Briefly, I want you to turn to a partner, introduce yourself...because as you know a strong start is important, and take a minute or two to discuss these questions.

(Give a 30 second warning before gathering their attention.)

One last question for the group...how is starting a training on point 3 like starting to plant seeds of faith when kids are 3 or 4 years old, or even elementary? (Allow for some answers)



# Laying the Groundwork

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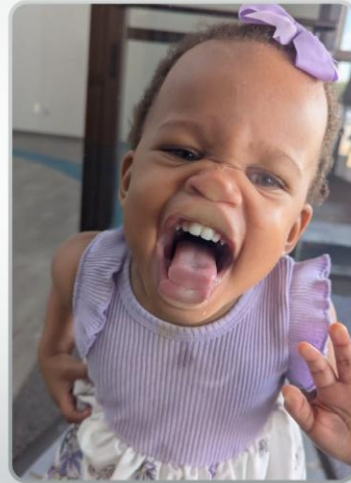
When you're laying the groundwork for faith in a child's life...starting when kids are in preschool is like building without a foundation...or starting a training without covering the first two points.

Let's get started with this training for real...at the beginning, with prayer.

(Pray as the Spirit leads. Here are some prompts to guide you: Pray thanking God for the time we have together. For bringing faithful leaders and volunteers that want to make an eternal impact on the lives of kids and their families. Pray for them to have wisdom and energy to serve His little ones, and may God get the glory through it all.)

## A little about myself

David Jennings  
Children's Minister at  
FBC Tuscaloosa



(Note: This is where you can describe a little bit about yourself and share a story that is connected to preschool and faith. Here is a sample.)

My name is David Jennings and I'm the Children's Pastor at FBC Tuscaloosa. As a proud dad, of course I had to add a picture of my daughter McKenna...seen here licking the glass door. While she didn't learn that from me, she recently proved to me that littles are always watching.

My hands were full, and I was trying to walk. Our little 5-pound Chihuahua named Charlie decided he had a death wish and wanted to walk right in front of me at his own pace. Without a second thought, I raised my voice...ok, I yelled..."MOVE CHARLIE!"

It was a bittersweet moment when a few minutes later, I see McKenna following the dog yelling "MOVE CHI-CHI" ...same tone and mannerisms.

I say bittersweet because it's so awesome that even before reaching two years old, she is looking at me for guidance and how to live her life. How I live and act is making an impact on her...but it's also very scary that *even before reaching two years old, she is looking at me for guidance and how to live her life. How I live and act is making an impact on her.*

Please do not think of what you do as just babysitting. You are laying the foundation for faith. You have the privilege and honor of introducing littles to God and the church, and know that they are soaking it all in, even when it doesn't seem like it.

# Today's Training

- The “Why” behind early childhood faith education
- Practical tips for those in trenches

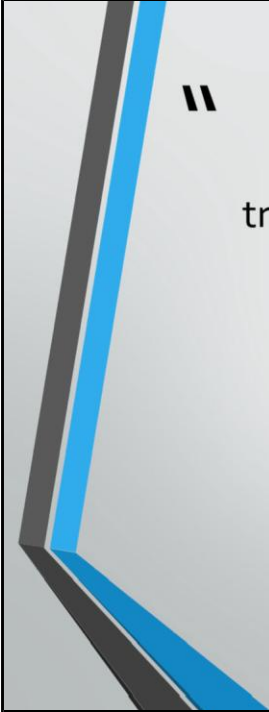
Today we're going to start by talking about the “why” of early childhood faith education. Then we'll move on to some practical tips where hopefully you'll find one or two ideas that you can take and make your own!



# Why #1

## Babies CAN Learn

The first “why” we’ll cover today is the fact that the time you spend with the youngest of the young isn’t just wasting time. Babies can learn about God.



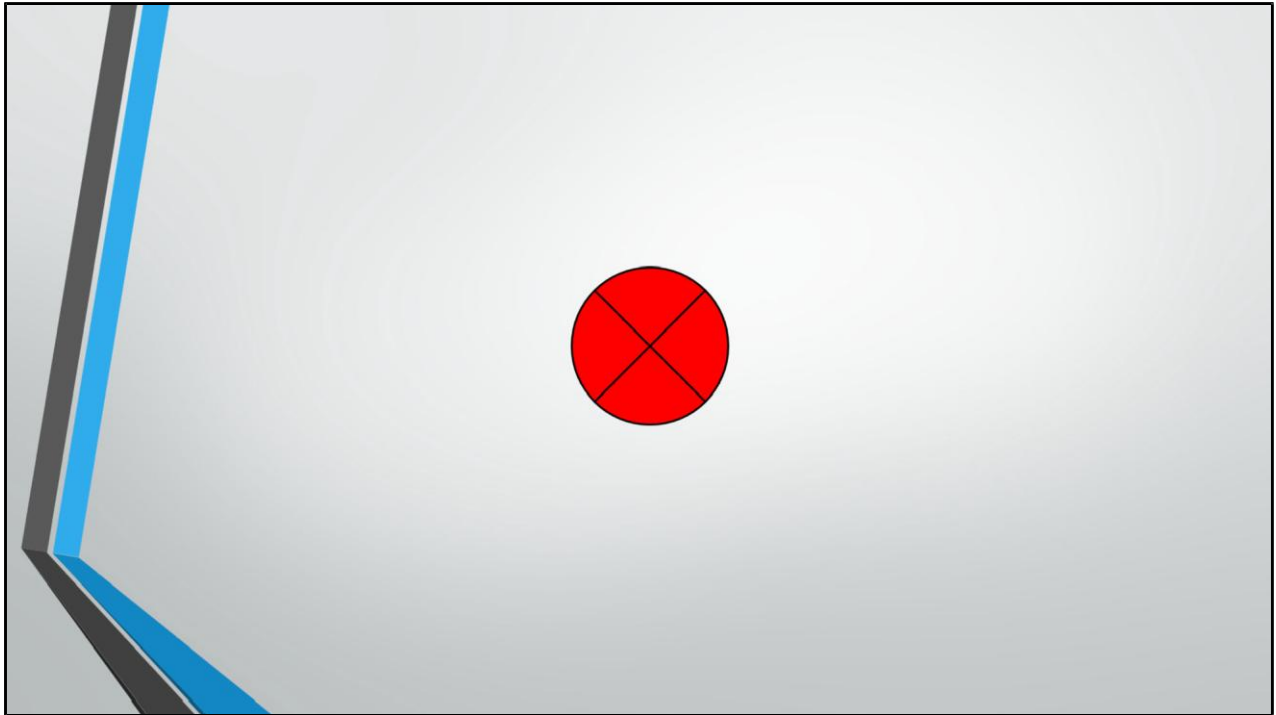
“ Both words *and* actions play a major role in the young child's nascent ideas about God. If trustworthy people speak about God with reverence, even young children associate the word/sound "God" with something special. ”

*-Patricia Fosarelli talking about James Fowler's findings to Contemporary Pediatrics*

Listen to this quote, “Both words *and* actions play a major role in the young child's nascent ideas about God. If trustworthy people speak about God with reverence, even young children associate the word/sound ‘God’ with something special.”

It’s not about vocabulary or memorization. It’s about introducing the concepts of love and trust, and how that connects to things like the word “God.”

Let’s take a look at something that was formed in you before you could even remember.

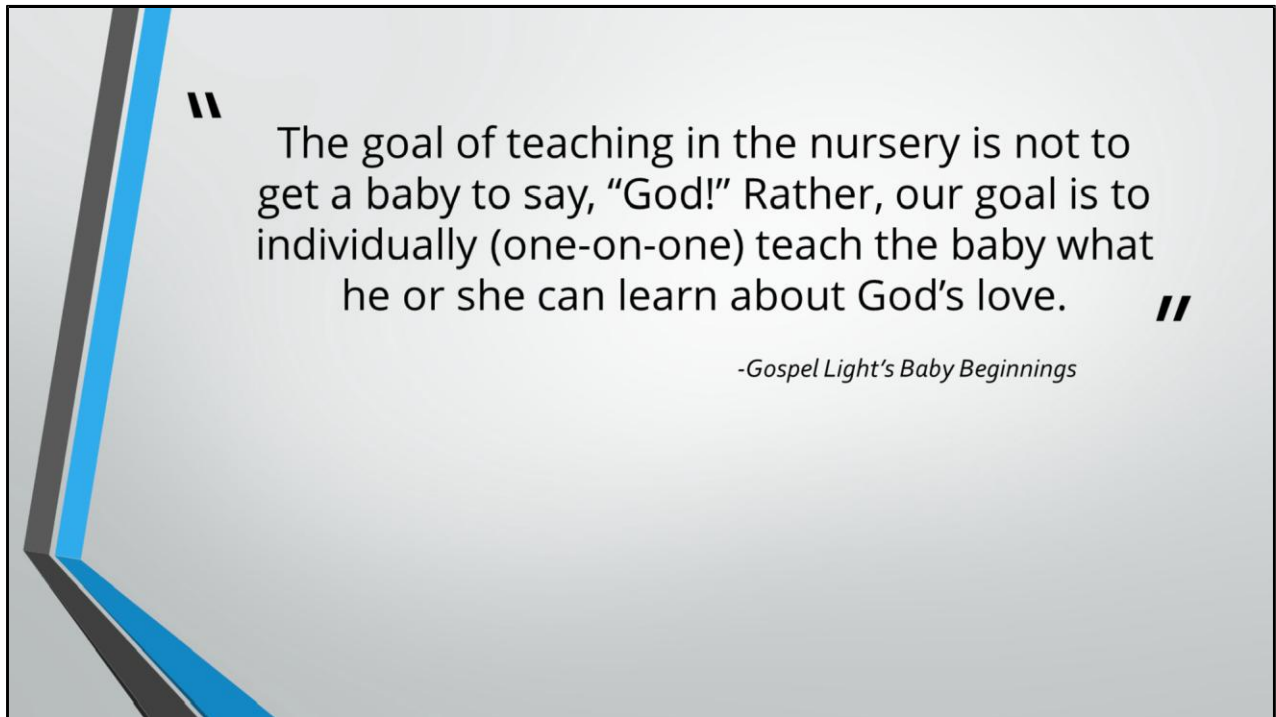


I want you to make a triangle using your two hands (demonstrate by putting the tips of your thumbs together to form the bottom of the triangle and having your index finger tips touching to form the top corner of the triangle).

Now I want you to stretch your arms out and look at this red dot through your triangle. If you are watching this and are too close to the screen, just pick something else far away to look at through your triangle.

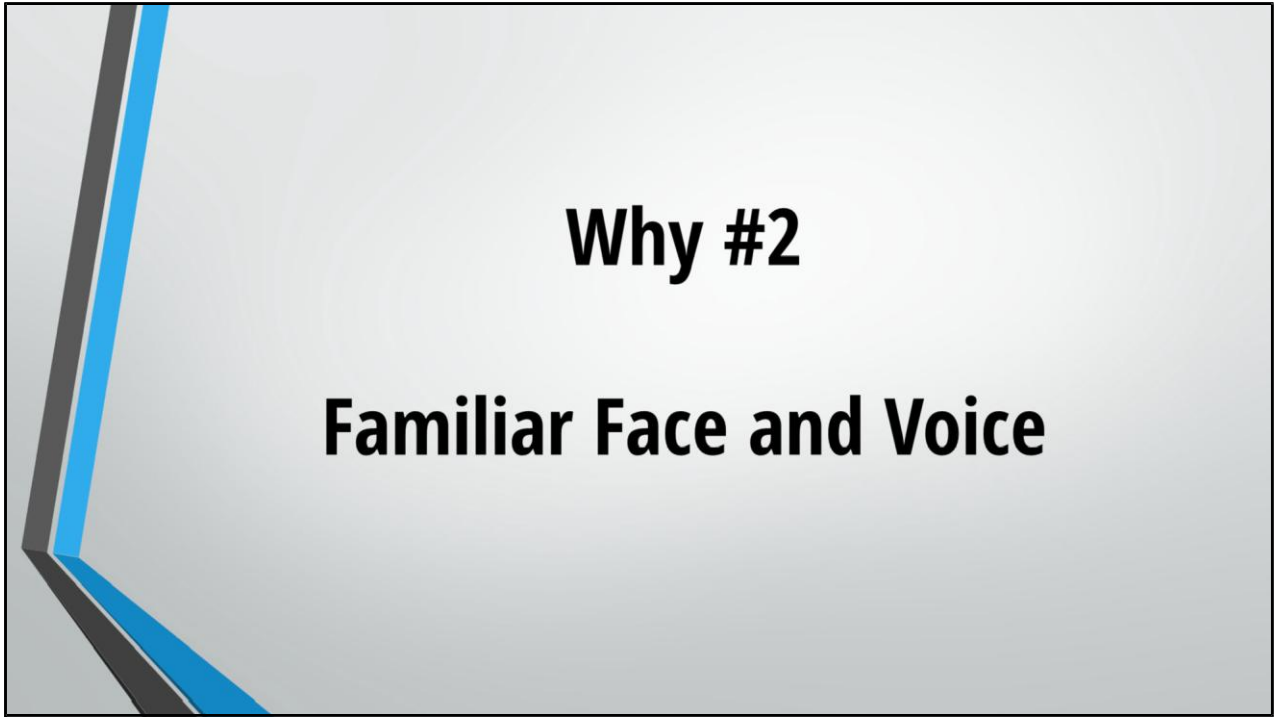
Now slowly close one eye, then swap to the other eye. Most of the time you'll find that one eye has the object more in the center, and the other eye sometimes has the item to the side, or even out of the picture. The eye that has the object closest to the center is your dominant eye.

Just like most people have a dominant hand, people can have a dominant eye as well. And that starts to form in the womb and develops up to age 3. You don't remember that forming, I bet. But the brain was at work taking visual input and making connections that will last a lifetime. Baby brains are incredibly receptive, absorbing faith foundations that can guide them for a lifetime—even if you can't see it yet. What you do matters deeply, shaping their spiritual 'dominant eye' in ways they'll carry forever.



But no, it’s not going to be like a senior adult Sunday School class where you have multiple charts, timelines, and maps posted all over the walls. The goal isn’t to give them a seminary education. Check this quote out from the book *Baby Beginnings*, “The goal of teaching in the nursery is not to get a baby to say, ‘God!’ Rather, our goal is to individually (one-on-one) teach the baby what he or she can learn about God’s love.”

Your first “why” is that babies can learn about faith. Foundations are being set mentally, physically, yes, even spiritually. We must start early.



“Why” #2 is all about consistency.



Babies' brains are developing at a rapid rate...and as much as we love to see them cuddle with stuffed animals, they prefer to see human faces and hear human voices. They're looking for safety and love. A quote from [childrensministry.com](http://childrensministry.com), "A baby's healthy development is largely dependent upon how much the baby can consistently trust familiar adults to care for his or her needs. Consistently demonstrating it is fundamentally important to a child's earliest perception of our loving God."

Your "why"? Because your consistent face and voice show babies they are safe, loved, and cared for at church.

## Why #3

# Partner with Parents

Ministry to babies and toddlers isn't just to babies and toddlers. It's to the parents as well...and not just allowing mom and dad to get their spiritual cups filled by attending a service. This is your opportunity to help encourage and equip parents to be the spiritual leaders they were designed by God to be!

And they need help. Let's play a game to see what parents are thinking. What do you think most parents would say the definition of a successful parent would be? Turn to a partner or two and come up with a list of five answers that fill in this blank.



**We desire to train up our children  
to be \_\_\_\_\_**

We desire to train up our children to be (blank). What do you think most American parents said? Take some time to come up with your top five answers and we'll compare in a few minutes.

(Allow time for people to make their lists. Give a 30 second warning before moving on.)

## We desire to train up our children to be \_\_\_\_\_

- Happy // 25%
- Successful // 22%
- A good person // 19%
- Educated // 17%
- Independent // 15%
- Godly // 9%

Alright, ready to see what people said?

(Click through to show the answers)

Happy // 25%

Successful // 22%

A good person // 19%

Educated // 17%

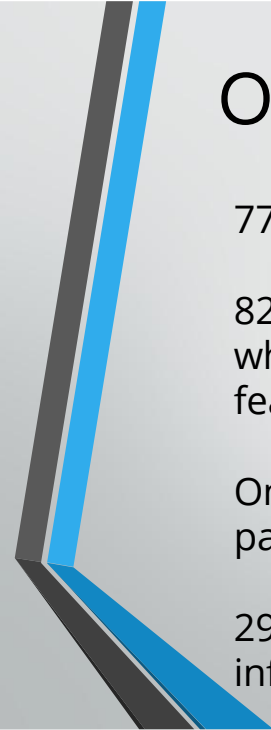
Independent // 15%

(Wait before revealing the last one)

What do you notice about our top five? Anything missing that stands out?

If you look lower down on the list, you'll find our last one, Godly, at 9%. Does this surprise you? And when you only poll parents who attend religious services regularly, it only jumps up to 24%...didn't even make the top spot.

You can read more about this survey in Lifeway's book *Nothing Less*. It is an amazing read with other surprising facts.



## Other Facts from *Nothing Less*

77% of the parents surveyed claimed to be Christian.

82% of parents agree that when they think about what their child will face in the future, they become fearful.

Only 14% were aware of what the Bible says about parenting.

29% of Christians say faith is the most important influence on their parenting.

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Parents are the ultimate disciplers of their children, but many haven't been disciplined themselves.

Your "why" ... by serving their babies, you are opening the door to a relationship to parents that can change a family tree. We'll share a few tips on how you can partner with parents later, but for now, let's move on to "Why" #4.

## **Why #4**

# **The Growth of the Church**

“Why” serve the youngest? The future of the church depends on it!

Ok, so maybe I am being a little dramatic here...God will grow His Church in the way He sees fit. But it is interesting to see how He uses our faithfulness to pass on our faith to the next generation.

## Stats from Barna

88% of parents say their children's time in children's ministry is as important as their time in service.

90% say the children's ministry was an important factor in selecting their current church they attend.

90% of parents of 5-14-year-olds say the children's ministry at their church is making a long-term difference in the lives of their children.

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90% of parents of 5-14-year-olds say the children's ministry at their church is making a long-term difference in the lives of their children.

This shows us that parents aren't going to come to your church if they don't feel it's a safe and loving place to leave their children. They see the importance and impact of what you do (although they may not know how to duplicate it at home, according to our last set of figures).

We can't treat children as the church of tomorrow. When they repent and trust in Jesus, they are our brothers and sisters in Christ. But before we even can get there, you are helping lay the foundation...you are planting the seeds. You are having an eternal impact on the preschoolers, who will have an impact on the church moving forward.



The fifth and final “why” ... Jesus cares about children and babies.

## Jesus loves me, this I know...

"Jesus said, "Leave the little children alone, and don't try to keep them from coming to me, because the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these. After placing his hands on them, he went on from there."- Matthew 19:14-15

"It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea than for him to cause one of these little ones to stumble." -Luke 17:2

From seeing Jesus warmly welcome and lay hands on children, to seeing Jesus give a serious warning about causing little ones to stumble, we see His heart for children. In John 6 we see Jesus use the contributions of a boy to feed thousands. Look, God even used John the Baptist as a baby inside of Elizabeth to see how we should react when we're close to Jesus.

Jesus loves children, and it's our honor to introduce these littles to Him.



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So, there are just 5 “whys” we do what we do. So, before we go on to some practical tips, let’s take some time to debrief. Get into a group of 2 or 3 and spend a few minutes answering these questions.

## Questions to Consider

What's your "why?" What caused you to serve where you're serving now (or looking to serve)?

What are the most important parts to your ministry to babies/preschoolers?

What can your ministry leaders do to help you in your position of service?

How can you help the members of your church see babies/preschool ministry as more than babysitting?

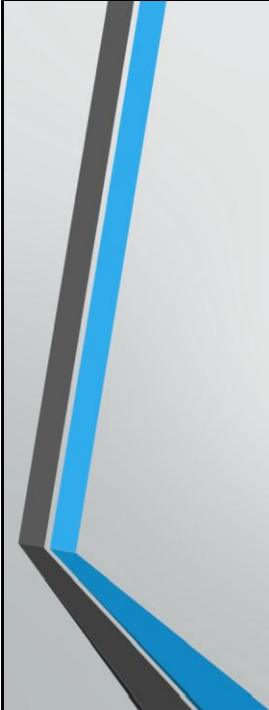
(Give participants time to review the questions. As discussion dies down, or when you need to move on for time, give a 30 second warning, then call for everyone's attention. If there is time, feel free to ask for anyone willing to share what they talked about in their group.)



# Laying the Groundwork

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Now that we've covered "why" we do what we do, we'll go over five things to remember as you serve little ones. Consider these "hows" of baby ministry.



# How #1

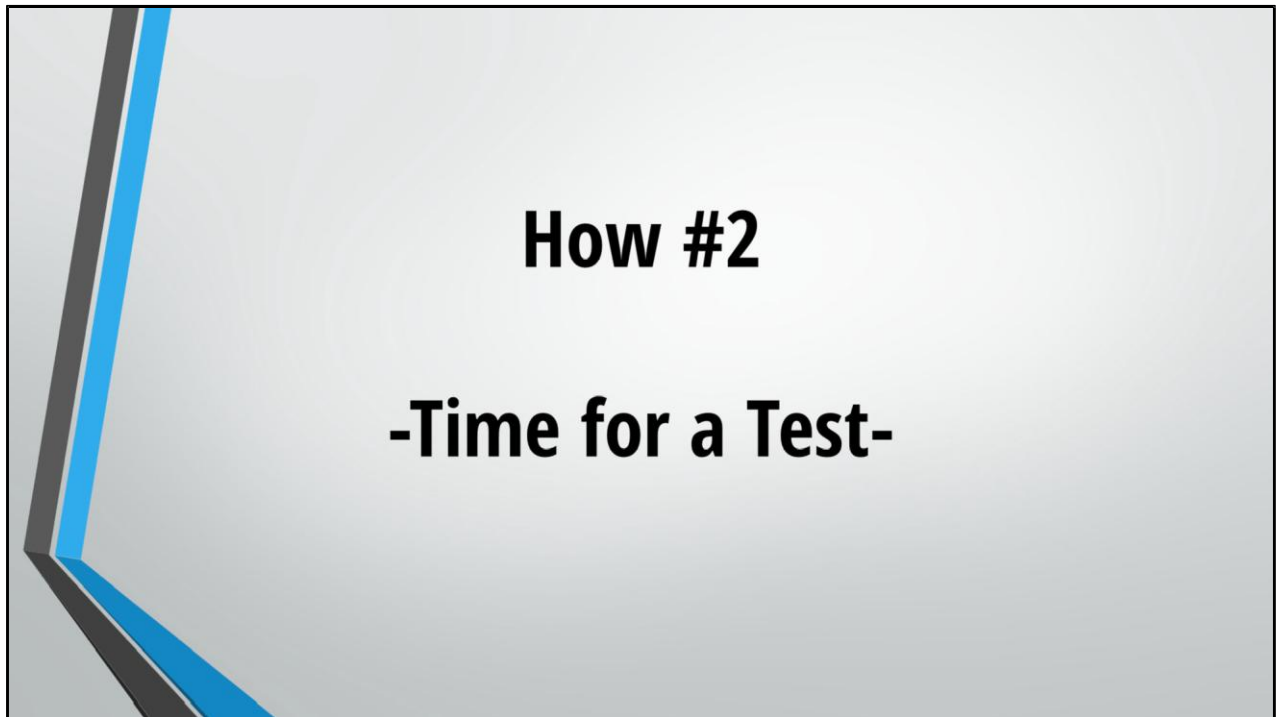
## Utilize Curriculum

Ok, it sounds obvious to some, but too often, volunteers and even leaders will look at the stack of pages and activities and say...yep, too much for too little. If we start making a game plan to lead kids into faith starting at age three, we are starting three years too late.

Most curriculum out there today have special devotions to prepare your own heart. Use it. You can't pass on what you don't have. It shows parents you have a plan, and it helps keep different learning styles in place.

And if you don't have a curriculum, that's ok! Consider what the elementary kids are discovering. You'll have to put in the work to make it baby and toddler friendly, but you'll all be on the same page.

Maybe you're a small church...can't afford curriculum and forget preschool team...it's you and MAYBE some other person. First off, let me say, THANK YOU for what you do. You don't have to have a huge team or a fancy budget to get curriculum. May I suggest visiting [Lifeway.com/lobl](http://Lifeway.com/lobl) or searching *Lifeway Ages and Stages*. You'll find simple, biblical concepts that you can review each time you're with babies and younger preschoolers...simple phrases to repeat and pray over the children.



Before I tell you tip number two, let's do another activity. Pair up with someone, perhaps someone you haven't been paired up with yet. (Pause to let people pair up.) Ok, now we need someone to be the leader and someone to be the listener. To pick, compare phones...bigger or newer phone gets to be the leader, and the other will be the listener.

# Instructions

## Listener

- Think of a well-known Bible story/event
- When the game starts, simply tell the leader what story you want to hear about and sit there and listen.

## Leader

- Summarize the story
- Send 1 text message
- Check the high and low temps for tomorrow
- Read the last email received

Ok listener, your job is simple. When the game starts, you tell your leader a common, well-known Bible story and say go. Just listen. That's it. Simple right?

Leader...you have three things you need to do. While you summarize the story, you need to send 1 text message...doesn't matter what or where it is sent. Check the weather for tomorrow. Review the last email you got.

You're going to have 45 seconds to do this, so you're going to have to try and summarize while doing the three things.

Ready. Your time starts when the listener tells your story. Begin.

(Give teams 45 seconds to play, then gather everyone's attention.)

# Questions to Consider

Listener...what was it like hearing a story from someone who was distracted?

Leader...what was it like trying to divide your attention?

In what ways is this activity like or unlike how volunteers serve in our nursery?

What distractions can we eliminate from our nursery?

(Take a brief review of how everyone did. Either have an open discussion on these questions or tell them to discuss these questions with their partner.)



## How #2

# Eliminate Distractions

If you haven't guessed it by now, our second "how" is to give your full attention to these babies and toddlers. They can tell when you are addicted to a screen. They can hear people gossip about church members when you're holding them. Make sure to give them your all. Not saying you can't carry on a conversation but be mindful of what you say!



# How #3

## Partner with Parents

We've talked about it during our "whys" but so many parents today know its preschool ministry is important...they just don't know how to do it at home.

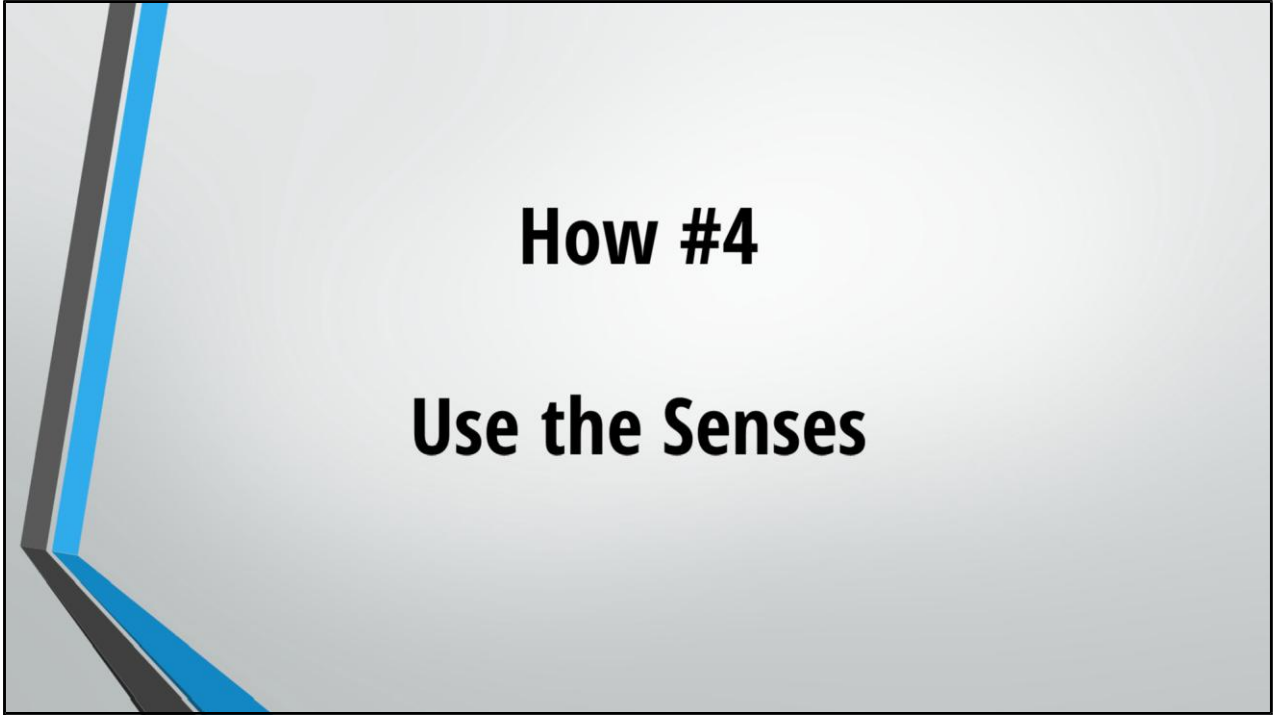
Do this...put your hand flat against a table or on your lap. Move just the ring finger up and down. Let's say the more it moves up and down, the more faith seeds are being planted. Now imagine the middle finger, being the tallest, represents the time parents spend with kids. Let's take that out of the equation by hiding it under your palm. Now move that ring finger. Yeah, it's a lot easier to move kids toward faith when parents are helping.

Here are some rapid-fire tricks that could help you partner with parents!

# Parent Ideas

- Greet parents by name at the door
- Take their prayer requests
- Suggest, but don't force, resources that can help
- Send encouraging texts in the middle of the week
- Don't give them a hard time if they show up early or, more likely, late
- Send birthday cards to their children
- Review what you did in class and share what they can do to continue it on...keep it simple!

- Greet parents by name at the door. Don't make them come to you.
- Take their prayer requests. What if you built a relationship with them and now they know someone is specifically praying over them and their child? Huge!
- Suggest, but don't force, resources that can help, like the Ages and Stages webpage mentioned earlier.
- Send encouraging texts in the middle of the week...something to remind them they are doing good...bonus points if it ties into the lesson.
- Don't give them a hard time if they show up early or, more likely, late. Church is where community is built. Yes, they may be goofing off talking about where to go eat, but they may be getting counseled. Even if you're hungry and ready to go, make sure to have a smile on when they return.
- Send birthday cards to their children...and the parents!
- Review what you did in class and share what they can do to continue it on...keep it simple! Don't overwhelm them but help them see it was more than just babysitting.



# How #4

## Use the Senses

As brains grow, using all the senses God made is a great way to instill faith. Let's look at examples of how you can incorporate this in your time with kiddos.

# How to Use All 5 Senses

- Hearing – Repetition is key!
- Seeing – Show kids the Bible, look outside
- Hearing – Repetition is key!
- Tasting – Use bottle or snack time to pray. Taste and see that the Lord is good!
- Hearing – Repetition is key!
- Touching – Allow for hands-on experiences...pat, pound, move all around
- Hearing – Repetition is key!
- Smell – Scratch and sniff stickers are the best
- Be flexible and ready for change when toddlers want to do something new

(Click through these one by one)

- First, Hearing – Repetition is key! The easiest way to do this is through music. So much developmental growth can occur using music playing in the background or sung as babies fall asleep. Use music to help you repeat key points.
- Seeing – Show kids the Bible. Look outside...take them to the window and point out all that God has made.
- Hearing – Repetition is key!
- Tasting – Use bottle or snack time to pray. Taste and see that the Lord is good! Next...
- Hearing – Repetition is key!
- Touching – Allow for hands-on experiences...pat, pound, move all around. A loving touch that's secure but not overly firm can do wonders for a baby. Next...
- Hearing – Repetition is key!
- Smell – Scratch and sniff stickers are the best...talking about how God made flowers. Order some flower scratch and sniffs! And finally, can anyone guess what's next? (Give it a brief moment to see if anyone says repetition)
- Be flexible and ready for change when toddlers want to do something new. Yeah, you might have a song planned for a 2-year-old and they decide it's time for snack. Be ready for unexpected change in plans.



# How #5

## Sunday School Adoption

The final “how” is a suggestion that we have found helpful at our church. Making sure your leaders are ok with it, find an Adult Sunday School to adopt your class. Maybe it would be the class you are in, but you never get to go to because you’re always serving. Or maybe it’s an older adult class whose members can’t commit to serve each week.

Find a group and ask them to do three things:

- 1) Send a helper each week to serve as an extra set of hands if needed, and if not, just to pray over the littles.
- 2) Have them commit to praying for each family by name each week.
- 3) Be ready for requests. Need freshly baked cookies one Sunday, they are on it. Need someone to dress like a Bible person, they got the robe ready.

Think about it from the standpoint of a parent. Not only do I have a volunteer consistently pouring into my kid, but I have a whole Sunday School class praying for my family.

It’s a win-win. I guarantee you once those people who would never normally serve consistently see what it’s like to make a difference, you may see more of them in the nursery soon.

## Questions to Consider

What are some things that you found work well for you when serving preschool and younger?

What's one way you can better partner with parents moving forward?

What is a group of people in your church you can get plugged into serving our little ones?

Take time to pray for your church's ministry to families.

Before we end, let's take a moment to debrief some more. Pair up and talk about these questions.

(Give participants time to review the questions. As discussion dies down, or when you need to move on for time, give a 30 second warning, then call for everyone's attention. If there is time, feel free to ask for anyone willing to share what they talked about in their group.)

## Charles Spurgeon

"Here, then, is the secret. You must impart to the young your own soul; you must feel as if the ruin of that child would be your own ruin."

"It is not very easy, I know, to preach Christ to little children, but there is nothing else worth preaching."



Celebrated pastor, Charles Spurgeon, was the king of quotes. One of my favorites was, "There is hardship in everything, except in eating pancakes."

But he also had a few quotes about ministry to little kids. Here are two of them I wanted to share with you to end our time together.

"Here, then, is the secret. You must impart to the young your own soul; you must feel as if the ruin of that child would be your own ruin."

"It is not very easy, I know, to preach Christ to little children, but there is nothing else worth preaching."

Anyone who signed you up for this job and told you it would be easy...I'm sorry to say, they were half right. It's not easy, but it's worth it. Thank you for making a difference.

(End with prayer, here is a sample)

God, thank you for who you are and what you have done for us through the redeeming work of Your Son, Jesus. We know your Word will not return void. Thank you for the opportunity for planting the seeds of faith. May generations be changed forever because of the faithful servants loving on the least of these. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.



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