

Preventing bullying at Kids Church

Bullying refers to repeated verbal, physical, social or psychological behaviour that is harmful and involves the misuse of power by an individual or group towards another person/s. Bullying may include behaviours such as excluding, poking and pushing, gossiping, taking someone's belongings, or humiliating, but bullying is not a one-off act of meanness.

Bullying has no place at Kids Church. At Kids Church we model and teach Christian attitudes and values of inclusiveness, welcoming, equal worth of all individuals, respect, forgiveness, and love. Bullying is the direct opposite of Christ-likeness and therefore must be taken seriously at Kids Church.

Following are some ideas on how to prevent and protect against bullying at Kids Church:

1. Be organised

Bullying is less likely to occur if children are engaged and busy in the lesson and activities. This means the teacher needs to be organised and thoughtful in lesson preparation.

2. Provide adequate supervision

Problem behaviours thrive in the unstructured times of Kids Church and after church. Adequate adult supervision by parents and other adults will limit the opportunity for these behaviours to occur or go unnoticed. If adults are involved and/or supervising what the kids are doing, not disengaged onlookers, many problems can be avoided or dealt with quickly before escalating.

3. Develop inclusive relationships

Consider planning activities that draw a group together so that everyone is included and the group can get to know each other. Many children are targeted for bullying because they lack close friends, social skills or confidence. By drawing them into the group you are helping strengthen them as part of the group.

4. Always respond to a child's concerns

We want to create a culture of openness and transparency at church and that includes amongst kids. Children who come forward should be praised for their bravery. When a child reveals they have been mistreated at Kids Church our response must be immediate, consistent and appropriate. Be careful to not dismiss a child's concern as "kids being kids". It is never ok for a child to feel unsafe at Kids Church. If you are uncertain of how to respond talk to your Kids Church leader or minister.

5. Love the victim and the bully

Sometimes our culture might encourage us to despise the weak or hate the bully. Jesus loved us when we were the worst of sinners, and he loves us in our weakness and vulnerability. Therefore we love, forgive and encourage both the bully and the victim. Remember also that bullying can be a learned behaviour and the bully at church may be the victim elsewhere.

6. Reinforce positive behaviours

When you see a child being kind, including others in their game, or caring for someone make sure you praise and encourage that child's behaviour.

7. Address bullying in your lessons

If bullying has become a problem at your Kids Church or for children who attend your kids church you may consider specific lessons on bullying. Discuss God's response to victims, bullies and bystanders and our social responsibility. Reinforce that God's love and forgiveness is needed by all of us.

8. Train teachers and recruit parents

Consider addressing anti-bullying approaches at Kids Church training so that all teachers are aware of how to respond to, prevent and notice bullying behaviour. Informing parents will ensure they and their children are aware of expected behaviour at Kids Church and encourage open communication between teachers and parents. Parents are ultimately responsible for teaching their children about being followers of Jesus and Kids Church is supporting them in that role.

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This information is available at www.safechurchpcv.org.au/resources