



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 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,

Defining the age range

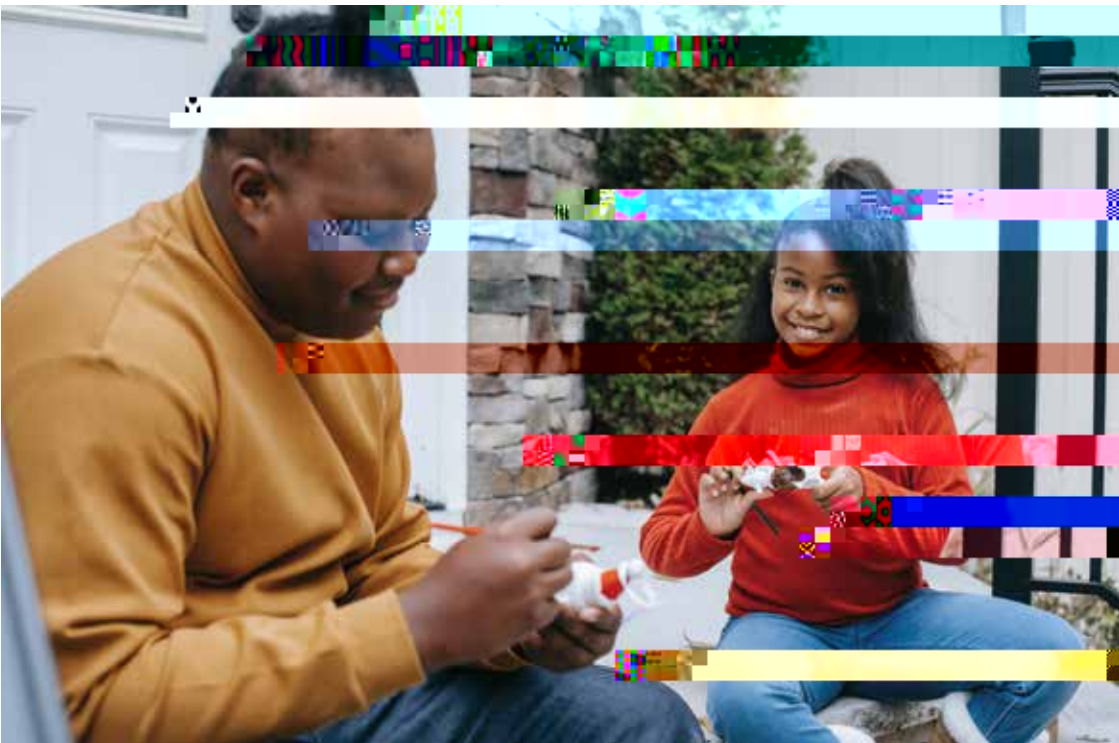
For the purposes of this booklet, children are defined as being aged from birth up to age 11 (Year 6).

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 years¹)
- 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.

¹ At the time of writing (Autumn 2020) specific information about working with creche-aged children was being prepared. It's planned to be available on the C&Y webpages by the end of this year.



Children's work covers a wide age range and while all age ranges ~~pr~~



- Organise activities that allow children to learn about the world and explore their interests – always being aware of their development stage.³
- 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.

³ See the 'Other resources' section on page 10 for more information on child development

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 5](#), 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

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.

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

