

Leading children's sessions live online

Online safety

Consider how you safeguard leaders and those participating. Set up a password to enter the meeting in video conference platforms like Zoom. If you have two leaders, get online five minutes before the advertised start time, meaning when the first people sign in, you are ready. If you lead sessions alone parents/carers must be present with their children. Let parents know that they should be in the same room as the child/children, but don't have to be on camera. The youngest children may need a parent with them all the time to help and support. You may find it's really good to have parents/carers and children interacting together – encourage it if it works well! Email information to the parents/carers in advance including information about safety.

A note on safeguarding: You will need to follow safeguarding policies relevant to your church or organisation, and any other relevant policies and procedures regarding running sessions for children/young people/adults at risk. The suggestions below are not intended to replace your local ongoing safeguarding policy. Breakout rooms are not suitable for working with groups of children and young people for safeguarding reasons – unless you have the leaders to facilitate safely, i.e. two per group.

Practise and prepare

Before your session, practise signing in and using the different features on your online platform. For example, on Zoom you can share your screen with other participants, a really simple way to show videos and images, and even simple templates that people can copy. Another useful tool is the mute function. It can be easier to keep everyone on mute to avoid background noise, and ask individuals to unmute themselves when you invite them to say something. You might find that some people are shyer online, which means you need to speak more. Preparing bullet points or a short script could help you stay on track and keep everything moving.

Using the weekly Children's session online – general advice and tips

- Keep online sessions shorter than face to face sessions would be. Try to keep to the structure but also include times for general chat and play if possible – you could also include a snack time. Encourage whole households to join in with activities and get creative using what they have around them and/or what you are able to provide safely in advance.
- Give your families the **Activity sheet** in advance of the session. This can help introduce the theme and encourage them to offer it to their children during the session if they aren't engaged with what's going on.
- Remind parents – and yourself! – that attention spans can be shorter online. Don't be afraid to hold shorter sessions, take breaks, allow children to dip in and out, offer suggestions for play materials they could use at home if they have them.
(See suggested play materials for very young children at the start of each session in the magazine and as part of 'Create your own worship and learning' in the *Prepare* section.)

Prayers

Include prayers within the structure to begin and end your session. However, keep prayers short, as it's harder for children just to listen to your voice than when you're face to face. Responsorial and prayers with actions work well because children are able to participate.

Gather

- Use the simple song – especially when very young children are present. As these have words written to well-known tunes, you can teach them (and/or share the words on the screen) and then invite the group to mute themselves and sing along.
- Use the gathering prayer.
- Use the suggested activity, adapting as needed or sharing the picture from the Bible passage might also work well as a way to introduce the theme.
▶ How to use the Bible story picture image: on the ROOTS website, go to *This week's images*, right click on an image and select 'Save picture as'. You can then show this using the screen share function.

Share the Word

- Use the *Stop and share* points as it is a way to break up the story as you tell it. Invite people to unmute themselves to respond to the prompts or ask their own questions about the story. You could also share the image while you tell the story.
▶ How to use the Bible story picture image: go to *'This week's images'*, right click on an image and select 'Save picture as'. You can then show this using the screen share function.
- The suggested activity in *Share the Word* is often a response story. These stories with actions work well, as everyone is listening for the cues.

- Many of our versions of the story for very young children are also written in response story style, this would also help cater for wide age-ranges.
 - ▶ How to find the very young children story version: *look for the teddy icon in the magazine, within the Very young children session online.*
- You may feel more comfortable using the version of the story for very young children each week as it's short, and involves simple props or actions.
 - ▶ How to find the very young children story version: *look for the teddy icon in the magazine, within the Very young children session online.*
- Don't forget that as well as sharing the story yourself using props and play figures you can also ask children to join in themselves with their toys and objects they have to hand at home. Group or team activities can be done as households. Encourage families to find their own ways of re-telling the story together at home.

Explore and respond

- We provide three activities as part of the session. In an online session you may only want to choose one or two. Consider what space and access to certain items there may be in different households when you plan your session.
- Games can often be adapted to use online by asking the children to use what they have to hand at home. Team games may be more difficult to adapt but remember that households can be encouraged to work as a team.
- Craft activities may also work well with some adaptations, e.g. use of everyday items they may have at home – or alternatively you may be able to send out the kit required.
- Try to always include the prayer activity which goes together with *Talk together and talk to God* – three questions which require time and space and open discussion. You might share these questions and ask children to discuss these together with parents/carers
- while they are on mute. Afterwards you can ask if any want to share their thoughts and bring these together in prayer as part of the prayer activity. You could also use the prayer activity provided for very young children.
 - ▶ How to find the very young children prayer activity: *look for the teddy icon in the magazine, within the Very young children session online.*

Singing

You can play music using the screen share function, or show a video with words, and everyone can sing along at home.

Go with God

- This concluding activity is important to include to help give structure to your session. This is often very simple and doesn't require too much kit so can easily be adapted for use at home. Remember to encourage households to work together and use objects they have to hand.
- Use the prayer – remembering to keep prayers short, as it's harder for children just to listen to your voice than when you're face to face. Responsorial and prayers with actions work well because children are able to participate.
- Finish with the simple leaving song. As these have words written to well-known tunes you can teach them (and/or share the words on the screen) and then invite the group to mute themselves and sing along.

Go with God 24/7

These suggestions work well consistently without adaptation with a general principle that suggestions like contacting a friend/neighbour, etc. can also be done virtually/on the phone/via email, etc. A great way to finish the session as a 'challenge' and return to at the beginning of the next session.

Through the week

Give households the ROOTS at home resource to use during the week. It offers a wide and varied range of activities each week - e.g. things to make, bake, read, watch - helping them to weave faith into everyday life. There are five activities – but remind households that they can choose what they want to do and may only choose one! Ideas are usable across a wide range of ages - making it possible for households to do activities together. It's available as a PDF, so it's easy to distribute - email it, print it, or share it on your website. On the back of each sheet, we provide both a children's and adult's version of the relevant Bible reading - and add a glossary where necessary so they can continue to explore the Bible passage together at home.

24-30 January 2021 Children's session

Additional tips on using this week's ideas online.

Gather

- See general help and tips on page 1.
- *Draw a map of the week* – this could still work although as activities are so limited consider using 'Yes' and 'No' on magazine page 20 or *Gather* section online.

Share the Word

- See general help and tips on pages 1-2.
- *Freeze-frame the story* – ask households to do this together as different characters or different sections of the story.

Explore and respond

- See general help and tips on page 2.
- *Quick response game* could be played in households if there are two or three people.
- *Make an invitation* – simplify this as needed for what people have available at home.
- *Fish prayers* – simplify this as needed for what people have available at home. This goes together with *Talk together and talk to God*.

Go with God

- See general help and tips on page 2.
- Ask the children to place the fish they made for *Fish prayers* somewhere special as their response.

Go with God 24/7

A great way to finish the session as a 'challenge' and return to at the beginning of the next session.

Through the week

Give households the *ROOTS at home* resource to use during the week.

- Find it on the *Week by week* page online, in *Faith 24/7*