

LESSONS FOR POST-COVID-19 CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

2 WEEKS | SUITABLE FOR CHILDREN BETWEEN 5-14 YEARS

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PURPOSE:

To give children space for the gift of reflection. Some children may be finding it difficult to assimilate back into school, others are excited to see their friends again. Some have enjoyed being at home during lockdown, others will have found life very difficult through this time. We have all been in the same storm but we have been riding in very different boats. This counselling exercise helps children process their thoughts and develop resilience.

SOURCE:

This material is based on two different resources:

1. A free printable from *My Big Life Journal—I Am Strong Like a Tree* link here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bpgQJzR3LPg>
2. The Tree of Life Counselling Material developed by REPSSI “The Mainstreaming Psychosocial Care and Support: A manual for facilitators.” Copyright REPSSI 2007.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

LESSON ONE:

- A large piece of paper per child (at least A3) and crayons/pens/pencils/felt pens to share around.
- Your own tree of life, which you have completed as a leader, to show the children.

LESSON TWO:

- The trees from the previous week and the same drawing materials.
- Extra activities for children who finish early—see end of lesson.

Note: depending on the size of your group you may be able to do this altogether or you may need to break into smaller groups.

LESSON ONE

WELCOME:

If this is the first time the children have come together at church since lockdown, it is important to welcome them and affirm them and say how much you are happy to see them again, how much you have prayed to God for them and their families during the lockdown and how thankful you are to God that everyone has been able to come together again. If it is your custom to acknowledge birthdays, you may wish to celebrate the birthdays of everyone who had one during lockdown.

INTRODUCTION:

Today we are going to do something a bit different, which will give everyone a chance to think about our lives over the past few weeks, about what God was doing, and about what is important to us. You may want to chat about this as you go (leaders will be happy to chat with you) and you may want to chat to God. First, I would like to read a couple of verses from the Bible (or you can invite a child to read them):

Psalm 1:1-3 GNB *“Happy are those who...find joy in obeying the law of the Lord (the Bible)...they are like trees that grow beside a stream, that bear fruit at the right time and whose leaves do not dry up.”*

This sounds like the Bible is saying people who love the Bible, God’s word, are a bit like healthy beautiful trees. There are quite a few verses in the Bible about trees. A really special verse comes at the end of the Bible, when the Disciple John got a beautiful vision or picture from God about what heaven would be like. He wrote (in Revelation 22:1,2) *“The angel showed me the river of the water of life, sparkling like crystal and coming from the throne of God...On each side of the river was the tree of life, which bears fruit twelve times a year.”* It sound lovely, doesn’t it?

Who can tell me something about trees? (Allow children to share anything they want to—most children will be keen to share their knowledge) Ask the children to talk about the different parts of a tree, trunk, roots, branches, leaves, fruit and also about the forests they may grow in.

So today, we are going to think about trees as being a little bit like our lives. We are each going to draw our own tree, the roots, the ground, the trunk, the branches, the leaves, the fruit. We are going to imagine that parts of our life are the parts of the tree. For example, the roots are where we have come from. The branches are our hopes and dreams and the leaves are important people that have been or are in your life.

You will each get a chance to draw your own tree of life and if you want to, you can share your drawing with others and tell a bit of your story. Here is my tree of life (explain a little bit of your story as you show your tree). Ask if there are any questions or discussion.

Remind the children that you and other leaders will be moving around the room to chat with them about any aspects of their trees, the activity or if they just want to chat about what has happened since you last met.

Give out the papers to each child and have pens/drawing items distributed so they can easily reach and use them. For 4 and 5 year olds you will need to help them by writing in the names on the roots, ground etc. Guide the group through each of the different parts of the tree.

Ask them to begin by thinking about the roots of their trees. As they draw roots at the bottom of the page they may like to write on the roots, names of the town, city, country they come from, their family name, whakapapa, people who have taught them a lot in life, extended whanau members, God.

The next part of the tree involves drawing the ground that the roots are in. This is who the child lives with now, what they do every day, favourite song or place when they are at home, where the places are where they notice God at work.

The trunk of the tree is to represent the skills that the children have. Things they are good at, talents, things they do well, things that other people tell them they are good at doing, spiritual gifts like taking care of

others, showing kindness, helping others, some of these things they may have been doing during lockdown. You could ask them if they learnt any of these skills from someone else. This could lead to sharing special memories about other people in their lives. You can ask other children in the group if they have noticed any special skills about each other.

The branches of the tree represent hopes, prayers, dreams and wishes for the present and the future.

The leaves of the tree represent people who are important to the child. It is OK to have people who have died on the leaves. If any child becomes upset thinking about someone who has died you could ask “Did you have lovely times with this person? What was special about this person to you? Would this person like it that you remember them in these ways?” God could be drawn in the leaves also. Would God be one big leaf or lots of small ones everywhere?

Children can also add fruit to their tree. The fruit represents gifts that the child has been given. They could be acts of kindness or care or love from others. Did they receive some special care from someone during lockdown?

If you have time, once children have completed their trees, they can be invited to stick their trees onto the wall to form a forest of trees (this gives support and encouragement to one another) and to share a bit of their tree story with the rest as they do so. As you are moving round the children while they work and as you hear their stories take particular note of what they share. A very valuable part is the re-telling where you as a leader highlight some of the important positive parts of their trees.

(You may not get all of this done during the first week. Ideally leave the trees in your ministry space so that they are there for the children to continue with the following week. Promise the children that they can take them home the next week.)

LESSON TWO

WELCOME:

Welcome the children back and let them know how much you are looking forward to learning more about them from their beautiful trees. Include your normal weekly rhythms, like birthdays, at this point.

If there are children who weren't there the week before, ask some of the other children to share their tree stories and so explain what was done previously.

INTRODUCTION:

Today we are going to think about the “Storms of Life”. As we look at the beautiful forest of trees on our wall, we know that even beautiful trees have to face storms and winds. What are some of the dangers that can come to trees? Fire, flood, wind, wild animals, bulldozers, etc.

Get the children to share answers. “We have likened our lives to beautiful trees in a forest. Would we be right to say that, like trees and forests, children also face dangers and challenges in their lives?” YES. What do animals in the forest do when storms come? This helps children share their own responses to trouble (hiding, running away, protecting younger animals, etc.) When the different ways in which animals respond to storms have been adequately explored, you can say: “I wonder what children do when these problems and storms come into their lives? Are there ways they respond and things they can do?” (Many counsellors say this kind of questioning gives children an opportunity to bring forth their skills and knowledge and help them to realise they are not passive recipients of the hazards that come their way.) This may also bring forth stories of the recent COVID-19 lockdown.

As you take each tree down from the “forest of trees’ on the wall and return it to each child make sure you share something positive about them as noted on their trees as you “re-tell” their story.

If children finished their tree the week before invite them to add into their picture a representation of some of the storms/challenges that they have faced before. This could include any challenges from the weeks of lockdown or anything else they find difficult. They could also include some animals sheltering in their picture. The picture could be finished with the words “God helps me to be strong like a tree.” Remind children that we can chat to God about our hopes and dreams (the branches), our talents, every part of our tree, as well as asking Him for help in the storms.

At the end of the session, get all the children to hold their trees so they become part of the forest. Remind children that we can all support one another just like the trees do in a forest, and that God is there in between us all, always ready to hear us and help us. If children have shared some personal stories during the two weeks let everyone know that, “We only share our story. We don’t go outside the group talking about anyone else’s story but our own.” Thank everyone for their participation and finish with a prayer thanking God for each part of the trees. You could get the children to put their hand on each part of the tree as you pray. E.g. “Thank you God for the roots of our trees, our parents and grandparents, the places we were born and especially for you God, who gave us life.” etc.

If you have children from a wide age range and some who may finish the tree activity earlier than others, you could include a couple of additional activities for them to move to, leaving those who are still working on their trees to continue.

SUGGESTIONS:

1. A play dough table with green and brown play dough—they can mould their own trees.
2. A prayer tree—a dead branch in a pot or drawn on white board or cardboard where they can write or draw their own prayers to God, or tie them on to the branches with string.
3. A few children’s Bibles turned to the story of Zaccheus. “Here is a Bible story about a tree that helped someone meet Jesus. What were Zaccheus’ storms and challenges? What was Zaccheus’ hope? What fruit did Jesus give him?”
4. A quiet, reflective prayer space with soft music where children can pray or read.

Below image taken from I Am Strong Like a Tree YouTube video



