

Choosing Curriculum

Choosing curriculum can be a daunting and time-consuming task. We are frequently asked which ones are best, what we would recommend and how to make the right choice. So, we thought we would share the insights we, and like-minded others, have gleaned over the years. When it comes to deciding on how best to choose and implement curriculum we recommend pondering the following:

1. Why does this ministry exist? What's your goal or mission? The vision, values and mission of your church will influence your choice of curricula. Many churches have developed vision and mission statements that describe who they are and how they will engage with God, one another and the community. This will have a bearing on the particular resources and programmes a church will favour.
2. What do you value? A great way to find this out is to give your ministry team a chance to brainstorm all the values they have for the ministry: kids loving Jesus, faith transformation, teaching the Word of God, fun, community, creativity, relevance, parents taking the lead...etc! Write these ideas on a whiteboard then narrow them so you and the team know which ones are the top three to five. Finally, step back and discuss whether you all agree that these values are the most important. You have now developed your ministry's core values, and everyone on the team has ownership of these values. This will help inform the programme and curriculum choices you make.
3. What's your ministry's philosophy of learning? Every publisher has an underlying learning philosophy that will be present in every lesson. How do your leaders believe that kids learn best? Do they think it's appropriate to have a video-based curriculum, or is that too passive? Are they strong proponents of multiple intelligences—teaching toward how every child is built? Is a lot of teacher talk (lecture) okay, or do they want kids doing things that are much more hands-on and discovery-oriented? Are there a good variety of activities to encourage children to wonder, explore and respond to God? This discussion doesn't have to be academic; just talk about what you believe. And if you don't know, agree to learn more about this. It's critical!
4. Think about what you hope your curriculum will help you achieve. Develop a set of goals. Do you want it to: Teach children the Bible? Develop their faith in God? Encourage children to live their daily lives in the light of the gospel? Transmit to them particular traditions and practices of your denomination? Incorporate them into the worship life of the church? Support and resource parents to share faith at home?
5. Put together information on the following (thank you to Kids Friendly for this list):
 - How many children do you have and what ages are they?
 - What length of time do you have for your programme?
 - Will children stay together?
 - Will they go into small groups related to their ages?
 - How many leaders do you have? (This can influence whether you break into small groups or not).

- Are there different goals for different groups?
- How much help do the teachers need? (Some like detailed instructions while others just need a basic outline)
- Do you have consistent leaders for at least a term at a time or a rotation of leaders/helpers over shorter periods?
- What is the budget for resources and staff/leaders?
- What spaces and rooms can be used?

Once you have gathered this information and have made decisions about mission, values, goals and learning philosophy you are ready to start analysing curricula. A great place to start is by looking at the Scope and Sequence. Some curricula have a chronological walk through the Bible; some are focused on the point (or the topic). Use your values, goals and learning philosophy as the filters for deciding whether or not this curriculum will deliver that which you are seeking to grow in the lives of your children.

At this point in the process it's a good idea to ask other leaders what they are using and why. Make use of your regional coaches and local cluster group if you have one in your area.

And don't forget to PRAY! This needs to be the central focus all the way through this process. Ask the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your discussion, questions and decisions.

We are here to help as you work through this process so feel free to contact us for further assistance and guidance. See the contact details on the inside cover.