



Your Children's Facilities, part 2 of 2—

Are Kids Attracted or Distracted?

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Natural Light

Many churches are creating areas of natural light in their children's facilities because natural light has a calming effect on children. Young children can become irritated and unhappy when there is inadequate natural light.

Children's classes are often in the church basement. To the visiting child and his/her parents, this may communicate a message—our children are not valued.

Our elementary-aged children are on our basement level. Fortunately, we have a patio on one side that opens to the light. We have converted the patio into a small amphitheater for our "Construction Zone" (our version of children's church). Currently some of our Sunday School classrooms have large windows that look out into the amphitheater. We want to open up the entire level by taking down the walls and exposing all of the classrooms to the light. This would make natural light available to every area. We would then use moveable partitions to divide the space into classrooms.

Color

I recently visited one of our boys in the hospital. Walking the halls, I realized how unfriendly and uninviting this was to a child. Then I entered the pediatric ward. It was as though I had walked right into a world of imagination. The walls were painted with fun,

colorful scenes from storybooks. The cold, sterile environment had suddenly become warm and inviting.

In some churches, children are placed in rooms lined with stacks of chairs, tables, or someone's junk. No wonder children are not attracted to these rooms. I have yet to walk into a sanctuary lined with chairs or with old sheets of plywood leaning up against the walls.

Children's space needs to be filled with color, not junk. Even in a small church, walls can be painted with colorful murals of Bible scenes. With a little paint, a blank wall can be transformed into a pathway to adventure.

Each of our early childhood rooms has painted on its walls a bright, colorful mural depicting a Bible theme. Our outside "Construction Zone" amphitheater is painted bright blue with a speckling of other bright colors. The bleachers are bright orange, yellow, green, and mustard. The other "construction zone" items that hang from the walls are painted in bright pinks, purples, and greens. The physical environment is compelling to the children. We believe this is partly responsible for the dramatic increase in children bringing their friends to church.

Kid-Friendly Furniture and Equipment

When I was a new children's

ministries director, I held meetings in the children's classrooms and the teachers sat in the preschoolers' chairs. One day a teacher brought in her own chair. I realized I had inadvertently placed this teacher in an awkward position. She had been distracted for entire meetings by her discomfort. She finally decided to bring her own chair. I was somewhat embarrassed, but discovered an important principle: People are more comfortable in furniture that is suited to their size.

Children need furniture and equipment that encourages independence as well as comfort. We recently purchased very small tables and chairs for our 1-year-old classes. The toddlers freely move on and off the chairs and around the tables. They are delighted at their ability to move independently of the adults.

Characters and Costumes

Children are drawn to bigger-than-life characters. These characters embody a child's imaginative power. At our church we have several different characters the children have come to love. One is our big "pussy cat" of a lion named Clayton—our theme character. Between services he mingles with the children and adults, shaking hands and nodding enthusiastically.

Another favorite character is

Scriptureman—a Superman look-a-like. He uses Scripture to show that his true strength lies in knowing and serving God.

You can enhance your environment by having your staff dress in costumes that fit your theme. (Toddlers and young preschoolers are more receptive to characters and costumes from a distance.) When a child approaches the

classroom, his or her first impression is of a room filled with the possibility of fantasy and adventure.

Conclusion

Many children's workers face challenging space issues. They must use their creativity to transform seemingly unusable space

into rooms children will enjoy visiting.

A quality children's environment begins with adults who trust and value each other. Once that relationship is nurtured, the creative juices can begin to flow and then...watch the kids—children's ministries never looked this good.

Questions For Further Study—

1. Evaluate the lighting situation in your children's church. What improvements might be needed?
2. How might you decorate your current facilities to make them more child friendly?
3. Name three things that can be changed in your children's ministry facilities to make them more effective.