



Children in the Service

As we prepare to start Catalyst Church, I believe that our policies, as related to children, are the most important policies we are implementing. I know there will be people who will leave our church and people that will connect to God through our church as a direct result of our Children in the Service Policy. I wanted to take a moment to address our official stance on this, and answer some questions that may arise.

We do not allow children between the ages of six months and fifth grade in the adult worship service. This is our regular, normal, always-in-effect policy. Because we care about people, we want them to participate in a service without any distractions. Because we care about children, we want them to learn about Jesus in an appropriate environment. There are three primary reasons why we made the decision to implement this policy.

Content. Our main service is designed for adults. We talk about what the Bible has to say about sex, parenting, and finances. Most children are not ready to discuss these topics the way we're going to talk about them. The music and the message are not always appropriate for children. It does not do children any good to be forced to sit through a message on tithing or justification – they cannot understand what is being discussed. In most circumstances, it actually does more harm than good. You would not want a 5th grader to sit through a college algebra class (and then get upset with them for not sitting still).

I remember sitting in church as a young child and being bored and confused, doodling on the bulletins and sticking gum under the pews. I literally hated going to "big church" and the only praying I did was that the service would end soon. I have met people who hate church now because they were forced to "sit still" when they were children. On the other hand, I can still remember some of the important lessons I learned in Sunday School, at Vacation Bible School and other kid-friendly environments. We don't want to do anything that would promote to children the idea that God is boring, church is irrelevant, or that Jesus is not for them.

CatalystKIDS, on the other hand, is an environment that is designed for children. The Bible stories, crafts, songs, themes, decorations, etc. are all done with children in mind. The content of those environments is age-appropriate.

Consider this comment I recently read on a website discussion board. A parent posted, "In our church, my two-year-old and my six-year-old attend the main service for approximately 10 minutes before the minister announces that it's time for the kids to go to their nursery and/or Sunday school classes. Within that space of time, I've had to stop them from crawling over the

pews, running down the aisles, taking out the song books and donation envelopes and drawing all over them, playing noisily with a toy car or stuffed animal, etc. I really try to restrain them...but I've just learned to endure it. It's getting a little bit better and it's important to me that they be exposed to a regular spiritual practice so we'll keep going with them but it really is a headache sometimes."

Exposing them to regular spiritual practices and forcing them to endure something that was not designed for them is not going to help their spiritual development. I don't want parents to have to arm themselves with sippy cups and Cheerios in order to keep their children still in church. In fact, Dr. James Dobson says that it's not a reasonable expectation and may do more harm than good.

Distractions. As a parent, if your child is in the adult service, you will have to devote a considerable amount of attention to helping them behave appropriately. Anytime I am in public with any of my children, I have to devote at least some of my focus to helping them behave properly. We have worked hard to create a service that will relate to your life and communicate a Biblical principle. We want you to be able to focus on hearing from God. We want people who are far from God to be able to consider the message.

As your child's parent, it may not bother you to have them fidget in their seats or cry, but I can guarantee you that it bothers those sitting around you. Because what we're doing is so important, we want everyone in this room to be able to focus on the message and participate in worship. As the pastor, it's hard for me to concentrate on the message when I am trying to tune out a crying child. The focus of 1 Corinthians 14 is maintaining a sense of order in a public worship service. While we obviously don't want any parent to get upset and leave the church over this, we don't want the desires of a few to outweigh the needs of many.

I do not want anyone to get angry and leave the church, but I do want you to respect the other people in the room. This is a spiritual decision – we want people to be able to worship freely and focus on hearing from God.

Appropriate Environments. We never want to think of children as distractions, and it's not their fault if they act out in an environment that was not designed for them. We have an excellent environment for children. We have staff and volunteer teams who are capable of providing leadership and who are passionate about leading children to Jesus.

In addition to being a pastor, I am also a parent. I can say that there is no other place that I want my children on Sunday morning than in their age-appropriate environment at CatalystKIDS. We are proud of the environment that we are working hard to create for children. They will learn about Jesus through stories, songs, games and crafts. Some of these things, they will remember for life. I want everyone I know to speak Biblical truth into the life of my child. We have Godly, caring adults who invest in children every week. We complete a background check on every volunteer and provide training for everybody that works with children. We believe that teaching them in ways that they can understand is keeping with their spirit of Jesus and the importance he placed on children.

As a church, we will do everything we can to help guests, new parents, and everyone else be comfortable with what happens on Sunday morning. Greeters and ushers will introduce you to the CatalystKIDS volunteers, who will be glad to give you a tour. You can obtain a guest badge and observe your child's class, or stay with them for the entire time. And you're welcome to serve as a volunteer in any of the CatalystKIDS environments. We will do whatever it takes to help you feel comfortable.

I understand there are some that strongly believe that Sunday morning worship should be for the whole family, and I certainly respect your opinions. But there are 168 hours in the week, and there are plenty of opportunities to worship together as a family. And while we don't want anyone to leave our church over this, we recognize that there are several other churches around Central Connecticut where worship as a family might be encouraged.

Our heart is to reach everyone in Middletown with the message of Jesus. We want to reach adults. We want to reach children. We want to reach teenagers. We want to reach college students. We want to offer adults a creative, relevant, engaging and appropriate service on Sunday mornings. And through CatalystKIDS, we want to offer that same type of experience.

If you are a part of Catalyst Church, make sure people you invite are aware of this policy. Help them understand the heart behind the rule. And if you've read all this way, thanks!

Frequently Asked Questions

1. **Doesn't this take a decision away from parents?** In a way, we recognize that it does. But we're asking parents to lay down their personal preferences for one hour a week for the benefit of everyone in the room. Remember, a corporate worship service is different from a private worship experience or even a family worship experience. There will be a day when hundreds of people will gather together to worship at Catalyst Church. Frankly, the effectiveness of a worship service is not a parent decision; it's something that the leadership of Catalyst Church takes seriously.
2. **What if my child is really mature?** It's obvious that you're doing a great job of parenting. However, we're not going to make exceptions because it's not fair to our volunteer teams to make judgment calls on who is capable and who is not. We apply this rule to staff children and children of volunteers. Perhaps your child has been gifted with unique perspective or spiritual maturity. If that's the case, then he or she needs to be in an environment where they can use those gifts to lead other children. We believe that children can be leaders. Maybe they need to participate in a CatalystKIDS environment, not for what they will simply get out of the lesson, but for what they can add to the discussion.
3. **What if I'm uncomfortable with the kid's ministry environment?** We understand that new environments can be difficult. That's why we will do everything we can to help parents feel comfortable. We'll give tours, guest badges and make introductions. You're always welcome to stay with your child until you do feel comfortable. We take

great care in selecting leaders – performing background checks on every volunteer who works with children and always keeping two adults in every environment. Part of being a mature parent is learning to trust qualified, experienced people with your child.

4. **What about guests?** We design our entire Sunday morning experience with guests in mind. We think guests want to observe the service and listen to the message without the distractions of crying children or feeling a child kick the back of their seat. In fact, guests are one of the driving factors behind this policy.
5. **Isn't this unbiblical?** We know that Jesus had a special place in his heart for children. In a way, we believe that this policy speaks directly to that. We work hard and invest many resources in creating an environment where children can meet Jesus. We believe we are honoring the heart of God by leading children from where they are to where God wants them to be. We believe it actually does a disservice to children by expecting them to participate in something that was clearly designed for adults. At the same time, this policy is not an issue of right or wrong. It's not right or wrong to have a family service – it's a choice that we're making based on our freedom in Christ and who we are trying to reach.

