

# How Can We Nicely Kick Kids Out of Church?

I [shared](#) a few weeks ago about a card a church had given out inviting parents who brought their kids to “enjoy the remainder of the service” in the lobby so others could “engage with the sermon.”

Another children’s ministry group I am a part of recently had a similar conversation regarding if a church is large and streaming online, what card they should hand out to parents if kids are loud in the main service.

Apparently, this is a new thing? I had not heard of this practice of handing cards to parents to invite them to leave the service until recently, but twice in one month made me decide to do some digging.

What I found was disheartening:

- I found stories of parents being told that children younger than seventh grade were not “allowed” in the [main auditorium](#).
- I found articles by leading people in the children’s ministry world listing the reasons why children should not be in the [corporate worship service](#).
- I found columns written by pastors describing why their church chooses not to welcome or even allow children to [congregational worship times](#).

I could go on, but I’m sure you get the idea.

I’d love to say that this information was new to me, but it’s not. But, like all of us, I get into my little bubble, my echo chamber, and I wanted to think that since I first was made aware of these types of policies and actions, that things had changed.

I wanted to believe that over the past decade – as more and more [research](#) has emerged about the absolute importance of intergenerational relationships and

shared space for prayer and worship and creating a sense of belonging for all generations to the larger church body - that churches would have examined these practices and worked to transition out of them.

I wanted to think that the [examples of Scripture](#), of Jesus welcoming children and rebuking the disciples for turning them away, of Paul addressing children in letters that would be read in the general assembly, of all the Old Testament times of gathering where all of Israel was present had been prayerfully considered and embraced by churches in the U.S.

And I had hoped that as a community of faith, we would have recognized that the very continuation of our faith is dependent on [generational discipleship](#), not a curriculum or a program, but one generation passing on their faith to another generation through times of mentoring, prayer and communal worship.

Instead, I found this question being asked, "How can we nicely invite the children to leave?"

What is happening? Actively working to bar children from being in the congregational assembly with their parents and their church seems unbelievably counterintuitive to a faith that is literally passed down from generation to generation.

"But we have an amazing children's program," someone might respond. Great, that's wonderful. Children need times of age-specific ministry and teaching that is appropriate to their level of understanding.

But they also need meaningful time with their church, hearing the words of the sermon, watching the adults worship God, participating in the acts of worship and being present amid the assembly. One does not negate the other. To sacrifice one for the other is not an answer; it's just a new problem.

"But kids are a distraction," another person might assert.

First, that saying needs correction. Kids are [not a distraction](#); they can sometimes

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be distracting. As Dr. John Trainer, a family physician in Florida, has said, “Children are not a distraction from more important work. They are the most important work.”

And so, what if there is a distraction during the service? That’s part of life. Distractions come in many shapes and forms and not all of them are children. Are we going to remove anyone and everything that causes a distraction? Of course not, but we will ask the children to leave.

“But this is the way we’ve always done it,” still others might protest. No, it’s not.

This idea of removing children from the corporate worship service and splitting everyone up in the church by their age or life experience is not the way we’ve always done it.

In fact, it’s relatively new in the life of the church (think 50 to 70 years old). For generations and generations, [faith was a shared experience of all ages](#).

“But it works for our church,” someone might say. OK, I get that. It is the [easiest way for a church](#) to operate. Curriculum is made for age-specific ministries. Services are geared toward adults between 25 to 65 years old. It’s all set up in our systems and cultures to “work” this way.

But here’s the thing: What works in our “church” may not be what works for the church.

The kingdom of heaven, according to Jesus, belongs to “ones like these,” the children. In fact, Jesus says, “Truly, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3).

There simply has to be more. There has to be a place for the little ones to come. And not “come” to a place where nearly everyone looks like them, but come to a place where they are part of something bigger and they can belong to a faith community.

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If there isn't room for them in our little corner of the church, there will be room for them somewhere else. They will find somewhere to belong.

*Editor's note: A [longer version](#) of this article first appeared on Embree's [website](#), Refocus Ministry. It is used with permission.*