



# How to ENGAGE ACTIVE KIDS in Sunday School

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA

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How can we engage active kids in learning during Sunday School? This is a question that I often get asked as the Education Program Coordinator for The Presbyterian Church in Canada. The question usually comes from a Sunday School teacher who has children in his or her class who are restless and not able to sit through the lessons they have planned.

While our temptation might be to label a child's inability to engage in a lesson as a behavioural issue, we must also consider that the lesson likely wasn't created with active, hands-on learners in mind. Our goal as Christian Educators is to help children encounter Jesus, learn about the life of faith and grow as young disciples. There are fun and interactive ways to do this that will capture the attention and imagination of active children.

**MODIFY LESSON PLANS:** Many children's ministry curricula offer suggested activities to accompany the weekly lessons; however, you may find that the activities are primarily craft- or worksheet-based. Do not be afraid to modify the lesson plan to include activities that are suited to the children in your Sunday School. All parts of the lesson can be modified to be interactive: add dance moves to the songs you sing, have the kids act out the Bible story rather than read it, invite the kids to shout the important words as you read scripture, go on a Bible "adventure" and move around the classroom looking for clues about the story. Essentially, your goal is to get the kids moving and having a hands-on experience as they learn. Your classroom will be noisier and more chaotic than usual, but you'll capture the attention of the kids who learn best by doing.

**INCORPORATE MESSY CHURCH ACTIVITIES:** Messy Church is a form of church that usually gathers once-a-month and it is geared towards families. It uses hands-on activities to explore Bible stories and creative forms of storytelling, prayer, songs and games to teach people about faith and worship. Everything that happens at Messy Church is experiential and fun. The Messy Church movement has many excellent resources on crafts, games, science-based activities, sports, cooking ideas and more that connects scripture with hands-on experience. While these activities were created for Messy Churches, they can easily be adapted for use in Sunday School. Do a Google search for "Messy Church activities" or visit our website for more information: [presbyterian.ca/messy-church](http://presbyterian.ca/messy-church).

**BORROW IDEAS FROM THE WORKSHOP ROTATION MODEL:** The workshop rotation model is a way of organizing Sunday School that engages kids in Bible stories with interactive workshops. It is designed to allow kids to use different learning styles by having them rotate through a workshop each week and engage creatively with a Bible story through art, games, cooking, drama, digital media, technology, music, science and video. Like Messy Church, this is a comprehensive program, but you do not have to transform your whole Sunday School into a workshop rotation Sunday School to use many of its elements. There are specific workshop rotation model curricula available, but there is also an online community of Sunday School teachers using this model who share their resources for free or for a small subscription fee: [rotation.org](http://rotation.org).

**USE LEGO:** One of the best ways to keep the attention of kids who like to build things is to incorporate LEGO into Sunday School. To start, you do not need to create a full lesson based on LEGO—although you certainly can! Why not just choose a LEGO-based activity to accompany your lesson plan? A good place to find Christian LEGO activities is Emily Slichter Given’s *Building Faith Brick by Brick*; there are two volumes of this book, which collectively contain 86 stories and lesson plans. The books are affordable (approx. \$25) and easily available through major retailers. Another resource that is useful is Brendan Powell Smith’s *The Brick Bible for Kids*, which tells the stories of the Bible using photographs of LEGO scenes. There are also several free resources for teaching scripture using LEGO that you can access online through a simple Google search.

**MAKE VIDEOS:** Making videos in Sunday School has become easier now that many people have phones with video recording capabilities. If you have kids who are interested in media, having them make videos based on the scripture they are studying is a great idea. Encourage the kids to do it all themselves: study the text, come up with a script, shoot the video, add music and effects, and edit it. It is ok if this is a project that lasts for a few weeks—it might get the kids thinking about the scripture and planning their video between Sundays! After it is done, find a way to share it with the congregation during service or on a special movie night.

**INCORPORATE SPORTS OR ACTIVE GAMES:** Even if you, as a children’s ministry leader, do not think of yourself as “sporty,” there are many ways to incorporate sports and games into Sunday School. The website “Ready, Set, Go” is a library of free user-generated sports and play resources that, while they may need to be adapted to suit a Presbyterian context, contain many great ideas to engage active learners: [readyssetgo.ec/en](http://readyssetgo.ec/en). If you have a lot of kids interested in sports in your congregation or neighbourhood, consider inviting the adults in your congregation with gifts in that area to come lead that part of your children’s ministry program or consider starting a sports evening or camp for kids outside of Sunday mornings.

**ENCOURAGE ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN WORSHIP:** There is more and more research coming out about how important it is for children to be with the whole community of faith during worship. Since most Presbyterian churches invite children to go to Sunday School during worship, consider having occasional intergenerational Sundays. For some parents and Sunday School teachers who care for active children, intergenerational worship services can seem daunting. Giving children specific roles—“special jobs”—during worship is a great way to involve active kids. Could they be an apprentice reader to one of your regular lay readers? Can some kids join the choir for this special Sunday? The Christian Reformed Church has an excellent Intergenerational Ministry toolkit that contains ideas for making many different aspects of church life intergenerational: [crcna.org/FaithFormation/Intergenerational-church-toolkit](http://crcna.org/FaithFormation/Intergenerational-church-toolkit)

## GENERAL TIPS FOR EMBRACING ACTIVE KIDS IN SUNDAY SCHOOL

- **Let them move around.** Expecting kids to sit quietly like they have to all week at school is not fun for active kids. Switch what you are doing often enough so sitting activities are interspersed with moving around activities
- **Let them be loud.** Create moments in Sunday School where kids can shout, sing and laugh loudly.
- **Let them play.** Find or invent games to go along with your Bible message. Plan for fun and messy crafts that kids will enjoy. Incorporate active or sports-type games alongside traditional storytelling.

The ideas in this resource have been gathered from experienced Presbyterian Church Educators. If you have any questions or further suggestions, I would love to hear from you. Please contact me, Emily Hill, at [canadianministries@presbyterian.ca](mailto:canadianministries@presbyterian.ca) or 1-800-619-7301 or 416-441-1111, ext. 271.