

# ACCOMPANYING FAITH

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**CORE VALUES FOR MINISTRIES SERVING CHILDREN**  
in the Seventh-day Adventist Church

## IMPRESSUM

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## INTRODUCTION

GOD HAS PUT A LOT OF POTENTIAL INTO EVERY HUMAN BEING — REGARDLESS OF THEIR AGE, CULTURAL BACKGROUND, GENDER OR CHURCH AFFILIATION. OUR CORE VALUES FOR WORKING WITH CHILDREN ARE BASED ON THIS CONVICTION.

THESE CORE VALUES ENCOURAGE LOCAL CHURCHES TO LOOK FOR WAYS AND MEANS OF PERCEIVING, STIMULATING AND FOSTERING EVERYONE'S POTENTIAL MORE CONSCIOUSLY. THAT WAY, WE CAN LEARN FROM ONE ANOTHER, JOINTLY GROW, AND ACCOMPANY CHILDREN ON THEIR JOURNEY OF FAITH.

WE WOULD LOVE FOR ALL LOCAL CHURCHES TO STUDY THE CONTENTS OF THIS PUBLICATION AND TO USE THEM AS A BASIS FOR THEIR MINISTRY EFFORTS, SO THAT THESE CORE VALUES INCREASINGLY BECOME THE SPIRITUAL HOME GOD DESIRES FOR HIS CHILDREN AND OUR SOCIETY AS A WHOLE.

IT IS OUR RECOMMENDATION TO DISCUSS THESE CORE VALUES WITH THOSE WORKING IN THE LOCAL CHURCH AS WELL AS ITS LEADERSHIP.

FOR METHODOLOGICAL SUGGESTIONS TURN TO PAGE 20.





①

# SEEING CHILDREN WITH GOD'S EYES



# JESUS TREATS CHILDREN AS EQUALS

## GOD'S PERSPECTIVE

**Each child is created by God. They are unique and valuable (Psalm 8:2-5, 139:13-16).**

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Children are a gift from God. Every human being is precious in His eyes, from the very start. God has conceived every human being – even every small child – in His mind. He loves and wants everyone.

**Every child has an innate longing for God (Romans 1:19).**

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Each child is created in God's image and born with a connection to Him. Therefore they can perceive God. Children recognize God from very early on in life in a way which can be called "faith" in the broadest sense of the term. Every human being – and thus every child – is capable of a basic trust in the Creator, independent of their emotional, spiritual or cognitive development and external influences. However, children's concepts of God are diverse. Their faith is initially influenced and shaped by their

environment, for example their family or church. The environment influences the children's relationship with God, as well as their concrete ideas of God and His nature. These ideas are not fixed, but change in the course of a child's development. We want to foster the faith of all children, teenagers and young adults entrusted to us in family and church settings, and accompany them on their journey with God and their personal beliefs.

**Jesus says with regard to children, "Let the little children come to me. Don't keep them away. God's kingdom belongs to people like them." (Mark 10:13-16) He also awards them partaking in the kingdom of God and blesses them (Matthew 19:14).**

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From a historical perspective, Jesus' encounters with children are extraordinary. When Jesus meets children, He makes it clear that they are not excluded from the kingdom of God. They can come to Him and be near Him. In that very moment, there is nothing more important to Him than to bless the children.

**Children are important to Jesus. He involves them in His actions (John 6:9), wants them to be with Him and lets them celebrate Him as Messiah (Matthew 21:12-17).**

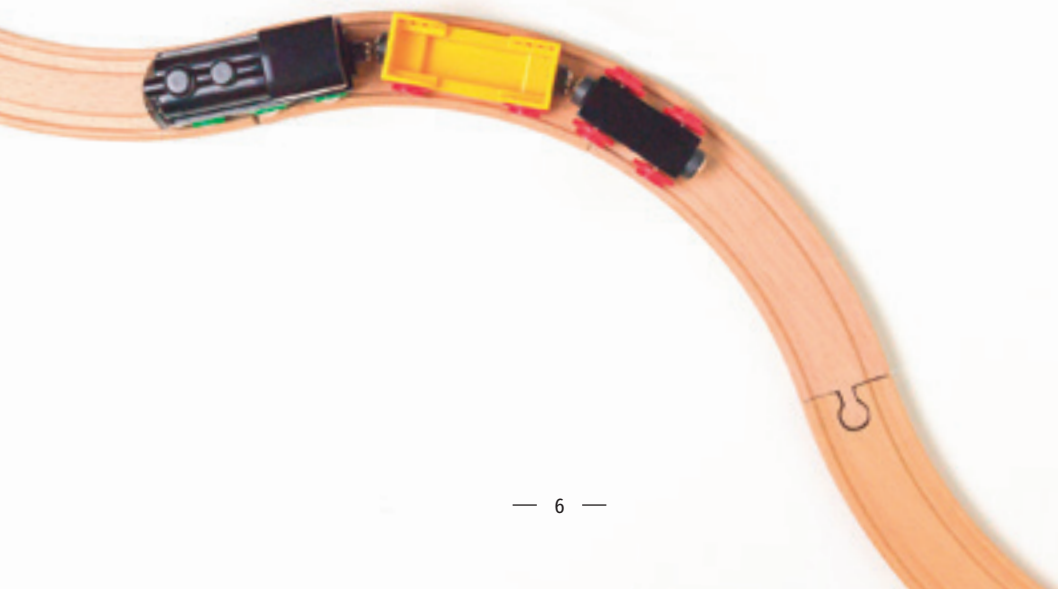
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Jesus serves children by healing them, speaking with them and blessing them. A little boy with five loaves of bread and two fish becomes part of feeding the multitude. And as the theologians in the Temple in Jerusalem distance themselves from Jesus, children recognize Jesus as the Messiah and thus fulfil an Old Testament prophecy. These events show that Jesus treats children as equals.

**Jesus presents children as role models for adults. "Anyone who will not receive God's kingdom like a little child will never enter it." (Mark 10:15) This means that adults can learn from and be challenged by a child's faith.**

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We, the church, need children. We don't need them for the sake of rejuvenation and diversity, but to learn from them. Without children, we would be missing a key aspect because children have a different way of accepting the kingdom of God, compared to adults. From their perspective, God's kingdom is all about approaching, opening up, asking, accepting, receiving gifts, and trusting. The exemplary thing about the faith of a child is that, on their own, children would never come up with the idea that one can or must earn the closeness and love of God. They hear about Jesus, what He has to give and want to have it – and to have it all.





**Jesus is looking for every single child. Everyone can be found by Him. He is the Redeemer, for children as well.**

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The understanding of sin as a state of separation from God should be viewed in the context of the child's individual development. For them, "sin" is first and foremost something very specific, namely a single act. Children up to an age of about ten to twelve years understand sin as doing something evil to a fellow human being and thus violating a law or general norms. To right this wrong, there must be a talk with people and/or God (through prayer), as well as rep-

arations. Only from puberty on can children understand that sin means a condition in conjunction with God, namely that sin puts a distance in the relationship with God. Only from puberty on can they understand that Jesus has restored the relationship because of His death on the cross. ("Jesus died for you.") Naturally, we do not exclude the topics of sin and forgiveness when we tell biblical stories. The focus, however, should always be on experiencing an acting God because that way the children's concept of God can expand (God is gracious, God is holy, etc.). How a child reacts to that will vary according to their development. A child

may like to say, "Jesus is my friend", or when they are older, "Jesus is my Lord. I follow Jesus." Children also encounter God personally through prayer, in nature or through interactions with other people.

**At every stage of life, a child can respond to God's offer of friendship in a way that corresponds to their individual development. Therefore, we perceive children as full-fledged believers and part of the church.**

Church workers should always listen carefully to how children talk about God and their faith, and appreciate it when children speak about it. It is important not to judge ideas that differ from one's own. The child's concept of God can be confirmed, questioned, corrected and complemented through the encounters with biblical texts and stories. At the outset of primary school, a child's concept of God and their relationship with God are not set in stone yet. If children receive sufficient incentives during this time, their faith can develop continuously. Over time, children will repeatedly respond to God's invitation and voice their responses in very different ways. What was expressed intuitively at the beginning of primary school will be articulated more and more deliber-

ately over the course of time. This process is, however, a very individual matter.

**The members of a local church have a joint responsibility to accompany all children (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).**

In Old Testament times and Judaism, children were part of the covenant people. They were involved in the rites and traditions of Israel. All of Israel, not just the parents, were commissioned by God to be role models and mediators of the faith. Today, too, everyone in the church – and above all those involved in the work with children – have a special commission. All members of the local churches are encouraged and supported to take advantage of internal and external training opportunities, in order to fulfil this commission in the best way possible.

**Parent's faith is key (Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 2 Timothy 1:5, 3:14-15).**

The faith of children is first and foremost influenced and shaped by their environment. Therefore, there should be contact people within the church for the whole family. Also, any ministry involving children should always seek to establish close contact with parents. If children experience a loving parental home and caregivers who put their faith into actions in everyday life, they grow into this parental relationship with God at

<sup>1</sup> See i.a. James W. Fowler, Lawrence Kohlberg und Anna-Katharina Szagun.





an early age. In the eyes of their children, mothers and fathers have the key responsibility as role models of faith when it comes to their words and actions. The development of faith is especially influenced by every act of joint conversation, learning and living everyday life. Faith can mature when

the children's concepts of God are a match to their experiences and emotions in everyday life. Positive experiences and emotions strengthen self-confidence, whereas negative ones cause self-doubt. All of these experiences eventually influence the attitude towards faith.

2

# TAKING CHILDREN INTO THE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

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AS CHRISTIANS, WE ARE CONVINCED THAT GOD REVEALS AND EXPLAINS HIMSELF IN HIS WORD. THAT'S WHY WE BRING GOD CLOSER TO CHILDREN BY ENGAGING THEM WITH BIBLICAL STORIES AND QUESTIONS. WE INTRODUCE THEM TO THE GOD WHO REVEALED HIMSELF IN CHRIST AND RECONCILED US WITH HIMSELF. THAT'S HOW WE WANT TO ACCOMPANY FAITH AND FOSTER SPIRITUAL GROWTH.

#### IT'S OUR COMMISSION ...

**... to take children into the relationship with God – especially in the family context. It is the task of the church to encourage this process in the families.**

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Today, it is no longer a matter of course that faith is shared or passed down within the family. Rituals and rhymes, stories and songs help children to get to know God, especially at a younger age. The church also needs to provide spaces in which children and their parents can pray, sing and read the Bible together. Research shows that the experience of joint worship as well as the experience of joy and reverence through song, play, prayer and preaching have a positive effect on spiritual everyday life. Thus, a worship ser-

vice may provide patterns or set an example for the home life. In this regard, we as a church are called to be as imaginative and specific as possible.

**...to provide children and their families with a home in the church.**

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Children are the church. They belong there, as do their families. Children are not the “future of the church”, children are the church today. The point is not so much to do something “for” families and children, but to do something together with them. What do the families need who come to us or whom we would like to invite? We can ask them and let them participate. And when we talk about families, we really do mean all types of fam-

ilies: single-parent families, patchwork families, and also families who are the verge of breaking up or who have had to deal with trauma.

**... to enable children to have experiences which strengthen and foster their faith. We do that by meeting the children's questions, opinions and doubts at eye level. The aim of this approach is: Children come to make their own decisions and develop a reflected faith of their own.**

Those teaching children do not just teach, but they also meet the children at eye level. Thus, they allow the children to encounter the Word of God on their own terms and to be part of this encounter. In this way children and staff stand together before God and His Word.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Our children's ministry materials show you what this looks like in practical terms: "Guck mal! – Kleine Kinder entdecken Gottes Welt" ["Look! – Small children discover God's world"] (age 2-4), "ERzählt – meine Bibelgeschichten" ["Tell me – my Bible stories"] (age 5-7), "Schatzkiste – Biblische Schätze entdecken" ["Treasure Chest – Discovering Bible treasures"] (age 8-11), "4you" Bible-study lessons to use for personal devotional times as well as teen ministry on Sabbath (age 12-15), "echtzeit – Impulse für authentisches Christsein" ["Be real – Ideas for authentic Christian lifestyle"] (suggestions for the Bible group discussions on Sabbath (age 16-19) and "relimaXx Impulse für dein Leben" ["relimaXx. Input for your life"] (religious education, age 12-15). The didactics of our material focus a lot on children and staff jointly discovering the Word of God. Further information can be found on [www.sta-rpi.net](http://www.sta-rpi.net).



Any adult taking this seriously, will try very hard not to emphasize their advance in knowledge. Rather they provide space for the children to discover things on their own terms. For example, this means we do not construe the meaning of biblical stories. Instead we provide age-appropriate information the children can use to understand the story on their own. These can for instance be historical and cultural backgrounds. The objective is not for children to "come to the right conclusion" but for them to make their own discoveries, and to treat those as equally important. Children are explicitly welcome to ask away, and we will do our best to provide answers. On the basis of their own faith journey and life experiences, adults provide



orientation and open up worlds of possibilities for children. Children will take those possibilities and do their own experiments with them. Dealing with children always challenges adult believers to explain faith in as simple terms as possible.

**... to accompany children in a way that their trust-filled faith can effect all of their relationships: the connection to God, the children's relationship to themselves and to other people in the context of their world.**

Faith is not just a matter of acceptance, conviction and spiritual reality. Faith is above all expressed in relationships with God and with people. Anyone working with children and any congregation exemplifies this in a tangible way. By doing so, we provide a space for children, in which their behavior and community spirit can reflect that we are all loved by God and live in the basis of His forgiveness; that we treat each other with care and think positively about. Churches in the “ministry of reconciliation” are aware that the invitation to be reconciled with God is only credible if they live this message aloud. It is all about establishing a relationship with God. Children who have been able to practice this can venture into their future with the solid foundation of a positive self-image and a strong sense of self-esteem. Anyone experiencing God as a reliable counterpart during their childhood and years, and some-

one they could have personal conversations with, is equipped with orientation and core values for all areas of their lives.

**... to give children access to the Bible and its message through our preaching. We want to introduce the living God of the Bible to the children and create references to everyday life. In this way, we are also implementing Jesus' commission with the next generation in mind (Matthew 28:19-20).**

Faith in Christ can only come into existence if Christian values and biblical principles are taught in relevant, authentic and creative manners and if Jesus is kept at the center of it all. Dealing with the stories of the Bible and the great history of God with His people is an incentive for children which forms and shapes their concept of God – and more. It may be that a certain concept of God rubs children the wrong way. Then they are invited and encouraged to take a stand. Those who approach God in this way and observe and experience other believers can grow a personal faith.



3

# CHILDREN ARE WELCOME

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WE WANT TO COME BEFORE GOD BECAUSE WITH HIM WE CAN BE GENUINE AND AUTHENTIC. HE ACCEPTS US THE WAY WE ARE. HE SHOWS US THE WAY, OPENS UP NEW PERSPECTIVES AND AWAKENS ENTHUSIASM FOR LIFE. WE WANT TO EXPERIENCE RELATIONSHIPS WITH EACH OTHER BECAUSE WE NEED ONE ANOTHER, LEARN FROM EACH OTHER AND WANT TO CELEBRATE LIFE TOGETHER. GOD IS LOVE. FATHER, SON AND SPIRIT ARE RELATIONAL BEINGS — AND HIS CHURCH SHOULD BE A MIRROR IMAGE. BUILDING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS IS ONE OF ITS MOST IMPORTANT AND MOST PRESSING TASKS. THIS MEANS THAT CHILDREN SHOULD GET THE OPPORTUNITY TO EXPRESS THEIR FAITH IN WORDS AND DEEDS WITHIN THE CHURCH.

## IMPLEMENTATION

**For children and families, the church is a place of encounters and joint activities, where they feel comfortable, feel like they belong and are safe. Everyone has their *raison d'être*, their place and task.**

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Besides age-appropriate offers, e.g. for younger and older children in children's groups or projects, we should always keep in mind that children view themselves identity-wise as part of their own family. Therefore, the whole family should have an opportunity to engage with others, if possible. Families are, of course, very busy and often experience stress in their daily lives. In order to help them, it should always be considered to what

extent each family member can make a contribution. An attentive church will for example strive to schedule family-friendly activities.

**Our answer to a highly individualized secular world is the creation of family-style community places of care for all generations and people from all walks of life (e.g. singles, patchwork families, single-parent families etc.) within our churches.**

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Apart from Christian churches, there are very few places nowadays where people of all generations can meet and learn from one another. Even people who, for example, have no children or grandchildren of their

own, can pass on something lasting (their knowledge, devotion, values, etc.) to the next generation in the church. Here you rarely focus exclusively on your own needs but have the chance to develop an understanding for people of all ages. Your focus is not living according to your own cultural norms. Instead, you will benefit from the experiences and testimonials of others, as well as from seeing their faith in action. Church can be a place of common understanding instead of a place where generations and lifestyles are out of touch with each other. Supportive churches care for their fellow human beings and form a supportive community because they know their mission is to love like Jesus and to stand up for their fellow human beings. Such a community makes it their objective to accompany in faith. This includes both intercessory prayer and practical support of all kinds.

**Everyone receives and everyone has something to give: Children, youth, adults and seniors are equal members of the church.**

Flexibility and the willingness for change are prerequisites of this caring attitude. This attitude is also characterized by a willingness to listen to everyone and a willingness to have everyone participate. Paul describes the church, among other things, as a body with many parts, gifts and abilities. 1 Corinthians 12:24 could also be read especially

with regard to children, “But God has joined together all the parts of the body. And He has given more honor to the parts that didn’t have any.” Children should be actively involved when it comes to matters of their ministries. They should also be allowed to partake in decision making processes in age-appropriate ways.

Young people in particular need adults who are role models for them apart from their parents. Churches do not only support informal intergenerational relationships but also intentionally train mentors who can accompany others spiritually. Accordingly, mentors in the church can help children, teenagers and youth grow spiritually and cope with the challenges of life. Similarly, younger people can be mentors for older people.

**This can also include becoming socially active together with the children. In doing so, children experience that they are capable of learning or mastering something.**

Children should be able to express their faith in the church in age-appropriate manners. To this end, the church has to create adequate opportunities. Joint activities for others show children that they can make a difference through their actions; whether it be working for projects locally or abroad, lending a hand in the church building and garden, or continuous intercession for others.



**Children are perceived as the individuals they are.**

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Children need guidance, support and rules. They also deserve respect at eye level. We do not manipulate children but of course we may inspire them. We treat them as people created and loved by God and foster their creativity by giving them space to grow. We incorporate their ideas and take their prayer requests and ideas about God seriously.

**Every child and every family is welcome.**

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Children should have a place in the church where they can flourish. They should experience that they can try things out for themselves, make mistakes and truly encounter God. Therefore, churches consciously work to build authentic relationships across generational, cultural and social boundaries and to get in touch with people inside and outside the church. This is especially important for the young people in the church because their faith can develop when they can build relationships in the church not only with peers but also with adults who are important to them.

These trusting relationships across generational boundaries presuppose, however, that we consciously create a safe space in the church in which we protect children from all forms of assault.

**We keep all children in mind: those who already come to us and those who live in our neighborhood.**

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It is not only about the children accompanying their parents to church. The church also keeps the children in its neighborhood in mind and view. What needs do they and their families have? How could the church serve and meet them? The answers to these questions are no longer as simple as they used to be. Today, children spend much more time in school, have a smaller range of action and face higher expectations. Other children experience neglect. Who do we want to reach? Who do we meet where?

4

# CHILDREN — AN AFFAIR OF THE HEART



# WE TURN TO CHILDREN WHOLEHEARTEDLY AND INVEST FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE.

## **Core values for those working with children**

### **God commissions us to our work with children and therefore our responsibilities also include:**

- › to accompany the children in prayer.
  - › to be someone children can rely on.
  - › to invest spiritual and natural gifts and to train abilities (advanced training, instruction etc.).
  - › to demonstrate teamworking skills (e.g. working with other co-workers).
  - › to live relationship-oriented lives (in relation to children, other co-workers and God).
  - › to be aware that you are a role model, and to reflect on how to go about that.
  - › to engage the message of the Bible on a personal level.
- › to deal with the children's everyday life and reality of life.
  - › to involve the children on the basis of their knowledge, skills and interests.
  - › to trust that children will engage us actively, develop their own solutions and answers as well as deal creatively with faith matters.
  - › to never give up on children – not even in difficult development phases or challenging times.

Furthermore, anyone working with children in a ministry context on a full- or part-time basis is subject to the official code of conduct of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in order to protect children and youth from physical, psychological and sexual abuse.

5

# TRAINING DAY "ACCOMPANYING FAITH"

TO INTRODUCE  
THE CORE VALUES  
FOR MINISTRIES  
SERVING CHILDREN





HOW DO YOU IMPLEMENT THE CORE VALUES FOR MINISTRIES SERVING CHILDREN? FOLLOWING ARE SUGGESTIONS FOR A TRAINING DAY PROGRAM ON "ACCOMPANYING FAITH". WHETHER YOU ARE PART OF THE CHURCH LEADERSHIP, A CHURCH EMPLOYEE OR VOLUNTEER — WE WISH ALL OF YOU SERVING CHILDREN IN VARIOUS MINISTRIES GOD'S BLESSINGS FOR YOUR DISCUSSIONS ON THAT DAY.

### **PART 1: "SEEING CHILDREN WITH GOD'S EYES"**

Experience a creative Bible time together! If you are a larger group, divide into four small groups of three to four people, each dealing with one of the four aspects following. You have about 20 minutes of group time for this part. If you are a small team, you can deal with all four aspects, the corresponding bible texts and questions consecutively without subdividing them. You will simply have to make provisions for a little bit of extra time.

#### **Aspect 1: How does God view children?**

Psalms 8:2-5; 139:13-16; Romans 1:19

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What do these texts say about children? Write a fictitious letter from the perspective of God. It could begin like this, "Dear adults in the churches! I think children are ... I have created them so that ... Children are able to ..." etc.

#### **Aspect 2: What does Jesus say about children?**

Mark 10:13-16; Matthew 18:1-6  
(see also Mark 9:33-37)

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Imagine the following event: One evening Jesus and his disciples are sitting together. One disciple asks him, "Jesus, could you please sum up once more what you think about children?" What can we learn from children today and from those in our church? "Children need the church but the church also needs children." What are the key messages of the Bible texts mentioned above?

#### **Aspect 3: What role does the family play in the faith of children?**

Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 20-25; 2 Timothy 2:1, 5; 3:14-15; Acts 16:30-34

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What "messages" does a child hear growing up in a family with parents who believe in God? What positive (and also negative) expe-

periences concerning this subject have you had in your family? Create a poster on this topic.

#### **Aspect 4: Collect stories from the Gospels in which children appear.**

Perform a small pantomime sketch for each story – if you work in small groups, the other groups must guess the stories.

If you have not split up into smaller groups, write each story on a piece of paper. Then draw the pieces of paper without looking, play the story and guess one by one.

**When you have split up for the four aspects, present your results. If you have worked as a whole group, proceed to part 2.**

Read pg. 4-9 of the core values. What ideas have you come up with regarding the aspects? Which ones are new or challenge you?

Make notes on a flipchart: What do you want to put into practice in your work with children and when do you want to do it? Which contents and consequences should become obvious?

### **PART 2: “TAKING CHILDREN INTO THE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD”**

The second part of the core values deals with the mission of the church and its staff in re-

lation to children. Have you ever composed a mission statement for your ministry?

If not, what is the motivation behind your work with children? What drives you? What is your vision? Share your thoughts in a lightning round and briefly elaborate on what is most important to you.

Record all of your team’s results on a large sheet of paper and write the five bold green orders from pg. 10-13 next to it. In what ways can they be helpful for your work?

Work together to create a poster from these. Talk about your personal vision but also about your joint ministry vision.

### **PART 3: “CHILDREN ARE WELCOME”**

Read pg. 14-17 of the core values. They are about encounter, relationship, participation and fellowship. Which aspects are you already implementing in your church – and for which aspects do you have ideas on how to do so more often or more effectively? Highlight relevant words or phrases and talk about parts of the core values that work well and about ideas you have beyond that.

Write the keywords for good ideas on cards and pin them to a moderation board. Now, sort the keywords by topic and ask yourself what you want to implement. Implementation is also about the personal attitude of



the staff. That’s why the final question is the same as before: Where do you personally want to start?

#### **PART 4: “CHILDREN – AN AFFAIR OF THE HEART”**

Working with children is a matter close to the heart. It only ever succeeds if we are whole-heartedly engaged.

Cut hearts from red paper. Copy the eleven values for those who work with children from pg. 19 to a flipchart or a large piece of paper. Perhaps you would like to adapt these values to your previous results.

Those working with children are to attach the hearts to the values and share why they care about this specific value. Perhaps you have experienced first-hand how your heart was changed by your ministry for and encounters with children. If so, please share your experiences with the group.

Children are close to God’s heart. Take some time to pray together for the children of your church.

#### **NOTES**

During your training day, please also refer to the code of conduct that our church uses to protect children from physical, psychological and sexual abuse.

Draw attention to the important brochure “Religiöser Missbrauch” [“Religious Abuse”]. In order to deal with this topic, a separate meeting with all staff and persons responsible for ministries to children, pathfinders, teenagers and youth should be scheduled.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> [www.sexueller-gewalt-begegnen.de/materialien/downloads](http://www.sexueller-gewalt-begegnen.de/materialien/downloads)



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