

## LIFE Communities & Children Various Approaches for Developing “Family Friendly” LCs

### **Words to the Wise--some basic premises regarding intergenerational LCs:**

- If your LC successfully includes children, you will invest in families and future generations.
- LCs that help parents build their families will be exceedingly attractive to young families.
- Young parents are often among those most eager to be involved in a LC, but the least available (or most irregular) due to the multiple realities of parenting (school conflicts, sickness, etc.).
- It can be complicated, even bewildering, figuring out how to best develop LC life and provide “just right” for diverse children.
- Children are a wonderful God-given blessing, but it is a lot easier tolerating your own children than other people’s children.
- Since people may have varying but equally intense approaches, proceed carefully and prayerfully.

### **The “simple” continuum:**

- At one extreme is the total integration of children into the life of a LC. Children are full participants. Group life usually has got to be designed with the youngest in mind.
- At the continuum’s other end are LCs that exclusively focus on adults. Children are not included. It might be as simple as the fact that these people do not have children. Or it may be because some adults find the noise, confusion or distractions of children too overwhelming.
- Of course, there are many “in between” places or approaches that a group can choose.

Bottom line: Proceed cautiously. In determining the best “children” approach for your group, you will want to think carefully as leaders and discuss thoughtfully with the parents within your group.

### **A partial list of the “realistic” challenges that LCs experience surrounding children:**

- Children don’t have the same attention span as adults and don’t operate on the same educational or experiential level.
- Children can be noisy and demanding, thus causing distractions and interruptions. This can decrease the satisfaction of adult interaction.
- Diverse ages of children usually represent diverse needs that are not often satisfied or served with “one easy solution.”
- The frequency of childhood illnesses or sicknesses derails the attendance of parents (understandably, the home-needs will prevail).
- Finding volunteers or “for hire” sitters midweek can be quite difficult on school nights.

### **QUESTIONS for the LC Leaders and LC participants to discuss:**

- How important is it to the parents that their children be involved or included in the group? (or, alternatively, in locating a “family-friendly” group?)
- How much space is available –and what ages would be best served? (i.e. do the limits of space or equipment, make it safer or more appropriate for a certain age segment?)
- Shall the LC have a “point person” to coordinate these efforts?
- Shall we pool costs to hire someone to look after the children (or a pair of people)?
- How can the various parents (or even participants?) share responsibility?
- How will the LC know if is working? (or not working?)
- When and how often will the LC discuss how it is going and consider adjustments/modifications?

**SUCCESSFUL SOLUTIONS: Different approaches used by different groups.**

- A. Parents arrange their own childcare/sitters within their own homes (the agreed expectation).
- B. The LC arranges centralized childcare.  
Who does the childcare?
- a) find volunteers (perhaps from other groups).
  - b) recruit older siblings (beware of burning out “conscripted” older siblings!). (Hint: Some local high schools and all National Honor Societies have a “community service” requirement for graduation. If you are willing to fill out the simple paper work, you may find siblings and other church youth who are motivated!)
  - c) rotate parents on a schedule, each taking their turn to serve the children.
  - d) hire regular childcare persons with parents chipping in (in this day and age, it is often preferable to have 2 childcare persons; sometimes teenage friends are willing to make a commitment for a regular job).

Where do the children stay?

- a) in the same house if there is sufficient space and noise insulation
- b) in an adjacent home so that the adults can be in one and the children nearby next door (or in the same neighborhood).

What do the kids do? (sometimes a mix is needed):

- a) play
- b) have a lesson (feel free to call our Pastor of Children’s Ministries, Barry O’Brien, for curriculum ideas).
- c) watch a well-chosen video (i.e. Veggie Tales or...)

- C. That the children participate in a portion of the LC time (some groups have the children participate in the food/snack time or the worship singing and prayer portion of group life) and then adjourn to a separate room or portion of the home with whomever is supervising them. (I’ve even seen situations where the first half an hour is styled specifically for the children and includes a children’s Bible study or story before they go to a different room while the adults have their deeper fellowship or Bible study.)
- D. Mature children (teenagers) are invited to fully participate in the LC if they’re interested and available.
- E. Periodically (i.e. every quarter or every two months) the LC does a “total family evening” that includes everyone. Bring Grandma and bring the twin babies (and everyone in between). Perhaps the group does something special, such as a game night, a worship time, a seder, a Christmas party, a picnic or an outing.
- F. Family Connection—GC Children’s Ministry has been arranging for childcare for 1 hour.

**FINAL COMMENTS: The reality check.**

It’s a wonderful quality to be able to include children and involve them in the larger Christian family or spiritual community. Yes, it can be extremely rewarding. But it isn’t for every LC. Often just when one set of challenges are successfully resolved another set of challenges arises—a sitter moves or quits, the host family resigns, or the children’s needs change.

Great challenges but also great rewards!