

# Creating a High-Quality Church Nursery

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For many visiting families, your church nursery is one of the key places that make the difference between whether families keep coming to your church—or not. That’s why it’s important to take a close look at your church nursery to see how you can improve it to make it an even more welcoming place.

## 1. Envision your ideal church nursery with leadership.

Too often, the church nursery falls under the children’s ministry program or is a stepchild of the worship committee, which means that the church leadership assumes that someone’s taking care of this vital ministry.

Bring together your church leadership and envision what your hopes and dreams are for your church nursery. Most church leaders want their congregations to grow, so make the case of how a warm, welcoming, safe, and efficient church nursery can help achieve that objective.

Plus, once you get the leadership involved in a church nursery, you’re more likely to be able to give your nursery the attention and resources that it deserves.

## 2. Talk with people who work in your church nursery.

Key people in your church nursery are those who roll up their sleeves and do the work. Talk with them. Get their feedback and ideas.

Ask: What’s working best in your nursery? What improvements do they wish could be made? Why? What gets them excited about your church nursery? What are their dreams in creating a first-class church nursery?

People who work in your nursery often have a lot of good ideas but often don’t feel they have the power or the resources to implement changes. Talk with them and keep talking with them. Include them in key decisions.

## 3. Examine your nursery location.

Can visitors easily find it? Is your nursery in the best location in your church?

Ideally, you want your nursery close to your worship area. Label the room well, and include it in a map of your church. Again, consider having an outsider (such as a friend of yours) provide input on how easy or difficult it is for him or her to find the nursery. In some churches, finding the church nursery is like playing a game of hide and seek, with the church nursery in a well-hidden place.

#### **4. Examine the ease of staffing.**

Are you constantly scrambling to find volunteers to staff your nursery? How often do people volunteer—and what's your turnover rate?

It's vital that children in a church nursery have consistent adults who care for them. It's hard on young children (and their parents) when they're greeted by different adults each time. Yet, it's not easy to find volunteers who are willing to make a long-term commitment.

Instead of having volunteers come once a month or once every two months, see if you can encourage volunteers to commit to four Sundays in a row—as their commitment for their entire year (or to do so twice a year). This will help children get a chance to know the adults.

Some congregations now hire a childcare center to run their church nursery. That way, they're paying professionals who will be there each time. For some parents, having a professional staff is a big plus.

#### **5. Look closely at your nursery.**

Are the toys current? (Or are they 20 years old?) Is anything broken? (If so, repair what's broken or toss it.) Make sure that all toys are age appropriate and that cribs, bouncy chairs, and other items meet safety standards. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission has a free 20-page download about safety standards for various items from cribs to high chairs to gates to changing tables and more at <http://www.cpsc.gov//PageFiles/129289/202.pdf>.

What's the paint job of your church nursery like? Is the nursery bright and cheery—or getting dull and run down? Giving your nursery a fresh coat of paint and replacing some of the toys and furniture can really brighten up the place.

It's often helpful to find an outsider (such as a friend of yours who has never visited your church nursery) to come to your church nursery and talk about his or her reaction. Too often, we get used to our church nursery, and we miss out on the helpful feedback of an outsider. If the outsider is someone who can be honest with you, that's even better.

#### **6. Ensure your nursery is safe.**

Tour your nursery from an infant and toddler's view. Get down on the floor. Crawl around. Make sure that all outlets are covered and that young children cannot pull over furniture when they pull themselves up.

Download the free nursery safety guide: [http://www.flumc.org/mp/pdf/the\\_church\\_nursery.pdf](http://www.flumc.org/mp/pdf/the_church_nursery.pdf). The first four pages focus on how to improve the safety of your church nursery. Page 5 is a volunteer application form that you can use—or adapt for your church. Page 6 is a ready-to-use form for checking references of nursery volunteer applicants. Page 7 is an injury report form. The final page, page 8, is a report form for suspected incidents of sexual or physical misconduct.

## **7. Include your nursery as part of church tours.**

Make your nursery even more visible (and accessible) by including it as part of the tour you give when you provide newcomer classes. Whenever your church leadership works with a family before a baptism, consider having a stroll to the nursery as part of the process. Some churches also develop a ministry for expectant parents that includes showing them the church nursery.

## **8. Get feedback from parents who use the nursery.**

What do parents think of the nursery? What do they like best? What do they think could be improved? One parent suggested that children have nametags safety pinned to the front of their shirts and their backs. That way when children are crawling, nursery workers can still see their names and get to know them.

Some churches see the parents as important as their children. Some nursery workers go out of their way to learn the names of the parents and to get to know them better. You never know what parents are going through, and parents will feel more connected to your church nursery (and your church) when you make a point of getting to know them and keeping in touch with them.

## **9. Keep your nursery sanitized and clean.**

Since most children spend a lot of time on the floor of your church nursery, make sure the floor (and other areas) is cleaned often. Use a bleach solution (1 part bleach to 10 parts warm water) to clean bed rails, chairs, tables, swings, bouncy chairs, toys, and anything else that children use.

Set a policy for caregivers to wash their hands before and after changing every single diaper. Some nurseries keep a bottle of hand sanitizer for caregivers to use often.

## **10. Create guidelines and job descriptions.**

Guidelines and job descriptions help to ensure that procedures are clear and who has which responsibilities. A helpful, free resource is <https://www.churchpublishing.org/media/custom/IN-Formation/TheChurchNursery.pdf>. Incorporate ideas from this four-page document that's chock full of helpful suggestions.

## **11. Promote your church nursery.**

When is the last time you included photos and an article about your church nursery in your church newsletter? Bulletin? Write about the caregivers. Feature what's new in your church nursery (such as a new crib or new music). Write about how excited you are about your church nursery and the important ministry it provides.

## **12. Continue to monitor your nursery.**

Even when your nursery is effective, monitoring your church nursery will help ensure that it continues to be a welcoming place for children, nursery workers, and parents.

A church nursery often is the most important room in your church for visiting families with young children. Even if your worship service is welcoming, if parents don't feel welcomed and excited about the church nursery, they may never come back. That's why a church nursery is a key place to put your thought, time, and energy into so that you can attract and keep families.