

Helping children and young people engage with church online.

As an adult, I can sometimes find it difficult to focus on online worship. Zoom can be exhausting after a while and yet it is still vitally important to remain connected to Church in whatever way we can. As we adjust to restrictions once again, it is important to think about how we can encourage children and young people to engage with online worship and their church families. Each suggestion may not work for every family and that is okay – at this time it is important not think of church as another ‘box to be ticked’ but rather as a time to spend together with God – remove the pressure of having to worship but make it something you want to do.

Parenting for Faith have these suggestions:

(https://parentingforfaith.org/post/kids-online-church?fbclid=IwAR0-th_9pymvUA1uosbMYw_RBJTZM-IMYDdMaxWYmWrGeJRosWUV6sHTQpU)

1. Work out why you want children and young people to engage in online worship and focus on that.

Do you want your children and young people to spend church time learning about God, or taking part in praise and worship? Do you want them to reconnect with other families in church? Once you know why you want engagement, you can frame the service to focus on that. Children are all different and can have varying attention spans. Some may be able to sit and focus on a service for its whole duration – for others five or ten minutes may be enough and they will become distracted. If you know your child will only manage 10 minutes, make those 10 minutes meaningful: ask them to listen to the kids talk and then draw a picture of what they heard or complete an activity sheet to match the sermon topic. Provide them with some instruments to play during worship time or ask them to pray for a family they know. Give them the choice. If they stay in the room for the rest of the service (make sure they have quiet toys etc.) they will still listen and take things in. Or if they want to go to another room make sure they come back for the part you have decided to focus on.

2. Help everyone to get their head in the game.

Normally there is a routine to going to church – it may include a rush out the door to get there on time – but it is all part of church. If church is online, children will miss this chance to get ready and prepared. Make sure they know what is happening and what makes this time special. If it is useful, give children a task to help prepare beforehand – can they get everyone’s Bible in the room where you will be watching? Make sure they have everything to hand to allow them to engage in church; set distinctions and let them know why these things are happening.

3. Explain what is happening and when.

When children know what is happening, they are more likely to engage with it. Take time to explain to them what is happening in each part of the service. If services are pre-recorded, press pause and explain what is next or allow questions before continuing. If the service is held over Zoom, use the mute button and do the same.

If children can read, share the comments with them – say when someone says ‘hello’ and respond where appropriate.

Children will follow your example – before church explain why you are engaging – to see others, to share prayer time, to worship God, to learn, etc. Whatever your reason, share it with all family members.

Becky Sedgwick gives these Quick Tips:

Helping kids engage with worship:

- **Don’t insist they sing:** singing online can be a challenge! Explain that worship isn’t just singing, but is remembering who God is, keeping our eyes on Him and saying thank you, which we can do in lots of ways.
- **Explore with them other ways to worship:** for example, dancing, flag-waving, drawing, playing instruments.
- **Give them some options you are comfortable with:** for example, lie still and connect with God / draw or write what these songs are saying / join in with your instruments / wave a flag or dance / sit close and cuddle me / close your eyes and just listen.

Helping kids engage with prayer:

- If you're able to stop the video, you could stop and pick up on what's being prayed for and **add your own family prayer** for that bit before carrying on.
- **Encourage your kids (and you) to chat to God themselves**, either when you pause the video or later, about some of the things mentioned in the prayers and catch God's replies.
- Ask them to **listen and see which bits God highlights to them** and write those down to pray about later.
- Invite them to **draw or write their own prayers**.
- Before the service begins, ask your kids to **ask God to show them one or two people on the screen** he'd like them to connect with or encourage this week.

Helping kids engage with the Bible:

- If you know what the story is in advance, you could **read it together first** so it's not new to your kids.
- **Ask them to listen out for** any bits they don't understand / have questions about / spark an idea in them so you can talk about them later.
- **Help them follow the reading** on your phone / their bible.
- Invite them to **recreate the story as they listen**: for example, by drawing it / modelling it / recreating it with Lego or their toys.

Helping kids engage with online talks:

- **Don't feel you have to make them sit through it** if it's not something they can understand. Give them some choices about what they can do instead: you can sit quietly with me / draw / play / watch tv / leave the room.
- Ask them to **listen out for key words / phrases**.
- Ask them to **summarise the talk** in two or three sentences.
- **Link the rest of your week to the theme of the talk**: for example, if it was hope, look out for signs of hope on your walk, share stories of hope, pray that God brings hope to hopeless situations.

We know church is more than a building, it is the people, a community and a shared experience. Whatever way you and your family access services during this time, know that you are setting a positive example for your family. By seeing you take part in online services, they will see the importance and value of church – everything else they pick up is a bonus!

As a diocese, we are coming up with new ways of engaging with children, young people and their families at this time – be sure to keep up to date with all that is happening through Facebook and the Diocesan Website (<https://www.derryandraphoe.org/>) There are children's activity sheets available on the website and these are updated regularly. DRY have a new Instagram page (derryraphoeyouth) which is also updated frequently and allows young people to engage directly with what is happening for them.

If there are other ways we can help you and your family to engage with online worship, please let us know by emailing kirsty@derryandraphoe.org

