

Children & Families Welcome Audit



On the threshold

What's the first thing you notice?
What else do you notice?
What are you curious about?



After a short look around

What words would you use to describe this place?
What do you like here?
Is there anything you don't like?



After exploring

What questions would you like to ask?
What do you think happens here?
Is there anything missing?



Optional extra

Design your ideal church.



Refreshments

Serve juice and cake/biscuits, having checked dietary requirements beforehand. Chat together.





Children & Families "Welcome Audit"

Preparing...

Pray! Ask your whole church to pray for the children, young people and families in your community.

Plan: who will host this visit? Ideally lay people with experience of working with children, because children are more likely to tell the Rector what they think that person wants to hear.

Who will you invite?

Call in a favour from friends/family/neighbours with young children! You should keep the group small: 2-4 children. If there are more who are keen, run more than one session. Children should be accompanied by a parent/another adult with caring responsibility. Children could have any kind of church experience, from lots (in a different church) to none at all. It's best if they are fairly unfamiliar with your church, so they can look at it with new eyes.

How long should the visit be? Around 30 minutes, concluding with refreshments: ask about dietary requirements/allergies beforehand. The best time for a visit is after school or a Saturday afternoon, NOT on a Sunday.

Your church building

Get ready for your young visitors. Just as we tidy up before welcoming visitors into our own homes, spruce your church up for the chosen date. This is not the time to make major changes – don't second-guess what you'll learn from the Audit. Simply prepare your building as you would for a special Sunday.



Before...

Pray some more! Make sure your whole church knows when this is happening and ask them to pray for those involved.



Explain: It's important to tell participants why you're doing this and what to expect.

To parents: "We're not recruiting or converting your children, just seeking their expert opinion as children to help our church be more welcoming. Please don't worry about what your children tell us about our church: there are no "wrong" answers. We want to hear what your children really think."

To children: "We're not here to tell you what to believe; we just want to hear what you have to say about our church. You are experts on being children, and we would like your help to make our church more welcoming for people like you and their families. So please tell us what you think. There are no "wrong" answers. We won't be able to change everything you tell us about, but we will think carefully about everything you say and make a plan based on your ideas. There will be a drink and something to eat at the end."

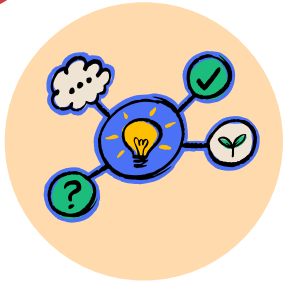
During...

Be friendly, encouraging and open to whatever the children want to say. Remind everyone that there are no "wrong" answers: parents may try to prompt or "correct" children's answers to tell you what they think you want to hear. You want to hear what children really think. Ideally, ask the questions orally and record the answers/take notes. With a school group, you could hand out the questions and ask for the (anonymous) answers in writing. Don't try to answer questions during the Audit: simply allow space for them to be asked. You can discuss any that need a response during refreshments, if you are confident in doing so.





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After...

Reflect and pray about all the feedback you've been given. Be brave: children can be blunt and seeing your church through their eyes can be challenging. Be positive and realistic! Congratulate yourselves for all the things you already do well to make your church a welcoming place for children. Realize that many of the things you now might like to change are small and do-able (though not all of them will be).



Make a plan

Talk to your Rector, Vestry and congregation about the feedback and decide what you will do in response.

Make a plan of action (short/medium/long term goals) and start work!

Here is an
example...



PLAN



SHORT TERM (IN THE NEXT WEEK)

- BUY BISCUITS THAT CHILDREN LIKE/CAN EAT
- BUY A NEW SET OF FELT PENS
- TAKE DOWN ALL THE OLD COVID SIGNS

MEDIUM TERM (IN THE NEXT 3 MONTHS)

- CLEAR OUT THE STUFF THAT IS PILED UNDER THE BACK PEWS
- SOURCE A SMALL, STURDY CHILDREN'S BOOKCASE AND SOME COLOURFUL CUSHIONS FROM LOCAL CHARITY SHOPS
- ASK YOUR C&Y OFFICER FOR A LIST OF BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS AND INVITE YOUR CONGREGATION TO GIFT THESE INDIVIDUALLY TO THE CHILDREN'S BOOKCASE

LONGER TERM

- CREATE AND EQUIP A CHILDREN'S AREA IN CHURCH (YOUR C&Y OFFICER CAN ADVISE ON THIS)
- HOST AN EVENT FOR LOCAL CHILDREN AND FAMILIES TO CEREMONIALLY OPEN THIS AREA. HAVE LOTS OF PARTY FOOD. INVITE YOUR ORIGINAL WELCOME AUDIT FAMILY, SO THEY CAN SEE THAT THEIR WORDS HAVE MADE A DIFFERENCE. HAND OUT A 'SAVE THE DATE' INVITATION TO YOUR CHURCH'S NEXT EVENT FOR FAMILIES, TO CELEBRATE THE NEXT CHURCH FESTIVAL.