

teaching notes

Welcome to Connected!

God is longing to meet youth and children through the work you do each week.

You'll find each session has been broken down to include...

- Catch up
- Games – (for children and younger youth) you may find your group desire's more games or less, so we've included more than one option.
- An interactive introduction
- The bible context – either in story, or verse form depending on the age group
- Talk and discussion
- Testimonies
- Response – a time to draw near to God and experience his presence
- Craft and/or prophetic art for children
- Action – ways to interact with the wider community

This is your session, so feel confident to adapt it to your needs. Use what is appropriate to the time you have with your young people. Don't feel you have to pack everything in. We've given you depth and breadth so you can select what suits you. To help everyone no matter how much, or little experience they have. You'll also find suggested script in italics throughout each session. Use your own words and phrases, or rely on this text as a guide.

Each section fulfils a different purpose within the session. Let's have a look...

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Catch up

This time is included in every session for all three age groups. Have a leader introduce the time.

For children: ultimately we aren't called to just teach our kids but to bring them into the presence of God. God wants to know about every aspect of their lives and He cares about the smallest of things. You and the other children can reflect this kingdom value by allowing everyone to have a voice and share their lives together. This will also increase the level of engagement you have with your group.

For younger youth: at this age, your youth are starting to form a new frame of reference – their peers. Establishing community within your group enables them to form a Christian frame of reference which can be invaluable as they start to question the world and their faith, again a natural progression for this age group. It's also important they do life together as well as learn together.

For older youth: they are becoming adults and establishing habits and patterns for the rest of their lives. They are facing larger challenges and are stepping out in the world more than ever before. This is a time when establishing community within your group is vital so that they can start to rely on their Christian friends for assistance, advice and wisdom on where to place their feet.

If you have a large group it can really help facilitate relationships by dividing the children/youth into smaller groups. If you can have them stay in this group each week for continuity. Having no more than five in each group enables good quality relationships to develop.

Children: ask if they will show you how their week has been by using their thumbs – a thumb up means it's been a good week, a thumb down means it's been a bad week and a thumb to the side means there were good bits and bad bits. This allows your shy children still to share. As each child takes it in turns to show with their thumbs, the leader can follow up that gesture by asking: *Are you happy to tell us why it's been a good week?*

Younger and older youth: *Jesus spent time doing life with his friends, kicking back and chatting, as well as doing big stuff. We want to be a place where we can share how life is going for us. So, each week, we are going to take the time to catch up with each other. We want to be real so it would be great if we could be brave and share some of the things that have been rough this week, as well as some of the things that we've enjoyed. I'll start us off...*

Each leader should share how their week has been, some highs and some lows. Be aware of what things are appropriate to share, but keep it real. Being vulnerable and showing that you have good and bad times will help your youth share what is going on in their lives. Allow them the space to share but also to opt out if they wish. This culture maybe adopted quickly by some, others will need time to establish trust before they share openly. Then allow them the space to share. If something has been amazing, tough, or challenging, feel free to stop and pray short prayers in response. Praying on the spot and not delaying creates a culture of ease and informality in our accessibility to God.

Later, in the curriculum this 'Catch up' will develop into 'Catch up and testimonies'. If your youth have the skills to pray for each other, then encourage them to lead the prayer. If not, keep it to leader-led responsive prayer, as we will develop prayer skills through the curriculum.

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Games

Games are included in the children and younger youth curriculum because they allow interaction on a social level. Some loosely follow the theme of that session, others build community or are for fun. You’ll find for newcomers this is a great way to break the ice and for them to feel included into the group. Games can also increase engagement with talks and response times, as young people have had a chance to expel energy and are more able to focus.

Bible reading/story telling

Every session is built on the foundation of scripture. As we push into God’s presence, it is essential that we are deepening our understanding of His Word. The way we present scripture will vary, but this section is always present.

You may have a wide variety of reading abilities in your group, be aware that some may not be able to read at all – this includes youth groups. We use a variety of methods, but if we have asked your group to read from the Bible, include those with literacy issues by reading in pairs, or by telling the story by other means – have them act it out, or rework the story in a modern form, or use video clips, etc. Some DVDs are recommended throughout the curriculum.

Talk and discussions

Talks vary in format, some with breaks and interludes to explore a point, others punctuated by discussions, or testimonies. The aim of this time is for you to share biblical truths, foundations and kingdom values. You also want your young people to have the chance to explore subjects and process truths for themselves. Discussion offers the chance for Holy Spirit revelation for them and also for you as they speak.

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Testimonies

These are used in sessions to illustrate God at work at a practical and spiritual level in people's lives. Sharing good news creates a culture where the supernatural becomes expressed naturally in our daily lives.

Response and reflect

Holy Spirit will be present throughout your session, but at this point in the programme God is releasing even more of his presence into your young people. Don't rush this time, let it run over if your young people are engaging with God. Be ready to drop other elements you have prepared: ultimately His presence is more powerful than anything else we can offer our children and youth. The test of this section of the session is 'what fruit does it produce in the lives of our children and young people?'

So take the time to ask them what God did, how they now feel after their encounter, or if they think their actions will be different.

Endorse everyone present, not only those who see or experience God in a tangible way. Some of us simply feel peace or know things with greater levels of certainty, as a result of the Spirit at work in us and this is just as valid. Take the time to acknowledge everyone in the room, not just those who choose to share. Encourage the team to ask follow up questions when they see your young people during the week and in the following week, as we are aiming for 'fruit' in their lives outside of church too.

Craft and prophetic art

The curriculum includes this in the children's sessions and in some youth sessions. We use craft initially as we build towards children having the skills to see, hear and feel God at work in their lives and the world around them. Prophetic art offers creative ways to encounter God and for your young people to express what God is doing around them.

Action

Jesus calls us to be servants in the service of all. This section offers your young people the chance to reflect the light of Christ in different practical ways. They will have the opportunity to apply what they have learnt and use their spiritual gifts within their group, the church, or the wider local community.

Parent/Guardian letter

Included in the curriculum for 5-10's, these draft letters aim to help your parents/guardians experience God with their children at home. They are designed to be fun, to update your parents and given them tools to support faith development. They have been deliberately written so that the learning, sharing and experiencing can be done in the flow of daily life and not be an added burden.

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*God will take your
breath away!*

Worship

Worship is an essential component to helping children and young people encounter the presence of God. Every church will have a different expression of worship and while we don't include a section in this curriculum, we would encourage you to worship with your children either as a church family, or in your group. The second year of this curriculum includes a term's teaching on worship. However, in this first year, this section gives you practical and easy routes to authentic worship now.

1. Include worship in every session either at the start with your church family, or in your group prior to the talk.
2. Establish a set of shared songs that are used in services by your church family and by your children and youth. The first goal is to establish worship that everyone owns. Pick songs with all different tempos from lively to contemplative. Pick elements that express things simply in language that the children will understand or that can be explained in simple terms. The second goal is to move everyone to authentically worshipping, rather than being concerned about reading the words of the song. Simple words and repetitive elements will help you to achieve this. Remember reading issues can exist for some in their teens so moving to a place where the children and young people know the songs will free them in worship. Introduce songs slowly and break them down: don't feel you have to use the whole song. Use single verses, chorus or bridges, or use the elements your young people will connect with and then build from this point over time.

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3. Explain what a song means as you introduce it to your church family and express what you are doing as you worship. For example, to introduce the chorus from Cornerstone by Hillsong you might say; *When you build a house the cornerstone is the most important stone, it is the base for the whole house, take it away and the house will fall down. This song is about how Jesus is that stone in our lives. He makes us feel safe and secure. As we sing we are letting God fill us with his love and strength, so that we are ready to face any storm.*
4. Feel free to be led by the Spirit and pray simply during an instrumental interlude or in-between songs.
5. Build your worship: don't expect your children or young people to engage with lots of songs at first. Introduce one song and then in the second week build and include another. If you are looking to lead a set of worship, try linking two songs together. Initially start with up tempo songs. Repeat the same songs the following week, but add in the chorus of a more contemplative song. Be guided by Holy Spirit, remember the aim is to get your children/youth hungry for more worship, rather than overdo it and turn them off. You can build each week from this point. Introduce new worship songs slowly. Repetition is your friend, use it, this is about everyone starting to own their worship and to recognise it.

You can...

With God all things are possible! He is with you every step of the way. Connected aims to equip you to step forward confidently and move in the supernatural with your children and young people. If something comes up and you think, 'I have no experience of this', that's ok. First, try it out for yourself and within your team, then reflect in your own time on what God did. Be brave and be bold. God sees whenever we step out and brings the road up to meet our feet. If you don't step out it takes away God's opportunity to fully express His glory.

Remember this isn't about cramming everything in we have offered here, it's about using the elements that are right for your young people. God has called you to your young people and your input and insight are invaluable. He will equip you and he will give you new tools and experiences as you step out. You'll see and hear things you may never have thought possible. You'll find that children and young people can bring a revelation of God's heart that can be sharper and more inspiring than any renowned bible teacher. God will take your breath away!