



On your marks

Praying together can so easily slip down or even off the agenda of our time with children. However, if we really believe that listening to and talking with our Heavenly Father is one of the most important things we can ever 'do' and perhaps the one regular habit we long to pass on to our children, then we need to try to make prayer a priority from the very start.

The following idea is full of some useful 'prayer starters' from which you can select so you can find the best way for you to introduce the priority of prayer to your children this coming year.

Get set

Some of these ideas need a few simple props as indicated but most require no particular preparation - except of course our own personal commitment to prayer!

Go!

1. Get into the habit of always starting your children's session with a prayer, accompanied by a simple action, like: opening up the Bible and laying it down on a table; lighting a candle; playing a short piece of music; or putting down a special object or picture focus. Why not use a traditional prayer that the adults themselves may use in church such as:

The Lord is here - His Spirit is with us

or

(we meet) in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

or

Lord Jesus we meet today in your name; help us to come closer to you, Father God; and be filled with your Holy Spirit.

Working with your group, why not create your own special prayer that you will use each time you meet?

2. Set up an attractive special 'praise and prayer notice board' with colourful Post-it notes nearby. As your children arrive, invite them either in words or drawings to express something they want to pray about on the notes. Later make sure you include a definite time in your programme to bring the board into the centre and to pray through these prayers together.
3. Set up a special rainbow feature made of the seven wires and a supply of beads in the seven colours of the rainbow. Invite the group as they arrive to begin to create the rainbow by putting beads on the respective wires to represent particular things they want to pray about.

The colours might stand for: prayers for family and friends; for school; for church; for the environment; for painful things; for sad things; for worrying things.

As you gather these together as a rainbow of prayer, remind them of the sign of the rainbow that stands for God's promise that he will always be for us and never let us go.

4. Set up a prayer clock in your meeting area where you have pictures where the numbers would be, as well as the two hands. Include:
 - A picture of the church
 - A picture of the group
 - A picture of a school
 - A picture of a home
 - A picture of the UK
 - A picture of the world - this could include perhaps a linked country or person for which your church prays
 - A picture of a hospital

At the beginning of each session invite a different child each time to move the hands of the clock to point to two different pictures and make these a focus for your prayers.

5. Start your session with a favourite praise song - maybe one about prayer. In between the verses, pause the CD (arranging if possible for just the instrumental version of the song to play on) and use the 'silence' you create for praying for yourselves, for others and for God's work through you and others today.
6. Always start the session with the words of the Grace or the Lord's Prayer with actions - Lucy Moore has a Messy Church grace in her book *Messy Church*, which you could use.
7. Using some Scrabble™ letters, begin each session by spelling out the name of one of the children and then ask the group to think about things that they could pray for that begin with each letter of that child's name and make these a focus for your prayers.
8. At the beginning of your session get into the habit of praying through, with actions, what you're about to do, for example:
 - Help us to sing your praises - *lift hands in worship*
 - Help us to understand the stories from your book - *open an imaginary book*
 - Help us to learn new things about you - *point with surprise and delight*
 - Help us to pray for those in need - *hands together in prayer*
 - Help us to become our best for you - *hands on heart*
 - Help us to enjoy making something - *hold something amazing!*
 - Help us to get to know each other better - *join up hands*

Amen - *clap hands*

9. Start the session by standing in a circle, holding hands, and then use different actions together as a prayer, for example:



- May we reach up to you Father - *linked hands raised high*
 - May we reach out to others, Jesus - *turn around and reach out with both hands*
 - May we go into your story with the Spirit's help - *hands all reaching into the centre*
 - And may we grow closer in love to you and the each other - *hands around each others' shoulders*
 - Amen- *all hands 'punch' the air*
10. For your praying, pass around an object that represents something you're going to focus on, for example a globe for the world; a unlit candle for mission; a compass for people travelling; a schoolbag for school that week; a box of plasters for those who are unwell; a church magazine to pray for the church, and so on.

In summary make praying a regular part of your programme. Turn the Bible story you do into a prayer. Make prayer a priority rather than peripheral to your meeting.

There are plenty more prayer ideas on our website and we are sure you have already created and used many more of your own. Here are three more suggestions:

1. 'Pass the parcel' prayer, with several objects or prayer focuses in words to unwrap when the music stops.
2. Have a bowl of water and some floating candles. Carefully invite the children to place their candle on the water, which the leader then lights to accompany the prayer that they suggest.
3. Pass round an old 1p coin. On this there are symbols, along with its shape, which can represent the world, the poor, people in power, people in prison, others, those in need and so on.