



MASTERING
MISSION TRIPS
SERVING
CHILDREN AND TEENS



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INTRODUCTION

Somehow you have found yourself in charge of planning and executing the activities your mission team will do with a group of children and teens. Perhaps you found out you will serve several hundred children. You may now realize this large group contains a wide variety of ages. Your team may only have a few people or people who have little or no experience with teaching children. Your team may be serving in another country or in an environment or culture unfamiliar to most of your team.

In short, you are feeling overwhelmed and underprepared. This e-book was created to help even the novice mission team member be better prepared to effectively serve ministries working with children and teens. The strategies shared here have been field tested in a variety of countries and environments. Using them will help your mission experience be more effective for team members, leaders, staff and volunteers of the groups you are serving – and more importantly, the children and teens.

If you still have questions after reading this book, feel free to contact us directly through our website Teach One Reach One. We would be happy to assist you in any way we can.



BEFORE YOU DO ANYTHING ELSE

It's tempting when given an assignment to plan lessons and activities for children to immediately begin generating ideas. Unfortunately, if you start your preparations first, your mission team may never accomplish what the people you are serving wanted and needed you to accomplish.

Before you do anything else, your team and the people you are serving need to establish the two or three most important goals for your trip. Many of you may want to skip reading the rest of this section, because you believe you have already been given your goals for your mission trip.

If those goals sound something like "Conduct a VBS for 500 children on the life of David" or "Teach faith-based tutoring classes in our summer day camp", what you have been given are not goals. They are assignments. How do you know if you did those assignments well? What if your interpretation of your results and the perceptions of the people you were serving are radically different?

A goal which will be much more helpful to your team, and ultimately the children, is a S.M.A.R.T. goal. These are goals that for our purposes are specific and measurable. (The remaining letters represent achievable, realistic and time bound, but as Christians, we will leave those to God. His Plans for us are usually much greater than anything we would think are possible.)

These goals are not goals for our egos, but rather goals reflecting Proverbs 16:3. We are capturing what we are committing to the Lord. This will help your team keep focused on the important things and not allow themselves to be distracted by all of the things that can happen on a mission trip.

As we mentioned a typical mission team "goal" is usually something like "Teach a VBS for 500 children on the life of David." A better S.M.A.R.T. goal might be "After the lessons on Monday, at least 75% of the children in each group will be able to give two or more reasons why it is important to find and develop the gifts God has given them to serve Him."

Notice the S.M.A.R.T. goal is much more specific and has several measurable numbers in it. (Note: Don't let the number 500 in the first goal confuse you. Not all numbers help measure results. Some are merely the "ingredients" for your mission trip.) This team will know at the end of the day, if they accomplished what they needed to accomplish. If their numbers are much lower than the target, they will know some things might need to be changed or adapted before classes the next day.



S.M.A.R.T. goals also allow your team and the people you are serving to be on the same page. Often mission teams and the people they serve have very different ideas if the service provided was ultimately helpful. When your goals are clear, it is also clear if you accomplished what it was hoped you would accomplish. This can prevent a number of uncomfortable conversations. When everyone has agreed to specific, measurable goals, the results and feedback can be much more objective.

Limit your S.M.A.R.T. goals to only two or three for a short-term mission trip. Any more goals than that and your team will be overwhelmed and feel unnecessary stress. Try to have each goal match one of the top priorities given to you by the people you are serving. So for example, if the missionary mentions they have been having issues with children getting into fights, make sure one of your goals addresses a certain number of the children being able to list or demonstrate a specific number of godly conflict management skills.

Once your team has created its S.M.A.R.T. goals, don't forget to share them with the people you are serving for their feedback. It's important before you begin the next stages of planning to be really clear about what the people you are serving really need your team to accomplish for them.

Note: Teach One Reach One has resources available to help you with setting goals, including a S.M.A.R.T. goal worksheet and free consultations by email or telephone.



KNOWING YOUR TEAM

Even though your team now has clear, specific, measurable goals for your trip, you still aren't ready to begin planning lessons and activities. Your next step is evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of your team.

This isn't an exercise in judgment or to discover who has been given the most gifts by God to serve Him. Rather, it will help you plan activities your team can realistically execute well. If you have a team full of extremely shy introverts for example, it probably isn't the best idea to plan an over the top drama for them to perform.

The assessment of your team should include discovering their gifts, talents and previous experiences. This can be a lot of fun, because the more you learn about your team members, the more you can creatively plan activities incorporating those gifts.

The problem you may encounter as you begin talking with your team about their various gifts is that many people have been taught to be modest. This means you may have a wonderful artist in your group, who will tell you he really isn't "that good" at art. Remind people you aren't asking them to boast, but you need to know what talents they can bring to the team in order to help you plan well.

You may also find you have quite a few team members who don't even realize all (or any) of the gifts they have been given. The Church has often not done the best job at helping Christians with gift discovery and development. You will need to be a talent scout of sorts. Watch as team members interact with each other. Listen to them talk about their hobbies and interests. Often these will give you clues to hidden talents.

Record what you find out about each team member and then see what talents and gifts your team has. Are there clusters of talent? Do certain team members have crucial skill sets? Are there talents none of your team members have, but are necessary for the success of your team?



As you formulate answers to these questions, you will begin to get a feel for what your group will be able to do well and what activities probably won't work for your team. You will also uncover if there are special skills that are essential and will require you to do some targeted recruiting.

Note: It is vitally important for the safety of the children you will be serving to make sure your church or the group you are serving has run a criminal background check on any adult who will be working with children. The background check is inexpensive and will reveal any felony convictions. It will also deter predators who may want to join your group only for an opportunity to have easy access to children. Do not assume anyone is automatically safe, no matter how long you may have known him or her. Doing so can put children, your church and the program or missionary at great risk.



ASSIGNING TASKS TO TEAM MEMBERS

Once you know the strengths of team members, you will want to begin assigning tasks to team members. Don't try to do everything yourself – especially in the planning stages. If you are more experienced than the rest of the team, this will be very tempting. It will seem more efficient to do everything yourself rather than delegate or train others to handle the various preparation tasks. Doing the preparation for the trip by yourself, will most likely mean you begin the trip already exhausted. You need to be well rested to be an effective leader. Remember, good leaders delegate!

Make sure as you assign tasks for both the preparation stage and the actual mission trip, you are considering the strengths of team members. Asking someone who is talented in drama (but very unorganized) to organize supplies never ends well. Some tasks, like carrying items in luggage or counting supplies, can and should be shared equally by all members of the team. Don't forget those often overlooked gifts of shopping, organizing or logistics. They can often be more valuable than some of the more obvious gifts.

If your team is small, you may have to assign someone a task for which they may not have been gifted. That's sometimes unavoidable and won't hurt your efforts, if handled carefully. Provide training to give them more skills to be successful. Encourage them to shadow someone who does that role well in your home congregation for several weeks. If possible, consider asking someone with that gift to provide mentoring and practice opportunities before leaving on your trip.

After assigning tasks, try not to micromanage team members as they complete them. It is important, however, that you establish some format for accountability. Many teams have regular meetings before leaving to hold each other accountable and work on certain tasks together. If someone is not performing his/her task, ask what you can do to help him/her be successful. Reassigning tasks is possible, but is usually not in the best interest of the team member or the team as a whole.

You may prefer to allow team members to volunteer for the various assignments. While this does often encourage them to be more engaged in their tasks, it does come with a risk. At times, you will find some people who will volunteer in areas in which they are not at all gifted or prepared to serve. Sometimes training and mentoring will help. At other times, you may need to gently redirect the person to a different task.



If your team is large or what you are doing on the mission field is particularly complex, you may want to consider creating written job descriptions. A center leader may assume he is responsible for setting up his area, while you may have envisioned a team of people who sets up for all of the centers. A clear job description will make sure all tasks are covered. If you choose to provide job descriptions, make it very clear that all team members will be asked from time to time to perform tasks outside of their job description.



TRAINING TEAM MEMBERS

Highly effective mission teams are often teams that have received training to improve skills they will need while working with the children they will be serving. Some team members may need less training than others, but even experienced mission team members can often use new training or refreshers.

The following areas are the most common training workshops requested by the groups we help who have mission teams serve them. They will often ask us to provide training minutes before the groups begin serving so they are more effective. If you can provide the training before arriving, it will not only help your team, but also the group you are serving.

- **Personal Spiritual Growth** – Mission team members often expect to grow spiritually while serving, but haven't really given much thought to how they personally need to grow. Helping team members study and reflect on how they may be able to grow spiritually before leaving will also keep them focused on what is most important, even if conditions get tough during the trip.
- **Empathy** – If you don't do any other training, this is perhaps the most important. Sympathy and empathy are often confused. Sympathy can actually harm the people you are serving while empathy can help them. Empathy training will help your team members be intentional about what they say to the people they are serving. It will give them the tools to lessen the emotional distance between them and the people they serve, making it easier to share their faith effectively.
- **Classroom Behavior Management** – Mission team members need to be trained in acceptable classroom management techniques. Children will often test boundaries when confronted with unfamiliar teachers. Being prepared will help both volunteers and children have a more positive, rewarding experience.



USING LOCAL PEOPLE AS ADDITIONAL VOLUNTEERS

At times, the group you are serving may offer additional staff or volunteers to help you carry out the activities you have planned. You will often have little opportunity to communicate with these people until you arrive. Try and get as much information about the people who will be helping you as possible in advance. What will they be able to do? Do they have any expectations about how they will be used? Is there anything important you need to know about their skills or other factors? The more information you can get about these extra volunteers, the more effectively you can use them. If these people will be taking lead roles in activities, try to make sure they have all of the necessary information well in advance of your arrival. This will allow them to ask you any questions and be prepared to cover their role when your team arrives.



THEMES AND ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN

Some ministries and faith-based programs may give you a theme for your week of children's activities. This theme may or may not be attached to Bible stories.

While themes can be helpful, they also come with some hidden pitfalls that can lessen the effectiveness of what your group does with the children.

The most important thing to remember when working with a theme is what your ultimate goal is and any S.M.A.R.T. goals your team generated. Your ultimate goal of course is to do whatever you can during your time with these children to help them learn about God and what He wants from them and for them in their lives.

Themes can be one of the biggest distractions from meeting your goals. If you forget to constantly view the theme through the lens of your goals, the vast majority of the time your activities will end up becoming much more secular than you realize or would have intended them to be.

A cute theme like "Strong Men of the Bible" sounds like fun. Samson, David and others like them have great stories with wonderful godly principles and commands in them. Yet, instead of activities helping students process what it means to really be strong in godly ways and practicing Christian life skills, something else almost always happens.

Someone creative thinks "strong men" equals "circus". Suddenly, your activities revolve around everything circus. Oh, there's usually a Bible verse thrown in here or a principle mentioned there, but the focus of the activities is more likely to end with a circus performance featuring Samson. No wonder kids are confused!

A great test for whether or not your theme is distracting you from your godly goals is whether or not it has anything to do with the Bible. Circus performers, igloos and alligators are fun and catchy. Ultimately though, those snowball fights and trapeze artists distract your students from the vitally important things they need to be learning.

Young children especially are concrete learners. Abstract ideas like forgiveness and love are still a bit difficult for them to process. When they see an alligator talking to Samson, a child still in the concrete thinking stage may legitimately believe for a very long time there is a story in the Bible where Samson talks to an alligator.



The really sad thing is that many Christians believe if you just use what is in the Bible, your activities will be dull and boring. The truth is children are often the most excited and engaged when they are discovering the experiences and truths in the Bible for themselves.

Take a look at some of the activities on our Teach One Reach One site. The day we had a donkey for the kids to ride and reenact the Triumphant Entry was anticipated for weeks. For a few dollars, we had kids all over town jumping out of bed early that morning and getting ready quickly so they wouldn't miss "donkey day".

Kids who learned about the story of Creation and then grew free food for their families using their mom's kitchen scraps were still talking about the experience three years later. Children who won't try new foods have even been known to go home after our wedding parable interactive drama and ask for "Bible" foods like couscous and figs!

The Bible is full of exciting stories, godly adventures and interesting history, food and culture. There is absolutely no need to modernize it or adopt cutesy secular themes to make it fun and interesting to children. Use what God has given you to the fullest and you may just find your students are begging for more. Plus they won't wonder where to find Elsa and Anna in the Bible or what a circus has to do with Samson.



THEMES AND ACTIVITIES FOR TEENS

It's tempting to skip creating or using a theme when you are ministering to teens. While you probably don't need to have a cute, catchy theme like you would when serving younger children, it still helps to have a theme around which the mission team will plan its lessons and activities for teens.

Having this theme, even if it is never expressed to the teens, will be another way for your team to stay focused as it plans and executes the lessons and activities you will use during your time with them.

For example, if the missionaries or leaders have asked you to focus on godly ways of avoiding and managing conflicts, having a theme that reflects your purpose will remind you to avoid planning things that have absolutely nothing to do with your purpose or in some way undermine what you wanted to accomplish.

Avoid choosing themes that will shift the focus of your service and mentoring from the Biblical to the secular. There are lots of ways to engage and excite teens about godly principles without turning all but a few minutes of your time with them into a series of secular games, discussions and activities.



PLANNING ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN

When planning activities for children there are several things you need to consider. Failing to take these factors into consideration in planning will cause your team problems when you begin working with the children. You need to ask the following questions as you begin your planning.

- **How much time are you expected to fill with activities?** You should allow a few minutes at the beginning and end of your day for songs, announcements and other all-group activities. This should fill no more than twenty minutes of your time. The remainder of your time should be divided into twenty to twenty-five minute segments. You will need to plan an activity for each of those segments.
- **How old are the children you are serving?** Preschool children will need to change activities every ten to fifteen minutes instead of every twenty minutes. Some activities can be appreciated by a wide range of ages, while others will be targeted to specific ages. Younger children may not have the fine motor or academic skills to complete the same activities older children can complete. Older children are able to begin understanding and discussing more abstract concepts than younger children. Your activities should be within the appropriate skill sets of your students.
- **What is your budget?** Most of the Teach One Reach One activities were designed to accommodate both programs with large budgets and programs with no budgets. Within some activities we will give you ideas of additional things you can do if you have the money to do them. You will want to choose activities that will fit within your budget.
- **What are your goals?** It is easy to create meaningful goals and then forget to see if the activities you are planning will help you meet those goals. Not every activity will help you meet every goal, but activities should not distract your team or the students from the most important things you want them to learn from your time with them.
- **What activities are realistic for your team to execute?** It is important to take into account the size, gifts, talents and skills of your team when planning activities. Your team can be asked to grow while serving, but expecting them to execute activities they are not equipped to handle, will leave everyone feeling frustrated.



- **Are the activities you are considering hands-on, meaningful and memorable?** Do they require students to process information about what God has said? Do they require the students to use multiple senses and experience things? Will they be experiences the students will still remember when they get home or even weeks and years later? The answers to these questions can mean the difference between an activity that will have a meaningful impact on children and an activity that merely fills (and wastes) time.
- **Are the activities designed to help children understand the cultures of the Bible or process godly commands and principles?** Often children need to experience part of Bible culture to thoroughly understand the Bible story. Clay lamps using oil are uncommon in many areas of the world. The parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids doesn't make much sense if children don't understand clay lamps. Seeing one and how it works, makes the parable more understandable. In the same way, telling children to handle anger in godly ways without giving them specific tools and practice, isn't very helpful.
- **Are the activities designed to make students think and process rather than just color and glue?** In general, a student-generated work of art requires students to think about what they are trying to portray. On the other hand, a coloring sheet is more likely requiring the student to focus on what colors should be used rather than any principles from the lesson. Crafts can add value to the lesson or they can waste time. Consider carefully how students will have to think to complete the activity.
- **Is the activity secular or spiritual?** Sometimes this is a difficult decision. Your goals for the trip may be a mix of both. If your focus is to be primarily spiritual, make sure your activities are too. Chances are if the students go home talking more about the secular part of the activity than the lesson that was to be learned from it, you may have shifted the balance a little too much to the secular side. Or if someone walked into your class while students were participating in the activity would they know they were in a Bible class? If your team is asked to tutor secular subjects, the balance will always be towards the secular. The challenge then becomes how to work God into what you are doing in meaningful ways.
- **Have you remembered the "Platinum Rule of Activities"?** It is better to have too many, high quality activities, than not enough activities or a lot of low quality activities. We have a limited amount of time with any children to reach them for God. Make sure your team is using the time you have been given as wisely as possible. It is always better to have students leave wanting to stay longer and do more, than to have them sitting bored for long periods of time.



PLANNING ACTIVITIES FOR TEENS

Planning activities for teens carries with it some special challenges. Popular youth ministry wisdom encourages lots of time spent in playing crazy secular games and just chatting about nothing in particular. While these activities may have a place during your time serving teens, brain science has proven they don't accomplish what people assume they accomplish.

Crazy secular games and “hanging out” together talking do not create meaningful bonds between teens. At best, they create a slightly warm memory of having fun together (or not, depending upon what happens during the game). The real bonding you actually want these teens to have with each other and the local church is only accomplished from sharing their hearts with each other.

As you plan your lessons for teens, make sure there are opportunities for them to explore and engage with the commands and principles you are teaching them.

- **Ask questions that will gently guide them through the various levels of expertise – remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating and creating.** (Visit the Teach One Reach One website for more information on Bloom's Taxonomy for the Bible Class and Asking Better Questions in Bible Classes.)
- **Fill in any gaps in knowledge of Bible stories or understanding of Bible cultures the students may have that pertain to your lessons.** Teens may have little or no knowledge of even the most basic Bible stories. They are often very interested in learning about and experiencing some of the customs from Bible cultures or even seeing copies of ancient objects and tasting foods enjoyed by people in the Bible. Filling in these gaps in ways that are fun, but not condescending can help teens better understand Bible passages.
- **Give them plenty of opportunities to ask questions, express doubts and think about the concepts you are sharing.** Many teens want to play with new ideas and see how they fit into the world, as they currently understand it. Make your classes a safe place to have these discussions or provide opportunities outside of class for mission team members to help teens work through these new ideas.



- **Give them the necessary tools to put Biblical principles into practice.** If your lessons are about godly ways to handle conflict, actually teach them the steps to handling conflicts in godly ways. Often teens want to put the commands and principles of God into practice in their lives, but have no idea how to do it. Teaching them practical things they can do to live out what you are teaching them will help them not only better understand what you have taught, but also put it into practice.
- **Give them opportunities to practice these new concepts and skills.** If time allows, have them practice some of the godly skills you have taught them. Practicing in real world scenarios will often make them realize they have other questions or concerns about what you have taught. You want teens to be as well equipped as they can be when they leave you to do what God wants them to do.

Note: The Teach One Reach One website has free teen lessons you can use.



ADAPTING ACTIVITIES FOR CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Many of the activities on the Teach One Reach One website have been tested in several regions of the United States and in several countries around the world. Some of our activities introduce children to the cultures of Bible times. These are new cultures for almost any child today, and children in a variety of cultures can appreciate the experiences. Many activities are variations of activities done by children in many parts of the world. We have found that even when an activity is new to the children in a particular culture; they still enjoy it and learn from the experience. In fact, they seem to especially enjoy the idea of participating in a totally new adventure.

There may be instances when an activity you have planned may be culturally inappropriate or be a sensitive subject in that particular area. Taking the time to double check your activities with the leaders of the group you are serving will keep you from accidentally planning an activity that will suddenly have a number of children crying or frightened. The leaders may still want you to do these activities, but may give you additional guidance on how to handle the emotional responses children may have.



PLANNING ACTIVITIES FOR AN UNFAMILIAR LANGUAGE

Missionaries are often overwhelmed with the amount of translating they must do on a regular basis. Asking them to translate the materials you will be using can place an undue hardship on their already limited resources. The missionary team will most likely appreciate any translation needs you can have done for yourself.

Missionaries have advised us to avoid using translation programs and apps. They are technically accurate, but often make mistakes on verb tenses or choosing the appropriate word for a particular situation.

The best person to use for translating materials to another language is someone who is a native speaker of that language and your language is their second language. While not perfect, it is still more likely to be accurate. If you have the resources and time, consider having a second person edit the translation.

When actually working with the children, it is important to have at least one fluent speaker teaching each activity. This is not always possible and you often must make adjustments. It is important to remember that if the children have someone who can understand their questions and answer them fluently, the chances of meaningful learning improve greatly.

If your group is performing a skit or drama, don't be afraid to learn the lines in the language of the children you are serving. Try to have fluent speakers critique pronunciation of lines by non-fluent speakers as you rehearse. It takes more time and effort than doing a drama in English, but allows you to add additional learning elements to your lessons.



PLANNING DRAMA ACTIVITIES

Dramas can help children understand a Bible story better than if it had merely been told to them. Many children are primarily visual learners and they learn better when they can see things.

Participatory dramas can add an entirely deeper level of understanding for the children you are serving. It can also make the drama more memorable. Imagine the difference between a child hearing about the Israelites drinking bitter water and eating manna and quail versus watching others do those activities versus actually participating in them. They will remember eating manna and quail much longer than they will remember merely hearing a story.

When dramas depict a Bible story, it is preferable to have the script mirror the scriptures as closely as possible. The Bible has plenty of drama and action without anyone having to add something for “artistic license”. If you do decide to add something, make sure what you are adding does not detract from the story or change its meaning. Using the NIrV Bible as the basis for your script will help keep the dialogue at an appropriate grade level for elementary aged children.

If your group will be serving this mission field regularly, it may be a wise investment to help them create a permanent drama closet of costumes and props. This will allow other visiting groups and permanent volunteers to use dramas to teach the children. It can also free up valuable suitcase room in the future for other important items. This can be a sizeable investment for your team, so make sure they have a safe place to store the items between your visits.



PLANNING ACTIVITIES FOR UNUSUAL CLASSROOM SPACES

Mission teams often find they are working with children in an environment very different from a traditional classroom. Your team may find itself working with children outdoors, in gyms or in some sort of temporary shelter.

When planning activities which will be executed in these unique environments, you will need to consider a few additional items to make sure the children you are teaching are able to learn well.

- Spread the activities as far apart physically as possible. These unique classroom spaces often make hearing the teacher difficult. Putting more physical space between the various activities will make the noise from other activities a little less distracting.
- Consider using portable sound systems. Some groups you serve may already have these available. Or your group may own a portable sound system you can bring with you (check airlines and customs for any baggage rules that may make this impossible). Any teachers who are soft spoken can use the system at a low level so their group can hear and not disturb other groups.
- Eliminate any game that will create a tremendous amount of noise or has the potential for balls or other elements of the game entering the space of another activity. While this activity may be great, it is probably best done in an environment where it is not preventing learning from occurring in other activities.
- Be prepared to move activities after the first rotation or day. After you have used the space once for the activities, you should know what adjustments you need to make to help students learn. Make these changes as quickly as possible. It is much better to move people, set up barriers or make other changes and disrupt things a bit in the middle of a day than to lose more valuable learning time to distractions.

Note: The Teach One Reach One website has many free activity ideas you can use.



GROUPING CHILDREN EFFECTIVELY

Unless you are working with very few children, you will need to divide them into smaller groups. Although it seems like a simple task, inappropriate grouping can cause a lot of problems.

When grouping children there are some general principles you want to remember, if you want the learning experience to be as effective as possible.

- Groups should be as small as possible, while still allowing students to enjoy the activities you have planned. If for example you have planned a game that requires twelve players, breaking children into groups of ten that rotate through that activity won't work well.
- It is important to keep safety ratios in mind. Opinions vary and experienced volunteers can handle more children safely than those who have little experience with children. In general though, for third grade and below an ideal ratio is one adult volunteer for every six children (One adult for every three or four toddlers/preschoolers.). When working with children in grades four through six, one adult should be able to handle up to fifteen children. Your team will need more adults per child if you are working with children who have serious behavior problems, special needs or if working in potentially unsafe environments (near or in bodies of water for example). Sometimes, it is impossible to maintain these ideals. If you are in that situation, make sure to put other safe guards in place to protect children and volunteers.
- Children should be grouped in groups that are developmentally appropriate for the activities you have planned. Some activities are experiential and can include a wide range of ages in the same group. Each child will experience the activity on the level that they are able to achieve. Activities requiring some sort of academic knowledge and experience will require tighter grouping. Preferably, for those activities every child in the group should be no more than two years apart in age. For some ages, this gap needs to be even narrower if possible. Much of that depends on the local school system and when most students are able to read and write independently. When in doubt, ask the group you are serving how they recommend dividing the groups for the activities you will be doing with them.



- It is essential to have a way to quickly identify in which group a child who has wandered away belongs. Tee shirts, bandanas and other clothing items of different colors are great, but can get expensive. Office supply stores sell dots and labels of different colors. Assign each group a color and place that color label on the shirt of each child in that group. Emphasize that the color is their group for the day and it is very important they remember to which group they belong. (There are always a couple of kids who manage to lose their stickers.)
- Be prepared for children or parents who insist the child is in a group with specific children. Be very careful when considering these requests. At times, a child will become inconsolable in an unfamiliar situation if separated from a special friend or relative. At other times, you may find the two children cause major behavior issues when allowed to remain in the same group. If groups are seen as too fluid, you may be plagued with constant requests for children to switch groups. Use your best judgment, but usually firm groups with a rare special exception work the best.
- Even if you can't get the names of the children you will be serving during the planning stage, try to get as much information as you can about the them. The most important information includes the ages of the children and how many you can expect each day. This will help you plan appropriate groupings before you arrive. If the group you are serving begins hedging, try to get them to give you a number range of children to expect. Let them know it is very important they don't underestimate the largest the group could be as that may mean you run short of supplies.



SCHEDULING A DAY OF CHILDREN'S LESSONS AND ACTIVITIES

Your team will understand the entire plan for each day if you can plot it on some sort of grid for them. There is no format that is necessarily better than others. What you want is a way to easily summarize what each group of people – both team members and children – will be doing at any point in time during the day. If your physical situation is somewhat confusing, you may also want to sketch out the layout of the area you will be using, with the various “classroom” spaces well marked.

Below is a sample schedule for a mission team serving different groups of children each day. A site map was not included as we were using a gym and had decided to designate the three areas once we saw the actual space. You can also include other important information like volunteer and group assignments on this schedule.

8:30-8:45	Orientation/Making group assignments, etc.		
	GROUP 1	GROUP 2	GROUP 3
8:45-9:10	Drama	Empathy	Bible Origami
9:10-9:35	Bible Origami	Drama	Empathy
9:35-10:00	Empathy	Bible Origami	Drama
10:00-10:25	Prayer Journals	Choices Game	Service Project
10:25-10:50	Service Project	Prayer Journals	Choices Game
10:50-11:15	Choices Game S	ervice Project	Prayer Journals
11:15-11:30	Wrap-up for all groups		

Area A: Drama 3 times then Prayer Journals 3 times

Area B: Empathy center 3 times and then Choices Game 3 times

Area C: Bible Origami 3 times and then Service Project 3 times



ORGANIZING MATERIALS FOR LESSONS AND ACTIVITIES

Taking the time to organize needed supplies will save you a lot of time and frustration once you arrive. It makes it easier for the items to be divided between multiple suitcases and to check and make sure everything arrived at the mission site. It also makes daily set-up much easier and keeps activity leaders from running around searching for missing supplies. I have also found, it often isn't until you begin organizing supplies that you realize you don't have enough of one item or forgot a needed item entirely.

The easiest way to organize is to have a large zipper baggie for each group, each activity and each day. So if you will have three groups each day, who will participate in six activities and you are serving for four days, you will need seventy-two baggies. (Note: Don't worry about wasting resources. I have found the groups we serve are actually quite excited to be gifted the slightly used baggies, even with writing on them.)

On each baggie, write in permanent marker the group "name" (Group A, Blue Group, etc.), the activity name and the day of the week. So for example, one baggie might read, "Group A, prayer journal, Monday". Then when you are onsite and suddenly the "Group A, prayer journal, Monday" baggie is missing, people are more likely to find it in their luggage. (I don't know why, but it works much better than "Does someone have a prayer journal baggie in their room?")

Make sure to pack a few extra supplies for emergencies. Clarify with the group you are serving whether or not you will also need to bring standard supplies like markers, glue, pens, etc. If you need them, place what each center will need for the entire week in one baggie since all of the groups will share those supplies.

You may be tempted to combine all of the supplies for one center in a baggie and not divide it by days or groups. This can work if you are teaching a small group of children. For larger groups of children, the extra dividing keeps people from allowing too many children at the beginning of the week to "start over" with fresh supplies and then finding you don't have any supplies for the children at the end of the week.



CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Appropriate classroom management is essential if your team is to be effective. Children need structure and boundaries to learn well. Children who are allowed to misbehave will prevent others from learning. On the other hand, children are meant to move and experience life. Classroom management techniques that are too rigid can also inhibit learning.

As a part of your group preparation and training, you need to have some basic written guidelines for classroom management. The group you are serving may have their own classroom management guidelines they want you to follow. Go over all of the guidelines thoroughly, making sure everyone understands the expectations for classroom behavior and managing discipline problems. You may even want to have volunteers sign the guidelines, especially if you have had issues in this area in the past.

Below is a sample of classroom management guidelines. This is only a sample. Please check the guidelines you will use with the group you are serving, church leaders and attorneys to make sure all local regulations are followed.

XYZ Ministry values the safety and well being of our students. The following guidelines are our expectations for classroom management.

- XYZ Ministry has an open door policy. We require classroom doors without windows in them to be open at all times.
- XYZ Ministry staff and/or permanent volunteers may come into your classroom at any time. They may offer assistance or observe your class.
- Parents of your students may observe your class if they have received prior permission from the XYZ Ministry staff. The staff will inform you when they have given permission to a parent to observe your class.
- Physical/corporate correction is not allowed under any circumstance.
- Cursing, demeaning comments, insults and other ugly speech are not allowed under any circumstance.



- We encourage you to require our students to follow XYZ Ministry rules:
 - o Do not talk when someone is giving instructions or teaching a lesson.
 - o Raise your hand if you have a question or need help.
 - o If an activity allows talking, movement and/or noise, you are still expected to be respectful of others.
 - o Do not use your words to be disrespectful or hurt others.
 - o Do not use physical violence or force against others.
 - o Follow instructions given by leaders, teachers and others placed in authority over you, unless they violate our ministry rules or God's laws.
- If a student disobeys rules or does not follow instructions, they are to be given only one reminder.
- If a student is openly disrespectful or disobedient, please let our floater know as quickly as possible. The floater will determine appropriate consequences. If you become a permanent volunteer, you will be given training on giving appropriate consequences to students.
- If you encounter a problem not addressed by these guidelines or have any questions, please contact Joe ABC.

If at all possible, assign at least one team member the function of floater. The floater regularly rotates around the area you are using and checks in on each of the activities. If there is a problem of any kind, especially involving student behavior or any student needs, the floater will handle the issue. This allows the person leading the lesson or activity to continue teaching.

Floaters should be people highly experienced in working with children. They should be very familiar with the classroom management guidelines you have in place and any possible consequences the group you are serving would like you to use. Having a floater adds an extra level of safety for both students and volunteers.



ASSESSMENT AND ADAPTATION DURING THE MISSION TRIP

No matter how many times your group has served a particular mission site or how well you have planned, you will need to make assessments and adaptations while you are actually serving. The more quickly and accurately you can make these assessments and changes, the more effective your group can be.

Sometimes team members, floaters or leaders will notice some things in the learning environment that are distracting students. Maybe it is too hot, too crowded, louder than you anticipated or the electrical grid is suddenly down for the day. If you have someone who is normally a project manager or handles logistics on a daily basis, they can often spot and troubleshoot these types of problems very quickly and help the team make immediate adjustments.

At times, the information you were originally given was either inaccurate or changed greatly, even to the surprise of the group you are serving. This can be as simple as a vastly different number of children or as complex as overestimating the academic skills of a particular age group. This may mean more sophisticated problem solving. If you have some experienced educators, they can sometimes coach these changes while the centers are still happening.

Even if no one noticed any issues that needed immediate correction, it is important to take a few minutes at the end of each day and discuss what happened. Are there ways you can change things for the next day to make the centers even more effective? What went well and what seemed to cause the children some problems? What other changes can your group make so the next day runs more smoothly?

Assessment and adaptation while on the mission trip means team members need to be prepared to be honest, humble and flexible. Just because something didn't work doesn't mean it wasn't a great idea, it just isn't working in this particular set of circumstances. The bottom line for your team should always be that the spiritual education and health of the children you are serving is always the top priority.



SURPRISES ON THE MISSION FIELD

Something will happen on your trip for which your team did not prepare. Whether someone becomes ill or a piece of luggage is lost or the electricity goes out for an entire day, you just can't prepare for everything. These surprises can ruin the trip if you let them. Or they can become the part of the trip everyone laughs about for years to come. Surprises can even be a catalyst for the spiritual growth of team members.

The first key to handling surprises is to cover everything in prayer. Pray as you plan the trip. Pray each morning before the children arrive. Pray continually for the souls your team touches during your time there. It is amazing how prayer can keep your team focused and balanced through even the wildest surprises.

Managing expectations is also important. Preparing team members to expect challenges, exhaustion and frustration will help. Reminding each other flexibility and encouragement are important to team success is crucial. If your team truly functions as a team, surprises should not cause major disruptions to your service.



AFTER THE TRIP

One of the most important things you can do after a mission trip is to bring the team together one last time after returning home. Take some time to celebrate successes and mourn any disappointments. Discuss what went well and what you would change if you were to do the trip again. Even team members who have no intention of joining the next team, can offer valuable insight.

Encourage the team to put together a reflection packet for the group you served. Include photos, videos, artwork, and journal entries - anything the members of your group are willing to share. This can not only encourage the missionaries, but also give them materials they can share with others who may express an interest in what they are doing.

If the group you were serving gave you feedback that has not already been shared, take the time to share it now. Encourage team members to share positive things they saw and learned about themselves and other team members. Every mission team can find things they want to change and improve. It is important though to also take the time to encourage and build the team and its members up for future service to God.

A LAST WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT

What you and your team do with the children you are serving can change their lives in a number of crucial ways. Teach One Reach One wants to help your team be as successful as possible. We have lots of free resources online you are welcome to use. We can also provide materials for you to use in training your group or we can sometimes come do a workshop at your location. We can also provide free consultation by email or phone. Please let us know how we can serve you and your team.

