HOW TO VBS: BREAKOUT NOTES FROM CPC25

If you attended our "How to VBS" workshop at Children's Pastors Conference (CPC)'25 or wish you could have, we've got you covered! This guide includes all the highlights and practical takeaways you need to create a successful Vacation Bible School (VBS) experience. Whether you're a seasoned pro or hosting for the first time, these ideas will help you throw the best VBS for kids, families, and your church.

WHY VBS?

Let's start with the big question: why should your church host a VBS? It's no secret that VBS takes a lot of resources—money, time, and volunteers. And with busy summer schedules, you might even wonder if kids will show up. Despite these challenges, here's why VBS is still worth it:

- **Unmatched Bible Engagement:** VBS offers kids the most concentrated amount of time to engage with the Bible, ministry leaders, and peers. It's an opportunity to dive deeper into Scripture and its application than they typically could on a Sunday morning.
- **Community Visibility:** Hosting a VBS increases your church's presence in the community, helping you connect with families who might not otherwise attend your services.
- **Building Relationships:** It's not just about numbers; it's about creating meaningful connections—between kids and God, between families and your church, and among your volunteers.

REFRAME YOUR WINS

Before you start planning activities and designing logos, take a moment to think about what would make your VBS a win. Instead of focusing on attendance or new memberships, think about the qualitative wins.

If you need help, try thinking about what a win might look like for each of these **GOALS:**

- **God:** Help kids grow closer to God.
- **Outreach:** Reach families in your community.
- Adventure: Make learning about God exciting and memorable.
- **Learning:** Teach biblical truths kids can carry into their daily lives.
- **Serving:** Create opportunities for kids and volunteers to serve others.

How you choose to define your wins and successes will help you as you get further into planning your VBS.

PLAN WITH PURPOSE

Whether it's for one day or one week, VBS is a huge undertaking. So, start your planning by identifying your top goals for this year. Map out a planning calendar to keep you and your team on track, starting with big-picture milestones and working down to the finer details.

Think about how you'll plan as early as **8 weeks** before your event and as late as **1 week** before your VBS. For each week, think about each section of VBS that needs to be planned.

Most likely, you won't need to be planning snacks when you're eight weeks away, but that's a good time to think about registrations, marketing, and your communication strategy for parents and volunteers.

PROMOTE, PROMOTE, PROMOTE

Once you've got a plan, it's time to talk about your VBS!

Here are some ideas to make promoting your VBS fun and effective:

- **Weekly Tabling:** Set up a themed table at church to showcase your VBS theme and get people excited.
- **Preview Events:** Host a no-pressure event where families can check out the theme, activities, and schedule.

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- **Kid-Made Invites:** Let kids create invitations for their friends to make it personal.
- **Leverage Social Media:** Use posts, videos, and countdowns to spread the word online.
- **Word of Mouth:** Encourage your church family to personally invite neighbors, friends, and coworkers.

YOU'LL NEED HELP

Volunteers are the backbone of VBS. Recruiting and equipping the right team can make all the difference for your event. Here's how to build a strong volunteer base:

USE PERSONAL INVITES

Announcements from the stage and email are great for raising general awareness, but here are some other ways to invite potential volunteers.

- **Invite directly.** A direct ask shows you value their gifts and believe they can contribute.
- **Be specific about the role.** For example, "You're so creative! Would you help us build a stage backdrop?" is more effective than "Can you help with decorations?"
- **Invite across age groups.** Don't forget to ask parents, high schoolers, and even college students who can bring fresh energy to your team.

TRAIN YOUR VOLUNTEERS

Look at you! Now you've got a whole team of VBS Avengers assembled. So... what now? It's time to train them, of course. Here's a quick look at what VBS training could look like:

- **Onboarding:** Start by sharing the **"GOALS"** framework with your volunteers to inspire them and keep the bigger picture in focus. Remind them how VBS can be a pivotal moment in kids' lives—a chance to connect with God, make lasting friendships, and create joyful memories that carry into the next school year.
- **Inspire and Empower:** Help each volunteer understand the specific role they play in achieving the goals. Whether they're leading small groups, managing the tech team, or organizing snacks, emphasize their value. Be specific: "The decorations you're helping with will make kids feel excited to walk into this space," or "Your energy in leading games will show kids God's joy in action."
- **Form a Core Planning Team:** Recruit a group of committed volunteers who can take ownership of key areas, like...
  - **Promotional Leader:** Manages marketing and registrations, organizes tabling schedules, and oversees check-ins.
  - **Activities Leader:** Plans and leads games and icebreakers to keep energy high.
  - Music Leader: Oversees the worship or song portion—whether with pre-recorded tracks or a live band.
  - **Snack Leader:** Prepares snacks and meals, recruits parent helpers, and oversees the first aid station.
  - **Storyteller:** Captures photos and videos, creates daily slideshows, and posts updates to social media (with signed photo waivers from parents).
  - **Tech Team:** Handles behind-the-scenes logistics like equipment, chairs, and supply prep.
  - **Group Leaders:** High school and college volunteers who guide small groups of kids through activities and discussions.
- **Host Workdays:** Schedule weekly work sessions 1–2 months before VBS to create props, test activities, and prepare materials. These sessions also double as team-building opportunities. Add music, snacks, and laughter to make them enjoyable for everyone.

By giving volunteers ownership of specific areas and equipping them with clear guidance and encouragement, you'll set the stage for a successful VBS.

What Else? Maximizing VBS Impact

Your VBS can do more than create a fun week—it can plant seeds that grow for years to come. Here's how to maximize its impact:

- **Add a service project.** Incorporate an outreach element, like packing hygiene kits or making cards for a local nursing home. This connects kids' faith with real-world impact.

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- **Partner with other churches.** Collaborate to share resources and ideas. This can lighten your workload and create a sense of unity in your local faith community.
- **Stay connected after VBS.** Don't forget to think about how you'll connect with these kids and families once your event is over!
  - **Send photos:** Parents love seeing their kids in action. Share photos and highlights with families after the event.
  - **Reinforce Learning:** Provide conversation starters or a recap of what kids learned so families can continue the discussion at home.
  - **Follow Up:** Check in with families a few weeks later to keep building relationships. And, of course, invite them to future ministry events!

READY TO PLAN YOUR BEST VBS?

VBS can feel daunting, but it becomes much easier when you have a strong team by your side. With clear goals, the right people in place, and a creative approach, you can create a VBS experience that transforms lives—not just for the kids who attend but also for the families and volunteers who make it happen.

We know that's a lot of information, but don't worry—we've put together everything you need in the resources, including our breakout slides from CPC 25! These free resources will help make your VBS planning even easier! We can't wait to hear about your 2025 VBS!



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