

DIRECTOR





Director Guide

**To make your job as VBS
Director easier, make sure you**

- ☑ read the *Director Guide* completely.
- ☑ check out the Resource Download thoroughly.
- ☑ spread out all the materials in your kit.
- ☑ browse the other leader and teacher guides to become familiar with all aspects of this VBS.

Course Overview

Day 1 Uncovering Counterfeits

Day 2 Finding Fingerprints

Bible Passages	1 Kings 18:20–39	Various Scriptures
Commit This to Memory	1 Kings 18:39	2 Corinthians 13:14
Animal Pals	Camo the Mimic Octopus	Loop the Sugar Glider
Apologetics Focus	There's only one true God. All others are counterfeits.	The Trinity is a reality but also a mystery.
Lesson Focus	God is unique because he is the only true God. Today, we'll uncover counterfeit gods and discover the God of the Bible.	God is unique because he is one God in three persons. Today, we'll be on the lookout for those persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
Truth Sleuth Crafts	 A-maze-ing God Maze Master of Disguise Mimic	 Spy Kit Trinity Keepsake Ornament
Truth Sleuth Science	Spot the Fake! Whose Writing Is It?	Unique Fingerprint Patterns Print Patrol
Fast Action Games	Disguise Dash Sneak Training 101	Triple Play Three-Legged Maneuvers
Top Secret Snacks	 Mini Mimic Look-Alike Landmarks	 Thumbprint Cookies Trinity Pizza
Cool Contests	Mystery M&M's	Secret Signals

Day 3 Collecting Clues

Day 4 Cracking Codes

Day 5 Hot on the Trail

Various Scriptures	Luke 15:11-32	Mark 12:28-34; Revelation 3:15-16
John 17:3	Psalms 145:8-9	Mark 12:30
Scout the California Sea Lion	Gracie the Kunekune Pig	Homer the Homing Pigeon
The biggest difference between Christianity and other religions is who Jesus is.	God's character is like no other.	Unlike other religions, our God is about relationship. He is loving and personal.
God is unique because he himself came to earth to rescue us. Today, we'll be challenged to admit, believe, and forever receive him.	God is unique; he is beyond description! Today, we'll crack codes to track down some of his attributes.	God is unique because he wants to have a personal relationship with us. Today, we'll learn our mission to keep God as our first love.
 Ichthys "Jesus Fish" Verse Decoder	 Forgiving Father Agamograph One True God Bible Bookmark	 Love God Magnet I Spy Shaker
Insect Detectives pHantastic Experiment	Secret Ink Lab The Code of You!	If the Shoe Fits Decoding the Digital World
Search and Rescue Collect the Clues Kickball	Crack the Code Training Stations Prodigal Son Relay	Mission Possible Operation: IXΘΥΣ (Ichthys)
 Classified Clues Bananagrams	 Codebreaker Crunch Pig Slop	 Mystery Muffins Hot on the Trail Popcorn
Devise a Disguise	Code Cracking Bible Challenge	Mission Money Mania



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Director Guide

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Your Mission

OVERVIEW

Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to train special agents around the world to detect counterfeit religions and to know, love, and live for the one and only God.

At *Spy U*, the latest from Answers VBS, kids will be in training to become agents for the one true God. In this jam-packed week, the cadets will be trained in the following areas:

- Uncovering counterfeit gods and recognizing the only true God—the God of the Bible
- Finding that God is unique—one God in three persons
- Collecting clues to reveal how to become a child of God
- Cracking codes to discover attributes of God
- Discovering that God is not distant but personal, wanting to be their first love

Excitement and adventure await from the first minute of the day, when everyone gathers for the **All Agents Assembly**, which includes entertaining intros, catchy songs, a Mission Moment, and prayer.

Then the cadets rotate through five fun sites:

Mission Briefing at Spy U HQ, where God's Word is taught in hands-on ways.

Fast Action Games, where training challenges of the utmost fun are mastered.

Top Secret Snacks, where top level treats vanish in a hurry.

Truth Sleuth Science & Crafts, where cadets engage in hands-on science activities and crafts.

Operation: Missions, Music & Memory Verses, where kids can spend additional time learning songs and memory verses, and hearing about missions.

After training and mission assignments are completed, cadets regroup for the closing assembly, which includes more singing, contest results, and the highly anticipated daily drama. The drama is set in International City, a place that has drifted away from following the one true God. The Truth Mission Force is sent in to expose the truth about God. Agents Jordan Trace, Alex Cipher, and Riley Gizmo find foes in unlikely places as their assignment takes them through unexpected twists and turns.

All this adds up to one great, high-impact week! Ready, agents? Do you copy? The world awaits!

Our Goal

We are so thankful for how God has chosen to use the Answers VBS programs over the past years! But why did we decide to embark on such an undertaking in the first place? And why are we still at it by God's grace?

Our primary goal has always been to bring God glory by boldly and unashamedly proclaiming him to a strategic group—young people! From both a biblical and statistical point of view, young people are a big deal. They're not only awesome—we love 'em!—but they're also dearly cherished by our Lord and tend to be softhearted toward spiritual things. Researchers generally agree most people become Christians when they're children, so it's apparent this age group is a huge mission field!

Children are loved by their Creator, and Jesus said to let them come to him (Luke 18:16). We want children to come to Christ and not be hindered in any way from doing so. To that end, we combine a biblically rich VBS with off-the-charts, irresistible fun. In a day and age when content sometimes suffers, we don't want to sacrifice rich teaching. But it's also crucial that the most exciting book in the world not come across as boring or irrelevant. We want to reflect our creative, inspiring, joy-giving God who made laughter and fun.

So why do we do it? We want kids around the world to hear about and personally meet our awesome God and understand how they can receive eternal life through repentance and faith in Christ Jesus. We believe VBS is a great way to introduce them to God, as it is one of the biggest outreaches of the year for most churches.

We pray you will find that every prayer prayed, every minute invested, every dollar spent, and every word spoken will bring God glory as you reach kids for Christ. Just remember—VBS is worth it. May God richly bless your VBS. We're praying for you!

Your Role

As the director of VBS, you are someone who possesses vision, organizational and people skills, and a heart for children. The following are your responsibilities:

- Oversee the entire VBS (read through the Director Guide and other manuals for further information)
- Work with the church staff on VBS-related issues such as goals, dates, and budget
- Recruit, organize, and oversee the entire VBS staff
- Run training workshops
- Coordinate the closing program to bring everyone back together after VBS is over
- Establish effective follow-up
- Pray over all aspects of this job before, during, and after VBS

Frequently Asked Questions

The content of *Spy U* may be new to you. For a list of helpful articles on the topics covered in this VBS program, please visit AnswersVBS.com/spyufaq.

Terms to Know

Throughout the VBS curriculum, various terms will be used. Here is a list of some of the most common terms to know.

Cadets: Groups of children (individual classes) named after countries (Truth Team Canada, Truth Team Japan, etc.). They will “graduate” from Spy U at the end of the week and earn the title of “Junior Agents.”

Truth Team Leaders: Group leaders who guide the cadets from place to place during VBS. No teaching is required of this position.

Mission Briefing: The Bible and apologetics lesson time happening at Spy University HQ.

Agents: Teachers at Spy University HQ.

Truth Sleuth Science & Crafts: Rotation site where crafts are made and science activities are explored.

Top Secret Snacks: Indoor or outdoor location where snacks are served.

Fast Action Games: Indoor or outdoor site (outdoor is preferred) for recreation time.

Operation: Missions, Music & Memory Verses: Rotation site where kids can spend additional time learning songs and memory verses and hearing about missions.

Commit This to Memory: Time to learn and practice the daily Bible verse.

Animal Pals: Our friendly animal mascots that remind us of the main themes of each day.

Toddlers: 2–4-year-olds.

Pre-Primaries: 4–6-year-olds or children ages 4 through those who have completed kindergarten.

Primaries: 6–9-year-olds or children who have completed grades 1–3.

Juniors: 9–12-year-olds or children who have completed grades 4–6.

For multi-age K–6 groups, we recommend using the material for the Primaries.

Top 20 Tips for the VBS Director

Whether you're a first-time recruit or a seasoned director, here are some tips just for you.

1. Pray and study God's Word. "We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4). You *will* be busy, so keep in mind that the busier you get, the more you need to pray and study!
2. Read through the various guides thoroughly and early. Become familiar with the [Resource Download](#), which contains clip art, logos, printable and customizable versions of the forms mentioned throughout this guide, and more. If you're a first-time director, ask previous directors and VBS veterans what's been done in the past. It helps to receive counsel! At the same time, don't be afraid to try something new.
3. Check out the web address listed on page 8 for great articles on the teaching at *Spy U*. This is a good resource for you and a good reference for volunteers or parents who have questions.
4. Many hands make light work. Be careful not to overextend yourself. Delegate areas of responsibility to people and allow them the joy of serving, even if it is not quite how you would do it.
5. When working with people, there most likely will be conflicts. Resolve conflict with prayer and gentle answers based on principles from God's Word. "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Proverbs 15:1).
6. Have a backup plan for games in case it rains and you need to be inside all day.
7. Have fun. Directing your VBS should be a joy for you. At the same time, though, remember you are in a spiritual battle with an enemy who will try to throw darts your way. "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances" (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18).
8. Label regular or electronic file folders with different areas of VBS and use these to file ideas and suggestions.
9. Help your church catch the significance of this event by sharing that VBS is a huge, God-given opportunity to reach many with the gospel of Christ.
10. Get enough sleep and exercise.
11. Make people feel loved, appreciated, and needed.
12. Communicate well. Make announcements, require attendance at the training workshops, send emails, and keep everyone informed.
13. Be enthusiastic! Your excitement is contagious and makes others want to be in on the fun.
14. When deciding on the ages to include in your VBS, keep in mind that this VBS is written to appeal to not only young children but also older elementary kids—and even teens and adults! It has answers from God's Word for real issues all kids face.
15. Be the *director*. Don't commit to teaching or any other VBS leadership role during VBS week. Stay as free as possible to greet, encourage, and troubleshoot.
16. Carry a cell phone or walkie-talkie with you during VBS week so you can be reached throughout the building.
17. Prepare two containers for each team leader. See page 34 for more information.
18. Soon after VBS is over, survey the staff so you can make improvements for next year.
19. Keep a list of answered prayers and praises. Share your list with others.
20. After VBS is finished, continue to pray for God to grow the seeds he planted and to bring more fruit over the next months. "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth" (1 Corinthians 3:6).

Connect with us and other Answers VBS directors through the following platforms

[Facebook.com/AnswersVBS](https://www.facebook.com/AnswersVBS)

[Facebook.com/groups/AnswersVBS](https://www.facebook.com/groups/AnswersVBS)

[YouTube.com/AnswersVBS](https://www.youtube.com/AnswersVBS)

[Pinterest.com/AnswersVBS](https://www.pinterest.com/AnswersVBS)

[X.com/AnswersVBS](https://www.x.com/AnswersVBS)

Terrific Trivia Tidbits

All spies try to do the same thing: get the right information. Trying to track down the truth is important business! But did you know spies have been around at least since Moses sent 12 spies to investigate the land of Canaan? And did you know a book on spying called *The Art of War* was written in 500 BC?

Use these fun facts and those below to start thinking about our fun theme—spies. These trivia tidbits can be shared ahead of time with adults at staff meetings and with kids during VBS week. They are also available on the [Resource Download](#) and can be used at arrival and dismissal time or during any downtime while kids wait to get to their next rotation.

Part I: General Information

- Did you know spies have a code of ethics that was developed in 1982? Yep. Spies have rules to live by.
- Code-crackers, also called cryptologists, do more than crack codes. They also create codes. Have you ever created a code?
- Hehe! When a spy walks past another spy and secretly hands him a document, it's called a brush pass. Sometimes spies actually pass a real hairbrush, just to be funny.
- What's the oldest code? Well, it just might be the Julius Caesar code. To use it, substitute one letter of the alphabet for another, for example: A for Z, B for Y, C for X, etc.
- Ever heard of a microdot? It's a tiny photograph, about the size of a period, that contains a hidden message so small that you have to use a high-powered magnifying device to see it.
- Heads up! In ancient Greece, some spies would be asked to shave and tattoo messages on their heads. Then they had to wait until their hair grew and covered the message to go on their mission. First thing after arriving safely, it was time for another haircut so the message could be read.
- Rabbits, bugs, and moles, oh my! In spy speak, all these words have special meanings. *Rabbits* are people spies are sent to watch; *bugs* are tiny, secret recording devices; *moles* are agents who work for the enemy agency undercover.
- Doctors aren't the only ones who operate. A spy mission is also called an operation.
- Check out these code names of real spies: Snow, Garbo, Blinker, and Zigzag.
- Don't scratch that itch! During World War II, British spies would sprinkle itching powder on their captors. When the captors started scratching, the spies quickly escaped.
- Smile, you're on secret camera! Spy cameras can be hidden in buttons, book covers, belt buckles, watches, and pens. One time, a camera was hidden on a bee.
- Spy shoes can also be used as radios. So if you ever see a spy tying his shoe, he may be up to something sneaky.
- Some spies are robots . . . or satellites. Satellites in space can be used to detect objects on earth as small as an orange.
- Night vision goggles are useful when a spy needs to see in the dark. But even though these goggles are helpful, the spy can't see normal colors because everything is tinted green.
- Spies sometimes carry a few items with them in case they need to change appearance quickly. Sunglasses, hats, makeup, and even changes of clothes may come in handy.
- What do Boy Scouts, butterflies, and spying have in common? The answer is Robert Baden-Powell. He spied for the British secret service by hiding sketches of Eastern European forts in pretend drawings of butterflies. Later, he founded an international scouting club that became the Boy Scouts.
- Don't forget! Good spies should always empty their pockets before they wash their clothes. One spy forgot this rule and left a secret note in the pocket of a suit he sent to the dry cleaner. He was arrested after the dry cleaner found the secret note and called the FBI.
- Canes can be used for more than walking. About 1,600 years ago, Emperor Justinian sent spies to China to learn more about silk. The spies stashed silkworm moth eggs in their canes and brought them back to Rome.
- Spies dug a tunnel under the Berlin Wall that was almost as long as four football fields—just so they could listen to Russian conversations.
- Dolphins have been used by the US Navy for many years. They are trained to locate and mark mines in the ocean and to find suspicious swimmers and divers.
- We all know dogs can be special pets. But did you know dogs have been used in espionage? Dogs serve as guards, sniff out bombs, and even gather information by carrying an attached small camera or microphone.
- You think double agents are sneaky? What about triple agents? Agnes Smedley was a triple agent who worked for Russia, China, and India!
- Sometimes spies are so tricky that they trick each other. Once, a spy made a fake brick with money hidden inside and left it for another agent. The agent found the brick but thought it was real, so he didn't open it. Later, he went back and discovered the money inside the fake brick.
- Not all spies work out in the field. Some spies sit at home all day reading the newspaper and watching TV. Public information is important intelligence too!
- Did you know there are estimated to be about 100,000 people who work for US intelligence? And did you know that US intelligence costs over \$70 billion every year? That's a lot of people and a lot of money.
- Clean up! Spies must be very tidy and organized so they can notice if anything is missing from their desk or bookshelf. They also must have good memories to remember all their papers and books and where everything belongs.

- Over half a million homing pigeons were used to carry messages during World War I. Some also had tiny cameras attached to them that revealed the location of enemy forces.

- Have you ever heard the saying “A little birdie told me”? During World War II, homing pigeons carried messages, photos, and maps to military leaders. The messages were put in tiny tubes strapped to the birds. So it’s actually true that a little birdie was used to tell them!

Laugh Detector

Animal Pal Jokes and Riddles

Day 1 Animal Pal Jokes—Mimic Octopus

- Why did the octopus win the football award?
Because during the game, he made ten-tackles.
- What did the octopus’ friend say to cheer him up? *“Seas the day!”*
- Why did everyone ask the octopus to fix their things?
Because he was really handy.
- Why did the octopus get a promotion at work? *Because he was good at inking outside the box.*

Day 2 Animal Pal Jokes—Sugar Glider

- What did the sugar glider’s mom say to her when she misbehaved? *“You’re grounded!”*
- Why do sugar gliders sleep so well? *They always have sweet dreams.*
- What do you call a lazy sugar glider? *A pouch potato.*
- What’s a sugar glider’s favorite meal? *Wings.*

Day 3 Animal Pal Jokes—Sea Lion

- Who was the sea lion’s favorite royal? *King Arfur.*
- What did the sea lion want to be when he grew up?
A Navy SEAL.
- Why aren’t sea lions good under pressure? *They tend to flip out.*
- Why do sea lions make good comedians? *Because they’re so sealy.*

Day 4 Animal Pal Jokes—Kunekune Pig

- What do you call a pig who’s a lumberjack? *A pork chop.*
- Who is a pig’s favorite president? *Abra-HAM Lincoln.*
- Why did the pig have to go to physical therapy? *Because he had pulled pork.*
- What did the pig say to his new neighbor? *“Nice to meat you.”*

Day 5 Animal Pal Jokes—Homing Pigeon

- Why did the pigeon detective come to the scene of the crime? *Because he suspected fowl play.*
- Why was the pigeon happy? *It was his bird-day!*

- How did the pigeon save money? *By using coo-pons.*
- What does a pigeon order at coffee shops? *A flappuccino.*

Miscellaneous Jokes and Riddles

- What did the hamburger say when it was put in the bun?
“I’m going undercover.”
- What three letters scare off a spy? *I C U.*
- What do a spy and a brain surgeon have in common?
They’re both involved in an operation.
- Why did the spy hang out at the ice cream parlor? *She wanted to get the scoop.*
- Why did the spy check out the bait shop? *There was something fishy going on.*

Knock-Knock Jokes

- Knock knock. *Who’s there?*
Cheese. *Cheese who?*
Cheese a good secret agent!
- Knock knock. *Who’s there?*
Juicy *Juicy who?*
Juicy that guy’s disguise?
- Knock knock. *Who’s there?*
Ketchup. *Ketchup who?*
Ketchup to him before he gets away!
- Knock knock. *Who’s there?*
Police. *Police who?*
Police let me in! I’m with the CIA.
- Knock knock. *Who’s there?*
Wendy. *Wendy who?*
Wendy you think we can go to VBS?

Tongue Twisters

- Spies spell spectacularly.
- Investigate invisible ink.
- Phony fingerprints fool federal agents.
- All allies analyze artifacts.

Spy Speak A to Z

A activate, affirmative, agent, allies, alpha, ambassador, analyst, artifact, asset

B betray, binoculars, bluff, briefing, bug, bureau

C camera, case officer, caution, cell phone, cipher, clandestine, classified, clearance, clues, code, communiqué, counterintelligence, courier, cover, covert, cryptologist

D debrief, decipher, decode, decoy, deep cover, diplomat, disguise, double agent

E encipher, encode, engage, escape, espionage

F false identity, fingerprint, footprint

G GPS (global positioning system)

H headquarters, homing pigeon, HUMINT (human intelligence)

I incognito, informer, intelligence, intellipedia, intercept, investigator, invisible ink

J jewels, Julius Caesar code

K key, knowledge

L laptop, leak, legend, lie detector

M magnifying glass, map, mastermind, microdot, microphone, miniature, mission, mole, Morse code

N national security, night vision goggles

O observation, officer, on assignment, operation, operative, over and out

P paper trail, paratrooper, passport, password, periscope, pinpoint, plane, polygraph

Q qualification

R radar, radio, reconnaissance (recon), ring of spies

S safe house, satellite, scout, security, special agent, spy, spymaster, stakeout, submarine, sunglasses, surveillance, synchronize your watches

T tail, target, telegram, telescope, top secret, tracking device, train, trench coat

U uncover, undercover, UV light

V virus, vulnerable

W wiretapping

XYZ X-ray vision, Zephyr

Spy Lingo

- A** **“Affirmative”**—yes
Aka—also known as
- B** **Birdwatcher**—name for spy in British Intelligence
Bug—listening device
- C** **Compromised**—when an operation or agent is uncovered
“Copy that”—I heard and understood the message
- D** **Dead drop**—a secret location where materials can be left and retrieved
“Do you copy?”—Are you there? Do you understand?
- E** **Ears only**—information too confidential (secret) to be written down
Expats—people who live in a country other than where they grew up
Eyes only—documents too confidential (secret) to be talked about
- F** **Flaps and seals**—using tools to open letters, read them, and replace them without tearing the envelope
FYEO—for your eyes only
FYI—for your information
- G** **Gather intelligence**—collect information
- H** **Hijack**—unauthorized seizure of a vehicle, person, or system
HQ—headquarters
- I** **Infiltrate**—to secretly gain access to a secure area
Informant—someone who provides information about another person’s secret actions
- J** **Julius Caesar code**—used by Julius Caesar and commonly called the Caesar cipher, which replaces each letter of the alphabet with another letter that is a fixed number of spaces away
- K** **Keyboard cipher**—code made by shifting fingers on a keyboard by a fixed number of spaces and typing from that position
- L** **Listening post**—site where audio surveillance from bugs and other devices can be heard
- M** **MI5**—the United Kingdom’s intelligence agency that covers domestic affairs
MI6—the United Kingdom’s intelligence agency that covers foreign affairs
Mole—double agent
- N** **“Negative”**—no
Neutralize—to make a spy ineffective by foiling their plans
- O** **Op**—operation
“Over and out”—goodbye
0100 hours—one o’clock in the morning
- P** **Pocket litter**—items in a spy’s pocket that verify their assumed identity
- Q** **Q gadgets**—legendary, imaginative spy tools often disguised as everyday objects
- R** **Ring**—network of spies or criminals
Rolled-up—when an operation goes wrong and/or an agent is taken into custody
- S** **Sanitize**—to delete information in a document
Swim—to travel
- T** **“That’s classified”**—that’s private information
Troll operative—online spy who creates confusion and conflict in the online platforms of other countries
Turn—to force or convince a spy to work against their country as a double agent
“10-4”—okay
- U** **U-2**—world’s most famous spy plane
- V** **Virus**—malicious computer code meant to disrupt or extract information from the targeted system
Voice-scanning software—technology that uses your voice as a password and is strong enough to even tell identical twins apart
- W** **Walk-in**—a defector who enters a spy office to give intelligence information in exchange for something
- X** **X-ray vision**—advanced technology that allows you to see through walls or containers
- Y** **Year of the Spy**—1985, the year that an unusually high number of spies were caught working in the United States
- Z** **Zephyr**—high-altitude surveillance system

Top 20 Tips When Working with Children

Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people, but Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 19:13–14

1. Show love. All children, regardless of age or appearance, need to be loved. Greet them warmly each day, and always be ready with smiles, giggles, encouraging words, and appropriate hugs. Make sure all staff are aware of your church's appropriate touching policies.
2. Learn names. It makes children feel important and loved to be called by their name. Make sure visible name tags are always on each child.
3. Keep it moving. Children have short attention spans.
4. Use active learning. The more children can actively be involved in the learning process, the more they will retain.
5. Be all there! Try to leave behind whatever is currently going on in your life and focus your attention on the children under your care during VBS. Listen to them and care for them.
6. Eliminate downtime. Find activities to do when you have a few free minutes so all time is being used in a fun and productive way. Practice memory verses, share Terrific Trivia Tidbits and Laugh Detector jokes, play impromptu review games, or ask fun conversation starters. (See page 74 for examples.)
7. Think safety. Read the Child Safety Precautions on page 52. Ensure there are always at least two unrelated adults with the children at all times.
8. Be thematic. Dress like a spy. Children love costumes, fun cheers, songs, and anything that goes with the theme. Get the kids enthused and excited about participating in the daily contests.
9. Walk worthy. Be an example in both word and deed. Children need to see authentic Christianity, so make sure you are walking the walk and not just talking the talk.
10. Notice the good. Children want attention and will sometimes act up in an effort to receive even negative attention. Be proactive by noticing and praising the things they do right. Be an encourager.
11. Be aware of age-level characteristics. With younger children, activities need to be hands-on, concrete, short, and simple. Older children love to talk and are processing and questioning information. Be ready to give an answer for the hope that is within you.
12. Challenge them. Children generally rise to the level expected of them, so challenge them to learn their memory verses and song lyrics. At the same time, encourage in them a true love for the Lord and his Word.
13. Pray. Before, during, and after VBS, be a faithful prayer warrior for the children in your care.
14. Be organized. Read through all training information, ask questions, and faithfully prepare any materials for which you are responsible.
15. Be a team player. Children do not need to hear negative words from their leaders. If you are frustrated or upset, take it to the Lord but do not complain or get angry in front of the children.
16. Remember to take bathroom breaks. The younger the children, the more important this is!
17. Maintain order. Children like order! Think through potential trouble spots in your day and decide on a firm, loving discipline strategy. Ask for help from experienced individuals.
18. Build team spirit. Work as a team rather than allowing cliques to develop. Everyone should be an important member of the team.
19. Use guided conversation. Be alert and ready to turn conversations to spiritual matters. Build upon what the children are learning throughout the VBS day.
20. Be prepared to lead a child to Christ. Attend the Gospel Presentation Workshop to be equipped should God give you the awesome opportunity to talk to a child about Christ.

Age-Level Characteristics

Kids are awesome! Each one is unique and is a special creation from the hand of our amazing Creator. With all their uniqueness, however, they also share some common characteristics. That doesn't mean every child always exhibits the following characteristics at the corresponding age, but these guidelines can be a benchmark to use when looking

at characteristics of children as a whole. Understanding how God has wired different age groups can help us be more effective in teaching and interacting with them.

First, you'll see characteristics of children in general and then characteristics broken down by the four age groups we use with Answers VBS.

Common Characteristics

- Children are born sinners (Romans 3:23).
- God has given each a conscience, and they (generally) want good to win over evil.
- God has shown himself to all children through his creation, making it obvious to all that there is a Creator.
- Children enjoy active learning—moving around, seeing things, touching things, smelling and hearing things, and being involved.
- Children need to be loved, encouraged, and praised.
- Children are rapidly growing and changing.
- Children trust the adults who are responsible for them.
- Children can get discouraged by criticism and failure.
- Children are eager to learn and are curious about the world and about God.

Toddlers (2–4 years old)

Physical Characteristics

Toddlers are active! They're on the move, running, climbing, and exploring. Some are beginning to perform simple tasks like using scissors. They can easily get hurt as they are rapidly developing physical skills but don't have wisdom to know when to stop.

Takeaways for Us

- Keep Toddlers moving. Engage them actively as much as possible. Have them do motions to songs and actions to Bible accounts.
- Supervise them carefully.
- Provide chunky, nontoxic materials.
- Intersperse periods of sitting with something active.

Emotional/Social Characteristics

Toddlers want to do things by themselves, such as picking out their clothes and dressing. They like imaginative, dramatic play. They're testing their powers and saying "no" a lot. They often want to please adults and try to mimic their behaviors. They're affectionate toward others. Toddlers are fearful of things that are loud and out of the ordinary.

Takeaways for Us

- Let Toddlers be helpers. Give them simple one-step jobs to do. Have them help pick up things and straighten the room at the end of the lesson. Let them know they've done a good job.
- Be consistently present all week; establish routines and stick with them.

- Be consistent in discipline. Let your "yes" be "yes" and your "no" be "no."
- Give them opportunities to dress up and play imaginatively.
- Don't dress in elaborate costumes that may seem unfamiliar and scary.
- Be careful to walk worthy—act and speak in godly ways. Little eyes are watching and will want to imitate you!

Spiritual/Mental Characteristics

Toddlers are curious and want to touch, smell, feel, see, and experience their world. They have short attention spans and learn/communicate in short sentences. They understand short and simple directions. They believe what you say. Their attitude toward God and others is in the process of being formed during these years.

Takeaways for Us

- Involve Toddlers' senses in learning! The more they can touch, smell, see, taste, and feel, the better!
- Give clear, simple directions.
- Keep activities and lessons short. Toddlers' attention spans are only a few minutes long before they need to switch to something new, so keep it moving!
- Be careful to speak accurately and truthfully.
- Show care and respect for your Bible and help them see your love for it and for the Lord.

Pre-Primaries (4–6 years old)

Physical Characteristics

Pre-Primaries are active and becoming confident in physical activities like jumping, hopping on one foot, and walking backward. They love to be moving. They're improving in hand-eye coordination. They're rapidly growing and may need rest after active play.

Takeaways for Us

Pre-Primaries like to play hard so keep them moving with short, simple games and activities. They may need to sit and rest for a brief time afterward.

Emotional/Social Characteristics

Pre-Primaries are less fearful than Toddlers but still often exhibit common fears, such as fear of dogs and the dark. They can have emotional extremes and are testing others to see who can be controlled. They want to please adults and want praise. They will often mimic adults' behaviors. They like imaginative play. Pre-Primaries can handle small tasks and responsibility.

Takeaways for Us

- Let them be helpers. Give them simple jobs to do and have them help pick up things and straighten the room at the end of the lesson. Let them know they've done a good job.
- Give them opportunities to dress-up and play imaginatively.
- Be consistent in discipline. Let your "yes" be "yes" and your "no" be "no."
- Be careful to walk worthy—act and speak in godly ways. Little eyes are watching and will want to imitate you!

Spiritual/Mental Characteristics

Pre-Primaries talk a lot and ask a lot of questions, including questions about God. They understand that sin is disobeying God's commands. They need a lot of guidance in tasks but can also follow a simple series of directions. They have an attention span of approximately five minutes. They enjoy doing new things, hearing stories and songs and can do basic memory work. They're not always able to tell the difference between reality and fantasy. They're developing attitudes toward right and wrong.

Takeaways for Us

- In downtime, give them time to ask questions. Be ready to patiently answer. But while you are teaching, be careful you don't get so wrapped up in letting them talk that the lesson doesn't happen!
- Vary activities often. The longer an activity goes, the more wiggly children become!
- When engaged in pretend activities, name them as such (e.g., "Let's pretend to be spies!"). At the same time, point out often that God's Word is not pretend but true.
- Repetition of songs and stories works well, and Pre-Primaries enjoy it.
- Sing the memory verse songs with them. They will be able to learn at least parts of the verses by the end of the week.
- Use visuals.
- Teach them about sin and asking God for forgiveness.
- Show interest in each child, letting them know you care.
- Be careful to speak accurately and truthfully.
- Show care and respect for your Bible and help them see your love for it and for the Lord.

Primaries (6–9 years old)

Physical Characteristics

Primaries love games and competitions, but it can be hard for them to lose. They are continuing to grow and improve in hand-eye coordination and fine and gross motor skills. They need to have opportunities for movement.

Takeaways for Us

- Use games to teach! Primaries love any kind of games, whether active or learning-type games.
- Help them learn to take turns and to be good winners and good losers! Both winning and losing well are important in God's sight.
- Use boy vs. girl competitions to get them revved up! As long as you keep it light and fun, they will enjoy these times.

Emotional/Social Characteristics

Primaries are becoming more independent and confident in their ability to do things. Girls play most often with girls and boys with boys, but there is some mixing of girl/boy friends. They like to have a best friend and enjoy pretend play. Primaries enjoy jokes and are gaining a sense of humor. They care about being accepted by the group and want adult/teacher approval.

Takeaways for Us

- Give Primaries plenty of opportunities to work in groups or with partners.
- Use humor with Primaries. The sillier, the better!
- Be careful to walk worthy—act and speak in godly ways.

Tips for Managing a Group of Kids

Kids are fun, and kids have energy! Whether you are a team leader, a classroom teacher, or an assistant, be prepared to confidently lead them using the following strategies.

Attention Getters

Call and Response—Teach the kids that when a teacher says something, they should reply with something else. Practice the following ideas so kids know your expectations for responding:

Teacher: I spy

Kids: With my little eye

Teacher: Mission

Kids: Possible

Teacher: Crisscross (as they sit and cross legs)

Kids: Spy boss

Teacher: Jesus loves me

Kids: This I know

Teacher: For the Bible

Kids: Tells me so

Teacher: God is good

Kids: All the time

Teacher: And all the time

Kids: God is good

If You're Listening—Say, “If you're listening, put your hands on your head. If you're listening, stomp your foot,” and so on. See how fast everyone catches on!

Rhythm Claps—The teacher claps a little rhythm, and the kids try to clap the exact rhythm back. Vary the clapping patterns.

Countdown—Hold up five fingers and start to count down from five to one. By the count of one, kids should be completely quiet.

Soft Talk—Start talking about something important very softly or in a whisper. Kids will often get quiet to hear what you are saying. Or say, “If you can hear me, clap once.” Continue softly with other commands.

Flash the Lights—This is a good signal to listen up.

Lining Up and Walking Through the Building

If You—Say different categories for lining up in fun ways, such as the following:

- “If you are wearing black like an undercover agent, line up. Now, if you're wearing red, line up.”
- “If your birthday is during the summer, line up. Now, if your birthday is during the school year, line up.”
- “If you have a dog, line up. Now, if you have a cat, line up. Now, if you have no pets, line up.”
- “If you are quiet, line up.”

Let's Be—When you are leaving a room, encourage good behavior in the hallway by making a game out of it. This works well with younger kids.

- “Let's be sneaky spies and walk as quietly as we can.”
- “Let's be robots. No talking—just stiff movements.”

Proactive Tips

Be Prepared—One of the best ways to ward off discipline problems is to be prepared. Think through and organize your day, leaving no downtime. Keep things moving! This takes more effort on your part, but it's worth it.

Active Participation—Keeping kids actively engaged in the lesson is perhaps the best thing you can do to keep the class from getting rowdy. The lessons are written to be creative, fun, and full of active participation. Play the games, act out the Bible accounts, and do the other ideas listed. Occupy kids' minds and attention with good stuff!

Helpers—Involve the kids. Let them be helpers; some kids just want to feel needed. Give them small responsibilities to show you trust them. Try putting them in charge of simple tasks, such as helping others learn memory verses, passing out papers, or holding a poster for the teacher. Sometimes a task can keep them busy and make them feel important!

Use Humor—Kids of all ages love to laugh! Have fun together. If you see a situation is getting tense or a child is getting upset for some reason, try thinking of a way to lighten the mood with humor.

Calming Rowdiness

Don't Yell—Kids may respond at first if someone yells, but they eventually dismiss it. Try some of these other ideas instead.

Separate Kids—Separate kids who misbehave around each other, but also encourage problem-solving when possible. “What are some things we could do to help you and ___ get along?”

Give Choices—Avoid power struggles by giving choices. If a child is resistant to doing something you've asked, try your command another way. “You can either sit with the rest of the group and listen to the teacher or sit with ___ (leader's name) at the back of the room.”

Praise in Public, Correct in Private—If someone does need correction, be careful not to embarrass him in front of his peers. If you need to talk to a child about a misbehavior, pull him aside at a time when the rest of the group is distracted. Kids will be less defensive if they don't feel they have to “save face” in front of their peers and if they feel you really care and aren't just coming down on them.

Know Church Policies—Know your church's policy for severe behavior issues. Do you take the child to your VBS director? Do you alert the child's parents? Do you involve other staff members? Be prepared.

Additional Suggestions to Share with Your Leaders

Pray—Some kids may never have had anyone pray for them. Pray not only about behavior situations but also about their eternal souls.

Prepare for Action

PRIORITIES

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. Psalm 1:1–3

To ensure that your VBS doesn't take a detour down the wrong path, work on deepening your relationship with the Lord before, during, and after VBS. As director, your commitment to continual growth in your personal relationship with the Lord is vital. This comes as you depend upon the Lord and eagerly follow after him. Daily prayer and Bible study provide fuel for your growth. The Lord tells us that "whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Encourage your staff to regularly spend time in fellowship with the Lord through prayer and reading his Word.

Take the responsibility of finding a prayer coordinator to head up a VBS prayer ministry seriously. Copy the following page for your prayer coordinator and encourage him to put together a combination of ideas that suits your situation.

Devotions for each VBS day have also been provided. You may want to read through these together or encourage your staff to read them on their own. Copies of the **devotions** can also be found in the Resource Download, in the *Helper Handbook* (1240070), and in the teacher guides for each age team.



Praying for Your VBS

Praying that the Lord will use this VBS program for his purposes is vital. Apart from him, we can do nothing. As you launch your prayer ministry, choose from the following ideas.

Top 10 Tips for a VBS Prayer Ministry

“When God plans a great work, he first sets his people to prayer.”—Charles Spurgeon

1. Find prayer warriors. Enlist people who are willing to pray consistently for VBS. Send each of them a list of VBS prayer requests for which they can regularly be praying. See the [Prayer Calendar Sample](#) for ideas.
2. Set up an email prayer loop. Use your church’s email prayer loop—or create your own—to pass along VBS prayer requests.
3. Gather your VBS crew to pray. Pray at meetings and encourage them to pray on their own. Write all VBS crew names on slips of paper and have each draw a name of a fellow crew member to pray for and with.
4. Hold a weekly prayer meeting devoted to VBS. Pray over that week’s praises and prayer requests.
5. Encourage your team leaders to pray through the names on their class lists before, during, and after VBS.
6. Hold a dedication service. Encourage the pastoral staff to include a time of prayer during the church service the Sunday before VBS.
7. Print maps and prayer request sheets and encourage your church family to walk the premises and pray over every area of the building and grounds.
8. Pass out “Praying for You” postcards (1240280) to willing and trustworthy church members with instructions to write a quick note to a child, letting him know someone is praying for him. Collect the postcards the week before VBS begins and have church staff address and mail them.
9. People who may not be able to make it to VBS can help by praying during the VBS hours from work, home, or wherever they are.
10. When VBS is over, continue to encourage your church family to pray for the children who came to VBS. Ask God to continue to work in their hearts and minds.



Staff Devotions

Devotion 1: One True God

For you are great and do wondrous things; you alone are God. Psalm 86:10

Imagine the confusion. Four hundred fifty prophets of Baal are limping about their altar, crying out and asking for their god to answer them by fire. The answer they receive? Utter silence. No response. They're doing everything they can to show their sincerity, to the point of harming themselves, and their god seemingly doesn't care. The confusion and desperation must have been palpable as the hours dragged on.

Then the scene shifts to Elijah. The odds are against him—450 to 1. Baal has 450 prophets desperately interceding beside a dry altar. The Lord has just Elijah and a sopping-wet altar. Yet, with the odds stacked against him, Elijah's simple prayer of faith gives us a glimpse into how God-focused he was: He asks that the Lord answer by fire so that the people may know who is God. He is zealous for God's glory and for the people to see that there is no contest between God and Baal. It's not as if there were two good options in the final "god matchup" and he didn't really know who would win. It's not like commentators couldn't agree on who was the better god. No, when Yahweh shows up, there is no contest. All competition is blown away. In fact, there is no competition. He alone is God.

In many ways, our culture is similar to what Elijah encountered. Instead of Baal, we have idols of all types—from the literal idols of Hinduism and Buddhism to the heart idols that people worship, like success, money, or romance. As one Christian figure wrote, our hearts tend to be idol factories (Calvin). We today still need the truth Elijah demonstrated in ancient times—the Lord alone is worthy of our worship and allegiance, and loving him with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength is the only way to find peace and meaning in this chaotic, idol-filled world.

Metaphorically, we will limp along as the prophets of Baal did until we bow the knee to the one true God.

As we share the account of Elijah and the prophets of Baal with the children under our care today, let's remind ourselves that the God of Elijah who answered by fire is the same God yesterday, today, and forever. We too serve the God who is there and who isn't silent (Schaeffer). In a world that is peppered with confusion about who has the final authority in our lives and where truth can be found, this is an immense comfort: The one true God is alive and well, and he is still at work in our world. We can pray like Elijah that the people in our spheres of influence would know that he alone is God. Consider the words of the hymn "God Only Wise" by Walter Chalmers Smith in 1867 as you prepare your heart to serve the Lord today.

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.

Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,
nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might;
thy justice like mountains high soaring above
thy clouds, which are fountains of goodness and love.

To all life thou givest, to both great and small;
in all life thou livest, the true life of all;
we blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,
and wither and perish but naught changeth thee.

Great Father of glory, pure Father of light,
thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight;
all praise we would render, O help us to see
'tis only the splendor of light hideth thee.

Devotion 2: Three-in-One God

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. 2 Corinthians 13:14

What do water, a three-leaf clover, and an egg all have in common? Did you guess it? All three have been used as analogies of the Trinity, and all three are gravely mistaken in their explanations of such a complex doctrine.

Psalm 145:3 tells us that God's greatness is unsearchable. Perhaps the place we most feel the truth of these words is in the doctrine of the Trinity. One God in three persons? What exactly does that mean? Today, we will uncover passages of Scripture that reveal the three persons of the Godhead who are all distinct, yet entirely unified in one coequal, coeternal divine essence.

What do we mean by coequal? This means that the three persons of the Trinity are all equally God. The Father is not the supreme God, with the Son and Holy Spirit merely following him as subordinates. Instead, they are equal in their divine standing and authority. We see Jesus submit his will to the Father when he prays in the garden of Gethsemane, but that act was not because Jesus was a lesser version of God. He willingly laid down his life.

What about coeternal? Some cults have claimed that the Son is a created being and that he is not eternal in the same way the Father is. That is a heresy. Jesus himself refers to his eternal essence by saying, "Before Abraham was, I am"