

Best Practices

For many of the parents, this will be the first time they have reconnected with the Church since their child's Baptism. Providing a sense of welcome and making an effort to help families feel comfortable is key. On these pages are some practices that can help to accomplish this.

Creating the Environment

- Make sure to create a prayer space where the Bible and the signs and symbols of the session are clearly visible.
- It is important that the screen used to display the PowerPoint® slides is big enough for everyone to read. You will also need the screen to show the videos suggested in the sessions. Check in advance that the technology is working properly. A small TV that is difficult to hear in a large room may well suggest that what you are watching is not that important.
- When you assign seating, make sure there is enough space around the families so that they will not be distracted by other conversations or activity in the room. Try to seat actively engaged families near families that are not as actively engaged. You may want to send an "evangelization guide" to actively involved families beforehand that provides suggestions about how to engage others in conversation where they can speak about the meaning of faith and parish life in their own family.
- Make sure the materials necessary for each session are gathered and easy to access in the manner suggested in the session plans.
- If you have the courage, invite parents to put their cell phones in a "parking lot" (a door-hanging shoe holder will work great). Letter the pockets and have parents remember the letter to reclaim their phone. Approach it as a game and declare a no judgement zone for the parents who just can't do it. But ask that no one use their phones, except during breaks.
- Gather a team of parishioners and ask them to help personally welcome families and help them register, get refreshments, and find their seats. These people would walk with each family to the different places and perhaps sit with them a while and chat before the session begins.

During the Session

- Pay attention for signs that it is time for a stretch break that you may not have planned on. During the break, you may want to allow time for a fun physical activity. Some research shows that physical activity can help with retention of information. You may want to have children and parents face each other and do a rhythmic sequence of hand claps and motions that continue to speed up.
- Always have bulletins available wherever participants are seated. Refer to parish events whenever there is an opportunity to connect to session outcomes.
- When leading the practice of scripture reflection, you may want to create more specific questions for children and parents since it will probably be the first time many have done this type of prayer. Possible example for a child question: What word or sentence stuck to your heart like glue? Possible example for a parent question: What thought or image did you have during prayer? Keep in mind that sharing with a large group can be intimidating. Provide encouragement and support to all participants.