



The Jesus Toolkit

FOR CHILDREN AT RISK AMBASSADORS
AND CHILDREN AT RISK

A MULTIGENERATIONAL TRAINING TOOL

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Introduction:

Children at risk are: ‘persons under 18 who experience an intense and/or chronic risk factor, or a combination of risk factors in personal, environmental and/or relational domains that prevent them from pursuing and fulfilling their God-given potential’.

“A high value of children must be taught at all levels within churches, organizations, academic institutions, etc. A high view of Scripture goes hand-in-hand with this approach to children”.

The Jesus Toolkit is one way in which people working with children at risk, what we are calling Children at Risk Ambassadors, can learn about the value Jesus puts on children and how we can value and listen to them. These can be parents, carers, teachers, Sunday school teachers, youth leaders, community workers, health workers etc.

In valuing children we also value their families and the role that parents play in nurturing their children but we recognize that many children do not always have parents and need others to provide the nurturing role instead.

In developing the Jesus Toolkit we felt that in training Children at Risk Ambassadors to understand what scripture was saying about children we could also use the material to help children at risk to also understand their inherent value and role. Indeed, learning these lessons together intergenerationally, albeit perhaps considering different questions, could be really helpful in one of the key understandings i.e. that adults listen to and value children’s perspectives.

“We value listening to children. Do families allow their children to express their opinions and desires related to decisions that affect their lives? How often in our churches do we consult with the children and youth before making a decision? Certainly we must avoid burdening our children with decisions that are beyond their understanding or maturity level, but there are many things in the lives of our families, churches, and communities that children can and should be consulted about. We value the process and the product of authentic listening to children’s opinions, dreams, desires, and hopes. Including children at risk in these conversations is not always easy, but it is a necessary and important step in embracing, engaging, empowering, and releasing them as full participants in the Kingdom and agents for mission”.

Mission with Children at Risk <https://www.lausanne.org/content/lop/mission-children-risk-lop-66#2-4> describes how the church might engage with Children at Risk:

“Children generally have relatively little power and voice in their worlds and are vulnerable to the decisions of more powerful adults in their families, churches, and communities. Considering this, how might children at risk see their place in the world, in the church, and as partners in mission? How might they wish to be ministered to,

advocated for, and partnered with in the Christian community? In addition, how might the church protect them, not only from abuse in the broken and sinful systems of the world but also from potential exploitation by the church or well-meaning adults?”

Children involved in Mission

“We place a high value on empowering the church to become a place where children at risk can participate fully as ‘vulnerable agents of God’s mission,’ while also being protected from potential harm resulting from this participation. As such, we must consider the following questions: What is ‘appropriate participation’? What types of manipulation, exploitation, and spiritual abuse might occur in this participation? All child participation will include power differentials between adults and children, and participation and protection must go hand-in-hand”.

“Children at risk are to be embraced, engaged, and released as ‘vulnerable agents of mission’. What do we mean by this? Children are vulnerable because of their smaller physical size, dependence upon broken adults for care and nurture, and disproportionate impact of broken and sinful systems. They are also active in the development process, not passive victims in their respective journeys, and they bring that same agency to the church and mission. All too often we have relegated children to *tabula rasa* status—as empty cups waiting to be filled with teaching until they are intellectually able to discern doctrine, to be ‘saved’, and then to contribute as adults through financial support, use of spiritual gifts, and leadership. In a sense, they are often viewed as ‘human becomings’, rather than as fully human and fully a part of the household of Christ”.

“We [can] also find it challenging to fulfill the call to mission *with* children. Many churches are doing a good job of ministry *to* children, providing Sunday School and outreach ministries. Some churches are engaging in advocacy and ministry *for* children, such as feeding programs, tutoring, or after school care, especially in contexts where many of the children in the communities are children at risk. Yet, ministry *with* children and children at risk is often more difficult. Churches must learn how to identify ‘appropriate participation’ of children, especially in evangelism and social action ministries. What is ‘appropriate’ may even vary by context”.

“The church is often in a unique position to be able to facilitate gathering together all of the stakeholders in the community in a ‘neutral zone,’ and this will allow for children to be ministered to, for, and with much more holistically. This seems to work the best when it is done at the local level where people can offer clear, tangible ways of partnering with one another. It also allows for personal accountability because you are able to meet face-to-face and work on tangible action plans”.

“The children themselves are excellent sources of information about their dreams, needs, visions, and desires. A final crucial lesson has been to recognize that mission with children

at risk will include creating spaces where children's opinions are listened to, taken into consideration when making decisions, and acted upon. Whenever possible, the children should be included in the design, implementation, and evaluation of the ministry. Collaboration needs to take place not only between churches and organizations, but also between adults and children at risk".

"What will it take for the church to see children as strategic, indispensable and fully integrated into the *missio Dei*? It will take each one of us being willing to act upon the understanding that holistic mission with children at risk means that children will be included as recipients of ministry (mission *to* children), that we advocate on their behalf in venues where they have little to no voice of influence (mission *for* children), and that we integrate them as meaningful participants from local to global levels (mission *with* children). Jesus came into the world as a child-at-risk, and he fully embraced and engaged children. We commend families, churches, denominations, mission organizations, non-governmental organizations, schools, and individuals to join us in mission *to*, *for*, and *with* children at risk as we all seek to partner with God in God's mission".

We hope that the Jesus Toolkit will help those working with children at risk to start the conversation with each other and also with children at risk themselves. A variety of formats are suggested. We believe the illustrations will, in addition to reading scripture, enable participants to be challenged and excited to understand a) that Jesus himself was a child at risk and that he grew up just like all children with challenges b) that he was and is indignant when adults kept/keep children from him and/or were abusive to children c) that he is an advocate for children and sees the amazing inherent value of who children are as well as what they can do and wants us to inspire children at risk ambassadors to encourage children to be part of the mission of God.

The Jesus Toolkit

The purpose of the Jesus Toolkit is to

- a) Encourage adults; Children at Risk Ambassadors working with children in difficult circumstances around the world that they are working alongside Jesus because he has a special place in his heart for children at risk. Jesus himself was a child at risk and experienced bullying, betrayal and the crucifixion. In addition he wants these children to not only experience his love but take part in his mission to other children, to their families, their communities and to the world.
- b) Encourage children at risk that they are deeply loved by God and that Jesus understands what it is like to be a child at risk. Also that they can be part of God's mission to reach out to other children, to their families, communities and to the world. Don't assume that some children are not at risk. Every child will have challenges and some may not always be visible.

When you go through the pictures and tell the story give plenty of time for the children and adults to look at the picture and consider the questions being asked. You could go through the all the illustrations in one session but you may prefer to just focus on one or two pictures each week or each day depending on the context in which you are working.

You may want to divide up the adults into small groups for them to discuss the questions together and do the same with children. However, you may prefer to keep both adults and children together so that they can learn from what each other says.

You will notice that for some of the illustrations the questions for adults and children are similar or the same but for others they are different.

Before you use the materials you may like to pray beforehand yourself or with your team that God is able to communicate through the scripture and illustrations.

It is always better to use the language people feel most comfortable to engage with even if they know English as a second language. So translation before it is used is important. Make sure that the translator uses language that is understandable by children and not just adults.

All the materials are available on the following website

1. Powerpoint
2. High definition Illustrations for the Flipbook, Gallery of Pictures/Posters
3. Non coloured outline of illustrations for the colouring book/comic

METHOD 1: Hardcopy Flip-Book

One way to use the illustrations is to create a Hardcopy Flip-book. These can be used in a range of different settings; Sunday schools, Schools, Community centres, Churches even under a tree because they don't rely on electricity.

You will need to get the illustrations printed onto hard waterproof or laminated A2 or A3 size card with the pictures on one side and the story and questions for that picture on the other. This allows the story to be read by the person doing the training while they are holding up the picture. The pictures can then be combined together in the correct order to make a flip-book, where the pages are turned over.

METHOD 2: POWERPOINT

Another way to use the illustrations is as a PowerPoint. They can be shown individually or as a series of pictures. You may like to leave the picture up on the screen while you tell the story for that picture and ask the questions to the child at risk ambassador adults and the children at risk.

METHOD 3: GALLERY OF PICTURES

An alternative is to put the pictures up as a gallery of pictures. For this you will need to print the illustrations onto A2 small poster size. It would be good to get them laminated so that they can be used again in the future. You can display them on the wall with tacks or blue tack and number them each with a different number. You can then put the questions on a table in front of the poster illustrations and invite adults and children to write a comment on each picture, with different coloured pens for adults (e.g. black) and children (e.g. blue). This could be done on poster paper where the children and adults can see what each other has written and be inspired by it. After everyone has written their comments then the facilitator can guide the group around the different posters reading what has been said and inviting additional comments.

Alternatively, they could write their responses on individual photocopied paper which is numbered so they can make comments for each illustration. If this method is used then the facilitator can then pull what people have said and put it together into a report which can then be fed back to those who did it so that they can be encouraged by what has been

said and to hear different perspectives than the ones they themselves gave. This can be done for what children said and then separately for what adults said.

METHOD 4: COLOURING BOOK/COMIC

The non-colourized outline version of the illustrations can be printed in A4 format and then stapled together in Landscape rather than Portrait version. Children and adults can then be encouraged to colour in the pictures as the story is told and the questions are asked. Adults love colouring in as much as children. You can use wax crayons or colouring pencils whichever is cheaper. The participants can also be given the story and questions or just the relevant questions in the comic depending if they are adults or children.

METHOD 5: ONLINE FLIPBOOK

We are exploring making the illustrations available in an application as an alternative way of accessing the material. This makes it harder to use in groups but may be useful for wider distribution to adults working with children at risk and children themselves