

Pandemic-Proof Your VBS — 3 Ways to Adjust VBS for Coronavirus Health Concerns

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January 11,
2020

What are we going to do about VBS this Summer?

That's a question all of us are asking right now. Even as some states open back, can you safely hold a large group program like Vacation Bible School this summer? How will you protect the kids and volunteers? What about the curriculum you already bought? Here are some ideas and considerations for planning your Vacation Bible School in this season of Coronavirus.

Don't miss our [poll asking readers about their plans for VBS](#) this summer.

Every church needs a plan B for this year's VBS.

Most churches begin preparing for Vacation Bible School programs long before it's even spring. Some start gathering supplies right after Christmas, and some might even look at planning for the summer ahead as soon as the school year begins! So it is more than likely that this year's program directors already had a theme picked out, registrations opened, volunteers lined up, and maybe even supplies ordered—and then a global pandemic hit.

Children's ministers at first casually figured quarantines would easily lift by Easter and things could resume normalcy...then restrictions were extended, and a little nervous nail-biting might have begun. Now, even if small gatherings are permitted, it looks like large groups will be out of the question for a large part of the summer. Does this mean cancelling Vacation Bible School? Is it better to postpone? Can we just throw caution to the wind and carry on with events speak-easy style?

Creative leaders can make this work.

Summer programs are a huge highlight for many children and adults. We will need to re-imagine how to organize and run things this year, but the show can go on! With a little creativity, we can still pull off a meaningful and memorable VBS. Of course, the best methods of doing so will vary according to the size and needs of the audience that you wish to serve.

Whatever you choose to do, carefully consider the guidelines set by your location, and keep in mind the concerns of all involved. Safety must be a priority first and foremost. With that at the forefront of attention, think about some of the following possibilities and parameters as you navigate how to execute a fantastic VBS, regardless of challenges. Here are a few potential ideas and accompanying suggestions to execute them.

Option 1 — Hold a “virtual VBS” at homes

You may decide to maintain total distance this year, and make VBS an event that parents can carry out at home with their kids. It might be a “backyard VBS” or a “living room” VBS, but you’ll still want to be as present as possible throughout. There are a number of great programs that are being made accessible online, but consider ways that you can still make it as true to “real live” events as possible. If you already purchased curriculum, check with your publisher for VBS at home modifications they support.

- Set a suggested week for families to hold the program.
- Make announcements, send out invitations, and provide all of the information needed.
- Put together kits for crafts and activities. These can be dropped off at houses or available for pick-up at church, depending on circumstances.
- Create files using documents, pdf materials, or links to print-outs, and make these easily accessible for parents.
- In addition to videos and materials provided by the program, create your own welcome videos and personalized messages, so that students can still see familiar faces at the helm of the VBS program.
- Maintain daily communication with your families. Again, this will vary according to audiences and circumstances. You may be able to use a web conferencing tool like “Zoom” to introduce or re-cap each day’s material. Or you might send out mass emails to parents reviewing the content covered.
- Adjust or adapt games so that they can be played at home with smaller groups, or even online, if you are using a more interactive web format.
- Encourage parents to take pictures of their children doing suggested activities. If they are comfortable doing so, invite them to share these photos, and compile a collage or slide show of kids having fun with VBS.
- Keep volunteers in the loop! If your volunteers are still willing, invite them to share the load with you by taking on components of VBS. Ask them to share videos and ideas for their elements of Vacation Bible School. If you wish to split up larger groups, assign leaders to a cluster of children, and allow them to keep in touch with how the week’s activities are going.
- Both during the week and after, set up quick surveys to encourage feedback on things that seem to be going/have gone well, and also things that could be improved.

- Consider holding a follow-up celebration. When restrictions have been lifted, invite students to come together for a few hours to enjoy some songs, games, and snacks, and to share how their experience with activities was.

Option 2 — Host Vacation Bible School as planned, with adjustments:

You might have a small enough crowd to still pull off “in-person” VBS this year. If you prefer to carry out your program as originally hoped, consider some precautions to maintain safety for all involved.

- Postpone your program week, pushing back as late as possible.
- Work with a skeleton crew, using only as many volunteers as are absolutely essential.
- Designate an age limit for volunteers to encourage safety for older members. If seniors are interested in helping, invite them to provide supplies or contribute written devotions.
- Consider holding as many activities as you can outside to allow more space for distancing practices. If you have availability to do so, use large tents to shade open areas.
- Limit participants to ensure safe distancing. Enforce pre-registration and decide on an optimal cap.
- Consider hosting more than one week, in order to accommodate multiple smaller groups.
- Carefully sanitize all surfaces after each rotational use.
- If advised or preferred, have volunteers and participants wear masks and/or gloves.
- Eliminate games or activities that might require close contact.

Option 3 — Adjust your “VBS” to another schedule or program time

Modify Methods: You can lengthen or shorten the duration of Vacation Bible School and still use your chosen curriculum.

- Turn VBS into Sunday school. If you are able to meet, use VBS lessons as a summer Sunday school option, spacing out stories and activities to fit into Sunday school hour timing.
- Host a “Vacation Bible School Blast.” Choose a day or weekend, perhaps right before the return to school, and condense VBS activities into a day or two.
- Opt for a two-a-day VBS in order to lower numbers. Slightly decrease the time commitment of each day, and allow space between sessions so that all students have time to transition.

- Save the whole program, and have “summer in winter,” executing a slightly smaller version of VBS for those who are available during a Christmas or January break.

Prayerfully contemplate how your congregation can still host a meaningful Vacation Bible School program, even with the restrictions and limitations of the current crisis. If you think it best to cancel the program altogether, you can always save supplies for next year... however, it might bring a blessed sense of normalcy for students to still have some kind of VBS event! Know that God is at work in any planning you are doing. Stay safe and stay Christ-Centered. Have fun!

More ideas for modified and virtual VBS at home

There are some great articles and resources for adapting to the challenges of hosting Vacation Bible School during this pandemic. Here are a few we recommend. Please leave a comment if you know of other helpful resources. These are all off-site links.

- [How to Host VBS at Home](#) (blog from 2017 but very relevant)
- [Group shares tips for VBS in this year of pandemic](#)
- [LifeWay offers 4 strategies for VBS during these times](#)
- [Cokesbury shares about ministering beyond the church walls](#)
- [Jenni Carter writes how and why to do VBS during COVID-19](#)
- [Concordia Publish House shares a planning guide and video about hosting a virtual VBS](#)
- [Go Curriculum has new created a virtual VBS at home made specifically for this situation](#)
- [Concordia Publishing House has more guides too](#)