

Core Skills

FOR CHILDREN'S WORK

Developing and extending key skills for children's ministry

A photograph of a whole green apple with several leaves on the left, and a sliced apple on the right. The slices are arranged in a spiral pattern, showing the core and seeds. The background is a gradient of red and blue.

Child development
Leadership skills
Programme planning
Children and community
Pastoral awareness
Spirituality and the Bible

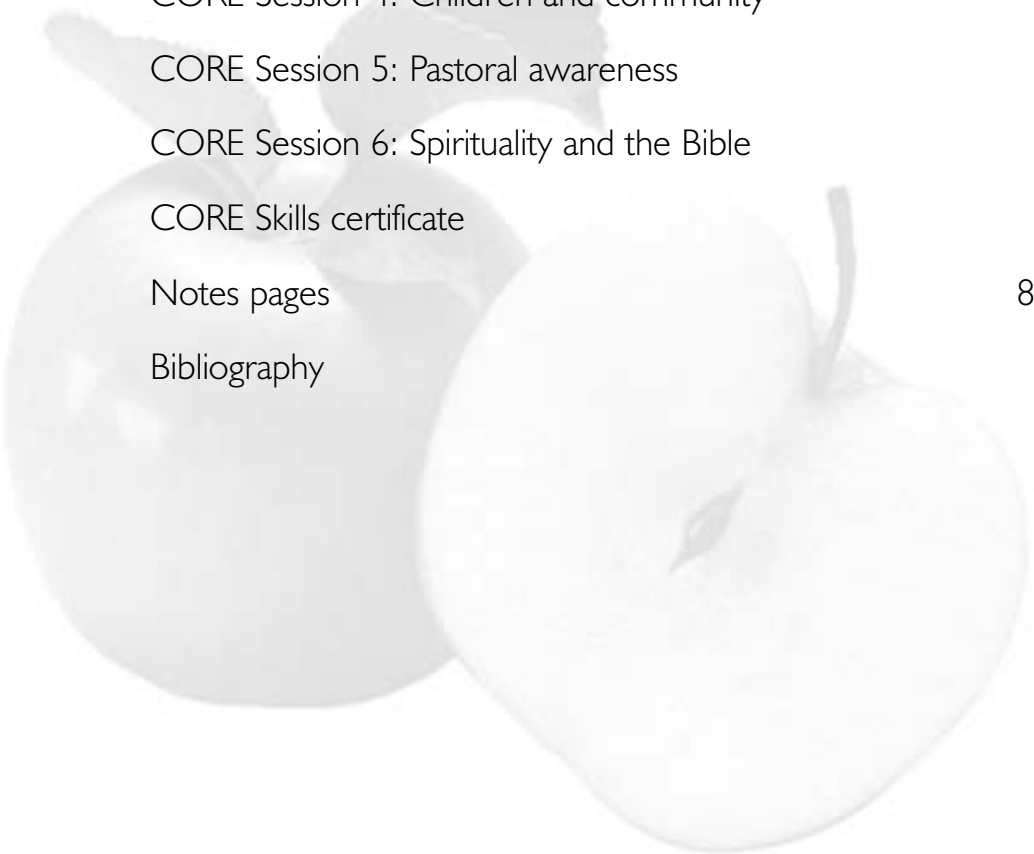
The Consultative Group on Ministry among Children

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Introduction

Guiding principles

All children are made in the image of God. They are loved unconditionally by God and were affirmed in the life and ministry of Jesus. This is reflected in the Christian community, where:

- ❖ God's love is made real through human life and relationships.
- ❖ All children and adults are of equal value.
- ❖ The Holy Spirit speaks powerfully through children as well as adults.
- ❖ Everyone experiences enjoyment, safety and encouragement in belonging.
- ❖ All contribute and all receive, learning from each other.
- ❖ The Bible is accessible to all.
- ❖ All respect one another as people of faith.
- ❖ Differences are acknowledged and diversity celebrated.
- ❖ All are being changed by the love of Christ and share the good news in the wider community.
- ❖ Worship, celebration and encountering God are vital to the growth of faith.
- ❖ All have a sense of belonging to the universal Church and of serving the world together.

Rights of the Child

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child has been an important document for all those working with children, both in and out of the Church. Its main drives are reflected through CORE, which are as follows.

- ❖ Calling for the provision of specific resources, skills and contributions necessary to ensure the survival and development of children to their maximum capability.
- ❖ Requiring the creation of means to protect children from neglect, exploitation and abuse.
- ❖ When adults are making decisions that affect children, children have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions taken into account, while recognizing that the

level of a child's participation in decisions must be appropriate to the child's level of maturity.

Safeguarding and Child Protection

CORE does not include Child Protection training. The majority of denominations in Britain and Ireland have their own policies, procedures and training, to which all participants in CORE should look.

CORE recognizes the centrality of Safeguarding and Child Protection to all our work with children, so we recommend that the information sheet on page 14 is completed by all participants before starting CORE. A copy of this sheet can then be included in your portfolio.

CORE aims and learning outcomes

Aim One

To help participants to develop an understanding of children and the skills required to nurture children in their journey of faith.

Learning outcomes

- ❖ To experience and understand the process of how people develop, learn and grow in faith.
- ❖ To listen to and accompany children as partners in faith.
- ❖ To evaluate their own skills, gifts, strengths and weaknesses and identify a plan for personal development.
- ❖ To help children engage with the Bible as a part of the living, personal and ongoing story.
- ❖ To work creatively with children, using a variety of methods to suit different learning styles.
- ❖ To develop skills to encourage children in expressing and valuing their spirituality and making their own response of faith.
- ❖ To share resources and ideas.

Aim Two

To provide the participants with the opportunity to explore and reflect on their own experience of faith and Christian journey, and the effect it has on their work with children.

Learning outcomes

- ❖ To recognize the need to feel valued, equipped and supported in their role.
- ❖ To reflect on and share their own faith story.
- ❖ To develop a reflective, enquiring approach to the Bible and its use in faith and life.
- ❖ To explore their experience of worship, celebration and spiritual life.
- ❖ To recognize the role of, and raise their awareness of, children's ministry.
- ❖ To develop the skills and habit of reflecting on their work with children.

Aim Three

To help participants capture and share a vision of a Christian community in which children's faith is expressed and valued.

Learning outcomes

- ❖ To articulate an understanding of God's call to be a pilgrim people, a missionary community and a global family.
- ❖ To advocate the active participation of children in mission and ministry.
- ❖ To explore ways of working with children in a variety of contexts, including new expressions of church.

Using CORE

This material is planned for ease of use in a variety of ways. As the material has been written from a number of ecumenical settings, it is hoped that it will be delivered ecumenically wherever possible.

If you are not sure where CORE might be happening or who might be co-ordinating it, you should contact your national denominational or organizational office, contact CGMC through the website www.cgmcontheweb.com or visit the CORE website www.coreskillsforchurches.com, where trainers can advertise their courses.

Each of the six sessions is designed to stand alone. It would make sense to do them in the order suggested, but it is possible for an individual or group to select one session and then perhaps add

others at a future date. This could happen occasionally over time; alternatively, all the sessions could be tackled in a regular pattern of one per week, fortnight or month. Once a week would give less time for reflection and putting ideas into practice, so a longer gap is recommended. A wider spread of time gives the opportunity to add visits to places of interest as well as exploring the web links.

Each session is designed to take two hours. This timespan will be achieved by selecting from the material available. Each session could be extended to cover a whole day by using more of the material, adding some from the website and slowing the pace in items used, to allow more discussion, exploration and activity. Instead of allotting specific timings to each activity, which will rarely reflect the actual experience of every group using the material, 'apple' indicators have been used instead.

- ❖ One apple indicates a simple introductory activity that might take only a short time to complete.
- ❖ Two apples indicate a more in-depth activity that will require some thought and time.
- ❖ Three apples indicate a high-content section containing the main thrust of the teaching.

By choosing more of the one-apple activities and fewer of the three-apple ones, you will have a shorter session. The reverse, of course, will give a longer session.

A CORE session is laid out as follows.

- ❖ **Aim** of the whole module.
- ❖ **Learning outcomes** that should be achieved through the session.
- ❖ **Materials needed** to run the session.
- ❖ **Opening thought** to enable reflection.
- ❖ **Starters:** ways into the topic.
- ❖ **CORE:** the main teaching element.
- ❖ **Biblical thought**, tying the teaching to the Bible.
- ❖ **Reflection on learning:** a prompt to help better understanding of the session.
- ❖ **Worship:** suggestions to close the session in themed worship.
- ❖ **Personal Reflection sheet** to assist participants in noting their learning outcomes.
- ❖ **Portfolio checklist** for those wishing to collect evidence of learning.

Resources, including websites, books, and articles, that may be useful for each session are posted on the CORE website:

www.coreskillsforchurches.com.

The lists will be added to and updated regularly. Suggestions for inclusion on these lists are always welcome.

The CORE website is an exciting part of the training. It offers many additions to the book as well as the chance for all to expand their CORE knowledge. Website features include:

- ❖ Resource lists for each CORE session (updated and extended regularly).
- ❖ A list of courses posted by trainers across the UK and Ireland.
- ❖ Contact details for denominations and organizations.
- ❖ New CORE modules for sale and download as they are made available.
- ❖ Bulletin boards for those involved in CORE.
- ❖ Resources for trainers, including PowerPoint, logos and certificates.

The Personal Reflection sheet can be completed by the participant at home or at the end of the

session. It is intended to enable the answering of the following questions.

- ❖ What encouragements, concerns and challenges has this module raised for you?
- ❖ What would you like to explore further?
- ❖ What action will you take or encourage your church community to take as a result of this module?
- ❖ What will be the benefits for the children in your group and for your church community?
- ❖ Which aspects of this session can you talk about and check out with the children in your group?

For those who want to use CORE as part of an accredited learning course, the portfolio checklist summarizes the learning for which you would need to show proof, in order to satisfy the requirements. More information on CORE and accreditation will be available on the website.



Introductory Session



Aim

To provide a basic introduction to working with children in a church context.

Learning outcomes

- ❖ To share hopes and fears about working with children.
- ❖ To reflect critically on a variety of strategies for developing relationships with children.
- ❖ To evaluate the use of a code of conduct.
- ❖ To explore issues around children, theology and culture.
- ❖ To consider how to approach a session with children.
- ❖ To determine future learning needs.

Materials needed

Before the session

- * Labels or name badges for people as they arrive

Starters

- * Flipchart paper and pens
- * An apple
- * Post-it notes

Core

- * Copies of 'Children and church' questionnaire (see page 20)
- * Copies of 'Assessing training needs' questionnaire (see page 21)

Opening thought

'Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground unperceived by your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.'

Matthew 10:29–31 (NRSV)



Our role in working among children for the church involves being God's representative in communicating God's love and care. That love and care is also shown to children by the way we act towards each other as adults. In this learning session, the group will not count the hairs on each member's head, but will develop a better understanding of each other's role in children's ministry.

Starters

Who am I?

You will need:

- * Flipchart paper and pens

In threes, check that you know each other's names, then find out about the context of each other's children's work. Talk about:

- ❖ How you each feel half an hour before a session begins.
- ❖ Your hopes and concerns about working with children and young people.

There will be feedback only on the hopes and concerns, which should be written on flipchart paper.

In the whole group, feed back your hopes and concerns and write them on flipchart paper. Then discuss the hopes and concerns that the children may be bringing to the groups with which the participants are involved. Write them up on the flipchart too, and compare this list with the first.

Think about how to find out how children are really feeling. Why is it important to find out?

Apple consequences

You will need:

- * An apple

Take the apple and start off a story about it: for example, 'This apple came from a small orchard not far from here, and one day...' Pass the apple to someone else in the group, who must continue the story, using the word 'apple' in their contribution to the story. Pass it around the whole group so that everyone contributes, and continue until the story is complete.

Why am I here?

You will need:

- * A flip chart or large sheet of paper, and pens
- * Post-it notes

How many ways can this question be answered? Write as many as you like, one on each Post-it note. It is up to individuals how they interpret the question. Stick the responses on to a flipchart, without comment.

Join up with one or two other people and talk more specifically about why each person is here in this group. Come back into the whole group and talk about the experiences of this activity.

- ❖ How did different people interpret the question?
- ❖ How did people feel during the Post-it exercise?
- ❖ What insights does this exercise give into working with children?

CORE

Children and their culture

Any adult who wants to work with children needs to understand a little about what it is like to be a child in today's world. The way an adult sees the world is quite different from the way a child sees it. An adult leader can never be a child, but can make some effort to get inside the world of children.

There are many important and powerful influences on children, and the values that are strongly communicated through the media are significant and formative. Spending time on children's websites and reading magazines aimed at children is a good investment and gives pause for thought.

Look at a selection of children's magazines. Skim-read them to get a feel of the impact and tone of the publication. As you read:

- ❖ Ask yourself what is the message being given there about school/home/lifestyle/spirituality/young women.
- ❖ List any words or phrases you don't recognize.
- ❖ Identify one or two articles that you would like to share with the rest of the group.
- ❖ Note the main themes of the advertising.

Share your findings with the rest of the group. If there is time together, try putting the values that children observe and experience in the media alongside those communicated explicitly and/or

implicitly by the church, and see the differences. Make two lists and ask:

- ❖ Which culture is easier to understand?
- ❖ How easy is it to be part of both?
- ❖ How easy is it to make choices within each culture?
- ❖ If the church is 'counter cultural', what does that mean?

The world of children and how children develop is explored further in Core Session 1.

Children and church

You will need:

- * Copies of the 'Children and church' questionnaire (see page 20)

Individually, complete the 'Children and church' questionnaire and then share responses together. How far are these statements true of the church you attend? (Mark 0 for 'Not true at all' and 5 for 'This is clearly our church's belief and practice'.)

Approaching a session

Share the experience of a memorable session you have led with children, one you have seen led, or one you experienced as a child. What worked well and why did you remember it?

What challenges have you met, or are you anticipating, in your work with children? Compile a list of these challenges under the following headings:

- ❖ Starting a session
- ❖ Using time in a session
- ❖ Working with a whole group
- ❖ Choosing activities
- ❖ Working with other leaders

The following thoughts may start off your discussion.

Starting a session

Think about how the tone is set in the first five minutes (atmosphere, layout, welcome and so on). How can you start the session off to build relationships with the children?

Using time in a session

When planning, always build in time to engage with a group and individual children. Consider the fact that one-to-one conversation is usually easier when a child is engaged in a practical task, especially a low-key task.

Working with a whole group

Use 'circle time' techniques from time to time. With younger children, a 'show and tell' can be an important, regular part of the session. For older children, frequent positive affirmation games will build up the group's capacity to relate positively and share more deeply.

Choosing activities

Always plan to spend time on what is important, and avoid giving time to activities that benefit the adults more than the children. For example, if you meet on a Sunday morning, avoid a weekly commitment to 'producing' something that has to be performed for the adults in church.

Working with other leaders

Consider how you plan and review together.

Assessing training needs

You will need:

- * Copies of the 'Assessing training needs' questionnaire (see page 21)

This session has drawn attention to just some of the skills and knowledge that are important for any adult working with children on behalf of the church. Some of this skill comes with experience, but only if you take time to do some conscious learning as well, and also take time to reflect critically on your experiences. Many church denominations have recognized the six sessions of this CORE training as the basic training requirement for children's workers. Look at the outline of these CORE sessions on the 'Assessing training needs' questionnaire and fill in the boxes to help you assess which topics are priorities for you.

Biblical thought

Children and church

Split into three groups, each group looking at one of these Bible passages: Psalm 78:1-8; Matthew 18:1-5; Luke 13:34-35.

If this was the only passage in the Bible you read, what would your 'theology' (your understanding of God's view) of children be? Try to sum it up in three statements, and briefly sum up how this would affect the life of the whole church. What do you feel now about the way you would work with children in your church, and why?

In the whole group, consider the different 'theologies' that different church traditions have, and the different ideas there are about why children are in the church. You may recognize the following models.

- ❖ If the children are considered to be the church of tomorrow and will only become useful disciples when they become adult members, the provision for children may be aimed at keeping them in contact with the church so that their real learning and work can begin when the time comes.
- ❖ If the children are seen as the church of tomorrow but need to lead a Christian life now, the children's work may be seen as a schooling in the Christian life. The children's activities may work on the assumption that the faith must be learnt and a Christian way of life followed. Information giving and Bible teaching will aim to lead to a vibrant adult faith and spiritual life.
- ❖ If children are seen as being as much a part of today's church as the rest of the congregation, and equally valuable members, then it will be vital that children's provision in the church is of a high quality, aimed at equipping their ministry. Children will be enabled to take part in all aspects of church life.

If someone came into your church and tried to guess what your theology of children was by watching the life of the church, what conclusions do you think they would draw? Think about visiting another church and guessing what their theology of children might be.

Reflection on learning

Building relationships with children



What is the group's observations of how they have all worked together so far?

Every group has some principles about how the relationships in the group will work—between children, between adults, and between children and adults. Some of those principles will be explicit (having quiet periods to listen to others, keeping each other safe by not running around, and so on) and some implicit (how children address adults, how the children are involved in decision making, and so on).

In a new group, in an established group meeting for the first time after a break, or in a group with lots of new members, it may be good to work together to produce a code of conduct and agree on it. The process for doing this will be important:

perhaps there will be some suggestions from both adults and children, followed by a voting procedure to decide which ones are to be included. Read the following examples and share your responses to them.

Rules set by the leaders

Don't run.
Don't shout.
Don't answer back.
When the leader is talking, listen.
Have fun!

Rules compiled by the children

Welcome to our club. We hope you have a good time, but when you are here you need to do things in our club way. We don't like anyone skittin' people, because we are all friends. Don't bring any sweets or chocolate just for you! We like playing silly games and running round, but when the leaders tell us to stop, we STOP! You'll probably find out that we are all a bit (lot!) noisy and talk too much. But we need to remember that when one of the leaders is telling us what to do, we shut up and listen. And we need to listen to each other as well.

We have one word that is banned – BORING. And we don't use any swear words at all. We have drinks every week so you don't need to bring your own. Finally, at the end of the night, no one goes home until someone comes to pick them up.

We hope you have a good time at our club.

Rules agreed by everyone

Be nice.
Help others.
Do the activities when the leaders ask us to.
Make new friends.
Help new people.
Enjoy ourselves.
Listen carefully.
Walk.
Join in.
Don't hit or kick people.
Don't refuse to join in.
Don't be nasty.
Don't run round the room.
Don't talk when someone else is talking.
Don't leave the club room.

How would you go about working with your group to agree a 'code of conduct'?

Worship



Read 1 Corinthians 12:4–6. As a focal point, have a selection of apples used in different ways: apple juice, apple pies, toffee apples and so on. Take time while listening to some music to consider the gifts and talents that you have in relation to children's ministry, because we all have a concern for children and can offer our different skills in different ways. Finish this meditation with a prayer together.

Suggested song

The Lord is good to me
and so I thank the Lord
for giving me the things I need,
the sun and the rain and the apple seed.
The Lord is good to me.

And every seed that grows
will grow into a tree,
and one day soon there will be apples there
for everyone in the world to share.
The Lord is good to me.

'Johnny Appleseed':
www.scoutingresources.org.uk/song_song05.html

At the close of the session, invite everyone to share in the variety of apple products together, in celebration of their involvement in children's ministry.



Children and church questionnaire

Mark 0 for 'Not true at all' and 5 for 'This is clearly our church's belief and practice'.

1.	Children are considered important in our church.	0	1	2	3	4	5
2.	People in our church feel comfortable with children.	0	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Children in our church are happy to be there.	0	1	2	3	4	5
4.	People in our church are willing to support children's work by praying.	0	1	2	3	4	5
5.	People in our church are keen to see children involved in worship throughout the year.	0	1	2	3	4	5
6.	Children are encouraged to join in with other church activities as well as worship.	0	1	2	3	4	5
7.	The adults in our church talk to the children and know their names.	0	1	2	3	4	5
8.	When the children enter the church, they are ignored, but someone greets their parents.	0	1	2	3	4	5
9.	We want children in our church to keep the church going in the future.	0	1	2	3	4	5
10.	There is evidence around the building of the children's involvement in church life.	0	1	2	3	4	5
11.	Our church wants our children to see that God loves them and has a purpose for their lives.	0	1	2	3	4	5
12.	Our church wants children to become active members of the church today.	0	1	2	3	4	5
13.	We want children to be able to look back, later in life, with warm affection at what church meant to them.	0	1	2	3	4	5

Assessing training needs questionnaire

No knowledge: **N**

Some knowledge: **S**

Fully confident: **F**

CORE Session 1: Child development

- ❖ To understand how children develop physically, emotionally, intellectually, socially, morally and spiritually.
- ❖ To appreciate the range of learning styles and approaches that there can be within a group.
- ❖ To reflect on personal experience of life and faith, and the effects of this on ways of working with children.
- ❖ To consider work with children in the light of some theories of human development.

CORE Session 2: Leadership skills

- ❖ To evaluate current skills, gifts, strengths and weaknesses and identify possibilities for personal development.
- ❖ To recognize the need to feel valued, equipped and supported in their role.
- ❖ To develop the skills and habit of reflecting on their work with children.

CORE Session 3: Programme planning

- ❖ To understand how learning styles in childhood differ, and are influenced by society and culture.
- ❖ To work creatively with children, using a variety of learning styles.
- ❖ To plan original sessions and deliver published programmes to meet the needs of children.
- ❖ To develop the practice of reflecting on and evaluating sessions.

CORE Session 4: Children and community

- ❖ To reflect on stories from different contexts and distil principles of good practice.
- ❖ To develop strategies for developing new areas of work with children in a variety of contexts.
- ❖ To explore an understanding of what it means to be 'church'.
- ❖ To advocate the active participation of children in mission and ministry.

CORE Session 5: Pastoral awareness

- ❖ To share insights about a variety of pastoral issues.
- ❖ To explore how power is used in working with children.
- ❖ To identify issues involved in providing a safe environment, physically, emotionally and spiritually, for children.

CORE Session 6: Spirituality and the Bible

- ❖ To explore the meaning of 'spirituality' and its relationship with faith.
- ❖ To gain an understanding of ways in which the Bible can enrich prayer and spiritual activities.
- ❖ To experience a time of spiritual reflection.
- ❖ To develop an awareness of the different styles of prayer that may be used, both in community worship activities and personal communication with God.

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Building on the huge success of the original *Kaleidoscope* course published by NCEC in 1993, this exciting new interdenominational modular scheme offers foundational training for all those involved with church-based children's ministry and addresses the six areas of expertise set out by the DfES in the Common Core of Skills and Knowledge for the Children's Workforce.

The material draws on the expertise of a wide ecumenical team under the guidance of the Consultative Group on Ministry among Children (CGMC) and comprises stand-alone modules in six key areas:

- ◆ Child development
- ◆ Leadership skills
- ◆ Programme planning
- ◆ Children and community
- ◆ Pastoral awareness
- ◆ Spirituality and the Bible

All six modules have been thoroughly field-tested as two-hour training programmes in ecumenical pilot groups. Each module is creative, thought-provoking, interactive and designed to inspire and refresh children's workers at all levels of expertise and experience.

To accompany the material, links to web-based support for group leaders are provided, including PowerPoint presentation options, forum opportunities, downloadable resources and further skills-based units.

'I congratulate the authors of CORE. They have produced an excellent piece of training for all those working with children to explore the issue of faith. Seeing children as equal partners and respecting their rights is central to this training and it gets my full support.'

PROFESSOR AL AYSLEY-GREEN, CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONER FOR ENGLAND



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