

Let's get started

Early Years Space for Mass



Early Years Space for Mass in Our Parish Where do we start?

An easy way for Parishes to begin ministry to Children and Families is to launch a welcoming space for children under school age inside the church.

What is a Child Friendly space in the church mean?

A child-friendly space in the church is a safe, calm, and welcoming area where young children can engage with the environment be included in the Mass while remaining under the supervision of their parents or carers. All activities and interactions are designed to be quiet, safe, and pram accessible, and the space operates in accordance with parish and diocesan safeguarding requirements to ensure the wellbeing of everyone involved.

Why start a Children's space in the Church?

Starting a children's space in a church is worth doing because it welcomes families in a visible and practical way, helping parents feel supported and included rather than stressed or isolated. It also creates a positive early experience of church for children, allowing them to feel valued and at home in the community from a young age. Finally, a child-friendly space strengthens the whole faith community by fostering hospitality, connection across generations, and a culture that recognises families as an essential and valued part of parish life.

Simple Steps to Make It a Reality:

1. **Start with a Conversation:** Meet with the parish priest and leadership to share the vision and benefits.
2. **Identify and gather a Team:** Begin with 2–3 volunteers who are passionate about children and family ministry and willing to learn.
3. **Onboard your volunteers:** Liaise with your parish office so that your volunteers can begin the process of registering and completing the requirements to be an Archdiocesan volunteer as soon as possible. The Parish office will:
 - a. guide each individual on the correct pathway for onboarding in accordance with the Volunteer Compliance Matrix.
 - b. ensure each individual is linked with the appropriate parish and role.

The parish office (particularly the team member responsible for volunteer compliance) will manage the onboarding process and track each volunteer progress. The Parish Safeguarding Officer then provides ongoing support to ensure safeguarding requirements are maintained.

Once the parish has confirmed the role, direct your volunteers to register via the Welcome Portal: <https://welcome.brisbanecatholic.org.au/>

Volunteers will need to select the correct parish and role when completing their registration.

4. **Meet as a team** to develop a plan (The Archdiocesan Ministries Children and Families team can support you with planning, training and resources). Considerations will include:
 5. Decide how often you will offer it and at which weekend masses. (Consider the capacity of your team and the mass that has the greatest number of families in attendance). Families respond best when there is consistency so that they know when to expect it's on.
 6. Decide on a suitable place. Close enough for parents to supervise and remain engaged with the Mass. A well-lit, well-ventilated area that's easy to clean, free from hazards and heavy foot traffic. Clear entry/exit. If possible, a space within eyesight of the sanctuary encourages little ones to notice what is happening throughout the mass, yet in many Churches this may not be practical.
 7. Secure a small budget for resources. Soft mats. Cushions or soft seating, board books and picture books, wooden blocks and stacking toys, large puzzles, drawing paper and large non-toxic crayons, sensory items (scarves, textured toys). Where possible, source resources that are connected to faith (e.g. sensory items could be aligned with the liturgical colours), books could focus on Gospel messages and stories. Avoid: Loud or electronic toys, small or choking hazard toys.
 8. Create a Parish Activity Plan (or Risk Assessment) to help prepare for practical considerations such as supervision, (your parish will have templates commonly used within your parish). Include Display clear signage: like; "Under school age Children's Space" and directional signs like; "Parents/carers remain responsible for their children."
 9. Arrange the method of communication for the team.
 10. Decide how you will organise your roster as a team, and the tasks expected before and after each Mass, (e.g. who will set up / pack down the space, regular rotation and cleaning of resources etc).
 11. Plan how you will let the community know this is happening? Remember your target audience are families, including new families, so be sure to promote on your parish's social media and school platforms as well as the parish newsletter.
 12. Discuss which other parish teams you could connect with to welcome and engage families (and others) even more?
13. **Launch and Reflect:** Make time to reflect as a team after each week and after a few weeks gather feedback from families.

14. **Celebrate and Grow:** Share stories and photos in the parish bulletin or on social media. This builds momentum and encourages others to get involved.

Once your space is well established you may want to explore some other great options:

- Monthly family mass
- Children's Liturgy of the Word
- Primary-aged youth group
- An Encounter Catholic Kids (ECK) fun day or holiday program

<https://www.encountercatholickids.com.au>

We're here to help!

Children and Families Team, Archdiocesan Ministries

Website: childrenandfamilies@bne.catholic.net.au

Follow us on Instagram: @encounter_catholic_kids

Join our Network on Facebook: Catholic Children and Families Network