



What to Know About Vacation Bible School for Kids

Vacation Bible School is a week of fun, games and craft. And it's usually free. Photo © Cristine Achieng'i.

Vacation Bible School (VBS) is a ministry outreach churches provide to educate children about God. Each church runs its own Vacation Bible School program but may use a purchased religious curriculum in its teachings.

To get more help on finding the right kids' summer camps, you can read the Summer Camp Guide.

What Is VBS?

VBS is a nationwide program many churches offer. The purpose is to incorporate themed activities that entertain kids with the chance to learn about God.

Vacation Bible School is an easy way to get kids involved in church while giving you the opportunity to meet the people within the church too. Church membership is not required to participate. VBS lasts about five weekdays in the summer. Children attend around three to four hours each day.

Vacation Bible School teachers are church staff as well as church members volunteering their time. Many of the church members helping out with VBS are parents too.

Vacation Bible School Themes and Activities

Many VBS programs choose one theme for the week. They use this theme to creatively adapt it to lines from the Bible.

Sample themes kids may experience at Vacation Bible School include:

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| 1) Beach party | 4) Road trip | 7) Space |
| 2) Environment | 5) Science | 8) Superhero |
| 3) Jungle | 6) Shipwreck | 9) Western |

A typical day at Vacation Bible School may include:

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| 1) Prayer | 7) Puppet shows |
| 2) Bible stories | 8) Sports activities |
| 3) Arts and crafts | 9) Snack breaks |
| 4) Games | 10) Team lessons |
| 5) Skits | 11) Character-building activities |
| 6) Songs | |

Age Range

Preschoolers up to high school age children may benefit the most from Vacation Bible School.

Age guidelines vary from church to church with many focusing on the elementary school ages.

Some also offer free childcare for volunteers who have children too young to attend VBS.

Benefits

- Children learn about religion through fun, age-appropriate activities.
- Life lessons help every child learn how to be a good person and a friend to others.
- Perfect for younger children to get a feel for camp without having to go away overnight.
- Kids meet new friends who share their beliefs.
- You don't have to be a church member to attend VBS.

Costs

There are many free summer programs for kids. Most Vacation Bible School programs are too. Some do charge a small fee, which usually covers snacks and craft supply costs. T-shirts and CDs featuring the songs learned that week may also be offered for an additional fee.

12 Free Ways for Kids to Enjoy Summer Activities and Classes

Free Summer Activities and Classes for Kids

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It's time for some summer fun, enrolling in multiple summer camps can be costly. The good news is there's plenty of free fun to be had that entertains and even educates children while giving parents' wallets a vacation too.

No-Cost Summer Classes and Activities for Kids

Find free summer programs for kids that won't cost you a cent and will keep your children busy until the school bell rings again.

Movies

Watch a free movie at the theater or under the stars. Many movie theaters host free movie days throughout the summer. Outdoor movies are usually in the park where there's plenty of room for families to spread out with blankets and coolers.

Indoors or outdoors, some free movie events are sponsored, which usually includes games, prizes, and food giveaways. Kids probably won't get to see the latest box office smash, but they do get to watch a family-friendly movie at no cost to you.

Sports Clinics

Learn from college athletes, their coaches, and even professionals in the sport. Free sports clinics are usually held on college campuses for a limited amount of kids. Each free sports clinic has its own rules but many allow children as young as 5 and up to 18 years of age.

Behind-the-Scenes Tours

What's it like to work at a TV station? How does the mail get from point A to point B? Let the kids take a behind the scenes tour to find out. You can tour many places simply by asking. Be creative when choosing locations to visit. If your kids are interested in animals, tour a veterinary hospital. If they like baseball, set up a tour at your local stadium.

Camps

Grants and sponsors make some summer camps free for kids. Art, writing, theater, math, science and reading camps are some of the themes of these camps. But many also include crafts, field trips, and swimming. There are even special free summer camps that cover anti-bullying, conflict resolution, self-esteem, leadership skills, and personal safety topics.

Vacation Bible School

Churches hold Vacation Bible School as an outreach of their ministries. Members of the church, as well as non-members, are invited for a free week of fun. Kids sing songs, learn Bible lessons, make friends, create crafts, perform in skits and learn how to treat others, among other valuable lessons.

Each church has its own age guidelines but 3 and up usually benefit the most from Vacation Bible School.

Volunteer Opportunities

As soon as kids can walk, they can start learning the benefits of volunteering with you. When they get older, they can branch out into their own volunteering opportunities. Cleaning up the park or the beach, collecting books and toys for the less privileged, visiting nursing homes and helping prepare meals for the homeless are just a few of the many ways kids can volunteer.

Library Events

The library is an excellent venue for story time. But did you know there are even more activities for kids at the library that won't get them shushed? Most libraries offer free summer reading programs. Kids sign up to read a certain amount of books over the summer. The library then awards prizes and holds a party for the eager readers at the end of the reading program. Or just stop in for one of the library's other special events. Themed activity days may include book readings, related crafts, and hands-on learning. For example, a fire safety day might feature stories about firefighters, a dress-up time where kids can put on a firefighter's gear and a visit from a real fire truck so kids can see how it works. Other lessons can also be educational with activities designed to teach kids about computers, stranger danger, and bike and water safety.

Arts and Crafts at Museums

Introduce art appreciation at a young age. Museums are reaching out to future artists through free kids' programs that encourage them to create their own works of art. Story time ties book illustrations into the art you find in the museum. Kids enjoy craft time, paint, use clay and a variety of other mediums to enrich their art experience.

Parks and Recreation Activities

Playing in the park can be more than an hour on the playground. Many parks and recreation departments set up a summer schedule of day-long activities. Kids are exposed to the arts, fitness lessons, a variety of sports, even computer instruction. Check your city's local parks and recreation department website to see what activities are planned near you.



Building Workshops

Some home improvement stores offer free building workshops that help kids build everything from a birdhouse to a miniature schoolhouse. Kids get free aprons, goggles and the required tools and supplies to build their own project with the help of the store's employees. The most popular kids' workshops are through Home Depot and Lowe's. Home Depot's Kids Workshop is the first Saturday of the month. Lowe's Build and Grow Clinics are every Saturday. Spend a day at a children's learning museum, children's theater or art museum absolutely free. Target Free Days lists thousands of places across the country where admission is free. Some locations have a reduced-cost admission, but most waive the admission fee completely. The program is available all year.

Volunteering for Vacation Bible School

Churches begin preparing for Vacation Bible School almost immediately after the current year's session ends. Volunteers are always welcome, even up to the day VBS begins.

You can help with snacks, crafts, childcare at the church, registration, setting up, breaking down, storytelling, coordinating other volunteers and more. If you prefer a hands-off approach, churches also ask for donations of household items, such as used toilet paper rolls or popsicle sticks, for some of their crafts or decorations. Call your local church to find out what their needs are so you can help with VBS. It may also help for you to attend VBS if your child is attending—your child may find that they are extra comfortable with you there, especially if this is their first camp experience.

Finding a Vacation Bible School

Most churches run their own Vacation Bible School programs. If the church you are interested in is not holding its own VBS, the church secretary can usually provide a list of other churches in your area who are holding VBS.

You can also check newspapers, local magazines, message boards, and the church's website. Vacation Bible School dates, registration info, and fees (if any) can typically be found through these resources as well.



Why You May Consider Sending Your Child to VBS

Vacation Bible School could be a wonderful opportunity for kids to socialize and learn more about religion in a relaxed setting. VBS has something for everyone, despite each person's religious views.

While activities are centered around teaching kids about God, VBS combines fun and learning without the formality of a Sunday service. Local churches will be happy to talk to you about what you can expect from their particular Vacation Bible School.