



Participant's Handbook

Welcome to the Parenting as a Church Leader course

Whether you lead a church, are part of a church leadership team, are a children's, youth and family leader or are a leader in training, this course is for you. Being a church leader affects every part of our lives, including our children. We all want to be good parents and good leaders. We want to see our children flourish spiritually and emotionally. But how? Parenting as a church leader requires unique skills and choices, and it can feel like a lonely journey.

Based on the book *Parenting as a Church Leader* (BRF, 2020), this course will help you think through how to be both a parent and a church leader and help your family not just survive, but thrive.

This guide is for you to use as you want. For each session there is:

- a session outline summarising that week's teaching, with spaces for you to take notes and your own personal reflections – or just to doodle in, if you wish;
- some questions that it may be helpful to consider.

We have designed the course to be as flexible as we can. Each of the four sessions is approximately 50 minutes long and breaks into three shorter sections. You could watch the course in a variety of ways:

- taking a day to watch all four sessions
- watching one session at a time
- doing it 'bite-sized': watching one part of each session at a time.

If you are doing the bite-sized option, you'll find the relevant discussion questions at the end of the notes for that session, or at the end of the video for that session.

Our website has a whole area designed to encourage and support church and ministry leaders as they parent – parentingforfaith.org/topics/parenting-church-leader. Under each of the four headings – Connected, Prioritised, Covered and Empowered – you'll find real questions Rachel has answered from church leaders at Parenting as a Church Leader training days.

At the end of this guide we've suggested ways you can keep in touch as you and your family journey through this great adventure of parenting as a church leader!

Our prayer is that you find this course a real blessing as you lead, in whatever context you find yourselves.

You've got this!

BRF's Parenting for Faith team

Parenting for Faith is part of BRF, a Christian charity that resources individuals and churches. Our vision is to enable people of all ages to grow in faith and understanding of the Bible and to see more people equipped to exercise their gifts in leadership and ministry. Find out more at brf.org.uk.

Session 1: Connected

Introduction

While there are many blessings of being a church leader family, you can also fear that, because of your vocation, your children's faith will be damaged and they may turn away from God.

It is true that your children will be impacted and shaped by your vocation (just as all children are impacted and shaped by their parents' lives). Your job, therefore, is to help your children navigate the difficult bits well and help them go on their own adventure with God, so that your family doesn't just survive, but thrive!

We'll be looking at how to do this well under four headings:

- Connected (this session)
- Prioritised (session 2, page 10)
- Covered (session 3, page 15)
- Empowered (session 4, page 21)

Part 1: The importance of connection

Your children need to feel fully connected to you. Think about a novice skydiver on their first flight in tandem with an experienced instructor. The thing that makes the novice feel safe is knowing that they are tightly and fully connected to the instructor, because he knows how to make everything work properly – then the novice can relax and enjoy the adventure.

As church leaders you are on the great adventure of ministry and your children come with you. What will help them get through the adventure well is a strong connection with you. You therefore need to figure out what helps your children feel connected to you so you can help them flourish even through tough stuff.

The problem of the hat dance

You can feel like you have two hats: a church leader hat and a parent hat. The problem is that in ministry, the two roles often seem to coincide. You can struggle to know which hat you are wearing at particular time; you and your family can feel the stress of trying to wear the right hat at the right time. You can feel like you are being pulled in opposite directions. But actually, you aren't two different people: you are one person whom God has called to both ministry and parenthood.

If you are doing the bite-sized version of the course, please skip to page 9 in this handbook, or to the end of the session's video, to see the discussion questions for part 1.

Part 2: How to build connection

Connection is more than just affection or being present. You need to proactively build connection, just like you do already with your friends.

Develop a language of connection

One of the most powerful things you can do is to build a language of connection with your children so that they can recognise and name when they feel disconnected from you. Discover what language works for you and once they have that language you can use it to problem-solve how they are feeling.

Growing connection in the midst of ministry

Your children need to know they are connected to you everywhere you are together – at home or at church. You can help your kids learn how to access connection with you in the midst of ministry, and you can learn how to grow connection with your kids right in the middle of the busiest service. The aim is to create a steady flow of connection so your kids never stop feeling connected to you, even when you are busy with your job.

Gary Chapman's love languages

Identifying which love languages your children have helps you to proactively build connection with each one separately. As they grow and change, you can adapt, so that you know that in the midst of your ministry you can always connect with them.

Ideas for quality time kids

Ideas for words of affirmation kids

Ideas for touch kids

Ideas for acts of service kids

Ideas for gift kids

If you are doing the bite-sized version of the course, please skip to page 9 in this handbook, or to the end of the session's video, to see the discussion questions for part 2.

Part 3: Coaching children through the complexity of church

Church can be hard and complicated and our children need help in navigating this. When you have built a steady stream of connection with your children, it means that you can coach them through the tricky sides of church well.

There are two tools you can use to help you coach children through the tricky areas of church.

Creating Windows

Creating a window into how you deal with the big complicated bits of church – and who God is in that – helps your children to understand the heart of what’s going on and to see how they can manage it themselves.

For more about Creating Windows, see parentingforfaith.org/tool/creating-windows

Framing

By explaining what they are looking at, you can create a framework so they can understand everything well – whether it’s why people go to traditional services or why someone got upset with you. Research suggests that the primary cause of church leaders’ children walking away from faith and the church is that no one talked about church conflict; if children don’t have a place to understand and process church conflict, they won’t know how to understand it or cope with it.

For more about Framing, see parentingforfaith.org/tool/framing

Family stress and hypocrisy

Sometimes, the pressure of the church hat can mean that your kids see you performing differently for the church congregation – one minute you are scolding them, the next you have a big smile on your face, welcoming everyone. If this isn't framed for your children, they may misinterpret this as meaning that they have to perform for the church or that you are hypocritical.

Questions for session 1

Part 1: The importance of connection

- When do you feel your parent and church leader hats conflicting?
- When does your family feel most connected?
- How do you currently build connection with your kids?

Part 2: How to build connection

- What language might work to help your family talk about being connected?
- Can you identify any ministry 'pressure points' when your children feel disconnected from you?
- What are your kids' love languages? How could you harness those to help create connection in the midst of ministry?

Part 3: Coaching kids through the complexity of church

- Has your family experienced church conflict? How have you helped them navigate it?
- Which bits of your ministry or your life with God might your kids need you to frame for them?
- Do you or your family feel the pressure to look good for the congregation? How could you help your kids handle this well?

Session 2: Prioritised

The second thing our children need to flourish is that they need to feel prioritised: valued, important, and safe and secure in your affection and love.

In church leaders' families, children can feel wobbly because they perceive a 'competition of needs'. The needs of the church for their parent's time and attention may seem so big in comparison with their needs that they internalise that as the need to compete for your time and attention.

Part 1: Removing the competition of needs

Three ideas to help remove the competition of needs:

1 Language matters

It's possible to unwittingly reinforce the competition of needs by the way you talk about your ministry. Shifting to 'it's a work thing' helps to emphasise your disappointment and reinforce your desire for connection with your child, so they can see that their priority in your life is still strong.

2 Communicate the yes

Communicate where they do have permissions to do things, rather than where they don't.

3 Choose to be a parent

Give yourself permission to be a parent while you are leading! Children need us to be a parent at all times, and there are times when you will need to be a parent in the midst of ministry. Work to create a culture in your church, your leadership and your teams where you are for each other's families.

If you are doing the bite-sized version of the course, please skip to page 14 in this handbook, or to the end of the session's video, to see the discussion questions for part 1.

Part 2: Tuning in – making your presence count

Children value your availability and attention more than the time you spend with them. If you can be fully present when you are with them, it makes a huge difference to them.

The stress of flexibility

While being a church leader can mean you have the flexibility to adjust your schedule to turn up at school or take a child out for lunch, children can find the unpredictability of this stressful.

Two ways to reduce the stress of flexibility:

1 Make a calendar

When children can see and understand their parents' schedule, a lot of the stress of flexibility is removed.

2 Be faithful

When you are faithful to the schedule, to the arrangements you have made with your children, it reinforces their priority in your life.

Be fully present

Your schedule might allow you to watch a movie with your kids in the afternoon, but they want you to be fully present, your mind and attention as well as your body.

Three ways to be fully present:

1 Don't multitask

2 Use bridging activities

3 Ditch the phone

Bored and Brilliant by Manoush Zomorodi

If you are doing the bite-sized version of the course, please skip to page 14 in this handbook, or to the end of the session's video, to see the discussion questions for part 2.

Part 3: Working from home

Working from home is hard! By creating good boundaries and structures your children can still feel connected to you and prioritised by you, even when you are unreachable just beyond the door.

Be clear about when you're working and when you're not

When you are clear about when you are working and when you're not, it removes the uncertainty for children. You may need to be creative in how you do this, using schedules, signs, timers or lists.

Use your flexibility superpower

Your flexible work patterns mean that you can connect with your family at unexpected or unusual times, or adapt your working hours for holidays or other events.

Create spaces for the 'yes'

Work out what level of interruption you are happy with and help your children understand how that works, so they are clear that they are prioritised and you will make space for that.

Questions for session 2

Part 1: Removing the competition of needs

- Do you see a 'competition of needs' in your family?
- How could you communicate the 'yes' in the following scenarios:
 - You can't sit with me because the bishop is here today
 - I can't take you to the match on Saturday because I have the church away day
 - I have to miss the school play because someone is dying
- Do you feel able to choose to be a parent?

Part 2: Tuning in – making your presence count

- How could you use the flexibility in your schedule to help your children feel prioritised?
- Of the three ideas for being fully present – not multitasking, using bridging activities and ditching the phone – which do you think you might try?
- What might your family need you to do to reduce the stress of flexibility?

Part 3: Working from home

- What do you like most and least about working from home?
- How can you set boundaries about being interrupted that still allow your children to feel prioritised?
- How do your children know when you are 'working' and when you are 'home'?

Session 3: Covered

Church leader families can feel exposed. Some liken it to being on a pedestal or in a goldfish bowl, and even though it can result from the congregation's love and affection, it can be hard. For your children and teens, it can feel like everyone's watching them and has an opinion. When you cover them from this spotlight, you protect their sense of self, help them cope with the reality of ministry life and give them the space to be themselves and build authentic, life-giving relationships with those around them.

Part 1: Protecting children from exposure

When children are uncovered – when they are pointed out or information about them exposed to all – they become vulnerable. Even if they enjoy being in the spotlight now, there will be times when they just won't want to be there. We can cover them from that so they can enjoy the safety of the shadows.

Don't make them the face of your family

Plan how to respond to the congregation's enquiries

Don't tell stories about them in sermons

Asking permission?

How to tell stories so they are still covered

If you are doing the bite-sized version of the course, please skip to page 20 in this handbook, or to the end of the session's video, to see the discussion questions for part 1.

Part 2: Dealing with congregational expectations

Whether you know it or not, the congregation will have expectations of church leaders' families that will rarely be clearly communicated to you. By thinking ahead about how you want to approach this, you can help your family and your children not to feel the pressure of these expectations.

Decide who you want to be

Frame who you are for the congregation

Responding to the congregation's advice and opinions

Assume the best

Have a response ready

Give them ways to help

See behind the complaint

Frame the congregation's expectations for your kids

Discipline

If you are doing the bite-sized version of the course, please skip to page 20 in this handbook, or to the end of the session's video, to see the discussion questions for part 2.

Part 3: Navigating confidentiality

Church is the most wonderful place for children to foster a ‘sticky web’ of multigenerational relationships that support and reinforce their faith journeys. But they are in a position where they may discover a lot of confidential information about those people. By covering them, you can lift the burden of holding confidential information and help them maintain good relationships with the congregation, whatever they overhear.

Foster positive relationships

Speak well of the congregation

Debrief in private

Equip them to hold confidential information well

Talk about confidentiality

Teach the values for holding confidentiality

- Protect people’s hearts
- Avoid gossip
- Don’t share other people’s stories
- Keep no secrets between us

Part 4: Freeing children to have close relationships

One of the reasons for covering children is to free them to have healthy and supportive relationships within the church community: relationships which are honest and open and which bring them love and support. You can actively help children and teens to do this.

Create windows into your relationships

Enable and empower their relationships

Questions for session 3

Part 1: Protecting children from exposure

- Do you think your children feel a spotlight on them?
- How could you use a story about your family without exposing them?
- How could you reply to one of these questions:
 - How did Harry's exams go?
 - What was Elizabeth doing out in town so late yesterday?
 - Which school will Luka be going to?
 - Why isn't Emma in the worship band - she sings so well!

Part 2: Living in the goldfish bowl

- Do you feel the pressure of congregational expectations on you and/or your family?
- What sort of family do you feel called to be? What are your children's roles in this church?
- Do you have any unspoken expectations of your children at church? How might you free them from the weight of being under the spotlight?

Parts 3 and 4: Navigating confidentiality and Freeing children to build close relationships

- How do you manage confidentiality and your children currently?
- Which of the ideas for teaching the values of confidentiality did you like? Which might you try?
- How are you currently encouraging your children to develop their own relationships in church. What might your next step in this be?

Session 4: Empowered

Both the discipling that happens at home in the everyday and the influence of the church community that wraps around the family are vital for our children and teens' faith journeys. There are some things only parents and carers can offer, and others that only church can provide. They need both.

Part 1: Helping children meet and know God in everyday life

Embrace being a parent: you have thousands of hours a year with them, rather than the 200 or so hours they spend in church. God set up children's discipleship to have family at its core. It's not about more church; it's simply sharing your life with God with them and journeying alongside them as they work things out for themselves.

The five Key Tools

For more on the five Key Tools, see parentingforfaith.org/tools

Creating Windows

Framing

Unwinding

Chat and Catch

Surfing the Waves

If you are doing the 'bite-sized' version of the course, please skip to the end of this session in this handbook, or to the end of the session's video, to see the discussion questions for part 1.

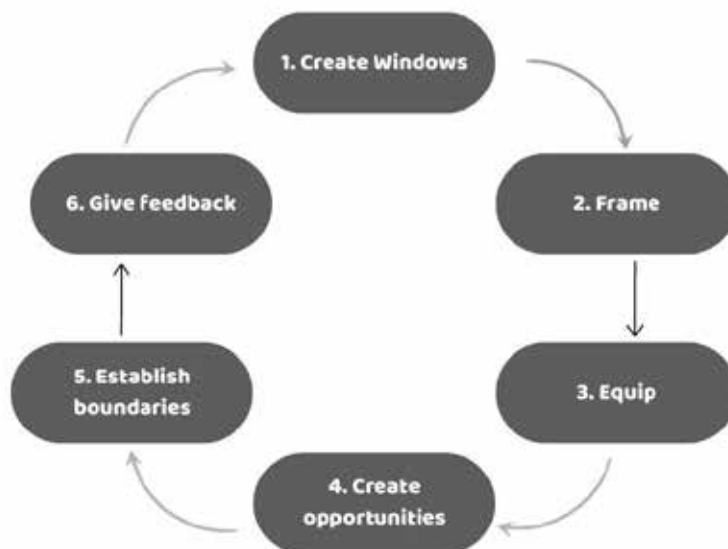
Part 2: Coaching children to engage with church

The five values of church

There are things about church that we love and value. It's so much more than simply being present: church is a deep and powerful blessing God has given us that we want our children to know too. You can proactively disciple your children and teens in these values and so help them experience the beauty of the church.

- 1 Draw near to God
- 2 Radically love
- 3 Spur and be spurred on
- 4 Find purpose in the body of Christ
- 5 Pursue the Spirit

The six-stage circle



1 Create windows

2 Frame

3 Equip

4 Create opportunities

5 Establish boundaries

6 Give feedback

The six-stage circle in action: Draw near to God

- 1 Create windows
- 2 Frame
- 3 Equip
- 4 Create opportunities
- 5 Establish boundaries
- 6 Give feedback

Finding your child's next step using the five values of church

Children and teens don't always like being in church. But there is so much more to church than just being present in services and groups. You can use the six-stage circle to disciple your child in any of the values of church – or anything you love about church – to help them find their next steps.

If you are doing the bite-sized version of the course, please skip to the end of this session in this handbook, or to the end of the session's video, to see the discussion questions for part 2.

Part 3: Building children into the body of Christ

Church leaders' children often find themselves helping out at church, but this isn't always the same as fulfilling their part of the body of Christ. There are things you can do to help your children find their own place and purpose in the church, just as any other member of the congregation.

Start with their passion

Problem-solve as a parent first

Treat them like a congregation member

Questions for session 4

Part 1: Helping children meet and know God in everyday life

- What has worked for your family in terms of discipling at home? What hasn't worked so well?
- Who was influential in your journey of faith as a child or young person? What did they do?
- Are you familiar with Parenting for Faith's five key tools? If so, which have you tried and what happened?

Part 2: Coaching children to engage with church

- Which bits of church do you really love? How can you share that with your children?
- Do you agree with the five values of church? Would you add any of your own? Which do you think your children experience?
- Which value of church would you like to explore with one of your children? Problem-solve how you might do that using the six-stage circle.

Part 3: Building children into the body of Christ

- Where have you seen your children playing their part in the body of Christ?
- How do your children currently serve in church? Thinking about the difference between just helping out and finding their unique purpose in the body of Christ, where does this fit?
- Would you be comfortable with your teen attending a different church they prefer? Why or why not?

What next?

We do hope that you have enjoyed this course and that you are already seeing the fruits in you and your family's life. Of course, this is just a beginning, and we'd love to continue supporting you in this journey.

Tell us how it went

We'd love to hear how you got on. Your feedback helps us shape and improve what we offer for churches and for parents. One easy way to let us know what you thought is through our online feedback form: parentingforfaith.org/pacl-course

The Parenting for Faith website is packed with stories and resources for parents and churches to read, listen to and watch, covering a host of different topics. There's a whole topic for church leaders who are also parents: parentingforfaith.org/topics/parenting-church-leader

If you are looking for ideas and inspiration as you empower your children and teens on their own faith journey, a good place to start is parentingforfaith.org/parents

And if you would like to know more about what how Parenting for Faith can help you encourage and resource the families in your church, including free courses you can run for parents and carers, visit parentingforfaith.org/churches

We're regularly adding new content, and we're working to develop what we offer over the coming months. Do keep in touch with us and help us shape what we offer.

Books and resources

There are five books in BRF's Parenting for Faith series, available in print and on Kindle:

- *Parenting Children for a Life of Faith – Omnibus Edition*, also available as an audiobook, contains the three original Parenting for Faith books plus some additional material.
- *It Takes a Church to Raise a Parent* explores how churches can intentionally create a culture where parenting for faith can flourish.
- *Parenting as a Church Leader* explores the unique challenges of parenting while also leading a church, and builds a set of simple tools and approaches to help leaders and their families flourish.
- *Babies and Toddlers: Nurturing your child's spiritual life* is for parents and carers of 0–3-year-olds, wherever they are on their faith journey, to help them help their babies and toddlers connect with God. On the website you will find video-based resources for churches to use to accompany the book.
- *Parenting Teens for a Life of Faith* – even when it doesn't feel like it, parents and carers remain the most significant influence in a teen's life. This will equip everyone involved in teens' faith journeys to understand the teenage faith journey and find their place in it.

Rachel Turner has also written two books, published by BRF, designed for parents and carers to use to help their children draw near to God:

- *Comfort in the Darkness*, a collection of retellings of Bible stories exploring God's character and promises that helps parents grow peace, confidence and an understanding of who God is in their children.
- *Comfort in Uncertain Times* helps children draw close to God and stay connected to him through biblical stories of anxiety, loss and transition

You can find these and other useful books and resources at parentingforfaith.org/topics/shop

Keep in touch

There are several ways you can keep in touch with Parenting for Faith:

- **join our email newsletter** – sign up at parentingforfaith.org/email
- **follow us on Facebook** – facebook.com/parentingforfaithBRF. We also have a group for church leaders who are also parents – facebook.com/groups/96212811418184
- **follow us on Twitter** – twitter.com/godconnected
- **follow us on Instagram** – [@parentingforfaithbrf](https://instagram.com/parentingforfaithbrf)
- **follow our podcasts** – parentingforfaith.org/podcast
- **check out our events and training** – parentingforfaith.org/events-and-training

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