

EPIC KIDS VALUES & PRACTICES

INTRODUCTION

At Epic Vineyard we value the children in our community very highly, and we strive to create a safe environment that welcomes kids to grow relationally with God.

This document will help orient both parents and kids team members to our values and our practices at Epic Vineyard, so that we can best nurture the children together.

We know that there are broken people in every community and as such there is potential for abuse to occur. In order to protect all our kids, we've written an abuse prevention policy that all helpers must adhere to, and every kids team member must have a current criminal record check completed in order to serve with Epic Kids. Please refer to the abuse prevention policy if you'd like more detailed information. This document will overlap with a few practices, but it is more to enable understanding of our values and how we live that out together.

KIDS BELONG FULLY

One of the unique characteristics of Epic is that we value children as fully human in their participation within the life of the Church. What we mean is that we don't perceive kids as "half human" (i.e., not grown up) and therefore think they don't have meaningful gifts to contribute to the whole. Rather, we believe quite the opposite! Kids are often the best conduits of the gifts of the Holy Spirit because they are more open to hearing and receiving from God – sometimes because they have less baggage, doubt, stress, etc...than adults.

We believe kids fully belong within the church community and are valued, seen, known, and encouraged to share themselves. Sometimes kids will speak the call to worship in a gathering, or serve communion, or help on the worship team, or read a scripture, or serve on a Sunday team. They are learning to share what they sense from the Holy Spirit in ministry time, through artwork, or any other form of creativity. We want to receive from the children.

SPIRITUAL FORMATION

We also frame the teaching time for the kids around the same content the adults are learning. In this way we are all learning on the same trajectory, although at age appropriate levels. This enables dialogue where the children can share something they are learning, which could in turn impact the learning of the adults or vice-versa. We believe in the value of life-on-life discipleship at Epic and being intentional about learning in parallel helps us facilitate more meaningful formation, especially within families.

However, it's very important to understand that at Epic we do not see the church as the primary discipleship context for our children. Rather, **parents are the primary disciplers of their kids**, and Epic

supports that process. This is distinctly different than the old "Sunday School" model many of us grew up with, where the expectation was that the Church would teach your kids about God and how to be a good person. Parents average 2182 awake hours with their children annually, giving them countless opportunities for conversations, creativity, prayer, etc... to influence their kids. Our kids team averages less than 30 hours annually with a child, and it's always in the context of a group, with a rotating team of adults. Clearly we cannot disciple with anywhere near the same effectiveness as parents. Our goal then is to support the spiritual formation that is *already going on* in the lives of children in our community.

Note: we intentionally *do not* use the term "Sunday School". Rather, we refer to Epic Kids as the time for spiritual formation for the children. Not all kids have a positive association with "school". In the same way that we wouldn't refer to a worship gathering as "work" for adults, we don't want to refer to it as "school" for the kids. Please be intentional in using the term "Epic Kids".

WORSHIP PARTICIPATION

We encourage parents to teach their children to worship God, both by modeling and by teaching children how to worship. It is the responsibility of parents in our community to help children engage, rather than run around, play, or find some other way of disengaging from participation in worship. We want to see our children grow in this area.

We want our kids to learn to fully participate in our worship gatherings. We try to find songs that are easily learned by children, even if they cannot yet read. Sometimes the easiest part for them to sing is a simple refrain within the song, or the chorus of a longer song. We have also started including a particular kids song each week, before the children head off to Epic Kids. This isn't to suggest this is their only song, but rather this is a song that speaks their language differently, or more intentionally. This is another way we can value children and teach adults to see them, to welcome them, to learn from them.

GROWING UP AT EPIC

Although we've more than doubled the number of kids in our community in the last 3 years, we are also a community with kids growing up! This means that we're thinking a lot about how we facilitate their belonging in our community and support their ongoing spiritual formation through adolescence.

A research study in Canada in 2011 (<http://hemorrhagingfaith.com>) surprised many when it was discovered that loss of faith didn't occur in young adults during their university years. Rather, it began around grade 6 (11 years of age), unless a child was known personally by at least two adults in their church community who they were not related to (i.e., not their grandparents or an auntie or uncle). Students who had the simplest of connections with two adults in their church community retained their faith in their adult life!

This is both amazing and encouraging, because at Epic we deeply value relationship with children. This is the part we can play as a church community, in helping shape their spiritual formation. It also means we want to increase our intentionality with tweens by creating small groups for them to belong to at least once a year (6-8 weeks), as well as continuing to invest in our growing youth group!

Kids don't stay kids...they grow. So, as a community we want to be proactive in reaching for belonging and spiritual formation all the way along their journey!

DEVICE FREE SUNDAY GATHERINGS

With feedback from the broader community we've decided to make worship gatherings a device free time for kids. This helps our children participate more fully in community life, including set up and clean up, as well as giving them increased time to build relationships with other kids and adults. Please remind children that there are no video games on Sundays at Epic.

PROCESS FOR ADDRESSING MISBEHAVIOUR

In the event that your child is misbehaving during our Epic Kids time, our first goal as a team will always be to try and resolve the issue through gentle reminders and discussion with the child. The team leader should keep an open mind and ask the child loving and thought-provoking questions and allow the child to express what the root of the problem is. However, if the issue cannot be resolved through a discussion between the child and team leader, a volunteer will bring your child back up to you in the service, and will give them a yellow circle to give to you. This yellow circle will serve as a non-verbal cue that your child was returned to you because of their behaviour, and will also signify the need for you to follow-up with the Epic Kids team leader after the gathering has ended. As outlined in our Abuse Prevention Policy, our Epic Kids volunteers do not have a duty, nor a right, to provide punishment to your children, beyond having open discussions with them about what behaviour is acceptable and what is not (please refer to section G of the Abuse Prevention Policy).

COLLECTING YOUR CHILDREN AFTER THE GATHERING

At the end of the service, it is the responsibility of a child's parent(s)/guardian(s) to collect their child/children from the Epic Kids groups downstairs. Every Sunday the adult teaching and ministry time will be 45 minutes long. Epic Kids will also run during this same 45 minute period, meaning that when the adults' time ends, the kids' time ends as well. We ask that parents be courteous to the needs of the kids' teams by picking their children up in a timely fashion, as the role of an Epic Kids volunteer should not extend beyond the scheduled learning time. There needs to be a clear hand-off between the Epic Kids team and the child's parents, so that parents know that they have taken over responsibility for their child.

We recognize ministry time is an important part of our gatherings, and we greatly value everyone's participation in this. In order to balance ministry time with collecting children from Epic Kids, at the end of ministry time the host at each gathering will remind parents when it is time to collect their children. Please pay attention at each gathering to this announcement, as it will vary depending on how much of the 45-minute period is left. If ministry time extends beyond the 45 minute period, we ask that parents still collect their children, and either designate one adult (perhaps one parent) to look after their child/children if ministry continues, or encourage the children to participate in ministry time as well, as they often have a lot to contribute and learn during these times. (Note: if parents request that another adult who is not the parent of their child/children to pick up their child from Epic Kids, it must be discussed with the team leader prior to the start of Epic Kids, or else children will not be returned to anyone other than their immediate family members).

DOOR SAFETY POLICY

Safety is one of our top priorities for the kids in our community, and there are a number of policies and practices in place to ensure their safety, but one in particular is to be highlighted. The door at the bottom of the stairwell immediately to the right when you enter the main front doors of the church is to remain locked at all times during the gathering. This is due to the fact that it is easy for someone from outside to access the area where Epic Kids takes place. Therefore, we ask that the children and parents use the back stairwell of the church when taking children to and from our Epic Kids time.