



Playfulness in the unexpected

David & Kathy Bland

Which of these sentiments do you most recognise in yourself?

- I love it when creativity goes rogue.
- It can take hours to prep enough stuff the activities
- Nobody did the cotton reel activity. I almost cried.
- They did it differently and didn't learn the Bible story which was disappointing
- When they are just playing it can feel like a children's club rather than church
- It is all about process not product.
- The toddlers ruined my activity.
- I like to have some wondering questions up my sleeve so I can link the activity to the Bible theme
- There is nothing for the teenagers to do.
- The adults usually don't join in
- I like to make sure all the cutting out is done in advance
- I like to make sure there a variety of resources so people can do the activity their own way
- We can't use anything sharp because it wouldn't be safe for the toddlers
- I feel I've nailed it when an adult becomes totally absorbed in an activity
- Having the instructions to follow is good because it means everyone ends up with the same end result.

An awareness of what we bring within ourselves in terms of an posture of playfulness, needing structure and planning, feeling more comfortable with product or process etc can be really helpful when thinking about either what we might need from other people on the team or what we might need to hold onto or let go of to give God space.

Random creativity

- Give each person some bits
- Time to create.
- Offer some prompts: what might you do with these if your theme was All Together if you wanted to include
 - Toddlers
 - Teens
 - Adults
 - Energetic children
 - Quiet people

- Dads
- Grandmas
- Planned activities – how can you make this appropriate for all ages? What are the issues and risks? What do we need to think about to make these activities appropriate for all ages?

Holding space

Playwork theory and practice might have a lot of wisdom for us as Messy Church leaders. What happens if you replace 'playworker' with Messy Church leader in this reflection about playwork?

What does a Playworker do?

- Wonders what might happen if.
- Supports without stealing the moment.
- Listens to what's said - and what's not.
- Offers comfort without fixing or fussing.
- Meets children where they are, not where adults think they should be.
- Waits instead of rushing in.
- Trusts children to lead the way.
- Plays, when invited - not before.
- Tidies, mends, and resets - again and again.
- In the background of so many brilliant play moments, a Playworker is there - watching, waiting, holding space.

What does a Messy Church leader do?

- Wonders what might happen if.
- Supports without stealing the moment.
- Listens to what's said - and what's not.
- Offers comfort without fixing or fussing.
- Meets people where they are, not where the Church thinks they should be.
- Waits instead of rushing in.
- Trusts people to lead the way.
- Tidies, mends, and resets - again and again.
- In the background of so many brilliant holy moments, a messy church leader is there - watching, waiting, holding space.

Does this ring true/ resonate?

Activity Leaders - some possible behaviours

- Know the Bible story/message
- Wondering Questions
- Modelling joining in
- Spotting how much to support and when to give them space
- Hands off to draw adults in
- Hold things lightly

- Spot the needs of parents of older children
- Permission giving - particularly for adults 'this is your time too'

End with creativity

- Choose something to be creative with and spend some time with God
- Where is God at work?
- How do we give God space to work?
- Yesterday we heard 'relate first then produce'. Remember to give space for relating with God. Playfulness gives space for God.