

Life Steps

Developing
spiritually
nourished
children.

*Billy Skiffert, author
of Jesus*

PLAN OUTLINE

THE LIFE STEPS PLAN FOR MINISTRIES TO CHILDREN

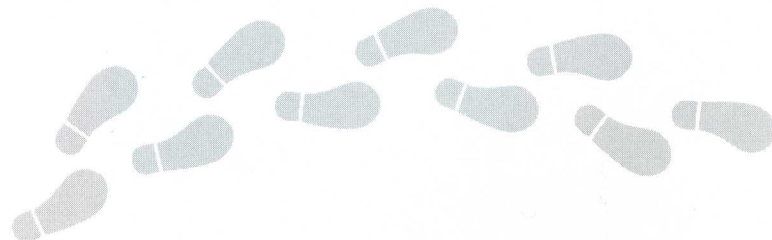
THE CORE CONCEPT

Kids love cookies, ^{candy} chocolate bars and potato chips. But they need a good, nourishing diet to thrive and grow. So, to help adults who care for kids, government food agencies have taught us about food groups. When people know the major areas of good nutrition, they can choose any food they like. They just make sure that over time they provide a balanced diet.

Kids love to have fun, even at church! They also need balanced spiritual nourishment to thrive and grow in faith. So, to help adults who do children's ministries, LIFE STEPS teaches about 6 basic spiritual need areas. When leaders know the major areas of developing faith in children, they can choose any program or curriculum they like. They just make sure that over time they provide a balanced spiritual diet.

^{basal} This booklet outlines what you need to know to implement the LIFE STEPS Plan in your church.

- Learn the spiritual need areas of children
- Check your ministry balance
- Set goals with need areas in mind



SUMMARY OF THE LIFE STEPS PLAN

ASK THE RIGHT QUESTION

When workers get frustrated, they may ask their program leader, "Can we change the curriculum? The kids are bored."
When program leaders see enough frustrated workers, they may ask the CE board or pastor, "Can we drop this program or try the one the other church is doing?"
Even if our programs succeed in drawing lots of happy kids, we must still ask the right question! The right question to ask is not "Are the programs working?" but:

Are our children spiritually nourished?

The LIFE STEPS plan helps you answer this question!

STEP 1: Learn the Spiritual Need Areas of Children

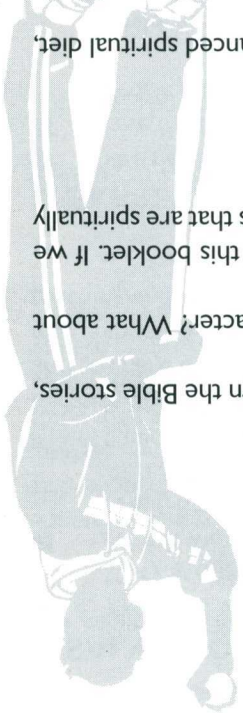
How do we know our children are doing well spiritually? We expect them to learn the Bible stories, memorize verses, and like coming to church.
But is that all there is? Do they need to know just Bible facts? What about character? What about commitment in faith to Jesus? What about missions or stewardship?
LIFE STEPS helps you learn the spiritual need areas for children on pages 4-6 of this booklet. If we succeed in giving our children quality opportunities to receive this diet, we will shape lives that are spiritually well rounded.

STEP 2: Check your Ministry Balance

When your target is clear, you can see if you're hitting it or not! Through the balanced spiritual diet, you can see all the areas that children need.
No single program or curriculum can be expected to provide the total balance. But altogether, as you look at the total experience that children are having in your church, you should detect a general balance of nourishment for them through the year.
LIFE STEPS provides a simple tool on pages 7-8 to help you check your ministry balance. Use it to get a general picture of the diet you're offering to kids in your church through your current ministry.

STEP 3: Set Goals with Need Areas in Mind

With LIFE STEPS, you are free to be creative! Once you determine low areas of spiritual nourishment, you must set goals to balance that out.
You can decide to run a special elective in Sunday School. Or you can change the focus of your Children's Church. Or you can change your Club curriculum. Or you can drop something altogether and start a whole new program.
When you keep the need areas in mind you can set clear direction for individual programs or for your entire children's ministry. See pages 9-11 for ideas to help you set goals with need areas in mind.



■ Step 1:

LEARN THE SPIRITUAL NEED AREAS OF CHILDREN

The following 6 items are the spiritual “food groups” for children. It is important to learn these items well. The 6 main categories are easily memorized. The paragraph explaining each one has been carefully developed and should be reviewed every time you overview your ministry balance. Being familiar with these objectives allows children’s ministry leaders to constantly calibrate themselves to major objectives as they do their ongoing work.

1. SALVATION:

- We need to give children regular opportunities to receive Christ as Saviour and to share their faith story as they have experienced it.
- *For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. Romans 10:10*

Children from Christian homes naturally affiliate with their parents’ faith. They will believe in Jesus because of exposure to the Bible at a young age. They should be encouraged to establish their commitment and to share their faith verbally. This will reinforce faith and ability to follow Jesus more fully. Churches are also expected to reach children from non-Christian homes. These children can be very responsive to teaching and must be given opportunity to invite Jesus to be their Saviour.

2. EXPRESSING DEVOTION:

- We need to teach age-appropriate core spiritual disciplines to help children express their love for God.
- *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind... Matthew 22:37; Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Psalm 100:2*

Children are capable of genuine worship, praise, adoration and devotion offered to God. Younger children pray and think about God very simply and naturally. As they grow into older elementary years, they need more teaching about prayer and how to read the Bible for their spiritual life. They need encouragement to engage in personal devotional activities like writing a journal and meditating. They need group worship activities such as praying with their peers, singing to God, and expression through the arts. Children need to learn to express their devotion for God/Jesus in personal and corporate ways.

In general a graduated approach will be best for children through their elementary years. For example:

- Early childhood Being sung with, simple stories
- Kind. to Grade 1 Saying simple prayers, singing together, drawing pictures to God
- Grade 2 to 4 ...to the above, add Bible reading and personal sharing
- Grade 5 to 6 ...to the above, add journaling and meditation

3. BIBLE KNOWLEDGE:

- We need to establish in children a foundation of Biblical knowledge through story telling and memorization.
- *All Scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the child of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16-17*

Children love to learn. They soak up knowledge and facts if presented creatively and imaginatively. A foundation of Bible stories will be the base of more sophisticated interpretation and application later in life. The telling of the stories should endeavour to engage children's imagination and guide them to think critically and to develop applications to their lives. Doctrine and theology can be taught in upper elementary. Scriptures should be memorized to establish a solid content base. The pace and importance of memorization increases as children approach the sixth grade. The review of memorized verses should be considered just as important as the learning of new ones.

4. CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY:

- We need to teach children to desire and seek out help from others in pursuing their relationship with God.
- *Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love each other deeply, from the heart. 1 Peter 1:22*

While parents have the primary impact on the life of a child, this gradually is replaced by peer influence in the teen years. Children need to value Christian friends for support and they need experiences that develop good fellowship links. Also, children increasingly need other adult Christians besides their parents to reinforce the truths of God's word. ("It takes a village to raise a child"). Close relationships with adult teachers/mentors help children to trust the church to be a faith-supporting environment. Teaching our faith heritage helps root children to our wider community. Fun, creativity, concerned care, and openness to new people should characterize our gathering times.

5. OUTREACH:

- We need to teach children to share their faith, and become more aware of global efforts to advance God's Kingdom.
- *Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. Matthew 28:18-20.*

Children need to learn to share their faith at their level. They can be eager and natural evangelists, especially in inviting friends to church ministries. Every child should learn a simple method to explain the way of salvation. Children also need exposure to the wider world of missions endeavours. Personal contact with missionaries is ideal. They need to be told how God is working in the world in extending his kingdom. Our goal is to nurture a heart for the lost. Prayer for and giving to mission endeavours is a key element of teaching.

6. SERVANT HEART:

- We need to teach children to be generous by involving them in giving and acts of kindness, especially to the disadvantaged and poor.
- *Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. James 1:27*

Children who are engaged in social concerns and Christian service grow up to be compassionate adults. Christian stewardship is using everything as God wants the believer to use it. The giving of tithes is a limited but important definition of stewardship for this age level. Acts of kindness and service to the poor teach children that they have a responsibility to our world. Later in life they will learn to critique their culture and discern the difference between success in God's eyes and success in human terms.

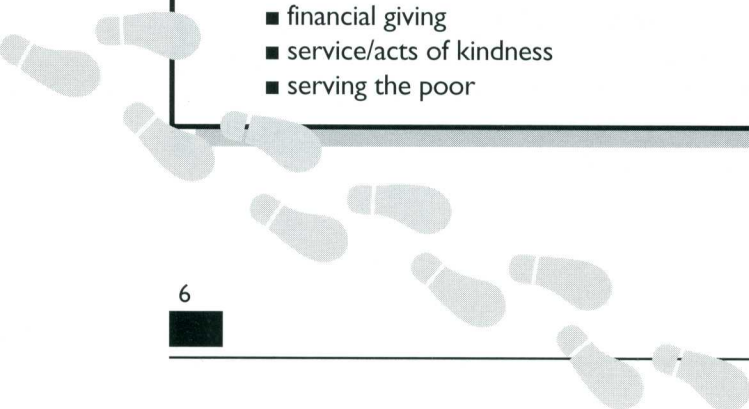
SPIRITUAL NEED AREAS SUMMARY

This chart summarizes the spiritual need areas and how they relate to the Description of a Discipled Person (adult). Remember, children grow up! A good start with them now will shape them to be more fully developed followers of Christ as youth and adults.

The column on the left summarizes the core ideas of the spiritual need areas. Note that children learn through experiences, play, activity, emotional stimulation, and relationship in addition to intellectual instruction. We should provide formal teaching, active experiences and relationship building for a well rounded approach in learning. This is why we say “children need to experience:”

The column on the right provides a simple phrase which summarizes the adult Description of a Discipled Person. A brochure outlining this “DDP” in more detail is available from Christian Education Ministries.

CHILDREN NEED TO EXPERIENCE:	TO HELP THEM BE DISCIPLES WHO:
1. SALVATION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ commitments to Christ ■ sharing personal faith stories 	Love God with all their heart
2. EXPRESSING DEVOTION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ prayer, Bible reading ■ group worship ■ spiritual disciplines (older children) 	Love God with all their heart; Possess spiritual self care skills
3. BIBLE KNOWLEDGE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Bible story telling ■ memorization 	Possess spiritual self care skills
4. CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ importance of Christian friends ■ good mentor relationships ■ quality experiences in church ■ exposure to our heritage 	Commit to a local church body
5. OUTREACH <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ learning to witness ■ missions awareness 	Actively work to win the lost
6. A SERVANT HEART <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ financial giving ■ service/acts of kindness ■ serving the poor 	Critique society and culture



Step 2:

CHECK YOUR MINISTRY BALANCE

A. PROGRAM OVERVIEW

■ To be used by each program leader

Program Name: _____



<p>4. CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Emphasis on Christian friends ■ Good mentor relationships ■ Quality experiences in church ■ Teaching faith heritage <p>Rare 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Strong</p>	<p>1. SALVATION:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Commitments to Christ ■ Sharing faith stories <p>Rare 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Strong</p>
<p>5. OUTREACH:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Witnessing tool ■ Missions awareness <p>Rare 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Strong</p>	<p>2. EXPRESS DEVOTION:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Prayer ■ Bible reading ■ Group worship ■ Disciplines <p>Rare 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Strong</p>
<p>6. SERVANT HEART:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Financial stewardship ■ Service/Acts of kindness ■ Serving the poor <p>Rare 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Strong</p>	<p>3. BIBLE KNOWLEDGE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Bible content ■ Memorization <p>Rare 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Strong</p>

Use this chart to get a sense of what has been covered by your specific ministry. It isn't necessary to observe each worker or class, but you should be familiar with the curriculum.

■ Ask this question in each diet area: "In this ministry, this past year, [Salvation] was..."
 1. Rarely addressed 10. Strongly addressed

■ You may wish to assign a number to each sub-point, and then get an average for each diet area. (Sometimes it helps to break the overview into smaller parts)

■ Doing this overview usually results in a sense that you'd like to emphasize something that has rarely been addressed. Mark those as specific goals you'd like to address in the next year of ministry.

■ Program leaders must prepare to explain their assessment in a larger meeting which will overview all children's ministries together.

B. TOTAL MINISTRY OVERVIEW

- To be used by all program leaders together

PROGRAM▶	Sunday School						Total
▼ NEED							
Salvation							
Express Devotion							
Bible Knowledge							
Christian Community							
Outreach							
Servant Heart							

After program leaders have concluded their individual overviews, get together to put the whole picture together.

- Write the names of all programs and elective events provided by your children's ministry (in addition to Sunday School) in the top line.
- Write in the numbers from each program overview underneath, matching with the need areas on the left. A scan down the columns will give you a snapshot of the priorities of each program.
- Add the numbers across and put in the total in the right column.
- Compare the numbers in the Total column. A lower number means that need area is addressed less. A higher number means that need area is addressed more or most.
- Discuss how leaders decided on their numbers. This will clarify the overview. It is all right to change the overview numbers to get a more accurate feel for your overall ministry.

Step 3:

SET GOALS WITH NEED AREAS IN MIND

After you check your ministry balance, plan to address low nourishment areas. Remember, programs and curriculum are just your delivery system. Don't attach more importance to them than they deserve! You are in control to choose how you will deliver the spiritual nourishment to your children.

You can address need areas with varying levels of complexity.

LEVELS OF COMPLEXITY:

Level 1

The simplest and easiest way to begin balancing your kids' spiritual diet is in the class. Just take one idea to implement and it will make a difference quickly. A great resource to help you is the Life Steps Resource Binder. It's full of ideas you can implement in your class at any time throughout the year.

Level 2

Address a specific need with a small group. You can pull kids out for a special program for a short period of time.

Let's say you had 5 children accept Jesus at your VBS program this summer. In addition, the camp director in your area sent you the names of 4 children from your church or community that accepted Christ. They need to be followed up, but your Sunday School only challenges kids to accept Christ, but not share their faith story.

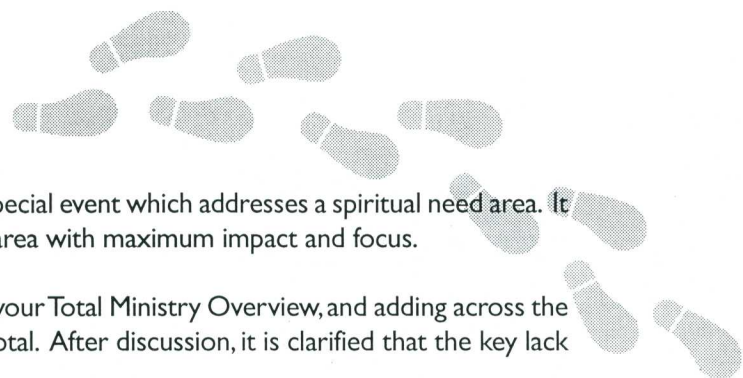
You need to set a goal in the "Salvation" nourishment area, specifically related to sharing faith stories. Some goal options could be:

- A. Get these kids to share their faith story in your opening worship time. Maybe spread them out over a few weeks.
- B. Start a special class for them, using *First Steps for Kids*®. It requires you to recruit a special teacher/mentor who will go through the lessons to reinforce their decision, and explain things about God, the Bible, prayer and the church. When they are finished the elective (eg. 4 Sundays), they can rejoin their regular class.

[Note: if you get a teacher who builds a mentoring relationship with them, you'll meet a bonus goal in the "Community" nourishment area]

- C. Make sure the Sunday School teachers of these children are alerted to the new commitment the children have made, and encourage these teachers to talk specifically with them.

This example shows how you can meet an immediate need or opportunity quickly and flexibly, knowing that your action won't disrupt your regular programming. You stay on course, but you also know that you're making progress toward the higher objective of balanced nourishment.



Level 3

Interrupt regular programming to have all children in a special event which addresses a spiritual need area. It takes extra work and planning but lets you develop an area with maximum impact and focus.

After filling in the numbers of each program into your Total Ministry Overview, and adding across the chart, you realize that “Servant Heart” has the lowest total. After discussion, it is clarified that the key lack is in Service and Acts of Kindness.

This means you’ll have to set some goals for this area.

You have some choices:

- A. Your Sunday School department (or age department) could plan for a special Christmas study of people in the Bible who were kind. Learning about the kindness of biblical characters can help kids intellectually.
- B. Your club program could plan for a monthly activity of going out and doing random acts of kindness in the neighbourhood. This would take the place of the regular craft or sports activity. The lesson taught that evening would focus on why we do these things as Christians, or centre on biblical people who were kind to strangers.

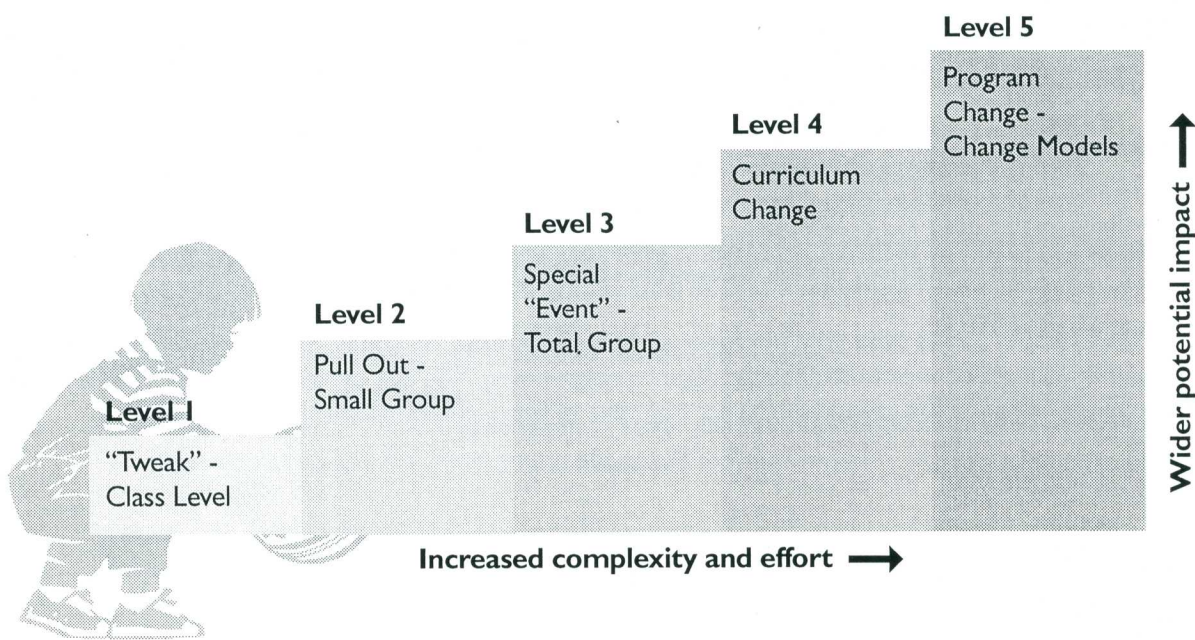
This example shows how you can meet the deficiencies that show up in your program overviews. It also shows how you can coordinate more than one program to make small adjustments to meet a larger need.

Level 4

Change your curriculum. The purpose would be to find a curriculum that balances your ministry better than your current one. This would take some research and time. You wouldn’t want to do this lightly.

Level 5

Change your model of ministry. Sometimes a total change is necessary to achieve better balance. It’s not good to switch to a different model just because everyone else is, or because it seems to attract success in a specific location. However, change is good if you detect that in your locale it will help you become more purposeful in your ministry!



RESULTS OF GOAL SETTING

- **Purpose.** Your ministry will become more purposeful and mission oriented. The LIFE STEPS plan will help you tie every children's ministry activity to a specific goal.
- **Worker encouragement.** Your workers will know how their role contributes to the overall spiritual nourishment of kids, even if they are only doing one part.
- **Focused evaluation.** You have clear reasons why a program or curriculum fits or doesn't fit based on a set of larger objectives.
- **Creativity.** You can use a published program or curriculum, or try out your own ideas to meet a specific need.
- **Efficiency.** Even if you only have Sunday School, short electives can build up a weak area without burdening your system with a whole program. Run only the programs you can afford, yet stay confident you're covering all the need areas.

START A REVOLUTION

The LIFE STEPS plan is designed for every church of every size! Apply it and watch it revolutionize your approach to children's ministry!! For more information and help to implement Life Steps, contact the Christian Education Ministries office or your provincial CE Ministries chair for seminars in your area, or personal consultation services for your church.

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FOR
KIDS

Christian Education Resources



Christian
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