



Outdoor VBS Planning Guide

Planning

- ◆ Identify what outdoor spaces you'll use for VBS.
- ◆ Determine max capacity in each space, following physical distancing guidelines. Remember, max capacity includes kids and volunteers. Formula: $\text{length} \times \text{Width} / 36 = \text{people 6 ft apart}$. Or use this [calculator](#).
- ◆ Determine your weather plan. Will you move VBS inside? If so, measure your space, then use the calculator to determine indoor max capacity. This will likely impact the total number of kids you can have at VBS.
- ◆ Considering your capacity limits and logistics, determine if you can handle both elementary and preschool kids during the same week.
- ◆ Write down the maximum number of kids you can have at VBS. This guides the number of volunteers you'll need.
- ◆ Determine the timeframe and content. You may want to do a full three-hour program, or trim the opening and closing so it's closer to 2-2 ½ hours. Or, consider doing fewer than 5 days. Are they sequential days? What time of day?
- ◆ Identify which spaces work best for registration, drop-off, pick-up, and stations.
 - o Grassy areas work great for games.
 - o Parking lots or sidewalks with a blankets become an easy station space.
 - o Borrow pop-up canopy tents for instant shade. These pop-ups also help define spaces. Don't overlook the potential in you your church drop-off area or patio. If it's covered it can be the perfect spot for a VBS station!
 - o Drop-off and pick-up may look different if everything is outside. Or if you're using your parking lot for VBS stations. Be sure to clearly communicate to parents what this looks ahead of time!
 - o Figure out bathroom availability in advance. Will you let kids into the church or use porta-potties? If bringing in porta-potties, don't forget a plan to clean hands!
- ◆ Create an outdoor VBS map to identify your stations for leaders and parents. If you have an existing church map, simply layer VBS locations over the existing map. This gives people context as to where things are in relation to your building. Be sure to include drop-off and pick-up areas.
- ◆ Create durable signage for stations. You might want to laminate station signs, then staple or zip-tie them to colorful foam core, cardboard or wood. Stake these into the ground or attach them to buckets of rocks or sand. If you need a free-standing sign, be sure to think about wind!
- ◆ Check with someone at church to identify any sprinkler heads, and have watering schedules altered during VBS hours.
- ◆ Verify that the mowing crew won't arrive during VBS.
- ◆ Have a plan for bugs. We don't want mosquitos, fire ants, or bees a-buzz during VBS hours. Tip: Spray the yard for mosquitos the night before.
- ◆ Be aware of the weather forecast.
 - o Have a plan for inclement weather. Can kids go inside if space permits?
 - o Have a set time when a decision will be made if "Plan B," needs to be implemented before the start of the VBS day.
 - o Have a plan to communicate easily with parents if weather forces you to shorten your program or have a delayed start.
- ◆ Create a sign-out procedure so everyone is safely accounted for at the end of the day.

Safety

- ◆ Follow all CDC guidelines, local and denominational directives.
- ◆ Maintain staff ratios, so supervision of children is manageable.
- ◆ Clear boundaries are very important. Use signage, traffic cones, and pool noodles to create visual boundaries. Spray paint works on grass and can be mowed off after VBS.
- ◆ Take time to discuss yard boundaries with volunteers and kids. This is especially important for unfenced yards or those close to busy streets.
- ◆ Add “safety volunteers” who just patrol the perimeter of the outdoor space.
- ◆ Use walkie talkies to communicate to key leaders.
- ◆ Have a plan for drop off and pick up. Your regular plan may work just fine, but it may not, if you’re using the parking lot for VBS. Create a sign-out procedure, so everyone is safely accounted for at the end of the day.
- ◆ Secure pop-up canopy tents into the ground or take them down each day or you may find they have blown away.

Decorating

- ◆ Decorating is different outside.
 - Less is more.
 - Think weather resistant—water, wind, and heat.
 - Laminate station signs and attach them to foam core.
 - Painted carpet tubes are cheap and make easy outdoor sign posts.
 - Use zip ties to secure decorations, put station signs on a stakes or pop-up canopy tent poles. These are also great for attaching VBS fabric and plastic backdrops to tent poles. (These are two backdrops that are water-resistant, as well!)
 - Consider color coding station signs.

Technology

- ◆ Plan for using media outside.
 - A larger tent or multiple pop-up canopy tents placed together can create a space with enough shadow for video projection.
 - You may consider moving your VBS to evening so the sun is less bright, making video projections easier to see.
 - Use a portable screen or create a screen by zip-tying a white sheet to the canopy tent leg. Or project the image onto a wall. Ask families if they may have an inflatable projection screen.
 - Secure a video projection unit. If you don’t have one, ask around at your church. Here’s an article on outdoor video projectors that may be helpful.
<https://outdoormovieprojectors.com/how-many-lumens-needed-outdoor-projector/>
 - If you have a little extra money in your budget, wow kids by renting an LED wall and hook up a laptop to a video projection unit that will display on the LED wall. (You might also ask if church members would sponsor this additional expense.)
 - If projecting media outside is not a possibility, teach the songs using a CD and call out the actions. That’s how we do it at our field tests and it works great!
 - Obtain a portable sound system and a microphone for your opening and closing leader. (This is a must for a groups over 25 people!)
 - You’ll need outdoor extension cords. (Be sure to tape these down wherever possible.)
- ◆ Have stations that use media (such as Sing & Play and KidVid Cinema) share the same location.

Supplies

- ◆ Organize supplies by station and day. Put supplies in a clear tote with a lid. Label each tote so it's easy for volunteer to find and grab what they need.
- ◆ Have a designated area where all VBS supplies can be found and brought out each day.
- ◆ Wagons or carts are a great way to “roll out” supplies. Ask your church families to lend them for the week.
- ◆ You may want a table at each station. Plastic folding tables or card tables are easier to move than heavy wooden ones. Ask your church families to lend them for VBS.
- ◆ Each station needs a place for garbage. If you don't have garbage cans, a 5-gallon pail works better than a plastic bag that may blow away.
- ◆ Clipboards for station leaders help keep the daily schedules from blowing away.
- ◆ Consider having a team of volunteers just for daily setup and take down.
- ◆ Use music download cards and have volunteers play the VBS music from their phone.
- ◆ Create a take-home bag for each child. Gallon-sized resealable bags work great. Use a permanent marker to put names on bags.

Info for Parents

- ◆ Ask parents to slather their kids with sunscreen and bug spray before coming. Have a few bottles of sunscreen and bug spray available for parents to apply, if they've forgotten.
- ◆ Ask parents to have their child use the bathroom right before leaving home.
- ◆ Encourage kids to wear ballcaps for sun protection.
- ◆ Require kids to bring a water bottle labeled with their name and a towel to sit on. The towel is a great visual reminder to social distance.
- ◆ You may want to ask families to provide a bag or backpack for their child to carry their water bottle and towel in. Or if you have budget, purchase an inexpensive string backpack for each child.
- ◆ Communicate what VBS will look like outside and all the safety procedures you have in place. A parent info guide is a great tool for this.

Still need a VBS? Check out Group's life-changing programs.



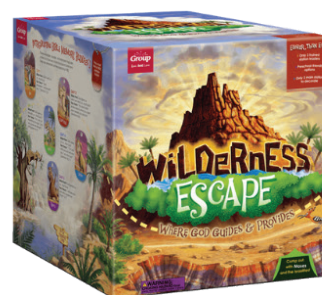
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