

Learning through



# God our Creator

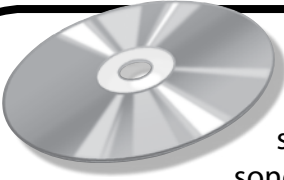
Great ideas for playtime groups and creche



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### God our Creator CD-ROM

The God our Creator CD-ROM is provided with this handbook and contains 12 songs and 5 movement tracks which can be played using a normal CD player. The song titles are listed on the CD-ROM label.

The following files may be accessed using your computer:

- Pdf files of all the black and white photocopyables shown on pages 17, 21, 28, 30, 35, 45, 46, 47, 61 and 62.
- Pdf files of coloured animal shapes for use with photocopyable on page 21, fruit shapes on page 35, name tags on page 61 and some of the characters used throughout this handbook.
- Graphic files of the following coloured posters:
  1. God made the sun, the moon and the stars
  2. God made the sky, the sea and the land
  3. God made all kinds of plants
  4. God made creatures to live in the sea, sky and on land
  5. God made people
  6. Creation
  7. God is great
  8. God is wonderful
  9. God is caring
  10. God is kind and loving

Note: Posters 1–5 are designed to join together as a frieze by matching the blended background colours. The graphic files open easily in Microsoft Word, PowerPoint or other graphic software. If you have trouble opening the graphics check the software you are using to open them.



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# Welcome

Two and three-year olds love life. They are mobile and keen to run, jump, sway, wiggle, climb – anything but stop still. They wake up every morning ready to explore their world and experience new things. They are beginning to develop language skills at an astounding rate and starting to interact with other children though they will often play next to, rather than with, other children.

These little people are becoming fiercely independent and 'no' and 'me do' are well-used phrases. Playtime groups and creche are great transition zones, from being at home with family, to going to a more structured environment of pre-school or Sunday school with a group of children their own age. This handbook of activities and ideas for playtime groups and creche aims to introduce two and three-year olds to their Creator God while they are exploring this new world of either playtime groups or creche. They are particularly useful in a creche if there are a small group of slightly older and more able children who need more challenge.

Included in this handbook are ideas of ways to introduce the children to God their Creator through:

- activities for both structured and free play
- activities that encourage the use of all five senses – sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste
- bite-sized story ideas suitable for limited attention spans
- ideas for snack time that reinforce the general theme
- craft activities for little fingers
- suggestion for musical activities
- ideas for introducing Memory verses and simple prayer
- plus lots of hints on organisation, safety, useful recipes, outreach ideas and much more.

Each session you can choose ideas that will introduce the children, and their carers too, to simple stories and activities that allow them to learn more about their wonderful God, who not only created them but continues to love and cherish them for all of their lives.

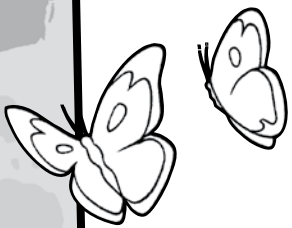
'Let the children come to me! Don't try to stop them.

People who are like these little children belong to the kingdom of God.

I promise you that you can't get into God's kingdom,  
unless you accept it the way a child does'.

Then Jesus took the children in his arms and  
blessed them by placing his hands on them.

Mark 10:14–16 (CEV)



## Teaching tips for working with young children

- Two and three-year olds have a very limited attention span – be organised so you can take full advantage of the time you have with the children for each activity.
- Provide a variety of activities – remember to include activities that involve auditory, visual and kinaesthetic aspects of the children's abilities.
- Set the boundaries – the children need to know what they can and can't do. Have simple, straightforward rules and stick to them.
- Create signals for stopping or changing an activity – make them interesting and interactive, and then use them consistently.
- Establish packing-up routines that the children can easily be part of – you may wish to use the *Pack it up!* song provided on the *God our Creator* CD-ROM.
- In a positive way help the children learn to respect the property of others. Always make a clear statement about what you do want rather than pointing out what you don't want to see.
- Playtime groups are an environment in which the children are beginning to develop early social skills – don't expect them to know how to interact but model appropriate ways so that to begin they can learn by copying how you are interacting with other children.
- Remember that the children may sometimes not seem to have 'done' much in some sessions but actually they have been observing and learning about interacting in a new situation.
- Always think through any safety issues to ensure that you are providing a safe environment for the children.

## Organisation

There will always be a lot to do in order to be ready and organised for each session – so share the load.

- Have a roster for setting up, morning tea and cleaning up and have people on the roster responsible for finding their own replacement if for some reason they can't make it.
- Alternatively, have a reserve on each roster. Sudden and unexpected problems can often occur so an extra pair of hands will never go astray.
- For hygiene reasons it is probably a good idea to have a roster for someone to make fresh playdough for each session – or a bulk supply of different colours and bring one each session!
- Involve volunteers in cutting out and sewing whether this be cutting paper shapes for a single craft activity or a supply of painting smocks or toy bags for the group to use each session. Older people in your church congregation may be happy to help – so don't forget to ask!
- Sometimes mums of older or grown children will be happy to come along to your sessions and be a 'Grandma' to help mums by nursing the new baby and letting mum spend some special time with their toddler.
- Remember to take photos (with the written permission of parents) of activities and make these into memory books that can become part of your book collection. Add simple captions and the children will enjoy 'reading' about themselves.
- When writing the children's names use the writing script they need to recognise when they go to school. Do not write in all capital letters as this will only cause confusion. Ask a parent with school-age children to get you a copy of the script taught in the local Infants school.

## 'Dress the space'

Depending on which aspect of Creation you are focussing on in each session choose some of the following ideas to add extra impact to the environment you are creating for the children.

### Day and night

- Hang pictures of starry nights, sunrises and sunsets in your area.
- Cut out sun, moon and star shapes and attach them to the walls or hang from the ceiling.
- If doing a series of sessions on creation add new things to your display each session and encourage the children to discover the new things.
- Darken the room by covering the windows with blue cellophane or drawing the curtains. Don't make it too dark as some children may become anxious.

### Land and sea

- Create different surfaces on the floor using carpet squares, pieces of artificial grass, rugs or thick cardboard cartons to represent land and blue crepe paper, sheets of bubble wrap or blue fabric to represent water.
- Display a globe, assorted maps and pictures of oceans, beaches, deserts and mountains scattered around your area.
- Play nature music with 'water' sounds as the children enter and begin their activities.

### Vegetation

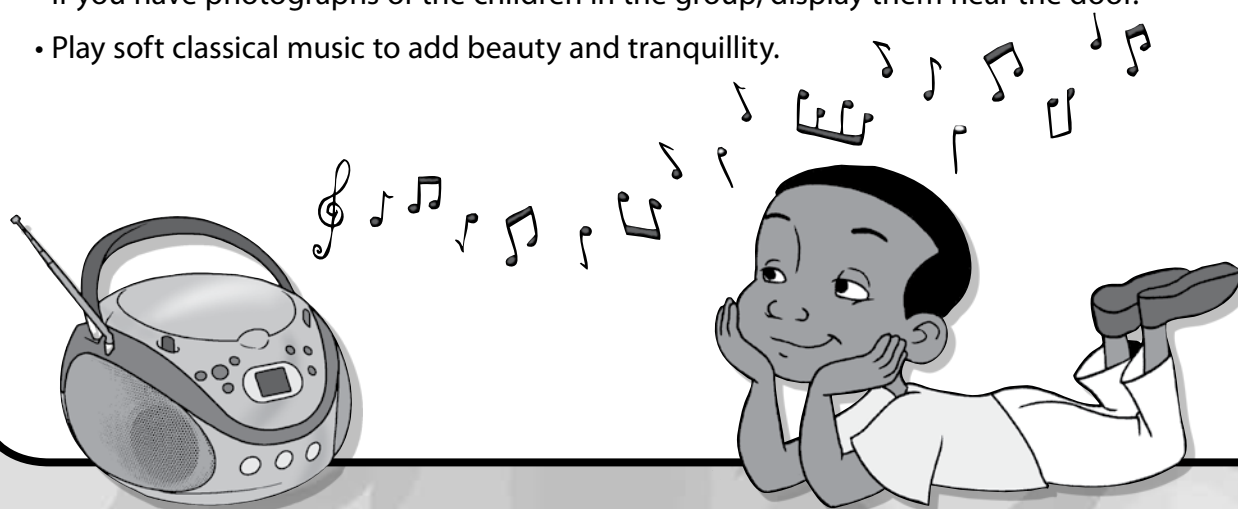
- When talking to the children about how God created all types of vegetation add long strips of green crepe paper to represent vines and some pot plants and flowers.
- Arrange bowls of fruit, berries and potpourri around the area.

### Animals

- Have animal footprints leading into your area. Make a template by cutting a footprint from the middle of a piece of cardboard with a craft knife. Place the template on the ground and sprinkle it with talcum powder.
- Alternatively, cut footprints from coloured Contact and stick them on the floor.
- Play music with animal sounds or bird calls.

### People

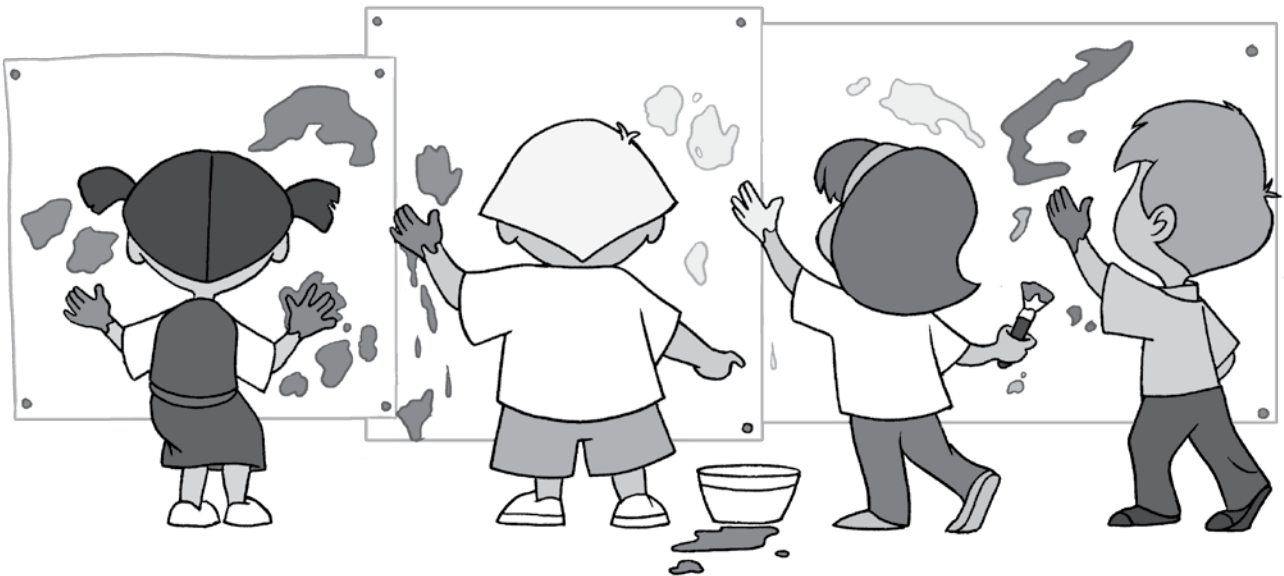
- Display pictures of people cut from magazines in individual and collage format.
- Hang mirrors at the children's level.
- If you have photographs of the children in the group, display them near the door.
- Play soft classical music to add beauty and tranquillity.



## Sensory activities

Young children learn primarily through their senses – seeing, hearing, touching, tasting and smelling. At playtime groups and creche we should provide children with a wide range of sensory experiences so that through stimulating their senses real learning will take place about themselves, their environment, their world and their God.

- Sensory play activities using different mediums such as water, dirt, sand etc do require extra preparation but they will be particularly enjoyable for the children.
- If possible, provide smocks to cover the children's clothes.
- Encourage parents to dress their children in older clothes so that the children's creativity isn't stifled by being afraid of getting their new clothes dirty.
- Always have appropriate hand washing equipment ready for a quick clean up after messy activities.



## Faith development

Children are in a continually changing process of development physically, intellectually, emotionally, socially and spiritually. Because of this the way we communicate the gospel will change, depending on the level of development and age of the children we are teaching.

John Westerhoff in his book *Will our children have faith?* has suggested stages of faith development that can be very helpful for us when designing age-appropriate children's ministry curriculum.

Westerhoff defines four stages of faith development as follows:

- Stage 1 is experienced faith which usually takes place during babyhood and infancy. These are the years when we experience 'trust' from significant carers.
- Stage 2 is affiliated faith in which a person identifies with the faith of others through key relationships.
- Stage 3 is searching faith and usually occurs during adolescence as children explore what they believe and question why they believe it.
- Stage 4 is owned faith, and is a description of a person who has come to personally commit to a faith of their own.

Two and three-year-olds fall into the first stage – that of experienced faith. In this developmental stage



the fun, comfort and safety that a playtime group or creche program offers can be of paramount importance. With two and three-year olds we can begin to introduce them to God through simple stories, songs, games and fun activities.

Through all this we must remember that God is at work; he is the one who will draw people into his kingdom, through the power of the Holy Spirit. He knows the right time and the right place for this to happen. We can relax and share the knowledge of God as our Creator as we model our trust in God and demonstrate his work in our lives.

Our knowledge of child development will influence how we design our programs and the kind of language we use. Children learn in different ways, so we need to use a variety of teaching methods. An easy way to remember this is to think in terms of auditory, visual and kinaesthetic. So include a variety of activities to allow for listening, watching and doing. We often ask children to be listeners – but they learn better when they see and do. Kids today are growing up in a visual world that moves quickly from one thing to the next so we need to frequently change activities. We also need to include active and quieter activities to cater for different personalities within the group.

Children love story. There is also great power in an interactive story in which the children can take part in simple ways such as by doing an action or changing facial expressions. Tell bite-sized stories that engage heart and mind.

Don't think that you always need to tell a story to the whole group but take opportunities as they arise to tell a story to a small group as you play with them in the sand-pit or are sitting with them as they eat a snack. Keep in mind the children's attention span – a rough guide is one minute per year of age. For two and three-year olds this is often just two to three minutes.

Children respond to relationship. You are the most valuable teaching tool available. Children won't care what you know, until they know that you care. They intently watch what you do, rather than listen to what you say.

The most important question to ask ourselves, however, is – Am I prayerfully dependent on God as I try to teach the children about God and his love for them?

Don't forget what is God's work and what is ours. It is the work of God's Spirit to bring people to faith in Jesus. Can God do this with a 5-year old? Yes. Can God do this with a child who is too young to even explain it properly? Yes. God's Spirit is at work ahead of us. We teach the children about God's love and then prayerfully place them into God's hands.

Much of the above is an edited excerpt of *Evangelism without the cringe*, paper presented by Rhonda Watson at SMBC Children's ministry conference, 2008.

For further reading:

Francis Bridger, *Children Finding Faith*, Scripture Union, Bletchley, England 2000.

John Westerhoff, *Will our children have faith?* Seabury Press, New York 1984.



# God our Creator

## Bible background

Genesis 1 begins by identifying God as Creator of the 'heavens and the earth' (Genesis 1:1) rather than by proving his existence. There was never a time when God did not exist. As David stated in Psalm 90, 'You have always been God – long before the birth of the mountains, even before you created the earth and the world' (Psalm 90:2). Yet, for many people, including children, this is a difficult concept to grasp fully. God's omnipotence and divine creativity is really beyond our understanding.

The New Testament reveals that the plural 'we' used by God when humans were created, refers to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (see John 1:1-3; 14:16,17; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Hebrews 1:3-5). Colossians 1:15-17 makes it clear that everything was created by Christ the Son and for him. The saving act of Jesus Christ is the supreme manifestation of God's glory (Ephesians 1:3-14).

The activities and teaching ideas in this book aim to begin to introduce the children to the triune God who is the ultimate Creator. He commanded order into a formless world. Genesis 1 shows the fulfillment of God's commands: the sky, light bearers (sun, moon and stars), day and night, and so on, were formed.

Genesis 1:1-25 is primarily about God and his name appears no less than 20 times in this passage. As the creation unfolds, more and more about God's creative power, divine purpose and loving intention for all living things is revealed. The creation is awesome but it points to an infinitely more awesome Creator.

'God said' is written eight times in Genesis 1 and each time God's command is fulfilled. Upon his command all elements of creation come into being. As the children learn about all the different aspects of creation they will begin to appreciate that when God commands something, it happens without question.

The power of God's word is demonstrated in many ways throughout the Bible. What the children are learning now will plant seeds of understanding so that they may one day make connections between: God's spoken command at creation; Jesus, the living word; and God's enduring and sustaining word, found in the Bible.

After he created earth, God commanded it to produce life or vegetation. The earth should sustain itself and its inhabitants with seeds, plants, fruit trees, grains and so on. This productive nature of the earth is a God-given gift and is for each of us to use and enjoy. We should not only use and enjoy the products of the earth, but also care for them and utilise them wisely. The plants are also there for 'everything else that breathes' (Genesis 1:30). God the Creator is also God the Provider. That said, God still wants us to put our complete trust in him, rather than purely in the earth's resources.

On the fifth and sixth days, God created birds, sea creatures and animals. His awe-inspiring creativity is seen in the spectacular variety of living things that he made.

God blessed his creatures so that they would be fruitful and fill the skies, the land and the oceans with life. Note that God created what we call tame and wild animals, indicating the different relationships humans would have with animals. Genesis 1:30 suggests that animals were initially herbivores – further indicating a harmonious relationship between all forms of creation.

As adults we often forget to pause in wonder and admiration at the beauty, intricacy and diversity of sea, bird and animal life, and indeed, all of God's creation. Allow yourself to look at creation through the eyes of a small child and once again experience awe for God, Creator of the heavens and earth. Your experience will not only enthuse the children, but will remind you that God is indeed worthy of our thanks and praise (Revelation 4:11).

The final act of creation was mankind (Genesis 1:26-31). Males and females were made in the image and likeness of God.

God gave life, blessing and food to all living creatures, telling them to fill the earth. So how are people different? God made men and women in his image. This means we are like God but not exactly the same as him. How are we like God?

Unlike the animals God created, we have what the Bible describes as 'God-breathed life' (Genesis 2:7), a spiritual and rational capacity that enables us to use language to communicate. Just as God relates to us, we can have a relationship with him and other people.

Like God, we have moral purpose because we had the original potential for true knowledge, righteousness and holiness. God has also blessed us with creativity and language skills – and much more – which sets us apart from other animals and makes us more like him. Just as God is our ultimate ruler, he has given us the responsibility to rule the earth (Psalm 8).

Throughout their lives, children will encounter all kinds of ideas about why people exist and what life is all about. While in one sense it is a mystery, the Bible makes it clear that the answers to these questions can be found only in God. We should naturally desire to praise him, and no other, for his wonderful work of creation.

After each act of creation, God stated that his creation was good. He blessed and commended it. In surveying the completed work, God saw that it was 'very good' (Genesis 1:31). Yet, our praise should be directed at him and not at creation itself. Psalm 98 tells the oceans to 'roar with all of its creatures' (verse 7), the rivers to 'clap their hands' (verse 8), the hills to 'sing' (verse 8) and the earth to 'shout with all of its people' (verse 7) in praise of the Lord. As you teach the children about this glorious aspect of creation, encourage thankfulness for all God has given. Try to bring praise and thankfulness into as many of the activities as possible without it seeming forced.

Psalm 19:1 notes that the 'heavens keep telling the wonders of God', while Psalm 96:11,12 says that the heavens, oceans, creatures and trees 'roar', 'rejoice' and 'sing joyful songs to the Lord'. As you and the children consider God's supreme wisdom, creativity and power, be encouraged to express wonder, awe and excitement about creation, just as the heavens and earth do. Allow yourself to look at God's world through the eyes of a child and recall the excitement that is so easy for a child to express.

## Teacher's prayer

- Reflect on God's awesome power in creating the entire universe. Give praise and thanks for his creation. Pray that the children will be in awe of God and desire to know more of him.
- Choose a Bible verse that speaks powerfully to you about God our Creator. Reflect on the verse, then thank God for revealing himself to you through the Bible. Pray that each child in your group will also be powerfully affected by God's creation.
- Consider the gifts that God's creation gives us. Pray that, as you interact with the children, both you and the children will be encouraged to be thankful for the good things God has made.
- Give praise to our great and wonderful God. Sing a song of praise, or just talk to God, praising him and thanking him for his creation. Pray that your enthusiasm and delight in God will inspire the children in your group to praise God.
- Do you know that you are precious to God? Do you enjoy knowing him? Pray that you can share your joy with the children and nourish a desire in them to know more of their Creator.

# Activities



## Sun, moon and stars

### You'll need:

- *God our Creator* CD-ROM and CD player

Play *Jumping jelly beans*, track 14 of the *God our Creator* CD-ROM and encourage the children to jump and move around your area. Explain that they must freeze when the music stops and mimic your actions in one of the following positions that you call out: 'sun' (droptothefloorinaball); 'moon' (bendforwardinanarcwith armsoutstretchedandpointingforward); 'star' (standwithfeetapartandarmsstretched diagonally as if doing a star jump).

## Shiny shapes

### You'll need:

- A large sun, a large moon and smaller star shapes cut from cardboard
- Glue and paintbrushes
- Foil, glitter, pieces of yellow, blue, grey, silver and gold paper, or other decorative materials

Arrange the sun, moon and star shapes on a table with the appropriate collage materials. Divide the children into groups and ask them to decorate the shapes with the materials provided.

**Tips:** To limit the amount of glue used, you may wish to brush the glue onto the shapes for the children. If you have a large group, place each shape on a separate table and allocate a group to each.

## Quick story idea

Show the children a modern, children's picture Bible. Say to the children: This very special book tells us about God and it begins with the words: 'In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth'. The earth is where we live and all around the earth are the heavens. What's in the sky during the day? (The sun.) When you look up into the sky at night, what do you see? (Moon, stars.)

Let's make our hands twinkle like stars. (You may like to quickly sing *Twinkle, twinkle little star*.) Show Poster 1 from the CD-ROM and explain that this is a close-up picture of the moon and the stars. The Bible tells us that God put the sun, the moon and every one of the stars in place. (You may like to choose actions for the different parts of creation and build on these each week.) Let's thank him together: 'Thank you God for making the sun, the moon and the stars.'

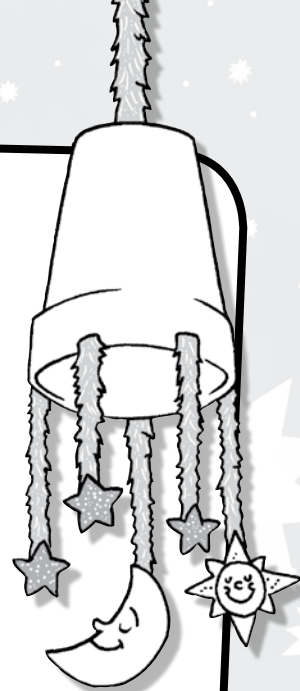
# Sun, moon and stars mobile

## You'll need:

- Small cardboard sun, moon and star shapes
- Glitter glue, tinsel, small metallic paper shapes and stickers
- Glue
- Hole punch
- Lengths of tinsel
- Polystyrene cups decorated with glitter
- Pencil or pen to punch holes in the polystyrene cups
- Memory verse strip (from page 46) copied onto brightly-coloured paper

Encourage the children to decorate the small cardboard shapes with glitter, tinsel, metallic paper shapes or stickers. Punch a hole in the top of each shape. Thread tinsel through the holes and attach the pieces of tinsel to a decorated polystyrene cup.

Give each child a memory verse strip and help him or her glue it around their decorated cup.



# Little twinkles

Mime the actions to and hum the tune of the traditional song, Twinkle, twinkle little star. See if the children can guess which song it is. Sing the song together doing the actions.

# Superstars

## You'll need:

- Body glitter and face paint
- Lengths of tinsel
- *God our Creator* CD-ROM and CD player

Decorate the children as 'stars' and 'comets'. For 'stars', use body glitter on their faces and tinsel in their hair. For 'comets', use body glitter or face paint on their faces and tie strips of tinsel to hang from their arms.

Play *In the beginning*, track 2 on the *God our Creator* CD-ROM. Encourage the children to dance to the song and run around like comets and shooting stars.