

Foster Care Kids Church Outline

Bible Verse:

Matthew 25:40 “Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me - you did it to me.”

Introduction:

Thanks for choosing to focus on Foster Care in your congregation this week, and for taking this opportunity to teach kids that they can affect change in the lives of other kids in Australia. Even our youngest kids need to know they can make a difference!

The following pages are designed to provide a one-hour lesson for your preschool and primary aged ministry. You can choose to use just a few components, or you could expand the lessons over a few weeks.

The ‘Kids Stepping in to help Kids’ lesson guide gives children a handle on ways to help other young people in the local community.

This lesson guide contains a Bible lesson, an activity to help children understand how others may feel, some real-life stories of children we serve, and some ideas regarding next steps.

Through this lesson children will get to know the heart of our Heavenly Father for kids who are hurting, what foster care is (and isn’t) and how they can help kids through prayer and being God’s hands on earth.

Right now, there are over 48,000 children in foster care in Australia, and God knows the name of every single one of them. These are children just like the ones in your congregation. The need is great and we believe that together, the church in Australia can be a beacon of light and bring about transformation and healing to a hurting world.

Thank you for partnering with Ark Australia to make a difference in the lives of children in our community.

In this kit:

- Bible lesson plans for church kids.
- Activities
- Prayer ideas
- Stories about foster kids
- Practical next steps

About ARK:

ARK Australia is a movement of communities dedicated to creating family and belonging to vulnerable children. Families in the ARK network gather together, forming small, local communities, to find and provide support for each other. An ARK community has families involved in foster care, permanent care, respite care and/or adoption, all with the desire to show these kids belonging, unconditional love, a new hope and a brighter future.

We seek to be part of the answer, raising awareness of the need for brilliant families to step into caring for these precious kids, and to provide stable support for those who choose to step up. We want to see families who engage in out-of-home care succeeding, thriving, persevering and raising kids who are well equipped for adulthood.

Children are the most vulnerable in any culture. They are devoid of the power to affect their own circumstances, and by design, require someone to care for them, to advocate for them and to respond to their most basic of needs. For most, that care comes in the form of a parent, but unfortunately for some, their parent figure is not on hand. Families in the ARK network have chosen to respond to the needs of those children, through either adoption or foster care.

Responding is not easy. It requires great sacrifice. It requires considering the needs of others above our own desires. It requires understanding that we may be a child's only hope of succeeding in life. It requires compassion for kids who have found themselves in circumstances they didn't choose, and being prepared to do something practical about that. It requires love. It requires grace. It includes pain. But it brings great reward and fulfillment.

ARK's mandate therefore, is twofold:

- We advocate for people to step into out-of-home care.
- We create support networks, underpinned by Christian values, for those involved in out-of-home care.

For more information on ARK Australia please visit our website.

Arkaustralia.org

If you would like to book a speaker for your church or learn more about foster care in Australia please get in touch with us via the contact page.

Kids Stepping in to Help Kids Lesson Plans:

Bible lesson: Primary Age and above

Read: Matthew 25:31-40

Watch the video. When we show love and kindness to others, we are showing it to Jesus.

Sheep and Goats Bible Story – LifeKids <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iWSkdx-XwWY>

Say: In Matthew we are reading about Jesus as he is talking to a big crowd.

He is telling the people in the crowd that one day he will come back again. And when he does, all people will be separated into two groups, the sheep and the goats.

Having a sheep group and a goat group is kind of confusing. It might help if we understand more about them.

Sheep can't live on their own. They know how much they need a shepherd, they follow the shepherd closely and they do what the shepherd tells them to do.

Then you have goats. Goats are stubborn. They don't know that they need a shepherd and they do what they want, even eating rubbish.

The Bible tells us that God will say to the sheep group, "Come join me in HEAVEN and enjoy your INHERITANCE! When I was HUNGRY, you fed me. When I was THIRSTY you gave me something to drink. When I was alone and a stranger, you INVITED me in. When I was naked you gave me CLOTHES to wear. When I was SICK you took care of me. And when I was in PRISON you visited me."

The people in this group were super excited. They were going to get to go to HEAVEN! But they were also really confused. They didn't remember doing any of those things. You would think you would remember if you happened to meet GOD one day, and you definitely would remember if He was NAKED!

But that wasn't what GOD was talking about. He said, "Whatever you did for the least of your BROTHERS and SISTERS, you did for me. So accept your INHERITANCE of ETERNAL LIFE and join me in HEAVEN."

The 'least of these' means that everyone matters to God, and their needs matter to him too. Even if they can't do anything for you in return or pay you back. So helping them is like helping Jesus in disguise.

GOD doesn't need us to feed Him dinner, or wipe His runny nose, but there are people who do. And when we help them, it's like a gift to GOD. He loves it when we love each other.

Ask: Have you ever helped someone? When you were helping them, did you think about how when we help others, it is like we are helping Jesus?

Say: GOD doesn't need us to do any of those things for Him, but there are plenty of people who do. Each and every one of us need help sometimes, and each and every one of us can be that

help. JESUS tells us many times that we should love our neighbour just like we love ourselves, which includes making sure that others have food and clothes and love. And when we do those things for others, it's just like doing them for GOD.

Ask: How do you think Jesus wants to help others?

Say: The Bible tells us of another time when Jesus' disciples were arguing about who was the best. Jesus didn't yell at them and tell them that He is actually God and created the WHOLE world, but the Bible tells us that Jesus sat down and called a little child to come and sit next to him. Jesus said, 'Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me isn't actually welcoming me, but rather the one who sent me.'

Ask: What do you think Jesus meant when he said to welcome a child?

Say: Jesus welcomed children to make a point to his disciples. In Jesus' time, nobody paid children much attention. When we serve, we shouldn't serve to get something in return. We are called to welcome those most in need of our care, those who have experienced loss, and those who need loving homes. Jesus tells us to welcome children just like you. He even sets the example first!

Welcoming children is part of following Jesus. Welcoming children is a part of being the church!

Explanation

What is Foster Care?

Kids come into foster care because grown ups who work for Child Protection (or the department) believe that it isn't safe for a kid to be at home with their family right now. The children's court has probably decided that they need to live somewhere else for a while.

Sometimes families have a hard time and need help from other adults or services to care for their children properly. This is called foster care.

Some of the reasons kids come into foster care is because they were being hurt in some way, or they were likely to be hurt. Or they weren't getting the care they needed at home, or sometimes because their parents are sick and can't take care of them.

It is very important to know that kids who are in foster care are not at fault. They haven't done anything to cause them to be in foster care and they are still just kids who want to be safe.

Kids who are in foster care might live with friends or family, like a Grandma or an Aunty. Some kids live with foster carers. They are people the kids don't know, but they have chosen to look after kids because they know that each child matters. Some kids go to a group home. A group home is where a group of kids live in one house and adults come and look after them. The adults don't live there, but they work as a team to make sure kids are safe.

Kids in foster care still have a first family - a mum and dad who love them, and often are working really hard to make sure they can all live together safely again.

Activity: Use an activity from page 6 to bring the lesson together.

Pray: Use some of the prayer tools on page 9 to assist with a focused prayer time to close.

Bible Lesson: Pre-Schoolers (2-6 years old)

Read: 'The Friend of little children' from The Jesus Story Book Bible.

If the children are younger- you can paraphrase the story as below.

"Jesus Friends were arguing. They wanted to know who was the most important helper in God's Kingdom! They thought if they were the cleverest or the nicest, Jesus would like them best. But they had forgotten something. None of what you do makes any difference. God's love is a free gift! It was a present! Who likes presents the most? That's right. Children do! While Jesus' friends were arguing, children had come to see Jesus. The friends tried to shoo the children away from Jesus. They said, "Jesus doesn't want to see you! He is too tired!" But they were wrong. Jesus said, 'Don't send them away! Bring the children to me!' Jesus didn't mind if the children were dirty, or if they had been crying. The children ran up to Jesus and he laughed with them and hugged them. Jesus told his friend, "It doesn't matter how big you grow, be like these children and trust in God. They are the most important people in God's kingdom".

(A video you can use <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IYgoGdf-nC0>)

Say: Jesus believes that ALL children are special. It doesn't matter what they look like, how their bodies move or if they live with their mum or dad, Grandma or Grandpa, or someone else.

Ask: How do you know that someone loves you?

Say: When you are loved. You are taken care of. Most of the time our Mum or Dad takes care of their kids, but sometimes they aren't able to, so another caring adult looks after them instead.

Ask: Have you ever had a babysitter or gone to Grandma's or a friend's house for a little while?

Say: We stay with other adults that show us kindness and love, just like Jesus showed the children who were in the story. Adults know that children are special, and that they need to be loved. But when you are little you can show God's love to others too.

Ask: What can you do to take care of a friend?

Say: In the Bible, Jesus tells us that when we take care of others, it is like we are taking care of him. That is really important! Sharing with others, helping to make sure someone is safe. Saying something nice or smiling at someone else helps Jesus know that we love him too.

There are some kids who aren't able to live with their mum or dad for lots of reasons. When they can't stay at their house, they might go and live with Grandparents or friends or they might live with a Foster Parent. These kids haven't done anything wrong, their family has just gotten bigger! Jesus loves them, and he wants us to show that we care for them too.

Activity: Use an activity from page 6 to bring the lesson together.

Pray: Use some of the prayer tools on page 9 to assist with a focused prayer time to close.

Activities

1. Cards (Option for Pre-schoolers)

You will need: Cardstock

Paint

Wipes

Love hearts

Printed verse or 'Jesus loves you' to stick onto the card.

Have younger children create cards to accompany gift bags or packs that older children are making. They could include painted handprints of children, love hearts, or a verse. While the children are making the cards talk to them about how nice it is to get presents, and how good it is to give presents and to see our friends smile!

2. Rubbish Bag (Option for younger children):

You will need: Some kind of basic bag (plastic or shopping bag)

Pile of items you will find in a house (include teddy, book, photo album, school things, toys, clothes, toothbrush, electronics, food and a couple of other things)

Give a rubbish bag (shopping bag) to one volunteer. Provide a pile of about ten items that the children might find in their house.

Say: Many of the children in foster care come from very sad situations. Their parents are unable to take care of them and keep them safe. Many of them suddenly must move from their homes to a new home with people they have never met.

Ask: If you had to move from one house to another and could only pack five things in a rubbish bag, what would you pack?

Together, agree upon the five things that would go into the rubbish bag.

Say: It's tough being a kid away from home. No kid should have to choose what they will put in their rubbish bag. It's important to understand how sad that might feel. The foster families that say 'yes' to having a child come and stay with them do their best to set up a room for the child with nice things and a place for them to keep things that are special.

3. Sticky Notes (Option for older primary children):

You will need: A pack of sticky notes

Give each student a pen and five sticky notes. Ask each student to write the five most important things in their life. (Eg. siblings, own room, friends, pets, sport, special items etc)

Say: The children who come into foster care have all lost something. Many times, experiencing trauma means that you lose some of the most important things in your life. Sometimes, you get to choose what it is you must get rid of.

Ask students to remove two sticky notes, representing the two things they would most likely give up.

Say: Sometimes, things are taken from children in trauma and they don't have a choice as to where they live, who takes care of them, or what they can take with them.

Ask students to remove one sticky note from the person on their left, and another sticky note from the person sitting on their right.

Say: Take a look at what you have left. How do you feel knowing that this is all you have left in this world? This is how children in foster care feel. This is why it is important to do everything we can to offer hope to them.

Stories from ARK Australia

The following stories are true stories of children who have been known to ARK Australia. ARK works to support Christian foster families and the children that they care for and we encourage God's church to remember to take care of them too.

The children in these stories' names have been changed.

The stories can be read aloud and discussed in a small group gathering.

Things to remember:

- Biological parents almost always love their children very much and are trying to do what they can for them. Addiction and family violence is a very complicated problem. Keeping kids safe is what matters.
- Australia has a long and horrific history of taking children from Indigenous families. Indigenous children are overrepresented in the foster care system due to the political and historical context. It is vital that Indigenous children remain connected to their culture and land and this is often done through extended family relationships.

Sally & Jesse's Story

Sally and Jesse were 2 and 3 years old. They had been staying with mum while she was getting help to stop taking drugs. Their mum had worked really hard to make sure they were safe and she was making healthy choices for them. When they left the centre where they had all been staying, they moved back in with their dad and little brother who had been with a foster family. In a few weeks, the fighting between their mum and dad got out of hand and their mum was badly hurt. Sally and Jesse were scared as they had seen their mum get hurt. The police and ambulance drivers took Sally, Jesse and their baby brother to the hospital. When they were there, two ladies from Child Protection came to take them to stay with a foster carer. They didn't have any of their toys or clothes, they hadn't even eaten all day. Sally and Jesse's baby brother went back to live with the family he used to live with. When they dropped him off, his foster mum made them a snack and gave them some water because they were really hungry and thirsty. Sally and Jesse went to stay with a different foster carer. They missed their little brother and were worried about their mum. When their mum came out of hospital they got to have visits with her. They spent Christmas with their foster family and each had a birthday there. Their mum found a new house to live in, it was a place where women can go to stay safe. When she was feeling better and was making healthy choices, Sally and Jesse got to go back to live with their mum. Their baby brother stayed with his foster family though. They miss him, but it is a decision that their mum made to try and keep all the kids safe and give them a good life.

Ella's Story

Ella lived in the desert. She had a mum and lots of family. When she was 2 she fell near a fire and got a burn on her body. Ella's mum had lots of problems with alcohol. She would leave Ella with lots of different family members as she was trying to keep her safe but she was often hungry and dirty. One night her mum got into a fight with some of the family and the police were called. They took Ella to the hospital because her burn was infected. Ella was scared. She didn't want to talk to anyone and spent lots of time pretending to be a dog. In the morning, child protection took Ella to a foster family because she wasn't being taken care of very well. Ella was only wearing a nappy and dirty shirt. She had no toys or other clothes with her. The foster family took care of Ella's burn. They also gave her medicine for bugs that were living on her skin and in her hair. As Ella began to feel better, she started to act differently. Ella was a very smart 3 year old, she knew how to take care of herself and she loved learning new things. She stayed with her foster family for a few months and grew bigger. She stopped acting like a dog when she was scared and found words to explain herself. Her foster family showed her lots of love. Ella had an Auntie who lived back in the desert who wanted to care for her. She was a safe person and was looking after other children in the family. The foster family were sad to say goodbye but they were happy that Ella would be going back to her country to be with her family. They invited Auntie over to their house and spent time-sharing about Ella. When Ella went on the plane with her Auntie she had lots of suitcases full of toys, clothes and books. She also had lots of friends and a foster family that stayed in touch with her and her Auntie.

Liam's Story

When Liam was born his mum left him at his Grandma's house and didn't come back. Liam's Grandma loved him but she was too old to take care of him. Liam had an older brother who was in foster care and his Grandma knew that Liam would need to live with a foster carer because his mum and dad were not making healthy choices. They spent their money on drugs, didn't have a safe place to stay and often fought with each other. When Liam was 7 weeks old he went to live with a foster family. His foster family already had 4 children but they loved Liam very much. As Liam grew he needed help to move and eat well. The foster family spent lots of time with him at doctor's appointments and therapists to make sure that he was able to run, talk and eat. Sometimes Liam doesn't understand things as well as others, or sometimes he gets upset over little things but his foster family is learning to understand how Liam sees the world and make sure he always feels loved. Liam is nearly 3 now and still lives with his foster family. He will be staying with them forever.

Prayer Activities

By the end of the lesson, Children in your class may have heard things that they have never heard before. It may be upsetting for them to hear about the traumatic situations some kids experience. They will likely be wondering what they can do. Besides the service ideas we have given above, the most important response to moments where God rocks your heart is to pray.

Below are 3 prayer options you can use to pray for different aspects of the foster care system. You could choose one, or have stations allowing your children to move around to what suits them.

1. Healing hearts - Praying for Foster children and their families

You will need: Large red heart in poster board
Packet of Band-aids

Give each child a couple of band aids for them to put on the 'sad heart'

As children come up to place their band-aids on the heart encourage them to ask God to help the families, you could say,

"God, please help families to be kind to each other."

"God, help children know that they are loved".

2. Building Homes - Foster Families

Using blocks, have the children build homes. As they are building, talk to them about what families do to look after their children.

When the children are finished with their houses, stop and pray together. Ask God for more foster families to look after children. Thank God for all those who are already looking after foster kids.

3. Staff - people who make decisions for kids

You will need: Small pieces of tissue paper
Pens
A balloon
Hair or a woolly jumper!

This is a fun, visual way to pray, and illustrates God's power and desire to hear our prayers.

Ask children who are some of the people that take care of kids.

Tissue paper can represent the workers:

Blue = police. Red = nurse. White = Doctors. Green = teachers. Yellow = social workers. Black = judges.

Either in pairs or small groups, take turns rubbing the balloon on a woolly jumper or on (their own!) hair. This will build up some static on the balloon.

Talk about giving our prayers to God and asking Him to show his power in each situation. Children can hold their tissue prayer close to the balloon and watch as it is pulled onto the balloon and sticks there. Pray that, as the paper sticks to the balloon, God will hold all of our prayers and that we will see his power at work through the staff who look after kids.

Service project ideas

Now that you know about why children come into foster care and how Jesus loves children, and those that help them, it is your chance to do something.

The following page contains a list of ideas to get involved. The ideas provided below are examples of things that ARK can support, or other local state initiatives that help children in foster care.

After your project is done, brag on your service project. We give you permission! It is important to remind everyone that all children matter. God knows each child in foster care by name. He loves them and we want to make sure that the world sees that God's Church loves and cares for them too.

Take a picture. Share it on social media and tag #ArkAustralia. Make sure you email us too so we can share it as well. Send it to: Louise.pekan@arkaustralia.org

1. Care Bags

Going into care can be traumatic and scary and most times a child only has the clothes they are wearing. With your support our aim is that every child who enters Care receives a Care Bag that shows them THAT THEY MATTER. Help us start that healing!

For what to include in a care bag please see the list at the end of this resource. There are different State and Territory based organisations you can connect to also included.

2. Pyjama or Sock drive

All mums know that socks get eaten by the washing machine! Now imagine living in different houses, or having lots and lots of kids in one house and you can see that finding matching socks might be a bit of a problem! A simple sock drive or pajama drive can help foster families make sure everyone has clean socks and PJs to wear. Create some little cards to attach to the socks, or include the Footprints poem to remind kids that they are never truly alone.

3. Foster Family Encouragement Kit

Ark Australia is a movement of families that are dedicated to inviting children into their homes and lives. The Foster Families love what they do, but it can be hard work too. You can encourage them by creating an encouragement kit. Ideas can include a hand drawn card or letter, household cleaning supplies, cookies, chocolate, tea and coffee, a journal, devotional book or a gift card to some place fun like a restaurant or movie. You might be able to come up with your own ideas too. If there are foster families in your church, make sure you make one for each of them, Don't forget to include the grandparents or extended family that are looking after children.

4. Social Worker Encouragement Kit

Social workers have a really hard job to do and they are often seen as the 'bad guys'. What they actually do is hero work. They work with families to try and make sure kids stay safe at home and when that doesn't happen, they try to make sure children have a safe place to go and can get the support they need. Social workers need lots of encouragement. You can support them by making up lots of little encouragement kits and dropping them off to your local agency office. Encouragement bags may include a hand-written card or letter, chocolate, tea, coffee, biscuits, hand-cream or sanitiser, tissues and a Bible verse bookmark.

Care Bags by State

Western Australia:

Operation Sunshine

<http://www.operationsunshinewa.org.au>

Care Bags -
Because Kids in Care Matter

<https://www.facebook.com/CareBagsBCCM>
sarahclancy@live.com.au

South Australia:

Backpacks for SA Kids

<http://www.backpacks4sakids.org/>

Treasure Boxes

<http://www.treasureboxes.org.au/>

Victoria and Tasmania:

Backpacks for Vic Kids

backpacks4vickids.org.au

New South Wales:

Foster Care Angels

<https://www.fostercareangels.org.au/>

Hope in a suitcase

<https://www.facebook.com/bringing.hope.in.a.suitcase/>

Queensland:

Hope in a suitcase

<https://www.facebook.com/Hope-in-a-suitcase-South-East-Queensland-region>

Care Kits

<https://www.facebook.com/carekitsforkidsqld/>

If there is no organisation in your area, choose an age and gender and make a bag using the list below. Donate to your local Child Protection office - they will be able to make use of it.

What to include in a Care Bag:

Check with your local organisation but the below list will get you started.

Choose a general age range, season (winter/summer) and gender per bag.

- Toothbrush & Toothpaste
- Hairbrush or comb
- Clothing: 1x pair of pyjamas, 2x outfits, 2x underwear, 2x pairs of socks
- A soft cuddly toy
- One comfort item (journal, colouring book and pencils, small toy)

For an infant/toddler also include

- 5x nappies
- Packet of wipes

Please do not include

- Razors, shoes, food or aerosol deodorants