



HOW TO CREATE WELCOMING SPACES

Becoming an FTD-Friendly Church

LUNCHTIME CONVERSATION REFLECTION

Sikunye seeks to equip and support churches to care for families in the First Thousand Days (FTD). This reflection is part of a range of Lunchtime Conversations hosted by Sikunye, aimed at equipping churches to become FTD-Friendly.

Listen to audio recording [here](#)

Watch the video recording [here](#)

Psalm 62:5-8

"Yes, I must find my rest in God. He is the God who gives me hope. It is surely true that he is my rock and the God who saves me. He is like a fort to me, so I will always be secure. I depend on God to save me and to honor me. He is my mighty rock and my place of safety. Trust in him at all times, you people. Tell him all your troubles. God is our place of safety."

HOW DO YOU CREATE A WARM, WELCOMING, SAFE SPACE?

FTD-Friendly Churches are seeking to enable loving connections by creating warm and welcoming spaces. This is less about the physical space and more about how moms and dads feel when they are in a church meeting or group setting like a mom's group or bible study.

A good question to ask is: Is our church a place where moms, dads and families love to come to each week? Is it a space where they feel seen, heard, loved and safe? or do they feel judged, shamed and alone? Do they feel both emotionally and physical safe in this setting?



WHAT ARE THE KEY INGREDIENTS FOR EMOTIONAL SAFETY?

You can create a warm welcoming space in any space – small church, big church, classroom, home. It is less about the physical space and more about the feel and thoughtfulness that has gone into 'seeing' mom and 'seeing' dad.

- **Warm, friendly welcome at the door.** Have a congregant serve by greeting and hosting families as they arrive. Leaders within the church can also serve in this way to acknowledge moms and dads.
- **Elbow bump greeting– for safety** (like the pre-covid handshakes or hugs)
- **Offer help** like showing moms and dads where they can sit or where the changing mat is or to carry something. Make them feel comfortable and at ease.
- **Connect with families** like being available after the service to hear how they are really doing.
- **Ask mom and dad, “How are you doing?”** Don't only focus on baby.
- **Smile!** Use a warm, friendly facial expression. Smile with your eyes when behind a face mask.
- **Positive, encouraging words** – 'so good to see you today, you are looking wonderful'
- **Acknowledge families or celebrate key moments** from the front of the church like announcing pregnancies or new birth/babies
- Sending birthday **cards, letters, or pictures.**



It is important to recognise there is no prescribed way to do this. Ask parents what would help them to feel emotionally welcomed and safe. Take into consideration your context, like the size of your venue and the cultural practices in your church. This might include working towards changing the perceptions or attitudes of the congregation towards babies, young children, and nursing mothers as well as the role fathers play in caring for their little ones.

WHAT ARE THE KEY INGREDIENTS FOR PHYSICAL SAFETY?

Is this a safe environment for mom or dad to bring their baby? Is it safe for children? Is enough being done protect young families from harm? Do parents feel safe to come to this venue? What must be improved to help them feel safe?

Walk through your venue with a view to see what is potentially harmful to a young child. What are the things that could be improved to increase safety? Here are some ideas:

- Implement a **child protection policy** in your church. Ensure that all leaders and volunteers are aware of how to safeguard and protect children in your church. For more information on developing a child protection policy contact visit [Connect Network](#).
- Remove any **child hazards** in your venue. Look for things like: covering all electrical plug points, buckets of water, sharp objects, any cleaning or poisonous materials that are in reach of children.
- Check if all the **toys and other materials** used in room or venue are safe for babies and toddlers.
- **Check your security measures.** Ensure doors / gates are closed, or have a volunteer at entrances – to protect children inside and watch that children are not unaccompanied or are able to leave without their parents.
- **Practice good hygiene** – including following all Covid regulations like social distancing, wearing masks and using hand sanitizer.

USEFUL RESOURCES TO HELP YOU CREATE A WELCOMING SPACE

- [Listening to families](#) – ask them what would help and grow your awareness
- [Making your church a warm and welcoming space](#)

