

## Forty Ways to Increase Sunday School Attendance

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### Be ready for newcomers

1. Be ready for visitors at worship with children's bulletins, crayons and a welcome kit describing all the things your church can offer children and their parents.
2. Make sure locations are well labeled and well described. For instance, rather than say, "Sunday school is downstairs," say, "Here is a diagram that shows the exact location of classes."
3. Search out people who are relatively new to your church. Interview them and ask what was helpful when they were new and what should be changed.
4. Urge the children in your church school to invite friends. Make sure that interesting activities are planned and each child goes home with a goodie bag—a quality brochure about the church, some token of appreciation such as a Bible bookmark and possibly candy or a ruler, notepads, pen, pencil or fridge magnet.

### Promotion

5. Invite your local newspaper or radio reporter to do a feature on a special program. Give them background material and quotes from parents and children.
6. Plan the entire year, then create a colour brochure outlining the year's activities.
7. Write about Sunday school in your church newsletter.
8. Target neighbourhoods with high populations of children. Do a walk-a-thon and hand out pamphlets and pens that have your church's worship and Sunday school hours printed on them.
9. Get your program outside as much as possible so people can see classes or corn roasts on lawns, coffee hours on sidewalks, games in the parking lot. This lets the community see and hear who you are.
10. Write an announcement or Bible verse on a piece of light cardboard. Cut the cardboard into puzzle pieces and write the name of one student on each piece. Mail one piece to each student and ask that it be brought to Sunday school next week. Put the puzzle together to find out the mysterious message. If someone is away, try to guess what the missing part might be or wait for another week.
11. Set up a Sunday school post office with a slot for each child/youth. Teachers can write encouraging notes or send notes home to their parents. Learners and other members of the congregation can be encouraged to write notes to each other.
12. Send out blank bookmarks. Ask learners to decorate them, then return them to class the next week where they may use them in their Bible.
13. Send rebus (using pictures to represent words) postcards to preschoolers and beginning readers. Try a rebus for Ephesians 4:26b.
14. Follow the same pattern that businesses use to improve sales.

Offer:

- a good product and make an inviting display
- intriguing, constant and noticeable advertising
- quality customer service
- follow up.

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**M**inistry with children and youth

## Spice up the routine

15. Invite children to tell about something that happened to them recently—tell me how you lived like Jesus last week; tell me a way you were good to your brother.
16. Build surprises into each lesson—a simple snack, a surprise visitor, a mini field trip, small and inexpensive prizes or Bible verses taped to the underside of each chair.
17. Send home a “teaser” for next week’s lesson—two pennies (widow’s mite), matzo cracker (Passover), band-aid (story of Jesus healing the sick).
18. Grow something in your class—plants, fish, small tree, a terrarium. Children enjoy the routine of looking after living things.
19. Find out the birthdays of each child/youth and celebrate!
20. Have a popcorn Sunday. Rent or borrow an industrial popper or just borrow small family-sized poppers. Invite the children and youth (and adults!) to munch while they are learning.
21. When learners arrive in your class area, have cereal boxes and milk set out. Begin your class with a healthy snack while you talk about things that happened in the previous week.
22. Provide t-shirts and fabric paint or pens. As the year progresses, add a picture or symbol which depicts something learned during the year.
23. Boost excitement and attendance by moving to a new venue—outdoors, a local restaurant, a retreat centre, or simply change class areas.
24. Make a travel board for your class area. Invite the learners to decorate it with a transportation theme—river boat, highway, trail track. Each week the child attends class, he/she moves a vehicle one space ahead. If children miss a week, they simply move ahead two spaces. Have a “travel party” at the end of the year.
25. Make an attendance paper-chain. Each Sunday have each child write his/her name on a link. Watch the link grow week by week.
26. Give your classroom a name that is imaginative and creative. This gives Sunday school a club-like atmosphere.
27. Create a craft table or a big craft bag. Set out assorted materials that are attractive and interesting such as cotton balls, glitter, tissue paper, cardboard, foil, construction paper, wrapping paper, glue, scissors, markers, stickers.
28. Have a class tea party. Set out napkins, china cups and saucers, pots of tea, sugar cookies. Talk about how being hospitable is part of the Christian faith.
29. Obtain large cardboard boxes (e.g. refrigerator or stove) and create cutouts of Bible characters. Cut out holes where the faces would be. Take a picture of each child with his or her face in the cut-out space.
30. Create a class calendar that outlines the activities and learning for the year. Add pictures and, if possible, add “surprise days”.
31. Plan a special party—for Halloween, Passover, Thanksgiving—outside of Sunday school. Every learner should have these experiences in their Christian upbringing—learning, worship, service, *and* fun.
32. Add music often. Soft, classical music during an art response time changes a mood and brings out spiritual thoughts in learners.

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### Staying in touch with home

33. Whenever possible, have learners take home something that reminds them of what they learned about the Bible.
34. At the beginning of the year, send out a letter to help parents keep up with missed classes. The wording of the letter might be something like this:  
Dear Parents,  
We know that now and then you'll be away from our congregation and your children will be unable to attend Sunday school. Because Christian education is vitally important to their faith development, we're sending you the upcoming Sunday school topics. If your children have to miss a class, you can use these topics to help them catch up. It is an honour to be your child's teacher. Thank you for letting me be a part of their growth in Christ.
35. Send a letter to parents telling them of their vital role in the Christian nurture of their child/youth. The wording of the letter might be something like this:  
Dear Parents:  
The Search Institute which does research into faith development and growth tells us that Mom and Dad are the primary people who influence faith development in children. Thank you for playing this important role in [child's name] life. Our church has resources that can help you in this role—picture Bibles, books of prayers, table blessings—feel free to borrow them at any time.

### Evaluate

36. It is important to ask the learners what is working for them. The book *God, Kids & Us* (Marshall Eibner and Graham Walker, United Church Press, 1996) has wonderful patterns and instructions on how to elicit feedback from children, even non-readers.
37. Do informal evaluations weekly by asking questions like these: What Bible story is your favourite? What is one thing you learned today? If you could change one thing about our class, what would it be?
38. Provide a suggestion box for children and adults to voice opinions. Act on the suggestions if possible.

#### And finally, the most important tips of all...

39. Be sincere about your faith. Children, youth and adults love, appreciate and remember teachers who are vibrant and sincere in expressing their faith.
40. Be prepared. Planning ahead for interesting and attractive classes tells learners that this is important stuff!

Original ideas from Dorothy Henderson, some adapted ideas from Neil MacQueen, [www.rotation.org/promote.htm](http://www.rotation.org/promote.htm) and *Sunday School Attendance Boosters*, Group, 2000.