



EARLY CHILDHOOD LEADER GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *Peace Lab*, where children discover God’s way of peace! Through learning how to resolve conflicts and figuring out ways to help others, children will learn how to be peacemakers in this VBS curriculum. The five Bible stories will lead children on an awesome adventure through the Bible, equipping them to follow Jesus as compassionate peacemakers.

The five sessions in *Peace Lab* match the interests and abilities of children ages 4–5. Each session includes:

- Gathering—Children gather and are welcomed to vacation Bible school. They will sing and give toward an offering project.
- Bible story—Children hear the Bible story.
- Responding to the Bible story—Children make connections between the Bible story and their lives.
- Activities—Children do activities that reinforce the day’s theme, including working in *My Book of Stories*, doing crafts, games, activities, singing music, and more. A snack is offered at this time.
- Sending—Children gather and receive a sending blessing.

SCHEDULE

Peace Lab is designed for a 2-hour-and-15-minute vacation Bible school program, but some programs may be longer or shorter depending on the amount of time available. The Early Childhood curriculum has plenty of ideas each day, but check with the VBS director to find out how long each day will be so that you know how much material to plan. Choose activities best suited for your schedule, space, and the children attending vacation Bible school.

The *Peace Lab* curriculum for the K–5 program includes a worship session, along with a drama that illustrates the day’s Bible story. Though worship and dramas are intended for older children, they are also appropriate for this age group. If you choose to attend worship with the larger group, take time later to talk about worship and the dramas to be sure the young children understand them.

ROOM ARRANGEMENT

Be flexible as you set up the meeting room space and organize a schedule. While some children can engage with stories and activities for longer periods of time, other children have shorter attention spans and will need to move around more frequently. Organize the space to accommodate the different needs and interests of the children, and to allow opportunity for movement between activities. Invite youth and adults to help you with the children, especially during snack, craft, and game times.

If space is available, set up the following areas:

- **Story area.** This space will be used during the gathering and sending times, as well as when children hear the Bible story. Place rugs or carpets on the floor; if you are able to provide a carpet square or individual cloth or towel to for each child to sit on, it will give children a contained area and limit their distractions.
- **Table area.** Tables will be used when children make crafts and when they eat snacks. If space is available, have two tables so that the same one is not used for both crafts and snacks.
- **Play area.** This area will be used for games and other movements. Some activities are suitable for outdoors, so in addition to having an indoor play area, you may want to designate an outdoor play area too.
- **Quiet time area.** You may use the story or play area spaces to provide a place for children to rest after eating their snack. Have blankets, pillows, and towels on hand to make the quiet time area comfortable.

ACTIVITIES

Peace Lab discovery ideas are suggested each day. Take time to do these simple demonstrations and allow children to help if they are able to do so. Young children will be fascinated with the results!

In addition to the *Peace Lab* discovery ideas, games, crafts, and other ideas are suggested each day as a way for children to respond to the Bible story. Numerous options are offered, and you will need to choose what you can do with the time and space available. Feel free to adapt activities to meet the needs of the leaders, children, and the allotted space. You may want to do activities as one large group, or you might break into smaller groups. Ask several youth and adults to lead the small groups. The youth and adults can also help children understand directions, and cut and glue as needed for craft projects.

Create a signal that it is time to end activities, and to indicate that it is time to gather as a group. The signal can be as simple as ringing a bell or striking a chime, or you may want to sing a song or chant words. Take time to teach the signal on Day 1, and use it as many times as needed to gather the children together. You can have children either gather in a particular space or stop what they are doing and wait for more directions.

MY BOOK OF STORIES

The student booklet, *My Book of Stories*, is an optional component of each day. It provides illustrations of the Bible stories as well as activities to help children remember the stories. If you decide to use it, make sure that each child receives a copy; have extras on hand in case there are any visitors. Send the booklets home with the children on the last day.

NAME TAGS

Name tags templates are on page 49. Make one for each child, and have extras on hand in case one is lost or there are visitors. Help children write their names on the tags, and provide crayons so that children can decorate them.

Fasten name tags to shirts with safety pins or tape. Or you may punch holes in the name tags and string them with yarn so they can hang around the children's necks.

Collect name tags at the end of each day so they can be reused throughout vacation Bible school. Send them home with the children on the last day.

SNACK AND REST TIME

Each day's session plan includes options for a snack. You may use these suggestions or plan your own snacks. Invite youth and adults to prepare and serve the snacks, and to clean up afterward. Have napkins or small plates on hand, as well as cups for juice or water. Make sure children either wash their hands or use hand sanitizer before eating.

Offer a prayer of thanks as you begin snack time.

- Your church may have a favorite spoken or sung prayer that children can learn and repeat together.
- Invite children to lead out in prayer, saying prayers they have learned at home or making up their own prayers.
- Offer a simple prayer, such as: *Dear God, thank you for vacation Bible school, where we can learn about you. Thank you for this food. Amen.*

Be aware of children with gluten intolerance or nut or other allergies. Have alternative foods on hand if necessary.

After enjoying the snack, have a quiet time when children can rest. Provide blankets, pillows, or towels so the children can rest on the floor.

MUSIC

VBS music is available on the *Peace Lab* CD, MP3 collection, and video collection. The songbook includes a lyric page, simple scores, motion instructions. The music videos demonstrate the motions and are captioned with lyrics.

Play music as children enter the room and as children leave. You can also play music softly in the background as children work on crafts, eat snacks, and work in *My Book of Stories*.

Sing songs every day so that the children become familiar with them and can learn them.

Consider purchasing bulk priced audio CDs or MP3 download cards so you can send the music home with the children and drive their parents crazy listening to them over and over!

BIBLE MEMORY

The same Bible memory verse will be said each day so that by the end of vacation Bible school, the children will know the verse. Use motions to help children learn the verse. Some are suggested below, or develop your own motions.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. —Matthew 5:9

Younger children may want to learn just the first part of the verse.

Blessed are the peacemakers. —Matthew 5:9

Motions

Blessed are the peacemakers (*arms outspread*)
for they will be called (*cup hands around mouth*)
children (*point to self*)
of God. (*point up*)

note: The Bible memory passage is from the *New Revised Standard Version*. You may use a preferred translation.

OFFERING PROJECT

We encourage you to include an offering project in your VBS that suits the needs of your parish and will provide a means of stewardship for participants.

Recipients

Here are some ideas for where money can be directed:

- If you choose to install a peace pole (see later in this guide), contributions could go toward the materials and other associated costs to make it a reality.
- Peace Bene is an excellent organization founded by the Franciscan Friars of California to promote peace and nonviolence. Learn more at PeaceBene.org.
- Heifer International works to alleviate poverty and build community by providing livestock and training through a “pay it forward” model. Being able to contribute one or more specific types of animals can particularly motivate kids. Learn more at Heifer.org.
- Catholic Charities USA is a remarkable organization serving those in need and advocating for justice. It also has member agencies in local dioceses. Learn more at CatholicCharitiesUSA.org.
- Catholic Relief Services is the international humanitarian agency of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. Learn more at CRS.org.

The above organizations have particular campaigns and educational materials that can help you share about the work they are doing in engaging ways.

Offering visuals

Plan a visual way to recognize the amount of money contributed during VBS. Be sure to update the visual each day and point out the progress that is made. Be sure to thank children for their generosity!

Here are some ideas for an offering visual:

- Purchase a large lab beaker, or create one. Get a large glass container and use a marker to write measurements on the side. Either put the money inside the beaker so children can see it or use a colorful marker to draw lines on the beaker to represent how much money was given.
- Make a Peace wall with each letter of the word representing one day of VBS. For example, Day 1 will be *P*. Get construction paper and cut out one letter *P* for each dollar given, and attach them to the wall. Day 2 will be *E*. Cut one out for each dollar given, and attach them next to the *P*. Review at the end of VBS and compare the days.
- One way to be a peacemaker is to smile. Draw smiley faces on a bulletin board or poster board, with each face representing a certain amount of money given.

JESUS



Today's Bible experience

Matthew 5:9, 43-48

At the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told his followers that peacemakers will be called children of God. Later, Jesus shared that people are to love others.

Purpose statement

Blessed are the peacemakers.

Bible memory

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
—*Matthew 5:9*

Bible background

The Bible verses for today provide a foundation for the rest of vacation Bible school. The Sermon on the Mount is familiar to Christians because it outlines things that Jesus wants to teach us. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus followed these teachings himself, giving us practical examples of how we can practice his words.

The Sermon on the Mount begins with the Beatitudes. One of them is “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Matthew 5:9). This is not a passive ideal—it is active. Making peace requires action. What does active peacemaking look like? The second part of today’s Bible memory passage—“for they will be called children of God”—gives a clue about what it means to practice peace.

Practicing peace means that we love others. We are to love those who are our friends, and we are to love those who are not our friends. We follow God’s example to love others. This is not always easy to do.

The apostle Paul took what Jesus said about peace and included the ideas in his letter to the church in Rome. The Bible memory verses for Days 2–5 begin and end with Paul’s encouragement to live a life of peace: “Live in harmony . . . live peaceably with all” (Romans 12:16, 18).

Throughout VBS, you will encounter stories of biblical characters who were active in making peace in some very practical ways. Children will learn from them, developing skills they can use to practice peace in their own settings. Encourage children to follow these examples and learn to make peace.

Advance preparation

Supplies

- Bible
- Name tags (p. 49); crayons; safety pins, tape, or yarn
- Peace Lab* music and player
- My Book of Stories*, one per child
- Snack, juice or water, cups, napkins or small plates
- Hand sanitizer or wet wipes

Preparation

1. **Pray for the adults and children** who will participate in VBS. May they be open to learning about God's way of peace and to practicing it in their lives.
2. **Read Matthew 5:9, 43-48** and the Bible background (p. 7) to become familiar with today's story. Read the daily plan and practice telling the Bible story. If you plan to read a storybook to the children (see titles at the end of the session plan), be sure to practice reading it.
3. **Prepare items for snack** (p. 10). If you are preparing one of the snack suggestions during class, try the recipe first to iron out any difficulties. Be aware of children who may have food allergies or gluten intolerances. Have alternate foods on hand, if needed.
4. **Choose activities** from pages 10–13 and gather necessary materials and supplies. Some of the activities require advance preparation. If a craft will be made, be sure to make one in advance so that you understand the directions. It will also be a sample to show the children what they will make.
5. **Create name tags for all children.** You can use the name tag template on page 49. Have several blank name tags on hand in case you need to make a replacement or have an extra child.

DAILY PLAN

Gathering

1. **Play music from the *Peace Lab* collection** as background music as the children arrive.
2. **Greet children as they arrive** and welcome them to the first day of vacation Bible school! Invite them to find their name tags and decorate them with crayons. Pin or tape the name tags to clothing, or place them around children's necks if name tags are strung with yarn. Make sure adults wear name tags too.
3. **Invite children to join you to sit in a circle** on the floor. Have children introduce themselves by saying "My name is (*child's name*), and I like to eat (*name a food*)."
Have children respond to each introduction by saying "Hi, (*child's name*)."
4. **Sing together from the *Peace Lab* music collection** and songbook. Here are suggestions:
 - "Power of Peace"
 - "Peace Maker"
 - "Walking the Ways of Peace"
5. **Introduce the offering project** (p. 6) and let children know that you will collect an offering each day. Be sure they understand the offering project so that they know what they are contributing to. If you join the older children for worship, the offering will be collected there.

Bible story

1. **Gather in the story area** if you are not already there. Ask the children to think about a time when someone was nice and kind to them. You may want to offer some ideas to help children think about actions that are nice. Then ask the children to think about a time when someone was not nice to them. Ask:

Whom do you think we should love—only people who are nice and kind to us? What about people we don't know very well? What about people who aren't nice and kind to us?

Jesus had a special message for us about whom we should love. Jesus also had a special message for us about peace. His followers wrote down his message, and it is part of the Bible.

Let's see what Jesus had to say about loving people.

Open your Bible to Matthew 5 and show the children where the special message is found.

2. Share the Bible story.

Jesus taught people who followed him many things about God. One day he talked about who will be blessed. When someone is blessed, it means that they have good things. Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”

Later, Jesus talked about how those who follow him should act. Some people say that you should love only those who are nice and kind to you, and hate those who are not nice and kind. But Jesus said something surprising. He said that’s not true! Jesus said that you should love everyone—people who are nice and kind to you and people who aren’t nice and kind!

note: Young children may have trouble sitting through the Bible story. Before responding to the Bible story, you may want to sing a quick action song such as “Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes” or “The Hokey-Pokey.”

Responding to the Bible story

1. **Give children time to think about the story** by asking some of the following questions. The children may share their responses or think quietly.
 - What did Jesus say about peacemakers?
 - Whom did Jesus say we should love?
 - Is it easier to love people who are nice rather than people who aren’t nice?
 - Can you think of a way to make peace?
2. **Pray.** Explain that when people talk with God, it is called praying. Demonstrate that when people pray, they sometimes fold their hands and close their eyes. Pray:

Thank you, Jesus, for telling us about peacemakers and about loving people. Help us to be peacemakers. Amen.

3. **Introduce the Bible memory verse**, Matthew 5:9. Tell children they will learn some of Jesus’ words about peacemakers. They will repeat the words each day so that they will know the words by heart and be able say them at any time.

Say the verse out loud one time. Notice with the children that this verse is what Jesus said in the Bible story! Say the verse again, and invite the children to repeat each line after you. Add motions.

Blessed are the peacemakers (*arms outspread*)
for they will be called (*cup hands around mouth*)
children (*point to self*)
of God. (*point up*)

note: For very young children, you may want to shorten the memory verse to “Blessed are the peacemakers.”

Peace Lab activities

1. **Choose several activities** from pages 10–13. Include a snack and rest time, and have adults and youth on hand to help with games and crafts. If you have a small group of children, you may want to do the activities as one group. If you have a large group, however, consider dividing the children into smaller groups and having them rotate among several activities.
2. **When it is time to clean up**, ring a bell, strike a chime, or use another signal. Use the same signal every day so that children know what to expect.

Demonstrate your expectations for putting away supplies and cleaning the area. Make sure names are on projects, and put them in a safe place so that they can be taken home.

Sending

1. **Gather in the story area.** Ask the children to think about one way they can be peacemakers and help others. When they have an idea, ask them to put their finger on their nose. If there is time, ask some children to share their ideas.

Let the children know that during each day of vacation Bible school, they will hear a Bible story about someone who was a peacemaker.

2. **Give this blessing** to the children as they leave:

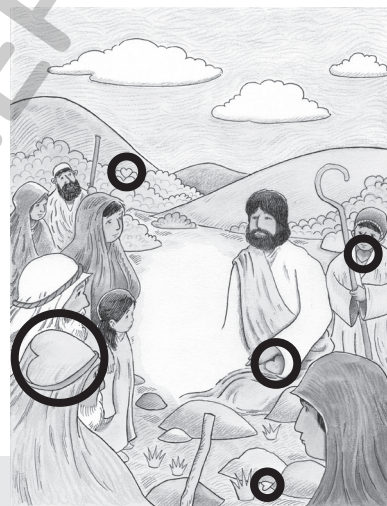
Bless our hearts (point to chest) and minds (point to head) so that we can find ways to make peace.

3. **Collect name tags** to use in the next session.
4. **Thank children** for spending time with you today. Tell the children you look forward to seeing them on Day 2 of vacation Bible school.

ACTIVITIES

My Book of Stories

Turn to page 3 in *My Book of Stories*. Explain that hearts symbolize love. Have children find the hearts in the picture and circle them, then draw themselves next to Jesus.



Snack

Offer a snack that has two parts, such as crackers and cheese or vegetables and dip. Divide the children into two groups; give one group one part and the second group the other part. Help the children discover that they need to share with the other group in order to make their snack.

note: Be aware of children with gluten intolerance or nut or other allergies. Have alternative foods on hand if necessary.

note: Before eating, have children wash their hands, or provide hand sanitizer.

Peace Lab Discovery

Explain that discovering peace and becoming a peacemaker takes time, just like it takes scientists in a lab time to experiment and discover the best way to create what they want to create. It's not something we learn in one day, but something that we experiment with and continue learning for the rest of our lives. As we start to practice peace, we may notice that others start practicing peace too! It can spread to others.

To illustrate this, trim the bottom edge of a piece of celery, then place the celery stalk inside a clear glass with colored water. Say:

You won't see the results today, but the next time we meet, you will see the color spreading through the celery. That's how peace is—we don't always see the results right away, but they will spread, and we'll see them someday!

CRAFTS

Peace Rocks

Materials

- Rocks large enough to write on (natural stones are available at craft stores)
- Paint and paintbrushes, markers
- Paint shirts

In preparation, cover the work space with newspaper. If painting, children should wear paint shirts.

1. Give each child a clean, dry rock. Think together about designs to paint on the rocks to remind children about peace. Children may choose one and paint it on their rock, or perhaps think of an original design.
2. Allow rocks to dry. The children will take them home so they remember that peace is important—peace rocks!

Peacemaker Mirror

Materials

- Small mirrors
- Glue
- Craft sticks
- Pens or markers

1. Have the children make frames for small mirrors by decorating and gluing craft sticks to a mirror. Adults and youth will need to help with gluing.
2. Have adults and youth help to write the children's names on their mirrors or frames, along with the words "I am a peacemaker."

Pictures

Materials

- Paper
- Crayons

1. Invite the children to think about a time when someone was nice to them, and to draw a picture of the situation. Another option is to draw a picture of a way the children can be nice to others.
2. Allow time for children to share their scenarios with the group, if they would like to do so.

GAMES AND MOVEMENTS

Blob Tag

1. Designate one child to be It. As the children run, It will try to tag a child. The two children will then hold hands and be a larger It.
2. One by one, each child will be tagged and join hands with It (the group), becoming part of the blob.
3. Before playing, remind children to tag gently to be careful that everyone in the group is safe.

Peace Ball

Materials

- Ball

1. Have children sit in a circle so that they can roll the ball to each other.
2. Before children roll the ball to another child, they must give an example of a way to be kind to someone (part of being a peacemaker).

Peace Dig!

Materials

- Whiteboard and marker
- Multiple wooden, plastic, or magnetic letters to spell the word *peace*
- Sand or oatmeal in a container
- Spoons

In preparation, hide the letters in the container of sand or oatmeal. There should be several letters so that the word can be spelled multiple times.

1. Write the word *peace* on the whiteboard and read it to the children. Explain that all the stories they will hear in Bible school are about peace.
2. Give a spoon to each child, and have them take turns to dig in the container to find a letter. Have children dig until all the letters are found. Have them place the letters in order and spell the word *peace* several times.

Peacemaker Scramble

Materials

- ❑ Chairs or carpet squares, one per child

In preparation, place the chairs or carpet squares in a circle. As leader, you will begin the game.

1. Have the children sit on the chairs or carpet squares. As the leader, begin play by standing inside the circle and saying, “I want to be a peacemaker with everyone, especially people who are wearing something blue.”
2. Everyone who is wearing something blue must move to another seat. The leader will also look for a seat. There will be one person who does not find another seat; that person becomes the new leader.
3. The new leader says, “I want to be at peace with everyone, especially people who . . .” (like to eat pizza, play basketball, have a sister, and so on).

Pass the Peace Potato

Materials

- ❑ Chairs or carpet squares
- ❑ Potato
- ❑ *Peace Lab* CD, CD player

In preparation, place chairs or carpet squares in a circle.

1. Have the children sit in the circle and give one child the “peace” potato to start the game. The children will pass the potato around the circle.
2. Play music as the potato is passed. When the music stops, the child holding the potato will share one way to be kind (i.e., one way to be a peacemaker). After sharing, the child will sit in the middle of the circle. Those players in the circle will need to shift to accommodate the vacant seat.
3. Play continues as long as you wish. To end the game, the children who are not in the center may share a way to be a peacemaker.

BOOK LIST

note: You may want to read to children. This list offers suggestions that fit the session’s themes. You are welcome to find other books as well.

- Kerley, Barbara. *A Little Peace*. Washington, DC: National Geographic Children’s Books, 2007. Even small gestures can spread a little peace.
- Leaf, Munro, and Robert Lawson. *The Story of Ferdinand*. New York: Puffin Books, 1977. Ferdinand the bull is not like other bulls. Ferdinand is peaceful!
- Thomas, Shelley Moore. *Somewhere Today: A Book of Peace*. Park Ridge, IL: Albert Whitman, 1998. Shows children around the world doing small things that make for peace.
- Tutu, Archbishop Desmond, and Douglas Carlton Abrams. *God’s Dream*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press, 2010. God’s dream is that people everywhere will care and share, find peaceful solutions to conflicts, and embrace all of God’s children.