

Section 3

Eleven Steps to A Custom Curriculum Fit



Eleven Steps to a Custom-Fit Curriculum

1. GET TO KNOW YOURSELF!

Any curriculum is but a set of tools in the teacher's hands. It is a starting point, not a final product! It needs to be molded to fit your children, your teaching style and your teaching situation. Your knowledge of your church leaders' vision for teaching the children/supporting families; the pros and cons of your teaching environment; and, a good knowledge of the families/children and their needs and abilities all work together to make a more understandable, enjoyable learning connection. If you start out by taking time to get to know who you are, you will make a better curriculum for all involved.

Ask God to give you a clear picture of where your church is and what He wants you to teach the children and consider using one or more of these ideas to get to know yourself better:

1. BRAINSTORM:

Simply get your Children's Ministry team/church leaders together and talk about who you are. Write down

2. THE CHILDREN'S MINISTRY QUESTIONNAIRE (Section 2)

Provide more structure for your team's thoughts and discussion by using the "Getting to Know You" Questionnaire." Ideally, have each member of your team/church leader involved go through the questions and answer them on their own. Then, bring everyone together and discuss your reflections.

3. THE TWENTY-FIVE LESSON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (Section 1)

Have your team/church leaders read through the twenty-four lessons and write down/discuss their answers to the questions that follow each section. This might be the most time-intensive option, but you might glean even more insight through it.

2. GET TO KNOW THE CURRICULUM!

Take a good look through whatever curriculum/s your team is considering. Read the introductions; a few lesson plans; and check out the curriculum website (if there is one). For each curriculum you are considering, fill out the Curriculum Questionnaire (included on the next two pages) to create an overview by which to compare the curriculums to each other.

New Curriculum Questionnaire

Fill out one of these questionnaires for each of the curriculums you are looking at. This will provide a great overview to aid your curriculum comparisons and decision-making.

1. Curriculum Name: _____

2. Publisher: _____ 3. Suggested Age Range: _____

4. Suggested Ministry Use (Sunday School, VBS, etc): _____

5. Curriculum Type: (Bible Study; Old Testament/New Testament Overview, Theology, Missions, etc.):

6. Format (Hard Copy/Download): _____

7. Resources you need to use this curriculum: _____

8. Is it single use or repeat use curriculum: (uses workbooks that have to be purchased again; have to pay each time you download or for an annual membership; or, gives you permission to make copies after your initial purchase, etc.)

9. Cost of Set Up: _____

10. Cost of Maintaining the Curriculum: _____

11. How many sessions of curriculum are available? _____

12. What are the lesson plans like? Scripted or bullet-points? _____

13. How easy are they to follow? _____

14. Does the curriculum elements follow the same order/structure each lesson? What is it? _____

15. How hard would it be to train teachers in this curriculum? _____

16. Would an inexperienced teacher or a younger Christian be well-equipped to teach them, or only an experienced or more mature Christian?

New Curriculum Questionnaire

17. Do they include a devotional for teachers? _____

18. How sound are the Bible truths? How deep are they? _____

19. Are the Bible truths appropriately explained for the age group they are intended? _____

20. What kinds of visual aids/props are included? _____

21. What kind of activities included? _____

22. What learning styles are the activities most suited for? _____

23. Are the activities time-fillers or are they "conduits of truth" which help reinforce the key truths taught?

24. Are the teacher prep steps clearly listed and easy to follow? _____

25. What kind of prep must be done for the typical session? What kind of prep work is it? _____

26. Are there any take home resources? What kind? _____

Any other thoughts/comments/questions?

Eleven Steps to a Custom-Fit Curriculum, continued

<p>3. CHOOSE IT!</p>	<p>Now comes choose and customize work. Review your reflections from the Get to Know Yourself Questionnaire. Then, look over the Curriculum Questionnaires you filled out for the curriculum/s you are considering. Based on this information, which curriculum looks best for your needs?</p>
<p>4. CUSTOMIZE IT!</p>	<p>Once you have narrowed it down to the curriculum you think fits best, it's time to start making a fit.</p> <p>Look through the curriculum and ask yourself questions like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What elements fit your teachers best, just they way they are? Which ones do not? How can you make them a better fit (re-writing/training/modeling/removing/practice/etc)? • What elements are like what you do now and would be easy for the children to get used to? • What elements might take a bit more time for them to get adjusted to? How can you make them a better fit (re-writing/training/modeling/removing/practice/etc)? • How does the time allotted for the curriculum compare with the time you have? What would you need to change to make it fit? • How is the curriculum's intended use different from how you will be using it? What changes in order/what you do/how you do it should you make? • (For instance, are you using a Sunday School curriculum for VBS? Then you may need to re-group the resources into a rotation of activities. etc.) • Who will do the prep for the lessons? How much will teachers do and how much will something on the Children's Ministry team or another volunteer do?

Eleven Steps to a Custom-Fit Curriculum, continued

<p>5. PREPARE FOR THE TEST RUN</p>	<p>If at all possible, test run the curriculum a few times before handing it over to your teachers. This will allow you to try it out and adjust it to make a better fit before you start to train other teachers to use it.</p> <p>Prepare your first lesson of the curriculum taking into consideration the customizing ideas you thought of from Step 4.</p> <p>Prepare any visual aids, games and crafts you will use in the lesson. Make copies of any take home resources.</p> <p>Now you are ready to try it out!</p>
<p>6. TRY IT!</p>	<p>Try out your customized version of the curriculum on the kids. Our favorite way to try out a new curriculum is with a smaller group of children (of the more-likely to be well-behaved variety), when there is an opportunity to do so. This gives the curriculum its best test-run. Ideally, you want to give any curriculum a few sessions trial period. New curriculum is new curriculum. Teachers will be getting used to it as will the kids.</p>
<p>7. EVALUATE AND ADJUST IT!</p>	<p>As you test-run the curriculum, you will probably want to evaluate and make changes. Reflect on how the teaching session goes, after each of your test runs and make any necessary changes. As you get closer to a good fit, add in more conditions like the typical classroom--such as your crazier kids, etc. See how the curriculum works with these new elements. Make more changes until you feel good about your fit.</p>
<p>8. SIGN POST IT!</p>	<p>Once you have figured out what works best for your children and those teaching the curriculum, put sign posts in place in the classroom. If you found that certain activities work better in a certain part of the room (such as games or craft time), put up a sign on the wall near that area indicating that. Or, put down a rug where you want to have Circle Time, if the curriculum uses one.</p> <p>If the curriculum follows a set time schedule, display the schedule on the wall in large print so a teacher can with just a glance know what he/she should be doing.</p> <p>If particular resources are used in the curriculum, store these and signpost these, too, so that even the newest teacher can easily find what he/she needs.</p>

Eleven Steps to a Custom-Fit Curriculum, continued	
9. CHOOSE YOUR LOAD BEARERS	<p>Once you feel that you have adjusted the curriculum to a good fit for teacher and children, begin to teach others how to teach it, too. Ideally, this starts as a mentoring experience between you and another teacher (preferably two) who are willing to learn the curriculum inside and out until they can teach it well themselves and later train others in it, too. I call these teachers, "load-bearers," because they will share the weight of implementing the new curriculum.</p> <p>Have your load-bearers first come observe you as you teach the curriculum. Have them read any introductory materials as well as the curriculum lesson plan you will be teaching from before they observe. After class, de-brief with them about the session. Have them continue to come for a number of session, gradually taking part more and more each session, until they can teach the curriculum themselves.</p>
10. ADD OTHERS	<p>With your load-bearers in place and confident in the curriculum, you can now begin to look for more potential teachers to be trained. Follow the same steps as you did with the load-bearers: have them read any introductory materials and the lesson plan before they observe a session. De-brief with them afterwards and gradually add them into the teaching experience.</p>
11. WANT MORE IDEAS? GO SEE IT!	<p>Find other churches that use the same curriculum and ask them if you can come observe the curriculum in action. Very helpful!</p>