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5 Must-Haves For A Safe VBS Program

It is VBS (or whatever you may call your kid's summer outreach program) planning time. Having safety essentials in place will allow you to focus on fun and fellowship while cutting down on frustrating situations. Sounds like a great plan, right?

Read on to get the top 5 safety essentials provided by a team of experts from *Protect My Ministry*, *Group Publishing*, *GuideOne Insurance* and the *American Red Cross*.



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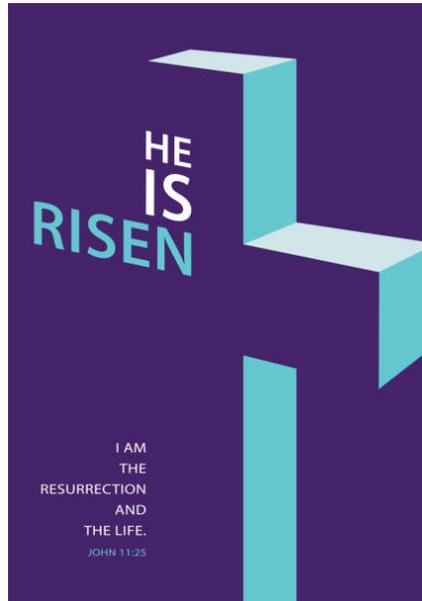
5 VBS Must -Haves

#1: A robust team of staff and volunteers

You need enough hands and eyes to keep track of everybody and smoothly run activities. **Pro Tip:** Overestimate registration numbers by 20%. If you think you might have 100 kids, be prepared for 120 with staffing needs and resources. **Another smart move:** Recruit floaters, volunteers who can step in when and where you need them.

#2: First-aid readiness

Prepare your volunteers to handle illness and common injuries from a scraped knee to anaphylactic shock by using first aid kits or calling for help. **Pro Tip:** Have supplies with you at all times. In addition to having a dedicated first-aid area or room (bonus points if there's a healthcare professional on site) have portable first-aid kits, with gloves, bandages, an ice pack and any supplies like EpiPens or inhalers for specific children who come with medications.



#3: Background Checks

Screenings deter criminals and sexual predators and provide peace of mind. **Pro tip:** Screen **ALL** staff and volunteers. The majority of your volunteers are likely volunteering at the church in some capacity already, but you still need to protect your kids and your church from liability. **Another smart move:** Conduct thorough screenings. It's a good idea to include a national criminal search and national sex offender search using their social security number as verification.

#4: Training and Troubleshooting

From severe weather to screaming meltdowns, you never know what VBS week will throw your way! That's why it's important to empower staff and volunteers so they can respond calmly and confidently to these situations. **Pro Tip:** Equip your volunteers with safety skills, responses and resources. Our experts agree this is key. Make sure your team has knowledge in these areas: first aid, weather and disaster emergencies, working with kids who have discipline problems, and abuse warning signs. Some volunteers say no because they don't think they'd know how to do what you need them to do. Let them know what resources and training you'll provide. **Another Smart Move:** Run through emergency drills (fire, lockdown, tornado, etc.) at your VBS volunteer training.

#5: Thorough information on each child

The more you know, the better off you'll be when it comes to protecting the kids in your care – and your church – in the event of an emergency. Gathering info is especially important since you'll likely draw children from the community who do not regularly attend your church. **Pro Tip:** Have registration and consent/release forms easily accessible. Round up the following:

- Information about health needs, medications, allergies, including food allergies.
- Consent for emergency medical treatment if the parents/guardians cannot be reached
- A media release form that gives permission for the child to appear in VBS photos or videos that are published on the church's website, bulletins and social media accounts.



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