

Where to start

1. **Pray** – Ask God for direction and help. Listen.
2. **Share the vision** – be clear what it is you hope to achieve with your all age worship. Write a mission statement and allow others to be part of it.
3. **Recruit a planning team** – include all ages. Need people who are committed to it every time for continuity. Include young people, children, families. Families who contribute feel more ownership. Ask people to help – don't just have people sign up on a sheet – not personal enough.
4. **Teach your team about all age theology** – mission focused, reaching out, joined up with church... journey, not patronizing but inclusive. You may need to preach to the adults about the theology of all age before you start doing it.
5. **Inspiration for planning** – Who is your audience? What are your shared areas of engagement? Humour is important. As is crying together. What is your inspiration? What helps you plan?
6. **Resources** – financial (for materials), personnel, venue etc – how often? Be realistic with what you have. Budget from church funds. Good books.
7. **Time to prepare** – don't underestimate the time it takes to plan. Start early. Creativity needs time to grow / develop.
8. **Set up and rehearsal time** – People might need to practice before the service – allow enough time to set up before the service.

Ideas

1. **Drama** (improvisation and scripted.) Ask others to do it! Use a mix of rehearsed performance and improvised volunteers. Drama is a good way of involving young people. Drama can bring a story to life. Consider videoing it and posting it online (with permissions.) Write your own scripts. (Some links to good drama resources can be found on our resources list)
2. **Theme ideas** Your time of worship doesn't have to be shaped around a single Bible passage. Consider choosing a Christian *theme* such as forgiveness, generosity, sacrifice, service or guidance. You could also use a more worldly theme, such as the migrant crisis, poverty, school and work, family or employment. Consider what God has to say about these themes and choose Bible passages to illustrate.
3. **Video** If you have access to a data projector, you can use video to help communicate a point, or just for breaking the ice or laughing together. Visual learners appreciate video and drama. (Some videos you may like to check out can be found on the resources list.

4. **Songs / instruments** Childrens' songs are not necessarily all age friendly, just as some adults' songs are not! Choose songs carefully. Consider having some percussion instruments available for use during songs. Some good song resources suggested in the resources list.
5. **Actions** Actions can help us remember words to songs and are good for kinesthetic learners. However, they can make others feel very self conscious, so treat with care. Invite people to join in if they want to. Sometimes, by engaging in actions as adults, we give permission to the children to join in. There are some churches, however, where the adults enjoy the actions more than the children! Actions don't have to be confined to songs, use them in prayer times and consider using sign language.
6. **Flags / ribbons** Encourage activity in worship! Dancing is a way to help children of all ages to worship God with their whole body. Flags and ribbons hold no special spiritual qualities, but children usually enjoy waving them. Encourage enjoyable worship!
7. **Conversation** What? In church? Yes! Encourage people to talk to each other, don't just rely on that happening before or after the service. We are the body of Christ - allow people to get to know each other by asking questions and discussing in small groups during the service. This is a great way for adults to learn from children and vice versa. Make sure that the children get included in conversations.
8. **Craft** You're either a crafty person, or not! Whether you enjoy doing craft activities or not, they are a good activity that allows you to have a chat with others next to you. You don't even have to talk about the craft or story connected with it - just chat and interested in the whole of each other's lives. Craft also reinforces a story or truth and is something to take home and be a further reminder of the worship time.
9. **Good talks** It's OK to have a talk in an All Age worship service, but not essential! If you do have a talk, make it interactive, engaging, inspiring, and use stories to illustrate your points. Stay away from a lecture-style approach which studies a passage full of theological fundamentals, but engage people's imagination, use humour and ask questions. Consider using a number of learning styles to keep everyone interested. A good talk can cover many levels of faith / educational development. Like a good Disney movie is enjoyed by adults and children alike, each take something different from it. Be animated and lively where appropriate.
10. **Getting people moving** When was being church all about sitting down and standing up but not moving around? Since pews were invented I guess! However, in All Age worship, consider moving people around. Encouraging people to come to the front for something, move into groups, move around the church for prayer stations or dance in the aisles... we are not a static church - demonstrate active faith by being active in the church.
11. **Space to reflect and wonder / imagination** When telling a story, or getting across an important point, consider allowing space for people to think, reflect and wonder! This can be done while some quiet instrumental music is played, or in silence. Then, encourage a time of sharing so we can learn from each other. Using the imagination is a powerful tool, and God often inspires people into action by first capturing their imagination.

12. **Games** Playing games together can build a sense of unity and provide a break for people to digest other parts of the service. It can get people up and moving after a longer time of sitting, and can also help emphasise a point if the game is structured in such a way. Games can be played in smaller groups, or led at the front all together.
13. **Creative play** Anything that you can make together without being told what to make could be called creative play! Play doesn't usually have many rules, and having some craft materials out (paper, scissors, glue-sticks, play-doh, pipe-cleaners etc) can help people of all ages to express themselves and practice being creative. God the creator is our inspiration!
14. **Puppets** Another visual way to communicate a story is by using puppets. Puppets can be characters in the Bible who tell a story, or can provide an excuse to ask loads of questions that others are too shy to ask. Puppets can be an expensive investment, but they can also be borrowed from Church House (Rotherham) or handmade. Allowing children to use puppets can be a great therapy technique as children can express feelings through the puppet more easily than personally. Be warned, puppets done badly can be a real turn off for children and adults! You may have some young people who could operate the puppets as a way of engaging them in all age worship.
15. **How to come at the bible** Keep readings short. If necessary, summarise through a story or drama. Invite others to read. Consider stopping at regular intervals through the reading to ask questions and interact with the text. Ask people what they would have done or thought if they were there. Story-based readings work better for all age service, rather than theological passages. Consider Bible memory verse songs (see resources list) and other creative ways of telling the story.
16. **Food and drink** When we eat and drink together, we build unity and relationships. Outside the Sunday morning service, consider eating together regularly... this is part of our worship together. While we eat - we can share faith, stories, lives together.
17. **Communion** There are some notes about admitting children to Holy Communion in the resources list, along with a list of books about children and communion. Communion can be a wonderful celebration in an All Age setting. Eating together builds community. Explore creative ways of including all ages in the communion service. Some churches invite everyone to the front to receive either the bread and wine, or a chocolate button and a prayer of blessing. Others include the children by asking them to take the bread and wine out to people in their chairs. The liturgy can help children to understand what is happening in communion, and they like repetition, so don't miss it out. Liturgy boxes can also help young children through the service (see the resources list for information).

Jesus took a little child and had him stand among them. He took the child in his arms and said, 'If anyone accepts children like these in my name, then he is also accepting me. And if he accepts me, then he is also accepting the One who sent me.' **Mark 9.36-37**

18. **Visual aids / props** Again, remember that people learn in different ways, and some people are visual learners. Hearing something may not communicate as effectively to some as seeing something. Take time to come up with creative

visuals and props to communicate more deeply. (A picture is worth a thousand words...) There are many who use PowerPoint to tick this box, but beware of poorly presented slides that detract rather than improve your communication. (A list of PowerPoint tips can be found in the resources list.) If you are talking about something in a story – how easy is it to get hold of one and show it? Props can also be an excuse to involve people – “I need someone to hold this...” Dressing up props work well for children of all ages!

19. **Using outdoors** If you have outdoor space you could use (and not everyone does), consider how you might use that space in worship. Could you give time for people to walk around the church to pray? Could you hold your whole service outside on a sunny day? This could serve as a good witness to those who pass by and show that the church exists despite the building.
20. **Responding / application** Do you provide opportunities for people to respond to the teaching? Do you illustrate ways of living out the challenges posed? Consider giving time for responding – it could be inviting people to bring something to the front (eg a Post-It, a prayer, a stone) to represent an inner decision made. What activities in the church could be highlighted for people to respond to? Help people find ways to serve.
21. **Offerings / collections** Historically, many churches have included the children when it comes to collecting the offering. This is a simple way of including children in the life of the church. However, money isn't the only thing we can 'offer' to God and the church. Consider how you can encourage people to give their time, prayers, resources, strength to serving the church and community. The Bible challenges us to give what we have, and this should not be a point of awkwardness in our times of All Age worship. Consider having collections for other charities and causes alongside the church collection, eg at Christmas, encourage people to bring an offering of money to the Christmas Day service, and after counting it up, present a number of possible charities to give to. World Vision (and others) have an online alternative gift catalogue where you can choose anything from mosquito nets to school supplies for people in need around the world. Many churches also take part in the Operation Christmas Child's Shoebox appeal, which is a wonderful way of encouraging people to bring items to fill shoeboxes to give to children around the world at Christmas. (See resources list for link)
22. **Humour** Consider the appropriate use of humour in your All Age worship. Humour can help people learn, enrich emotions and improve health! Laughter (and indeed crying) brings about a vulnerability that can build deeper relationships. Good for church! Be prepared to laugh at yourself! Sharing personal stories can build trust and empathy for one another.
23. **Colouring sheets** can just be an excuse to find something for the children to do. They are often boring and patronizing! If you use them make sure they are attractive and fun and don't send the children off into a corner to do them, make them available to everyone.
24. **Children taking a lead** Children and young people can be involved in All Age worship in many ways. They can lead sung worship, read, present some drama, contribute to conversations, collect the offering, welcome people, lead prayers and even lead the whole service. Some churches have children leading services with an adult as a way of training them. Some churches have occasional

services run by the children. Involve children in every area of church, including planning your All Age worship services.

25. **Poetry** can be lovely to listen to, but you might consider writing a poem or psalm together or in small groups.
26. **World focus** Encourage people to look outside the church building, to the world around them. Church should never be a place that just looks inwardly and leaves the world and its problems outside. You could invite families to present global issues using pictures and videos, to then invite people to pray and give. Many churches have missionary links - think creatively how this link could be adopted by the All Age worship service. Children can be invited to inform the church about a global issue and help plan fund-raising events.
27. **Community focus** Encourage people to look about and talk about what is happening in the community around. Have a project that all can get involved with. Pray for your community.
28. **Creative prayer.** Prayer stations can be really good in All-Age and if you give choice and variety it gives people the opportunity to engage with God in a way that they find the most helpful. It is an opportunity to move around and helps the kinesthetic learners.