

# Bridge-Ahead

## GUIDE

Evaluate and Prepare for Your Awana Year



# WHAT YOU'LL FIND IN THE Bridge-Ahead Guide

You have adapted and grown in the past year of ministry, and will build on that experience for greater fruitfulness. As we move forward in faith, the *Bridge-Ahead Guide: Evaluate and Prepare for Your Awana Year* is your starting place for launching a new club year.

Refer to the guide often; download it and share it with your teams. The evaluations, tips and resources you find on the following pages will help you think through your children's ministry as you move forward with child discipleship.

Raising resilient disciples who will lead the Church of 2050 is important work for the kingdom that can't be done without partnering together with God as our guide. If we can help in any way or if you have discipleship stories to share, please connect with our Partner Care team ([partnercare@awana.org](mailto:partnercare@awana.org))! We would love to hear what God is doing in your ministry.

Together for the future Church

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## GROUND YOUR MINISTRY ON THE 3B's:

# Belong, Believe and Become

Time after time, these three components show up as the central factors to effective child discipleship that lead to long-term transformation in the lives of children.

### **BELONG**

Highly Relational ministry led by loving caring adults

### **BELIEVE**

Deeply Scriptural ministry rooted in the Gospel and the truth of God's Word in order that kids may know, love and serve Jesus Christ.

### **BECOME**

Truly Experiential ministry designed to help kids navigate a changing culture, experience God's presence and walk in the ways of Jesus.



The Resilient Child Discipleship philosophy of Belong, Believe and Become is deeply rooted in the Scriptures. The “3 B’s” and the intentionality behind them frequently appear throughout the Bible, but are often not grouped together. Belong, Believe and Become are expressed in the books, letters and countless encounters between God and humanity:

Humankind can understand true *belonging* because Jesus came looking for us (Luke 19:10, John 1:14).

God's desire is for each of us to *believe* in Him for salvation (2 Peter 3:9, John 20:30-31).

He desires each of us to *become* who He created us to be and fulfill His purpose for our lives (1 Peter 2:2, Romans 8:28-29, 1 John 3:2).

Within your children's ministry setting, Resilient Child Discipleship is the process of a Christ follower — *you* — committing meaningful, intentional and consistent time to a child so they may know who Jesus is, are known by a body of believers, place their faith in Jesus, and reproduce their own discipleship so that a third spiritual generation can lead and love like Jesus Christ.

As you evaluate your ministry and prepare for this fall, consider ways in which you can help the children in your care Belong to, Believe in and Become who Christ made them to be — now and for the future.

[Content taken from \*Resilient: Child Discipleship and the Fearless Future of the Church\*](#)



# GO FROM GOOD TO GREAT WITH Evaluations

Before you make plans to continue what you did this past year, it's important to take time to evaluate your ministry effectiveness. Evaluations help you identify needs and areas for improvement, and they can help you meet your ministry goals. As you conduct your evaluations, consider the impact your ministry has had and what activities to continue, stop or start, for your leaders, families and children.

Because deciding what to evaluate can become overwhelming, we'll get you started with questions in the areas of self, church leadership, volunteers, families and general ministry.

You may want to go through the evaluation on your own; but at some point, gather with others — perhaps your key leaders (your guiding coalition), your families or your church leadership — and find out what they think. Their perspectives are valuable. Bring God into the process and be open to what He wants you to do in the new ministry year.

When all the evaluations are done, jot down next steps. If you plan on making changes to your ministry, be sure to clearly communicate those to anyone who will be impacted.

As a follow-up, set several times throughout the year to run through the evaluation process again, using these questions and any others you come up with. Note any additional thoughts or changes each time you gather.

## SELF

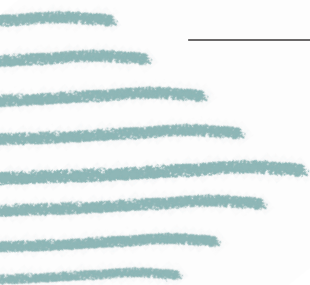
- How is your heart and attitude toward children's ministry?
- Are your attitudes helping or hindering your ministry?
- Are you connected to God and your church's vision? If not, what steps can you take to align?
- Who is in your guiding coalition — your team of people who can define reality, be on their knees praying for you and speaking the truth to you in love? If you don't have one, ask God to identify people to make up your coalition.

### NEXT STEPS:

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## CHURCH LEADERSHIP

- Are your church and children’s ministry aligned in purpose, mission, vision and values within and beyond the walls of your church? If necessary, when can you meet with church leadership to discuss?
- Are there traditions and policies of the church that are getting in the way of your children’s ministry? Have you discussed this with your church leadership?
- In what ways could your ministry partner with the other ministries and outreach activities of your church?
- Who from around your church could help you move your goals and efforts forward?

### NEXT STEPS:

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## VOLUNTEER LEADERS

- Are leaders excited to return and serve in your children’s ministry as loving, caring adults in a child’s life?
- Do leaders understand how your children’s ministry and the church’s purpose, mission, vision and values fit together?
- Are leaders serving in the best roles for their gifting? Do they understand what is expected of them in their roles?
- Do your leaders have the tools they need to serve in your ministry?
- What can you do to foster teamwork for new and existing leaders?
- How is your ministry providing opportunities for the spiritual growth of leaders?

### NEXT STEPS:

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## FAMILIES

- How did parents feel about the way you handled ministry? What did they love?
- Have you clearly communicated with families any changes?
- Have you communicated with your families what the goals and expectations are for them in the new ministry year?
- How engaged are your parents (in your ministry and with their kids at home)?
- Are your families ready to return in the fall? What concerns do they have?
- In what ways are you serving families and providing a kid-friendly environment for *all* kids?
- Do your kids feel a sense of belonging to your ministry and to the family of Christ?

**NEXT STEPS:**

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## GENERAL MINISTRY CONSIDERATIONS

- Have you set club goals and expectations for the coming year?
- What did you learn or discover this past year? Are there things you want to continue this fall?
- How is your ministry engaged in God's global vision?
- How are you involving God in the growth of your ministry?
- Do you need to adjust your budget to fit your current ministry needs and available resources of your church?
- Do you have the needed leaders and supplies for the new club year?
- Are you seeing the kids who attend your ministry growing as resilient disciples as evidenced by their matriculation from children's ministry to student ministry to spiritually engaged adults?
- Is your children's ministry staying fresh and dynamic or is there a sense that it's the same-old, same-old?
- Are there activities or traditions you need to let go of in order to focus on what is essential?

**NEXT STEPS:**

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## BRIDGE-AHEAD CALENDAR

# Keeps You on Track

As you use the next few months to plan for the return of your children's ministry, keep yourself and your team on track with this calendar. Each month lists some key activities you won't want to forget about.



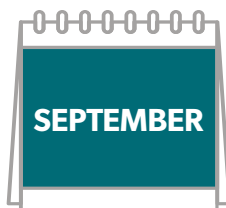
- Evaluate current ministry strengths and areas for improvement.
- Meet with church leadership to determine ministry focus for next year.
- Adjust your annual budget for the new ministry year.
- Determine new processes for effective ministry (class structure, etc).
- Choose program materials for leaders and children.



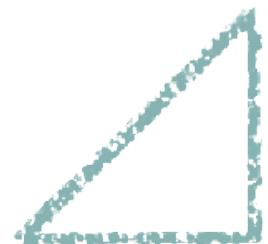
- Order program materials for Awana leaders and children.
- Promote the upcoming Awana season.
- Recruit directors for games/teaching/admin/age-groups, deputize to recruit other leaders.
- Design a realistic annual calendar and club night schedule.



- Train leaders on how ministry will work this year.
- Refresh child protection training/background checks for EVERY leader/volunteer.
- Prepare class supplies for all age groups.
- Communicate parent opportunities/responsibilities in your club.
- Promote Awana equipping events (Awana Basics Online, Awana Ministry Conference, Child Discipleship Forum, Resilient Experience, local missionary-sponsored events).



- Hold a FUN & EXCITING kickoff event.
- Offer incentives for families to stay engaged in Awana and for volunteers to participate in equipping events.
- Reevaluate and refine processes (ongoing).



## HOW TO GROW YOUR CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

# With the Personal Invite

After all the time spent planning your new ministry year, nothing is more discouraging than ending up with a lack of leaders willing to serve or — worse yet — no families or kids to serve. Although there are a variety of reasons why people don't engage in children's ministry, don't make your invite one of them. Below are some tips to help you grow your ministry leader base and your family attendance, as well as some clear and practical invitations to use.

### PERSONALLY INVITE OTHERS TO JOIN YOU

Communicating to the church as a whole may be the easiest way to express your ministry needs and invite potential leaders and families to your club. But the *most successful* way is with a personal invite. Take the focus off of your "need" and "us" and center your conversation around "God" and "them." People respond better when they hear the vision for reaching and discipling children, rather than your offer to "babysit." Addressing your vision also takes the pressure and guilt off of the people you're inviting so they can hear what God is doing, and want to be a part of something fun and exciting.



#### WHAT SHOULD YOU SAY?

##### OUR CHILDREN'S MINISTRY IS PASSIONATE ABOUT ...

- making resilient disciples in the lives of our young people.
- helping children have a place where they belong. They are safe, secure and loved.
- building into the lives of young people who will be the future leaders of the church.

Join us and see how God is transforming lives!



#### WHAT SHOULD YOU SAY?

**INSTEAD OF:** We really need volunteers to help in our kids ministry. We are so short-staffed, and it's hard to reach kids with so few leaders. Can you help us?

**SAY:** Kids today are facing some really hard stuff. But our kids ministry is providing them with a faith foundation, and you can be a part of that! God is doing some amazing things with our kids. We want you to join us and be a part of the excitement!



### INVITE LEADERS

Use face-to-face interaction to invite a prospective leader to serve on your team. Schedule an in-person chat or connect at an info table in the atrium. Just talk to a real person about their real potential to make a real difference for kids.



## INVITE FAMILIES

Your first time connecting with parents should be personal and pressure-free. Yes, you will hope for their help in making your ministry year fruitful, but the hard sell usually does more harm than good. Connect in person, by phone or even with a video text to let parents know you care and that you have taken steps to protect their kids. Then use their preferred contact method to keep them informed of club happenings. Remember to make your invitation Christ-centered, keeping it about them not you.



### WHAT SHOULD YOU SAY?

**INSTEAD OF:** We need more kids to come to our kids ministry and grow our numbers. There aren't many there, and we think your kids would have a good time. Can they join us?

**SAY:** Our children's ministry is passionate about making church a safe place where children belong and spiritually grow to become resilient disciples who have a firm foundation in Christ. We want every child to know, love and serve Jesus for the rest of their lives. Our ministry would love to have you and your kids join us this week!



## METHODS TO INVITE

Connect with leaders and families where they communicate, using any of the following methods.

- IN-PERSON
- A PERSONAL PHONE CALL
- A PERSONAL TEXT MESSAGE
- A PERSONAL EMAIL
- A GENERAL GROUP TEXT ([TRY THE REMIND APP](#))
- A GENERAL GROUP EMAIL
- AN INVITATION IN THE MAIL
- SOCIAL MEDIA
- CHURCH BULLETINS AND EMAIL
- ANNOUNCEMENTS DURING SERVICES OR PRE-SERVICE SLIDESHOWS

Personal communication remains important even after leaders and families have joined your club. During the year, share important information through email, text blasts and social media posts. Send birthday greetings and attend community events so you can see your families and leaders outside of church. In addition to personal contact, create a digital space — either on your church website or on social media — where they can find a club calendar, leader phone numbers, a list of theme nights and other important info.

The most engaged leaders and families are those who feel you care about them beyond their involvement in your ministry. Your personal ask and continued communication with them will ensure their devotion and loyalty to your club for years.

# 21 Tips for Recruiting Volunteer Leaders

Recruiting leaders is the never-ending responsibility of the ministry worker. Changing schedules and family moves have always contributed to the difficulty of finding enough workers. Instead of despairing, take the opportunity to review what recruitment techniques have worked for you in the past and get creative with some new ideas. We've got several to get you started.

- 1 Share your needs with current leaders and ask them to join you in recruiting new leaders.
- 2 Remind your current team of your ministry's vision and the importance of having enough leaders for participating kids.
- 3 Brainstorm with your current team ways to promote your club using your church's various communication channels.
- 4 Host a Return to Awana day at your church and ask leaders to share the blessings they get from serving in the ministry.
- 5 Pray for God to lead you to the right people for your ministry.
- 6 Invite those who want to disciple and share the love of Christ with the next generation (a theology degree is not needed).
- 7 Create talking points so everyone knows what to say while recruiting.
- 8 Keep in mind some people prefer to be personally asked.
- 9 Consider inviting a variety of age groups — middle schoolers, high schoolers, parents and grandparents — to help in your club. Encourage families and friends to serve together.
- 10 Promote Awana in front of the congregation by asking several kids to share what their experience in club means to them.
- 11 When you have an Awana event in which adults are attending, don't forget to promote the importance and blessings of being an Awana leader and invite them to join.
- 12 Make sure Awana is on your church's list of ministries parents and kids can get involved in.
- 13 Offer a taste of Awana by giving adults and older kids an opportunity to be a listener as children recite their verses.
- 14 Host a Back to Awana night with videos and a display of awards and handbooks.
- 15 Do your best to fill the highest leadership position first. For example, if you need a director, the sooner you put that person in place, the better.
- 16 Watch your ratio of adults to kids and explain that there will be children who cannot attend without the help of (additional) adult leaders.
- 17 Provide creative ways for people outside of club to serve your kids.
- 18 Be patient. If you don't hear from someone after a few days, ask them how they think God is directing them.
- 19 When someone decides to serve with you, celebrate their decision.
- 20 If someone declines, ask them to keep Awana in their prayers and encourage them to keep an open mind that God may move them in the direction of Awana at another time.
- 21 Don't panic. Keep praying and persevering. God will provide what you need at the right time.



# Retain Volunteer Leaders With These

# 21 IDEAS

After spending time and effort getting the stellar leaders you have to help you run club, stop and thank God. Then do your best to retain your leaders by communicating with them personally and collectively throughout the year in a way that makes them feel respected, valued and celebrated. We've provided some ideas for you to add to what you already are doing.

- 1 As soon as you have your team of leaders, host a kick-off meeting to reiterate your church and ministry mission and their role in discipling the leaders of the future Church.
- 2 If it turns out a volunteer leader is skilled or passionate in an area in which they are not serving, do your best to put them in a role that better fits their gift mix.
- 3 Take the precautions necessary to keep everyone safe and healthy.
- 4 Schedule regular meetings to create an environment of open communication and cooperation between you and your team, and leader and leader.
- 5 If a leader is struggling or needs assistance, be the first to lend a helping hand.
- 6 Be aware of adult/kid ratios — not only for child safety issues, but also to reduce volunteer leader burnout.
- 7 Be cognizant of your leaders' family situations and needs.
- 8 Create a culture of prayer by praying together as a community of leaders for your ministry, the kids and families involved in it, [Awana throughout the world](#) and one another.
- 9 Select a passage of Scripture that all the leaders can meditate on and memorize as a group.
- 10 Spend time getting to know other volunteer leaders.
- 11 Form a book club with your leaders and read inspiring child discipleship books such as [Resilient: Child Discipleship and the Fearless Future of the Church](#).
- 12 Involve parents in all aspects of Awana so they can support their children's efforts and the work of your leaders.
- 13 Encourage leaders to forge relationships with parents and share what their children have accomplished each night.
- 14 Inspire volunteers by asking them to recall a leader who impacted them as kids or who impacted them during the ministry year.
- 15 Share the story of an adult who went through your Awana program to demonstrate how influential your ministry is even after kids and teens grow up.
- 16 Show your appreciation in a tangible way. Consider baking cookies or giving out a \$5 gift certificate to a local coffee shop with a note that says, "Thanks a latte for all you do."
- 17 Organize a midyear event to thank your leaders for their commitment to the kids and to Awana.
- 18 Have an end-of-year celebration just for leaders where they can share their favorite moments of the Awana ministry year. Together, dream about what next year could be like.
- 19 Follow up the end of club with a more detailed survey, based on your year's goals and previous evaluations.
- 20 Before everyone breaks at the end of the ministry year, approach each leader and personally ask their intentions for serving next year.
- 21 Stay connected with your team through the break by using social media, Zoom, and the occasional coffee or lunch.

## OTHER HELPFUL Resources



As your partners in ministry, Awana staff — both in the corporate office and in the field — have created and gathered together the following resources to help you throughout the ministry year. If you don't see something you're looking for, contact [PartnerCare](#) at 866-292-6227.

**Club Refresh Resources:** Videos, Zoom backgrounds, posters, invitations, clip art and more all in one place! New items are added as they become available. Go to [awana.org/blog](#), category sort "Bridge-Ahead Guide."

**Coming Back to Different: Recommitting to Child Discipleship online event:** Watch the replay of our roundtable discussion, featuring four guests renowned for their experience in children's ministry and discipleship. Go to [YouTube.com](#) and search for the title.

**Resilient Child Discipleship and the Fearless Future of the Church:** This innovative, biblical and proven child discipleship philosophy will equip you to build your ministry for the future of the Church. Includes practical discussion questions to have with your team! [awana.org/shop](#)

**100 Theme Night Ideas for Your Children's Ministry:** Running out of ideas for theme nights? We've got you covered. Go to [awana.org/blog](#), category sort "Bridge-Ahead Guide."

**17 Free Resources to Use in Your New Year, New Start of Awana:** Plenty of curated resources to help you make resilient disciples, regardless of your situation. [awana.org/blog](#), category sort "Bridge-Ahead Guide"

**15 Ways to Keep Kids Excited About Awana During the Summer:** A list of things you can do during the break to get kids and families excited about coming back to club. [awana.org/blog](#), category sort "Bridge-Ahead Guide"

**Shout it Out! Publicize Your Awana Ministry:** Use these tips to spread the news about your Awana club. Go to [awana.org/blog](#), category sort "Bridge-Ahead Guide."

**The Priority of Prayer in Child Discipleship:** Listen to the replay of our free webinar to learn how to put prayer first in your ministry to kids. [awana.org/blog](#), category sort "Bridge-Ahead Guide"

**Training and Events:** Learn about AMC and other training events in your area or online. Events are updated throughout the year. Find them at [awana.org](#), under the MORE tab.

**Find Your Local Missionary:** Use our finder tool to locate your local contact. [awana.org](#); search under the MORE tab.

**Resilient Disciples & Awana Club Podcasts:** Each weekly conversation provides you with practical tips for your ministry or work with children, solutions for the issues you care the most about and lots of laughs along the way. Go to [resilientdisciples.com](#).

**Awana blogs:** Learn how to Reach Kids, Equip Leaders and Change the World with the helpful tips and resources in this weekly blog. Go to [awana.org/blog](#).

**The Child Discipleship Forum:** Join children's ministry leaders across the country and more than 14 visionary speakers Sept. 22 and 23 to collaborate, learn and dialogue about the most critical factors that shape long-term discipleship in children. Attend in person or online. Go to [childdiscipleshipforum.com](#).

**Social Media:** Stay connected with other leaders throughout the U.S. and the world, learn about our webinar and training events and watch our helpful videos.



**Partner Care:** Got questions about Awana products, events or just need some help with running club? Our knowledgeable team is on hand to help you. Call 866-292-6227 or email [partnercare@awana.org](mailto:partnercare@awana.org).

**Awana Member Info:** For specific information about beginning Awana Clubs in your church or renewing your membership, call 855-462-9262 to talk to a member of our team.

# Awana

## IS MORE THAN CLUB

When it isn't possible for you to run an Awana Club, we have alternative curriculum solutions to meet all your needs.



### BRITE ELEMENTARY

Brite™ is the adaptable, flexible, digital curriculum solution for your continued discipleship throughout the year. Weekly kid-led videos and lessons that are deeply rooted in Scripture will allow for practical learning and are sure to help you disciple the kids in your care to belong to, believe in and become more like Jesus.

Brite Elementary lessons contain an introduction, Bible Story and conclusion video. For kids who learn while doing, the printable activities — bookmarks, coloring pages, matching cards and more — are a flexible and easy way to help them memorize verses and apply what they learn in a Brite lesson to real life.

Learn more about this subscription-based resource and download a free five-week sample of Brite at [britecurriculum.com](http://britecurriculum.com).



### TALK ABOUT

Talk™ About is the NEW family discipleship resource from Awana. Talk About provides child discipleship opportunities through simple discussions and family fun, forming lasting faith one conversation at a time.

We crafted Talk About to supply you with everything you need to lead intentional faith conversations with your children when it best fits into your schedule. With a monthly subscription to Talk About, you'll receive an email each week with access to doable family discipleship resources that help you turn everyday moments into moments that matter.

It's the everyday moments of life that can become moments that make an eternal difference. These are the moments Talk About was created for. Bring the Gospel home and help your kids form lasting faith, one conversation at a time, with Talk About.

Receive a free month with promo code: NEWYEAR. [talkaboutdiscipleship.com](http://talkaboutdiscipleship.com)



### AWANA CLUBS+

When you're looking for resources to help you run a club, teach a lesson or become a better leader, Awana Clubs+ is your destination. Originally created to help clubs operate during the pandemic, it has become the go-to destination for crowdsourced materials from and for ministry leaders like you!

If you serve in a local Awana Club, go to **AwanaClubs+** and share the resources to your own website, send links to families to engage with, or simply download and use the materials in your club. The variety of options gives you freedom to use these resources how they best fit your unique church.

Parents and caregivers can also go to [awanaplus.com](http://awanaplus.com), themselves, and interact with the content provided. Whether they download resources, watch videos, or sing Scripture songs, the content will help families and kids grow in their faith.

Visit AwanaClubs+ at [awanaplus.com](http://awanaplus.com) and engage with your kids and families in a new way.



### CHILD DISCIPLESHIP FORUM

Raising generations of resilient disciples who will be the future leaders of the Church takes all of us working together. That's why we've created the Child Discipleship Forum for children's ministry leaders, senior pastors and parents to gather, collaborate, pray, learn and dialogue the most critical factors that shape long-term discipleship in children.

This year's event will take place Sept. 22 and 23 in Nashville, Tennessee. Both in-person and online options to attend are available.

Hear from speakers including John Mark Comer, Rebecca McLaughlin, Derwin Gray, David Kinnaman, Trillia Newbell and more. Discover the latest research from Awana and the Barna Group, and receive practical tools and resources to use in your local churches, communities and families.

Learn more about the Child Discipleship Forum and save your seat today. Go to [childdiscipleshipforum.com](http://childdiscipleshipforum.com).



awana.org  
866-292-6227

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# Child Discipleship Drives the Future of the Church

 **CHILD  
DISCIPLESHIP  
22 FORUM**

**SEPTEMBER 22 & 23, 2022**  
NASHVILLE, TN or ONLINE.  
SAVE YOUR SEAT  
[CHILDDISCIPLESHIPFORUM.COM](http://CHILDDISCIPLESHIPFORUM.COM)