**DIRECTOR’S NOTES**

**Stay on Track!**

At Rocky Railway, kids explore Jesus’ power in them and how we can trust Jesus—not our own strength—to pull us through life’s challenges. COVID-19 has come through our lives like a freight train and derailed countless plans, routines, and expectations. This summer, more than ever, the kids in your community need the hope, reassurance, and abundance of God’s love through the unique ministry of VBS. The Bible Points for Rocky Railway are so relevant:

**JESUS’ POWER HELPS US DO HARD THINGS. Trust Jesus!**

**JESUS’ POWER GIVES US HOPE. Trust Jesus!**

**JESUS’ POWER HELPS US BE BOLD. Trust Jesus!**

**JESUS’ POWER LETS US LIVE FOREVER. Trust Jesus!**

**JESUS’ POWER HELPS US BE GOOD FRIENDS. Trust Jesus!**

We all need to trust Jesus’ power to pull us through these unprecedented times! This summer, your church has an opportunity to meet families like never before through VBS.

Take a breath, pause, and pray. And don’t give up. With some planning, creativity, and faith, you can make VBS happen—no matter what. If physical distancing prevents you from having traditional VBS at your church, these adaptations can help you steam forward with a small-group, neighborhood experience. We’ll guide you to stay on track, using best practices to maximize this time-tested VBS experience.

Here’s what we do know:

- Parents are overwhelmed.
- Kids and parents miss connection.
- Kids and parents miss the sense of community that comes from VBS.
- Many communities are open for small-group gatherings.
- We’ve longed for ways to bring faith into the home—and God has opened the door for this opportunity.

That’s why a neighborhood VBS (often called “backyard Bible club”) model is ideal! You’ll maintain relationships with your church and community, and you’ll be a warm, welcoming, encouraging neighbor for those you connect with.

Thank you for making an eternal difference by staying on track with VBS!

*Group’s VBS Team*
WHAT DOES NEIGHBORHOOD VBS LOOK LIKE?

Church Hub

Provides the following:
- curriculum
- registration
- staff training
- background checks
- site supplies
- student supplies
- publicity

Site 1

Site 2

Site 3

Site 4

Site 5

Site 6

Site 7

Site 8
Planning

Begin praying for your church to embrace a neighborhood VBS model. Ask God to open new ways to reach the hearts of children, families, and volunteers in your community.

Choose a format for your VBS.

- VBS takes place in homes of several church members.
- VBS takes place in a local park or community center.

- If VBS is happening in a home, the homeowner doesn’t have to be the VBS Site Leader. Just find a willing homeowner who’d like to host a group of kids. Ideally, they should have a large backyard or adjoining open space (such as a greenbelt). You can decide who will be the Site Leader for that location.

- Determine if you want the Site Leader to lead all stations, if you have staff for additional Station Leaders, or if you want to incorporate media. Group does have downloadable videos of Shannon, the Imagination Leader at our field tests, leading a modified version of each Imagination Station session. You can find these at groupsamples.com

Who’s Who?

Host: the homeowner
Site Leader: individual in charge of leading activities at each site
VBS Director: individual coordinating and overseeing multiple neighborhood VBS programs

Choose and publicize dates for each location of Rocky Railway.
Remember that VBS doesn’t have to be five days in a row. You may want to connect with kids once a week for five weeks or divide the material into even shorter segments once a week all summer long! Get creative and keep your overarching ministry goals in mind as you plan.

Use VBS Pro to get kids registered and assigned to a site. If you upgrade to VBS Pro Premium, you can create multiple sessions of your VBS. Then just assign kids to the “session” (or site) nearest to their home address.

Content

Plan the content and timeframe for your neighborhood VBS. You may want to do a full three-hour program, or trim the opening and closing so it’s closer to two hours. Remember, kids won’t have as much “travel time,” moving from one activity to the next. Plus, with smaller groups, things will move more quickly.
Determine if you’ll include Operation Kid-to-Kid. Kids across the globe have been impacted by COVID-19, and the children in your community will gain a sense of empowerment at helping kids in Ecuador! One game option each day connects with Operation Kid-to-Kid, so if you’re not incorporating this missions project, simply omit that option.

Make a few simple modifications.

Sing & Play Express and Rocky Wrap-Up
Hold your opening and closing times in the yard or in the living room. You’ll need access to a TV and video player to show the daily Buddy videos and music videos. Lay out blankets for kids to sit around with their Crews. (Sitting around the edge of a large blanket can encourage physical distancing.)

Bible Adventures
This should ideally happen indoors, following many of the same setup instructions in the Bible Adventures Leader Manual. Feel free to simplify the setup, and use basic household items to create the “Temple Gate” area or Paul’s ship.

KidVid™ Cinema
If you’ve moved the TV and video player outside, you can meet in this same space. Or if the site has two areas to watch a movie, use a secondary spot like the living room or a basement.

Chew Chew Snacks
For a two-hour program, you don’t need to offer snacks. However, if you want to, provide a store-bought snack for kids. Simply modify the snack ideas in the Chew Chew Snacks Leader Manual so each child receives his or her own snack plate, rather than a Crew tray of snack supplies. Let kids gather outside for snack time—preceded and followed by hand-washing!

Imagination Station
Gather kids outdoors if weather permits. If you’re showing the pre-recorded videos of Shannon leading Imagination Station, you may prefer meeting indoors. Or gather in the same spot you used for KidVid Cinema.

Loco Motion Games
Day 1:
In “Hold the Track Line,” have kids hold pool noodles or ropes between Crew members.

Day 2:
For “H.O.P.E. Ball,” simply have Crew members stand about 6 feet apart in their circle.
If you choose “Tunnel Run,” partners can hold large beach blankets overhead instead of joining hands.
Day 3:
For “Railway Waterway,” change the game from a hand-to-hand relay to having players walk the pool noodle and cup all the way to the bucket. (You’ll need to make the bucket a bit closer to the starting line.)

If you choose “Alpaca My Bags,” just caution kids to keep their distance as they run.

Day 4:
❌ Omit “Mumble Hum Message.”

Day 5
During “Train of Thought,” rather than have Crews gather around a piece of paper, have leaders write the words from the handout on a whiteboard or large sheet of paper so everyone can see.

❌ Omit “Boxcar Bolt.”

Decide if you want a preschool track. With some slight modifications, mixed-age groups that include preschoolers can work. However, if you want a special area just for preschoolers, you can either have a completely unique site just for them or designate a Site Leader who will modify the activities in the Little Kids Depot Leader Manuals to create a special experience for kids ages 3-5.

Choose and recruit the team that will lead each station. Remember, you may not need an Imagination Station Leader, if you opt to use the video found at group.com/ModifiedVBS. One person can lead all activities, or you can have a small team share the responsibilities. (We recommend having at least two leaders so one can lead while the other prepares the next activities. Plus, you don’t want to overload volunteers!)

Check out your Rocky Railway Leader Manuals. The beauty of Rocky Railway is that it’s designed to work with 10 kids or 410 kids! Since the activities in the manuals were created and tested with kids in small, mixed-age Crews that travel through Station activities, you won’t need to make many modifications at all! For a backyard VBS of about 10 kids, you’ll have two Crews.

You have everything you need to lead a powerful, experiential, memorable, and life-changing VBS—no matter how many kids you have!

Check out the permissions guidelines for photocopying leader manuals on page 11 of this guide.

Provide a student pack for each child. Kids have had to forgo school trips, family vacations, birthday parties, and sports. This is your time to bless them with a bag of excitement that also fuels faith! By supplying surprise resources for each child, you’ll build daily anticipation (a little like Christmas!)—and make each child feel special!
Plus, the Group team has consulted with child psychologists and experts to determine which resources will be most meaningful to families during such an anxious time.

Check out the “Resources” section for more info on how Group has made it easier (and more affordable) than ever to get this cool cargo into kids’ hands!

**Assemble an assembly team.** At your church, assemble supply kits for each site. Sites will need items you typically have at church, such as markers, paper, pool noodles, and spray bottles.

Your team will also create a student pack for each child, including resources such as Bible Memory Buddies, Sciency-Fun Gizmos, and Tracking With Jesus Bible Books. Of course, you can also add God Sightings Wristbands and Sing & Play Express Music CDs. Simply put all the supplies for the week into one bag per child, or put each day’s supplies into separate zipper-sealed bags labeled for each day. Then you’d put all of those into one bag per child.

**God Sightings are more important than ever!** God Sightings give kids practice in looking for evidence of God all around them. Guiding kids to look for God and thank him is key in helping kids cope with the uncertainty and loss they’ve experienced recently. At Rocky Railway, you’ll celebrate God’s goodness every day!

Here are two simple ways to celebrate and display God Sightings in a home or neighborhood setting:

- Use colorful sticky notes to write or draw an image to represent kids’ daily God Sightings. Post the notes in a window in the shape of a heart.
- Use chalk to write or draw an image to represent daily God Sightings on the driveway or sidewalk. Think of how this colorful image can be a conversation starter with neighbors!
- Provide each neighborhood VBS site with a Paper Pop-Up Boxcar. These colorful pop-up boxcars (available from Group or your Group VBS supplier) can make a cool, themey “blessing box.” Let kids write or draw their God Sightings and drop them into the open boxcar.

**COVID-19 Protocol**

**Always follow the CDC guidelines for your state and local government restrictions.** When prepping supplies that will be distributed to kids, have a packing party. Volunteers can maintain physical distancing and wear gloves and masks as they pack supply kits. Safety first! If volunteers will deliver supplies to VBS sites, remind them to respect the 6-foot rule.
Consider having a pool noodle for each child to use as a reminder to keep physical distance. Have wipes or disinfectant spray to frequently clean items. For games, have multiple sets of the games supplies so each Crew gets its own clean set. Also supply multiple hand-washing stations.

If you include Chew Chew Snacks, consider preparing the daily snack only using store-bought items. For instance, on Day 3, instead of making the “coal,” purchase the Kellogg’s® Cocoa Krispies® Treats (https://www.kelloggs.com/en_US/products/rkt-squares-cocoa-krispies-product.html).

Adjusting how we do ministry will allow for ministry to keep happening! Your kids and families will thank you. You’ve got this!

Budget

Reprioritize your budget. We know budgets are tight and some have been decreased or frozen—but there’s good news. You won’t need to spend on elaborate decorations for the entire church, dramatically decreasing your decorating budget! Strategically invest your reallocated budget in what matters most: the relationships we establish with the kids and the resources we send into their homes. Meaningful resources may be the only Scripture or faith-related anything in a family’s home! We’ll show you what student resources we recommend a little farther down the track.

Supplement your budget. While it may seem that many are pinching pennies, people are looking for ways to make a difference. Oftentimes a modest financial donation gives individuals a chance to feel like they’ve helped out, when the gift of time is something they don’t have. Give your church members the opportunity to play a key role in your VBS through sponsorships or donations. By reallocating your budget toward in-home resources for each child, you’ll be sure to reach entire families with hope and the message of Jesus!

Recruiting & Staff Training

Flexibility is the key. While your amazing Bible Adventures Leader is used to just prepping and leading four rotations of Bible at VBS, now you may call on him or her to lead Bible and KidVid. Don’t worry! We always make it as easy as possible for every Station Leader! Two people can co-lead activities, especially if you use the Imagination Station video.

Crew Leaders still play an important role. Every site may only have two Crew Leaders, but they still play a key part of the VBS experience. These individuals establish relationships with children, are listeners during discussion time, and show Jesus’ love in tangible ways. During such a challenging season, these leaders matter!
And how cool for kids to know they have a Crew Leader praying for them every day of VBS. Next-level the relational aspect by having Crew Leaders reach out to parents at the end of each VBS day.

**Consider shifting your staff training to online.** Utilize platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or Google Meet for your volunteer meetings. These platforms allow you to share your screen easily with a PowerPoint or Keynote, so you can get everyone onboard. Be sure to address how station supplies will be gathered and content delivered. We’ve included two blank Rocky Railway slide images at groupsamples.com for you to easily create slides for your staff training. Just add a text box and type in your content or add images.

**Keep your church safety protocols in mind.** As always, it’s important to maintain best practices when it comes to child safety.

- Remember that all volunteers working with children need to have up-to-date background checks. Additionally, a child should never be left alone with a noncustodial adult—even in a home.
- Coaching your home-based volunteers about your church’s safety protocols protects them, you as the leader, and your church—and most important, it keeps kids safe.
- Group’s Shepherd’s Watch provides easy, affordable, and thorough background checks for VBS volunteers. Learn more at shepherdswatchbackgroundchecks.com.

**Resources**

Student resources reinforce Bible truths long after VBS. Focus on the important things—student items are the core resources of the VBS experience. Reinforcing what kids experience is key to making learning stick. As a VBS leader, you understand how kids learn best! When we teach like Jesus, we use something tangible (things we see, hear, taste, touch) to make spiritual connections that last.
Here are the student resources you’ll need with the modified stations. Most items come in packages of 10. You’ll need one of each item per child to include in the student packs you create. Crank up the Sing & Play Music CD and have a fun packing party!

Allocate the money you save on the things you aren’t doing (such as decorating) to supply important student items. Get your church involved in building a student pack for each child at VBS.

**Decide how VBS sites will get resources.**
- Volunteers deliver the student packs and other supplies to each site.
- Site Leaders drive through and pick up the materials at church.

| STAY-ON-TRACK STUDENT PACK CONTENTS |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| **Elementary**             | **Preschool**               |
| Bible Memory Buddies (pkg includes 10 sets of Buddies, enough for 10 kids) | Bible Memory Buddies (pkg includes 10 sets of Buddies, enough for 10 kids) |
| Tracking With Jesus Bible Book | Billy Boxcars (pkg of 10) |
| Bold Blaster (pkg of 10) | Buddies Forever Game (pkg of 10) |
| Hope ’n’ Hover (pkg of 10) | Fun Friends Puzzles (pkg of 10) |
| Off-Rail Roller (pkg of 10) | Little Kids Bible Pack (Student Book) (50 sheets, enough for 10 kids) |
| Perpetual Paper (pkg of 10) | Bold Blaster (pkg of 10) |
| Power Band (enough for 10 kids) | Hope ’n’ Hover (pkg of 10) |
| Try This at Home Sticker Sheets (pkg of 10 sheets) |  |
Station resources enhance online experiences. There are a few poster packs that will visually reinforce what Site Leaders are saying.

- Sing & Play Express & Rocky Wrap-Up: Bible Point Poster*
- KidVid™ Cinema: Bible Verse Posters*
- Little Kids Depot Bible Adventures: Bible Point Poster*, Bible Story Posters*
- Little Kids Depot KidVid™ Cinema: Bible Point Poster*

Decorating

Decorating for Rocky Railway has just gotten a lot easier! Although decorations are always optional, you may want to decorate a main set and (optionally) one other room for Bible Adventures.

Sing & Play Express, Imagination Station, KidVid™ Cinema, and Rocky Wrap-Up will all happen in the same space—we recommend using the main set area. Bible Adventures can be in another room, just for variety and to help kids immerse in a Bible-times setting.

Here's how to do it in a fast-track way!

Main Set Simple as 1-2-3!
1. Use the Rocky Railway Fabric Wall Hanging* to create your backdrop.
2. Create a 15-foot no-stress express using the Giant Train Poster Pack* mounted on foam core.

Main Set Next Level
1. Mount the Giant Bible Memory Buddy Posters* on foam core or cardboard.
2. Cut orange and yellow crepe paper* leaves to create awesome aspen trees out of tree branches and painted carpet tubes.
3. Design a depot with the Giant Decorating Poster Pack*.

Bible Adventures
While it’s not required, you may want to follow the day-by-day setup in the Bible Adventures Leader Manual. A few items you may not have in your supply closet:

- Big Blue Sky Fabric Wall Hanging*
- Stone Wall Plastic Backdrop*
- Wooden Plastic Table Cover*

Little Kids Depot
If you're offering a separate site or area just for preschool, you may want to decorate a room with the Bible Buddy Posters*, Bible Story Posters*, and Bible Verse Posters*.

*available from Group or your Group VBS supplier
Registration

**Have kids preregister for VBS just as usual.** Even though kids won’t be coming to your church, you still need to know who is participating and where they’ll attend. Set a deadline, ideally a week from the first day of your VBS. This will allow time for your packing party to create the student packs and deliver them or have volunteers pick them up.

Your VBS Starter Kit comes with a free easy-to-use online management tool called VBS PRO, which includes registration. You can upgrade to VBS PRO Premium and auto-assign kids into Crews, and create multiple sessions or sites.

Follow-Up

Take the opportunity at the end of your VBS to reach families of children who don’t regularly attend your church. Kids love getting mail, so here’s a great way to invite them to participate in your weekly children’s ministry, as restrictions are lifted. They’ll be eager to get out and come to your church!

Use the themed clip art on the Clip Art & Resources CD to create a personal invitation from all the Bible Memory Buddies at Rocky Railway.

**GRANTED PERMISSIONS FOR BACKYARD OR NEIGHBORHOOD VBS PRESENTATIONS**

**Who can use these permissions?**
These permissions are granted solely to the church or organization that purchased the Rocky Railway VBS starter kit. The permissions are granted for use in the VBS programming uses stated in this document.

**What are the permissions for?**
These permissions are in response to COVID-19. These permissions will allow your church to use your starter kit materials to host VBS presentations in multiple home-hosted backyard or neighborhood-hosted VBS events.

**What do these permissions allow?**
These permissions allow you to make a certain number of copies of leader materials including leader guides or excerpted material from the leader guides, music (with exceptions), and leader videos. These copies are only allowed for backyard or neighborhood modifications of your VBS program.
Can I use a copy at more than one location?
You will need one copy of the materials for each simultaneous event you host. If your backyard/neighborhood VBS events occur at different times, you can rotate your copies from event to event. Otherwise, you just can’t have more than the maximum allowed number of copies in use at any one time.

What if I need more copies than the permissions allow?
You can purchase additional guides or media a la carte. The number of additional copies allowed for each is shown in the chart below. You could also purchase an additional starter kit to have permission to make 9 additional copies (allows for 10 events total), whichever is most economical for the number of simultaneous events you have.

What specific items are the permissions granted for?
These permissions apply to the following leader materials for Rocky Railway VBS as stipulated below. The permissions apply to use in leading the VBS program only, not for making copies for student/participant use.
Full steam ahead and stay on track for planning your VBS!

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*Lyrics for three of the songs in the Sing & Play leader guide cannot be copied. See restricted titles below.

**See music and media restrictions below.

The following song titles, music video titles, and Power Point song lyrics can be copied within the limitations shown on the preceding chart.

- "We Can Trust Him (Psalm 33:4)
- "Power Shuffle"
- "Power in the Blood"
- "Your Power Will Pull Us Through"
- "This Train Is Bound for Glory"
- "In You Alone"
- "The Old Rugged Cross"
DENIED PERMISSIONS FOR BACKYARD/NEIGHBORHOOD VBS PRESENTATIONS

Copyrights on the following music items (including audio music, music videos, and song lyrics) are not owned by Group and we cannot provide permission to make copies of these items. If you want to use these songs in multiple simultaneous Rocky Railway VBS events, you will need to purchase additional media for each event location.

You cannot use the following Rocky Railway songs, music videos, or lyrics unless you have the appropriate additional media for each VBS location:
(The) Same Power
Everywhere I Go
Lions

Can I use my copies permissions to make copies to give to students?
No. Permission is only for leader use in conducting a Rocky Railway VBS.

Can I use these Rocky Railway permissions to create parent-led VBS experiences in their homes?
No. Separate permissions will be needed for single-family use. Contact permissions@group.com.
Rocky Railway VBS Permissions for Online VBS Use

If you’re planning to incorporate livestreamed videos from your church, follow these guidelines.

Granted Permissions for Online VBS Presentations

Who can use these permissions?
These permissions are granted solely to the church or organization that purchased the Rocky Railway VBS starter kit.

What specific items are the permissions granted for?

Rocky Railway Songs, music videos, and lyrics:
- We Can Trust Him (Psalm 33:4)
- Power Shuffle
- Power in the Blood
- Your Power Will Pull Us Through
- This Train Is Bound for Glory
- In You Alone
- The Old Rugged Cross

Other Rocky Railway Media:
- Bible Memory Buddy Videos
- Rocky Railway Skits Videos (sold separately)
- KidVid™ Stories Videos

What types of online events do I have permission to use these items in?

Livestream Events—online public or private presentations that occur one time live at a specific time.

Recorded Events—online presentations publicly or privately available for viewing on demand.

How long are these permissions in effect?
You may take advantage of these permissions until 9/1/2020. Specific timing stipulations for the type of event are as follows:

Livestream Events—Permission for one-time use for the duration of the live event until 9/1/2020.

Recorded Events—Permissions granted for a 30-day period from the time the event is first posted online or 9/1/2020, whichever occurs first.
DENIED PERMISSIONS FOR ONLINE VBS PRESENTATIONS

Copyrights for the following music items are not owned by Group and we cannot provide permission for these items to be used in any online application whether audio or video or lyrics. If your church has a CCLI license agreement, you can contact the copyright holder and inquire about online rights for your church use. That copyright information can be found in the packaging of your Rocky Railway Sing & Play Express Music CD.

Rocky Railway Songs, music videos, and lyrics:
(The) Same Power
Everywhere I Go
Lions

Can I use these items in a downloadable presentation?
No. Permission is not granted for download use.

Can I use the Rocky Railway VBS media items for online presentations that are not related to VBS?
No. Permissions are only granted for online VBS use.