Using Child Check-In Software to
Keep Your Kids Safe

One of the biggest issues facing churches today is keeping children in their care safe. Churches are at risk from an increase in child custody battles and child predators targeting churches. Children's ministry today needs to be mindful of who is working with the children as well as who is picking them up. . There are also many more food allergies today, so what is a Sunday school teacher to do? Can they really be expected to know who can pick a child up, what the child is allergic to, and other activities in which the child is not allowed to participate?

An automated child check-in system can help minimize the risk and assure parents that their children are in good care. The child check-in system should be put in place to monitor a child's involvement, who is authorized to pick the child up, and any other special instructions. The system should also track background information for your volunteers and staff who are working with the children. You need to understand if background checks are current and the authorization level of that volunteer or staff member. In addition to using a child check-in system, good, solid policies and procedures are needed to handle any situations that may arise.

Some things to consider when looking for an automated check-in solution are:

- Is the system an Internet-based or a software-based system?
- What security features are included to help ensure the authorized person is picking up the child?
- Can the system indicate allergy and one-time instructions?
- Can the system track background check information?
- Will the system track the involvement of the child and family?
- Is the check-in process easy and convenient?

There are many child check-in systems on the market today. Some are online, while others are utilize software installed on your churches network. The Web-based system are nice because the information is available anywhere you have Internet access, and the service provider is responsible the maintenance of that system. However, a software-based solution is ideal for those churches that do not have Internet access in their facility or those churches that want control of their data and systems. Software-based systems tend to be less expensive as well, since no hosting fees are required.

Next, you need to decide how you want to implement the check-out procedures for assuring only authorized persons can pick up a child. Does the system provide matching

labels, badges, wristbands, or other identifier for the parents that must be presented before the child is released?

Another consideration when choosing a check-in/check-out solution is the ability to track allergy information. Can the allergy information be easily, discreetly displayed on a nametag or sign-in sheet so that the teacher is aware of this special need? You may also need to indicate one-time instructions. For example, a child is cranky because they are teething or they need their bottle at a certain time. How will the system handle these kinds of instructions?

The ability to track background checks for the individuals who will be working with your children is an important feature of your check-in system. Consider whether the background check request and results can be tracked. Can the system prompt you for outdated background checks? Will the system allow you to check in the folks who are working with your students?

An added benefit to using a check in system is the ability to track families' involvement.

Many check-in systems record the attendance of those who are checking into a class or event, so you can see who is coming regularly, or who hasn't attended in so many weeks. If you see that someone hasn't come in awhile, you can make the follow-up calls as you see fit. Many check-in systems also let you capture information about your visitors, so following up with visitors becomes that much easier.

One of the most important issues to consider when looking at a check-in/check-out system is how convenient is it to check in the students.

New Hope Christian Center in Waterloo, Indiana, has even made their check-in process fun and easy. They have incorporated the check-in process as part of their children's ministry theme.

"Everything in the program is geared around an airplane and travel, from using videos of airplane takeoff and landings, to a flight attendant serving mid-flight snacks to the younger children," said Nathan Diehl, publications director at New Hope Christian Center. Each student gets assigned a passport,

which they get stamped each week they attend. On the back of this passport, we have placed a system-generated badge, which contains the child's name and barcode. All the children get their passport when they enter the room. The child then walks to the check-in station and scans their passport. Once the passport is scanned, a name badge is printed out.

Finally, your church must decide on the policies and procedures that must be in place in addition to the technology you use as a check-in system. How will things be handled if a parent loses their security tag? What happens if a child eats her nametag? How often do you do background checks? What are the procedures if the automated part of the system goes down?

The combination of a computerized check-in/check-out system and solid procedures will help ensure the safety of your children and give parents peace of mind when they drop off their kids. RPN

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