



Featuring Rob Parsons, OBE
and Katharine Hill,
Care for the Family

Getting Your Kids Through Church



Group Leader's Guide



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www.careforthefamily.org.uk
 Email: mail@cff.org.uk

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Course introduction

Getting Your Kids Through Church started as a prayer, turned into a book and then became a tour which has taken Care for the Family's team and myself around the country talking to parents, church leaders, youth workers and church members.



I have been reminded time and time again that as we pray for our children, asking God to protect them from the dozens of pitfalls that await them in life, we must also pray about another danger – the thing that destroys the seed of faith in millions of young people. We must pray that our children may come through their early experience of Christianity without losing their faith in God.

In this small group resource we will explore together some of the vital issues that affect every Christian home and church community. We have created this course because we are passionate about the role of the local church, and we are so grateful to every church leader, youth and children's worker, volunteer, friend and family member who invests in young lives. We want to come alongside you – all who share the responsibility for nurturing the faith and well-being of the next generation. We hope that we will be encouraged and challenged as we explore these vital questions together. We also hope that we will perhaps discover some of the things that might make a real difference to the seeds of faith growing in the young lives around us.

Rob Parsons, OBE

Founder and Chairman
Care for the Family

How to run the Getting Your Kids Through Church course

Getting Your Kids Through Church (GYKTC) is a video-based resource for small groups. It is ideal for parents, youth workers, church leaders and anyone else interested in supporting young people. *GYKTC* looks at some of the vital issues that face young people in church. In each session you will hear from some key people involved in youth ministry and have the opportunity to discuss the issues raised.

You don't need any formal qualifications to run a *Getting Your Kids Through Church* course, but if you're someone who enjoys reading, talking, listening to others and bringing out the best in them, then you will probably make a good course leader. Keep in mind that you will be learning alongside everyone else. You are the person who is making the course happen, but you are not expected to be an expert or have all the answers.

Let us know when you plan to run a *GYKTC* course by emailing mail@cff.org.uk and we will send you a link to some free posters which you can personalise to publicise it.

When you finish the course, please complete the 5-minute survey at www.surveymonkey.com/s/GYKTC-feedback. This will help us to make sure the course remains a great resource for churches. We would also like feedback from course participants. You can download survey forms at www.careforthefamily.org.uk/GYKTC

Course sessions

The course is made up of eight sessions, each covering a different topic. They contain a mixture of video content and group discussion questions, and this *Group Leader's Guide* will lead you through each session in detail.

The videos are available on DVD, can be downloaded from Care for the Family's website or streamed live on the Internet. The *Group Leader's Guide* and *Session Notes* are also available to download from the Care for the Family website.

The material is designed to be flexible to the needs of your group. You do not necessarily need to work through all eight sessions or even watch the sessions in the correct order (although the order of the sessions does have a sense of flow.) We do recommend, however, that you start the course with Session 1 and end with Session 8, regardless of what you may do in the middle.

Each session is designed to be completed in 90 minutes, but the suggested length of the discussions is a guideline only and you may make the session shorter or longer depending on time available.

Course content

- Session 1: The four stages of faith
- Session 2: Overfamiliarity
- Session 3: Don't sweat the small stuff
- Session 4: Belonging
- Session 5: Over-busyness
- Session 6: Killers of faith
- Session 7: Disappointments
- Session 8: Getting them ready for the world

Course presenters

- Rob Parsons, OBE, Founder and Chairman, Care for the Family
- Katharine Hill, UK Director, Care for the Family
- Rachael Orrell, Chief Executive, Saltmine Trust
- Gavin Calver, National Director, Youth for Christ
- Andy Frost, Director, Share Jesus International
- Cath Lyden, Project Coordinator, FRESH
- Gary Smith, Chief Executive, Ignite
- Meg Davies, Project Coordinator, Ignite
- Cathy Madavan, author and speaker
- Philip Jinadu, church leader, Bristol
- Lucy Smith, student
- Averil Neilly, author and speaker
- Mike Pilavachi, Executive Director, Soul Survivor

Course format

With the exception of Session 1 (which includes an introduction and excludes 'GYKTC on the road') the format of each of the sessions is as follows:

- Introduction with Rob Parsons
- Group discussion with questions [pause video]
- 'GYKTC on the road' – interview-style discussion with Katharine Hill and guests
- Group discussion with questions [pause video]
- Prayer

Some dos and don'ts when leading

DO Try to prepare well. Read the session notes and watch the video content beforehand. Think about how the discussion might go, but be prepared for the unexpected!

DON'T Let one person dominate the discussion, give direct advice, or criticise another member of the group. Everyone can have their say as long as this does not deflate the confidence of another person or imply that they've got it wrong.

DO Try to summarise people's contributions to the discussion and link them in with the main points to keep the discussion on track. You'll find that if you acknowledge what someone says (for example, "I found what Anne said really helpful"), each person will feel a vital part of the group and grow in confidence.

DON'T Constantly start sessions late or over-run. If you always start promptly, those who turn up late should soon get the message that they will miss something. Waiting for latecomers to arrive devalues the efforts of those who come on time and runs the risk of the session ending later and later, inconveniencing everyone.

DO Think in advance how you might handle things if anybody becomes upset or angry. It doesn't often happen, but it may occur occasionally.

DON'T Feel you have to use every word of the notes, cover every main point, or ask every question. Be flexible. Your group will get the best from the course if you gear it to their needs.

DO Remind everyone of the importance of confidentiality and the rule that things said during a discussion should be kept within the group.

Session 1: The four stages of faith

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The big picture

God has no grandchildren! Everyone who enters a relationship with him must do so directly as a son or daughter. So if our children are to have a real faith, they must receive and experience it for themselves. As parents, youth workers and church leaders we can't bear total responsibility for their spiritual journey, but we can – and must – do things, pass on values, and demonstrate attitudes that will make it easier for our children to develop a relationship with God. In this first session we begin with an introduction to *Getting Your Kids Through Church* from Rob Parsons and Katharine Hill, and then go on to look at how we can best help our young people as they navigate their journey with God.

7 min Play introduction

Rob Parsons and Katharine Hill introduce *GYKTC* and we hear what young people think about growing up in church.

Pause DVD

5 min Group discussion – Setting the scene

1. What particularly stood out to you from the introductory video?
2. What are your hopes for this course?

2 min Play video – The Super Regular Kid

A short animation featuring The Super Regular Kid, which highlights some of the challenges young people face growing up in church.

Pause DVD

15 min Group discussion – The Super Regular Kid

1. Thinking about your own life, are there any elements of EPIC's experiences you could relate to?
2. Was it easy or hard for you to develop your own faith as you grew up? Why was that?

Notes for group leaders:

In your discussion, encourage people to share their journey of faith. It is helpful for us to realise that many of us take a less than straightforward path to mature faith. Some people will have been brought up in a Christian home and some won't, and everyone's journey is unique to them. Some group members may currently be struggling with their faith and that is OK. Don't push people to share if they don't want to.

3. Do you think it is easier or harder for children and young people today? What pressures or opportunities do they have that previous generations did not experience?

10 min **Play video – The four stages of faith**

Rob Parsons introduces the four stages of faith.

Pause DVD

25 min **Group discussion – The four stages of faith**

1. The four stages of faith that Rob introduced are: experienced faith, affiliative faith, searching faith and owned faith. What do you think about the idea that faith is a four-stage journey?
2. Think about the children or young people you are bringing up or for whom you are particularly responsible. What stage of faith would you say they are at, and why?

Notes for group leaders:

This might be the participants' own children or a particular age group with whom they work at church. Others might have a concern for young people in general.

3. Often we feel insecure as parents or leaders because we think it reflects on us if our children ask questions or seem to wobble in their faith. This can make our young people fearful of telling us how they feel or what they are thinking.

Think about the passage Rob referred to in Matthew 11:2–3 where John the Baptist asks Jesus if he is the Messiah. How does it make us feel when children or adults share doubts or questions about their faith or if they don't seem to be as certain as we would like them to be?

4. How can we show unconditional love to our young people and build an atmosphere of trust and acceptance while encouraging their faith in a positive way?
5. What are some of the positive and creative things we can do at church or home to make the most of the particular stage of faith our children are at and to encourage them on their journey?

Notes for group leaders:

Let's get creative! Younger children might like nature walks with prayers of thanks to God, and older ones might be able to serve those in need. Share some ideas about how families or groups can have inspiring ways of modelling and sharing their faith and values – for example, hospitality, care, generosity and serving together.

Prayer

Pray that the young people and children represented by the group and in church will flourish at whatever stage of faith they are at, and that they will ultimately own that faith for themselves.

Session 2: Overfamiliarity

The big picture

There are many blessings in being brought up in a home where the parents know Christ – where his stories are told, where Bibles are strewn about the house, and where children are taken to the place where people gather to worship him every Sunday. But an ever-present danger is that those who enjoy such treasures get used to them – and to him: “It’s just Jesus.”

9 min Play video

Rob Parsons introduces the topic of overfamiliarity.

Pause DVD

25 min Group discussion – Overfamiliarity

1. Christians living in the UK are free of persecution and have many churches, festivals and books available to them. In such circumstances, what dangers and opportunities do we have? Are they the same for our young people?
2. Have we ever 'got used to Jesus' or become overfamiliar with him? How does this affect us – for example, our level of faith or gratitude?
3. How do we counteract this in our homes and churches?
4. Read Matthew 13:44–46. As Rob suggested, imagine this great treasure gone from your life. What would that look or feel like for you?

Notes for group leaders:

This might be a good place to pause and thank God for all that he has done for us and for what he means to us.

12 min GYKTC on the road

Play video

Katharine Hill, Rachael Orrell and Gavin Calver discuss some of the ways we can stop becoming overfamiliar with the life-changing message of Jesus in our homes and churches.

Pause DVD

25 min Group discussion – Keeping it fresh

1. Rob said: "Instead of talking about what we have done wrong, let's talk about what God has done right." And Gavin also discussed the problem of 'Hollywood testimonies'. How can we encourage our children and young people to see their own story with God as exciting?
2. If it's true that children and young people model what they see in others, what about our own testimonies? Do you see your journey with God as exciting? Why/why not? How do others see it?
3. Rachael mentioned that she encouraged her children to use their gifts for God. How can we intentionally disciple our children and young people in a way that makes them feel valuable to God's plans?
4. In this session we were reminded of the importance of investing in children while they are still young. How best can we make Christianity fun, real and relevant to the young people in our care?

Prayer

Write down the names of children or young people that you will commit to pray for and encourage (either children represented in the group or others whom God has laid on your heart). How can we do this more intentionally?

Session 3: Don't sweat the small stuff

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The big picture

Do we sometimes want our children to conform to standards that we are actually struggling to meet ourselves? And do we put pressure on them to fit a particular type of mould?

There's hardly a parent, youth worker or children's worker on the face of the earth who wouldn't be tempted at one time or another to get a one-size-fits-all 'Perfect Christian Child' mould for the young people in their care. But what is it that we really want for our children?

11 min Play video

Rob Parsons introduces the concept of the 'jelly-mould syndrome'. This clip includes *Uberteen 3000*, a short drama by Saltmine Theatre Company.

Pause DVD

25 min Group discussion – Don't sweat the small stuff

1. Do we ever frown on young people for not fitting the 'Perfect Christian Child' jelly-mould? What unrealistic expectations or unwise judgements might we easily make about them?
2. In what ways do we sometimes confuse personality and spirituality?
3. Read Matthew 25:34–40. What are some of the values and attitudes shown by young people that indicate they are attuned to God? Share some examples.
4. How can we better encourage young people who display these Godly characteristics?

Notes for group leaders:

Examples might include young people acting justly, showing compassion or caring for the poor.

10 min GYKTC on the road*Play video*

Katharine Hill, Andy Frost and Cath Lyden discuss how we're sometimes guilty of making young people feel alienated in church.

*Pause DVD***25 min Group discussion – Church life and culture**

1. What aspects of our church culture could restrain or squash faith in young people? Are our churches grey or full of colour?
2. Andy and Cath reminded us that it's not just us that shape young people – young people can also have the ability to influence us. In what ways might we be able to learn from them?
3. How open are you and your church to young people taking more of a lead in church activities? How might this be appropriately encouraged?
4. In what ways can we encourage 'spiritual aunties and uncles' to take an active role in the lives of our young people?

Prayer

1 Samuel 16:7 – "People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." Pray that we learn not to judge young people on their outward appearance but to look beneath the surface.

Session 4: Belonging

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The big picture

It is possible for a child to thrive in a youth group that has just five people, primitive facilities, and an annual treat consisting of a trip to the nearest town for fish and chips – so long as the leader *really* cares and the children know that they are special to him or her. It doesn't matter much whether the leader is twenty or fifty, is cool or dresses in tweed. The crucial thing is that the young people sense they are loved.

10 min Play video

Rob Parsons introduces the topic of belonging and youth workers contribute their thoughts on the topic.

Pause DVD

25 min Group discussion – Belonging

1. Reminding ourselves of our own experiences as young people can help us to think about how influential youth groups can be. How many of you went to a church children's or youth group when you were growing up? What are your memories of it and of your youth workers? If you went to a non-church youth group, what are your memories of this? Are there any contrasts or similarities between the two?

Notes for group leaders:

Non-church youth groups may include Scouts, Girl Guides, youth music groups, drama clubs etc.

2. In what ways might we sometimes be guilty of holding youth leaders responsible for the spiritual lives of our young people? What are our responsibilities as families or church members?
3. What more could we do to support and encourage the children's and youth work staff and volunteers?

10 min GYKTC on the road

Play video

Katharine Hill, Gary Smith and Meg Davies discuss what it really means for young people to belong in church.

Pause DVD

25 min Group discussion – A culture of love

1. Gary spoke about 'Belong, believe, behave'. Which of those three do we pay most attention to in respect of adults? Which do we pay most attention to in respect of young people? Why is that the case?
2. Gary discussed the value of taking young people to a thriving youth group and Christian festivals. Meg emphasised the importance of significant relationships over the size of the youth group. Is it a case of either/or? What do you think that young people need?
3. Rob, Gary and Meg all said that the key to any youth work is "to intentionally love young people". 1 Peter 4:8 says, "Love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins." What more could we do in our homes and churches to show unconditional love?

Prayer

In the introduction, Rob said: "We're not responsible for what we don't have, but God is asking us to use what we do have." Bible characters who used what they had to honour God include the woman who anointed Jesus with perfume and the boy who gave his loaves and fish to Jesus. Pause for a moment and, if you're comfortable doing so, sit with your hands open. Ask God what He has placed in your hands that you could use to help build up the next generation.

Notes for group leaders:

Some people may have skills, artistic or practical, while others may be able to offer their time, homes or technology. In the quietness, feel free to prompt with some ideas and maybe encourage people to write them down.

Session 5: Over-busyness

The big picture

When we are pursued by constant busyness, there is no end to the things we feel must be done.

Most of us are juggling so many balls – church, work, family, leisure and relationships. Is it really possible to 'have it all, and have it all now' or are there choices that we need to make about what we do and don't do?

10 min Play video

Rob Parsons introduces the topic of over-busyness.

Pause DVD

25 min Group discussion – Over-busyness

1. Busyness seems to be a disease of epidemic proportions. Are we busier than our parents or grandparents? In what ways?
2. Rob talks about everybody having the same 1,440 minutes to spend each day. Think of an average day in your life, then draw a circle and divide it into segments representing where and how you spend the day. Are you happy with how your typical day looks? What changes would you like to make?
3. Rob reminded us that Jesus knew what to say yes to, and therefore what to say no to. Saying yes to some things means that we have to say no to others. How easy do we find it to do this? Why is that?

13 min GYKTC on the road

Play video

Katharine Hill, Philip Jinadu and Cathy Madavan discuss some of the pressures that parents, church leaders and young people face.

Pause DVD

25 min Group discussion – Managing our time

1. Ecclesiastes 4:4 says that "All toil and all achievement spring from one person's envy of another." Do we ever feel we have to be busy and have to achieve? Do we feel we have to keep getting more responsibilities as a badge of honour? Why are we so busy?
2. Are church activities for young people as important as swimming lessons? Should a date night take priority over a prayer night? As Katharine mentioned, neither church nor family should become an idol, but we should seek to do our best with the time God has given us. What would you say are your priorities as an individual or as a family? How do we make sure that our lives reflect those priorities?
3. It's good to be reminded that values are caught and not simply taught. How does what we model to young people help them to negotiate a busy culture?
4. What more could we do to help young people to manage their time well?

Prayer

Set a timer (it could be an egg-timer or a timer on a mobile phone) for two minutes. Take these two minutes to consider the priorities that God has given you. Are there some things that God would have you say 'yes' to or say 'no' to? Pray about these things.

Session 6: Killers of faith

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The big picture

In our homes and churches attitudes such as cynicism, hypocrisy and judgementalism are potent in their ability to destroy the seeds of faith in the hearts of children and young people. They are thorns that can choke children's ability to believe, to see God at work, and to experience the reality of his love and presence. While none of us is perfect, we can all keep our eyes open and make sure that we are keeping the thorns under control.

10 min

Play video

Rob Parsons introduces some of the killers of faith in young people and there is a short drama, *Faith Killers*, by Saltmine Theatre Company.

Pause DVD

25 min

Group discussion – Killers of faith

1. Read James 3:9–12. Why is it so easy for us to be negative or cynical about church or about people in the church? What is the antidote to this kind of thinking?
2. How do we encourage ourselves and our young people to express our opinions and concerns in a way that does not lead to cynicism or judgementalism?

Notes for group leaders:

For example, would the young people you know feel able to explore a subject which you personally felt uncomfortable about them discussing or questioning? How do we find a way to express opinions and preferences positively?

3. Having established that none of us is perfect, can we admit to ever falling into the trap of being one thing in public and another thing in private? How can we be more honest with other people, including our children and young people, about our weaknesses and failings. How can we learn from them?

9 min GYKTC on the road*Play video*

Katharine Hill, Andy Frost and Lucy Smith discuss some of the key reasons for young people leaving church.

*Pause DVD***25 min Group discussion****Notes for group leaders:**

Please note that these are quite 'meaty' questions, so make sure you allow enough time to cover all the points.

1. Andy stated four reasons why people leave the church: having no personal experience of God, experiencing difficulties with the church, having unanswered intellectual questions, and the problem of suffering. Which of these would you say has the greatest impact on people's faith? How can we address them?
2. Andy and Lucy talked about having a 'doubters club' in churches. Where are the safe places for us to explore the big questions (for example sexuality, science, identity, reliability of scripture, cultural pressures etc.)? Where are the safe places for our young people? Do we need more?

Notes for group leaders:

If the group feels as though there are no safe places in your church to explore big questions, it might be something to discuss with your leadership team.

3. Andy reminded us that every church has a back door. Do we know the reasons why people have left our churches? What lessons could we learn from this?

Prayer

Give everyone in the group a seed (or place a seed or a small plant on a table). Spend a few minutes in silence considering what this seed needs for it to grow and what things would hamper or prevent its growth. Continue to pray that our young people will have everything they need to nourish their growth and that the things that might choke their faith will be cut back.

Session 7: Disappointments

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The big picture

When we are very young, we believe. We believe in others, we believe the future is bright, we believe that we are special, and we easily believe in a caring God. But there are times when all of us will face disappointment – in others, in ourselves, and even in God. This session explores whether we can prepare our young people and ourselves for the disappointments that will, at some point, come into the lives of every follower of Jesus.

11 min

Play video

Rob Parsons introduces the topic of disappointment with God.

Pause DVD

25 min

Group discussion – Disappointment with others and ourselves

1. Have you ever been in a situation where you were disappointed by or let down by somebody you really respected? Have you experienced this with a Christian leader?
2. How does it impact our children and teenagers when they witness adults behaving in a disappointing way or disagreeing with each other in an unpleasant manner?
3. Look at biblical characters who have not lived up to their values – for example, David and Moses.

As adults, if we are honest about our own failures we can help our children to understand the importance of forgiveness and grace in our walk with God. What are the challenges in helping young people deal with their own failures and imperfections as they seek to live a holy life? How can the Bible help us?

12 min

GYKTC on the road

Play video

Katharine Hill, Rob Parsons and Averil Neilly discuss what happens to faith when people are disappointed with God.

Pause DVD

25 min Group discussion – Disappointment with God

1. In the book *Getting Your Kids Through Church Without Them Ending Up Hating God*, Rob says this:

“Could it be that unwittingly we are living our lives with the unspoken belief that we have a secret ‘deal’ with God? It goes something like this: ‘God, I will follow you, serve and love you, but in return you will look after me. A little pain, some persecution that doesn’t get too nasty, and minor family traumas are all accepted as part of my sanctification. But that’s it. No failing marriages, children who turn their backs on church, illnesses that kill the ones I love, or redundancies that don’t ultimately lead to a more fulfilling job.’”

How true do you think this is in general and for yourself?
2. When we feel really disappointed with life, how does it affect our relationship with God?

Why is this?
3. In this session we were reminded that we all want children and young people to think of God as a loving God and for them to be able to have a smooth journey in their faith. How do we help them to navigate the reality of disappointments in life?
4. Read Habakkuk 3:17–18. In what ways can we learn to love God *anyway*? How can we learn to rejoice in God anyway?

Prayer

Pray about some of the things that have been shared in this session. Ask God to help us to trust him, even when we do not understand.

Session 8: Getting them ready for the world

The big picture

Perhaps the hardest thing about raising young people is knowing how to let them go. All we want to do is to protect them, but fear should not be our driving force. It is, of course, right for us to protect, educate and love our young people, but this alone is not enough. We must also equip, encourage and give them a vision as they engage with the world around them.

8 min Play video

Rob Parsons introduces the idea of preparing young people for the world.

Pause DVD

25 min Group discussion – Getting them ready for the world

1. Read Matthew 6:25–27. We often worry about those we care about most. But do we sometimes worry too much? What in these verses will help us?
2. Rob talked about the pitfalls of living in a Christian ghetto. How wise is it for us to protect our children from potentially harmful or tempting situations?
3. How can we help young people to develop their strengths and let them know that we believe in them?

11 min GYKTC on the road

Play video

Katharine Hill and Mike Pilavachi discuss how best to give our young people a vision they can take hold of.

Pause DVD

25 min Group discussion – Nurturing a vision

1. Mike shared the Chinese proverb, “I hear and I forget, I see and I remember. I do and I understand.” How can we model all areas of church life to our young people and include them in it in meaningful ways?

Notes for group leaders:

When asking young people to be involved in church, do we automatically think of the safe and easy jobs? How can we really stretch them? Example might include mission trips, visiting a care home, preaching.

2. How much of what we say to young people communicates what they should not do, rather than what they could do? Can we learn from what Mike said about painting a more positive picture?
3. Proverbs 29:18 (King James Version) says: “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” Do we have a compelling vision to pass on to our young people? What would it look like to have a big vision of God’s kingdom and our role in it? Are we ready for an adventure that would be impossible without God’s intervention?

Prayer

Get a sheet of paper and some pens, and together dream some big dreams. Imagine how you and the young people you know could transform the world with God’s help. Pray about these ideas and believe that through him all things are possible.

Conclusion

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The big picture

It's our desire that *Getting Your Kids Through Church* will help the next generation reach their God-given potential. We hope that together we can release our young people into being the church of today and not just the church of the future. We're all in this together.

3 min

Play video

Rob Parsons and Katharine Hill conclude *GYKTC* and there is a short clip about the work of Care for the Family.

Pause DVD

About Care for the Family

If you found this course helpful, you may want to explore some of the other resources that Care for the Family has available for churches, parents, couples and those who have been bereaved. These include books, events, DVDs, befriending projects, articles and newsletters.

Rob Parsons' book *Getting Your Kids Through Church Without Them Ending Up Hating God*, on which the themes of this course are based, is available to purchase in the Care for the Family shop.

To find out more visit www.careforthefamily.org.uk.

Care for the Family is a registered charity and has been working to strengthen family life since 1988. Our aim is to promote strong family relationships and to help those who face family difficulties. Working throughout the UK and the Isle of Man, we provide parenting, relationship and bereavement support through our events, courses, training and volunteer network and other resources. Our work is motivated by Christian compassion and our resources and support are available to anyone, of any faith or none.



www.careforthefamily.org.uk
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