



TASTER/FRIENDS NIGHT GUIDE





INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our taster/friends night guide. We hope as leaders you will find this guide helpful in planning for, delivering and following up on your very own taster/friends night.

Why?

Looking to grow the number of children and young people you are working with? Organising a taster/friends night is a great way of increasing numbers across your Company, it's a tried and tested method and something we would encourage you to consider. Running a Taster/friends night is certainly our recommended starting point when it comes to increasing your numbers.

How?

There are a number of steps that will ensure your taster/friends night is a great success, with the first being to put time into the planning. A taster/

friends night supports those groups with existing members, by providing encouragement for them to invite their friends, as well as those looking to recruit from outside your existing membership.

It's all about setting a date for this to take place, ideally it should be 4 to 6 weeks away to give you sufficient time to properly plan and promote the event. Through this guide we will take you through an action plan to help you get ready for the night, ensure that it is a success and that you see the children and young people coming back the next week. A successful friends/taster night should provide sustainable growth for specific age groups and the Company as a whole and is something that can be repeated during the session or on an annual basis.

Please take time to read through this guide and as a staff team consider the what, how and when. You will need to be committed and put some extra time in to make sure that your taster/friends night is a success.



Let's get started, planning is your first task, and these are the key areas you should consider:

Capacity Numbers

Do you know what your capacity is? Your capacity should be the maximum number of children or young people you can accommodate, ideally set for each age group, and this should be based on things like venue, leaders, age of young people, additional needs, assessing risk, etc.

As every Company is in a different situation, don't get into comparing yourselves with those around you (whether its other BB Companies, Scout groups, etc). At this point it may be important to acknowledge that your current numbers may be some way off your capacity in some or all age groups. The next thing is to consider is the journey you will go on to increase your numbers towards the capacity you have set.

Setting Goals for Growth

We recommend setting incremental goals for growth, that are realistic, that once you hit you can review them and set yourselves a new goal (within your maximum capacity). Whilst there are no set minimum numbers per age group, we would as a base level encourage groups to be looking at a minimum of 10 members in an age group.

For example, if you have 5 young people currently,

you could set your first goal at 10 or 15 this term, and upon reaching the set goal challenge yourselves to grow further the next term. You can always adjust your goals, and you may be surprised and find that you exceed your goals. Just remember to be realistic.

Target Date

We recommend that your taster/friends night takes place on the same day and time as your normal BB weekly meeting, as it means that the children & young people coming along probably don't have any conflicting activities and are more likely to return the next week.

Whilst you may have set some targets for multiple age groups or the whole Company, we recommend focussing on one or two age groups at a time. So, decide which age group(s) you might want to focus on first, you can always move on to another age group next term.

Look to set the date of your taster/friends night about 4 to 6 weeks away, to provide you with sufficient time to plan. In doing so also consider things like half terms or other breaks, as ideally you want to make sure there is sufficient time for newcomers to embed themselves into the group and make a commitment to join before any break in your weekly meetings. Also set the date when you know, as leaders you can commit to investing sufficient time into the planning, delivery and follow-up. Investing time throughout will be the key to the overall success of the taster/friends night.

Outline Schedule for Planning

The planner below sets out what the time leading up to your taster/friends night might look like:

Week 1	Agree targets, date and outline plan
Week 2	Prepare and schedule the promotion of the night
Week 3	Detailed programme planning
Week 4	Start promoting the night (comms and invites to existing members, etc)
Week 5	Continue to promote the night, remind parents/carers and young people
Week 6	Run your Taster/Friends Night!
Follow-Up	Communicate with those that attended, inviting them along next week
Review	Bring leaders together to review targets and plan going forwards

Promoting the Night

It is important to let people know about your upcoming taster/friends night and do all you can to promote the event. A key to this is that you are inviting children or young people along to a specific night (day/time), this can be done in a number of ways.

Remember that the best recruiters are your existing members and their parents/carers as they can share their experience/recommendation which will always be more effective than any leaflet or social media post.

Some consideration should be given as to how many children or young people you are aiming to get along so that you are well prepared. You therefore may want to ask those attending to RSVP through messaging you or completing an online form, so you have an idea of your estimated numbers. It's also recommended that you promote the night using a number of different methods, so you don't put all your eggs in one basket!

Consider using a variety of different ways to promote your taster/friends night:

Printed Invitations

Hand these out to existing members and parents/carers, for them to pass on to friends and others they may have contact with.



Top Tip: Parents/carers giving out invitations at the school gate or to friends is probably going to be one of the most successful ways of recruiting.

Giving each existing member 2 or 3 invitations to give out in the weeks before the taster/friends night would be ideal. There are printed cards available to purchase from BB Supplies or you can download a digital version which can be customised and printed (see our online resources at boys-brigade.org.uk/taster-friends-night).

Communicate with Parents/Carers

In the weeks leading up to the night remember to keep reminding your parents/carers through whatever channels you have available (email, text message, WhatsApp, letter, etc).

Social Media

Make use of social media, sharing on your Company pages/accounts. If you don't have Company pages/accounts, leaders could look to share from their own accounts too. To get wider coverage look for and post in local community and family groups on platforms like Facebook. Your Church may also be able to share on its social media. Digital social media assets are available online at boys-brigade.org.uk/taster-friends-night

Top Tip: This could also be a great time to start out on social media, create an account and sharing with the wider community about what you are doing. Social media can create a great window into what you offer at BB, with parents/carers being able to see what you get up to.

Leaflets/Posters

Customisable leaflets can be found on our online resources page. You can print these yourself or order them online to be printed and delivered to you. They can be distributed to community hubs, libraries, schools and even through the letterboxes of homes in the local area. Whilst leaflets can be great, we don't recommend them being the primary method of promoting your taster/friends night.



Banner

Have you got a banner or anything else outside your meeting place letting the local community know you meet there? A 'We Meet Here' banner is available to purchase from BB Supplies, and customisable templates are available online, check out our online resources page for more information. Having a banner outside your meeting space will also help confirm to those that see your publicity elsewhere that they've got the right place.



Newsletters

Look out for opportunities to feature in printed or digital newsletters which may be in circulation in your Church, local schools and local community.

Rewarding Existing Members

Could you incentivise existing members to bring a friend through making it a competition, awarding recruitment badges to those that bring 1+ member (these are available from BB Supplies for 1, 3 or 5 members) or through a prize/certificate.



Welcoming Newcomers

As part of your planning and preparation, consider what you can do to make sure those first impressions are good. From the moment your newcomers arrive, you want to make sure everyone knows what's happening and they get a warm welcome.

Consider the following:

Banner or External Signage

Use this to indicate your group meets here. This will assist those coming along for the first time in being confident about where they are going. An internal roller banner or other signage welcoming everyone will also help in providing a warm welcome. Vinyl external banners and internal roller banners are available to purchase from BB Supplies, and you can access customisable versions which you can get printed through low-cost online printing companies.





On the Door

Allocate a leader to be on the door to say hello and be the first person to welcome newcomers. With newcomers it's a chance to introduce yourself and the Company, meet every child/young person and their parent/carer. Ideally this leader should not be involved in running the programme, so they can dedicate their time to this. The leader taking responsibility for the door may need to take some details or check people off against the register (unless someone else is assigned to do that). Remember that first impressions are important, and spending time talking to the child/young person and their parent/carer is crucial to reassuring them that BB/GA is a safe and fun place to be.

Information/Welcome Pack

As part of welcoming newcomers make sure you have some information or a welcome pack ready to give out. This could include details of what to expect at the weekly meetings, information on safeguarding, info on leaders and their training as well as other practical information like subscriptions, uniform, etc.

This is all part of reassuring parents/carers that this is a safe and fun place to be. You can find a customisable template welcome letter and other resources on our online resources page.

Registration

If you haven't captured details in advance, which is certainly something to consider doing, then you will need to capture details as children and young people arrive. On the first night you must at least take some basic details of any newcomers. Alternatively, you could ask parent/carers to complete the simple online Joining/Waiting List Form available through OBM.

You can find out more about enabling and setting up the Joining/Waiting List on OBM from our online resources page at boys-brigade.org.uk/taster-friends-night

The Joining/Waiting List form can be completed easily on a mobile device and only captures essential information about child/young person and parent/carer, full details can then be completed later. A reminder that the paper Joining Form should be completed within 4 weeks of a child/young person joining.

Alternatively, where a parent/carer is invited into OBM they can complete all details as required by the Joining Form online, including signing declarations.

Opening the Doors

Consider when you will open the doors for arrivals, we recommend that this should be 5-10 minutes before the advertised start time of the session. From that time a leader should be ready to welcome at the door and children and young people should have an arrival activity they can join in with.

The Programme

Once the children and young people are through the door, it's the programme and relationships we build with them that are so important. If you are focussed on increasing the numbers in your Company or a specific age group then the programme is going to play a major role in attracting and retaining children and young people.

You will already be running your weekly programme, and that may be in a good place, but if you are currently struggling to retain existing members and/or do not see new members coming along in the first place (and/or coming back after their first visit) we would encourage you to spend some time reviewing your programme as part of your planning. Something that we do come across is leaders saying they want to increase their numbers but are struggling to get children and young people through the door, when we hear this it's often that the focus has been on recruitment, and there has not always been enough focus on the programme and making sure the experience

when somebody does come along for the first time is a good one.

Reviewing Your Programme

As the first step we would encourage you to take a look at our sample 2-week programme and see what you think. Does the style, variety, balance look different to your normal weekly programme? Our taster programmes have been put together by leaders who have run successful taster/friends nights, they are tried and tested, so a really good starting place.



Check out our Taster Programmes for each age group at boys-brigade.org.uk/taster-friends-night

As well as thinking about the programme for the actual taster/friends night, time should also be spent considering the ongoing programme, to ensure that you retain as many of those who come along on the taster/friends night as possible. If you are changing things up don't do it as a temporary way of recruiting but make the change permanent. It's fair to say you may have to try different things and see what works for your group.

It's important to ensure that your programme includes a variety/balance of activities, including a number of different Activity Areas (Get Active, Get Adventurous, Get into the Bible, Get Creative, Get Involved, Get Learning) and the taster programmes we have put together will help you to do this.



Another area to consider is accessibility, making sure that those of all ages and abilities will be able to fully participate in the programme.

Our 2-week Taster Programmes are designed to start from your taster/friends night and provide a programme for the week following this, helping to ensure that children and young people settle in and become fully embedded as part of the group.

Leaders & Roles

As part of your planning make sure that every leader has a role to play, and that things are distributed well across the staff team.

Consider whether you need any additional leaders to help on the taster/friends night, it may be helpful to have an extra pair of hands from a leader that would normally help with another age group for example.

This will just help you manage things better, especially if you get a larger number of children and young people coming along than expected!

Equipment & Resources

Based on your planned programme you should ensure that you have everything you need in place. This could be printed sheets, items that need to be purchased, or collected, so you have sufficient for the numbers you are expecting on the night.

Remember on your taster/friends night to over compensate, so you can welcome and accommodate all those coming along (of course, as long as it is safe to do so, if you get an unprecedented response!).

Action Plan

We have designed an action plan with a simple check list approach, which we hope will support you in ensuring you have considered everything you need to as you work towards running your taster/friends night.

Check out the Action Plan template at boys-brigade.org.uk/taster-friends-night



ON THE NIGHT

With all the planning taken care of, your focus should now be on delivering the actual taster/friends night. Consider the following key aspects to help ensure everything goes smoothly.

Setting Up

Make sure you have setup and prepared as much as possible before opening the doors. Where you can set up activities in different spaces across your meeting space, for example tables and craft all set up in another room, enabling the hall to be available for games etc without gaps in the programme for setting up and packing away will really help. Whilst this will be extra time leaders are committing we know it makes all the difference later on. Also make sure all the equipment is out and in the right places, so you are ready to go when it comes to that part of the programme.

Leader Arrivals & Briefing

You will need some of the team to assist in setting up on the night and we suggest this should be around 30 to 60 minutes before you open the doors. If you don't need everyone for this, ask all other leaders to arrive at least 10-15 minutes before the start of the session. During this time schedule in 5 minutes or so to gather as leaders, a time to make sure everyone knows what they are doing and do any final preparation, it's also an opportunity to pray together.

Opening the Doors

Once you open the doors make sure you have everything in place to provide a warm welcome (see 'Welcoming Newcomers' above). Once the children and young people arrive, you should have an arrival activity they can easily join in with. This is a really important part of the night as it is their first experience, so make sure it is engaging and that leaders are engaging with everyone especially the newcomers.

It's a continued opportunity to get to know them, so encourage leaders to ask questions and let the children and young people tell you about themselves (i.e. what school they go to, family, their favourite food, sport or hobby). This will really help to start building relationships and it will also help settle newcomers into the group.

During this time also encourage those that don't know each other to say hi and introduce themselves. Linked to this you could ask some existing members (perhaps older members of the group) to buddy up and/or make a special effort to welcome newcomers.

An arrival activity can be a range of activities, but should be something individuals can easily join in whether they are the first or last to arrive. The arrival activity should generally run from the moment you open the doors, until you start the main programme, maybe 5 minutes into the start time. There are suggestions for arrival activities in our taster programmes.

Programme Resources: You can find 100's of activity sheets and ideas on our Programme Hub and Planning Tools. Our Activity Sheets provide a range of puzzles, colouring and other types of activity sheets which can be printed and used as arrival activities.

Some parents/carers may ask about staying to observe the session, you should consider how you want to deal with this in advance.

There is a balance to this providing reassurance for the parent/carer and potential issues which could be caused in having multiple parents/carers trying to observe the programme. This will all be about whether there is space for them to do this, if leaders can supervise (as they should not be left unsupervised with the group or be involved in a hands-on way). Consider those with additional needs that may need that reassurance and/or support.

Delivering the Programme

Having planned and prepared your programme its now all about the delivery, the actual execution of it and how it comes across to the children and young people. Being as prepared as possible in terms of your planning and setup will mean you can focus on the delivery of the programme and engaging with the group.

Some key things to consider in delivery of the programme:

- ✓ **Keep the programme moving** throughout the evening, avoid gaps with no activity or having to do lots of setting up or packing away.
- ✓ Remember to **explain all activities clearly**, considering that newcomers to the group will not know where or how to do certain things.
- ✓ **Check in with newcomers**, making sure they are doing OK, encouraging them, etc.
- ✓ Be **positive & enthusiastic** – keep a smile on your face!
- ✓ For younger age groups, **something to take home** is good (reminder of BB when they go home).

Departures

At the end of the evening, as with arrivals, a leader should be allocated to be on the door. This role will be much of the same, and should include:

- ✓ **First Night Certificates** are available to download/print and give out to young people as they leave, providing something which acknowledges their first night at BB.
- ✓ **Speaking to young people** as they leave – asking if they enjoyed themselves, what the best thing they did tonight was and importantly that you hope to see them next week.
- ✓ **Engaging with parents/carers** in a similar way, but also making sure you share something of what they got up to during the night. If possible mention specific things by name so the parents/carers can see that you have got to know them.

Top Tip: Open the doors 5 minutes before the end if possible, the leader can then spend some time engaging with parents/carers before they come out. A great opportunity to answer any questions.

- ✓ Tell the young people and their parents/carers **what's to come next week**, and other opportunities that are beyond that including trips, camps, etc.
- ✓ **Joining Form given out or to expect an email invitation into OBM** to complete details, etc. Also share other information if you didn't do so on arrival like subscriptions, etc.
- ✓ Children and young people will often be keen to **get their uniform**, so discuss that and provide an opportunity to buy uniform. Do you stock uniform or order as you need to, it can be helpful to have a stock of uniform so they can get it there and then.

Debrief

Once all the children and young people have departed, it's a great opportunity to gather as leaders and have a short debrief. How did things go? What do we need to do before next week, etc. It might be possible to do this whilst you are doing some of the packing away and tidying up.



AFTER THE NIGHT

It's hopefully been a great night with some new faces and as leaders you are all feeling good and excited for the future. There's still some work to do to make sure all the effort put in so far is not lost, following up and making sure next week is just as good is really important.

In doing so we would encourage you to consider the following key areas.

Communication with Newcomers

Consider how you will follow up with all those that came along that night, a quick message the next day could be a great way of get some engagement from parents/carers. Don't forget to share on social media if that is something you do (make sure you have checked photo consent first though). You should also send a reminder to parents/carers a day or two before next week's meeting just as a prompt, hopefully you will get a response and therefore an expectation of who is coming back, etc.

Recruits from the Recruits

It is often the case that newcomers will bring someone else along in the weeks after they first started coming along.

Be ready for this, as you can easily find that you get different friendships groups and once one comes along, others may well follow. So you could find even more children and young people come along in weeks 2 to 4 than they did on the taster/friends night itself.

Future Weeks

As you move on to future weeks, consider:

- ✓ How do you continue to ensure the programme is engaging? After you have used the Taster Programme, remember there are hundreds of activities available through the Programme Hub or Programme Planning Tools. Go to boys-brigade.org.uk/programme
- ✓ Think about how you will continue to build relationships with parents/carers and young people. Try and remember the names of the children and young people, and continue to engage with parents/carers.
- ✓ Recognise existing members who have brought a friend along through awarding Bronze/Silver/Gold Recruitment Badges (available through BB Supplies), giving a prize/gift and/or a certificate. It might prompt them into thinking about another friend they could invite.
- ✓ Do any of your newcomers have younger or older siblings that might want to come along to another age group? Make sure you share details of other age groups.
- ✓ If anyone hasn't come back try and follow up with them to find out why, if things haven't worked it's important you understand why so that you can look to try something different going forward. Equally, it's not going to be for everyone, so don't be downhearted if not everyone comes back the following week.

Review Targets/Goals

Don't forget to review progress towards your target and capacity numbers for the group. How did things go? Do you need to change or set another

target/goal? Will you run another taster/friends night next term or for another age group?

Share Your Success

If you have the opportunity to share your success and what you have learnt with others, it may be with leaders from another age group in your Company, or with leaders from another Company in your Battalion or close-by. Help to encourage others if you can, and we hope as leaders you will feel enthusiastic about what you have achieved and can keep up the momentum.

Ways of doing this could be posting on your own social media channels, sharing on BB Leaders Facebook Group or emailing development@boys-brigade.org.uk

Support

The BBHQ Staff Team is available to provide you with support and encouragement, so please do get in touch with us on **0300 303 4454** or by email at development@boys-brigade.org.uk if we can help in any way.

We would also encourage you to take a look at other resources and links shared in this guide, but you should also be able to find everything on our website at boys-brigade.org.uk





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