GUIDE

Should VBS shirts have kids' names on them? What to print instead

Why kids' VBS shirts should keep names off the outside, what child safety guidance says about visible names, and what to print instead: crew colors, symbols and leader roles.

November 19, 2026 · 4 minute read

Every spring, someone on the VBS committee asks whether each child's name could go on the back of their shirt. It sounds like a warm, personal touch. The stronger plan keeps names off the outside of kids' shirts and lets the shirt name the group, not the child. Here is why, and what to print instead.

Should a child's name be printed on a VBS shirt?

A child's name should stay off the outside of a VBS shirt. Child protection guidance advises against visible names on children's clothing and belongings, because a stranger who reads a child's name can use it to sound like someone the child already knows. The Youth Protection Program at the University of Texas at Austin makes this point in its 2021 guidance on labeling children's items, warning that a visible name can place a child in danger when strangers and potential predators can read it. The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children has given parents the same advice in back-to-school safety coverage: do not label jackets, backpacks or other items on the outside with a child's name or nickname.

Why does this matter more for a shirt than for a name tag?

A name tag stays at church. A VBS shirt goes home. As the VBS T-Shirts planning guide notes, kids keep wearing VBS shirts long after the week is over. That is the point of a good design: the shirt shows up at the park, the pool, the grocery store and summer camp, carrying the church's

name and theme everywhere the child goes. A printed name would travel to all those places too, in front of adults no one at church has ever screened. The shirt keeps working for months, so whatever is printed on it should be something you are glad to have out in public for months.

How do leaders know who is who without names on shirts?

Leaders know who is who through the systems built for that job: registration, check-in and pickup. GuideStone's VBS planning tips recommend a registration form that lists food allergies, emergency contacts and who is authorized to pick up each child, then checking photo ID against that list when an adult arrives at pickup. Lifeway's list of 46 security tips for VBS describes churches using color-coded name tags in plastic sleeves, claim tickets for parents and security bracelets matched to group colors.

Name tags can be collected at pickup each day and handed back at check-in the next morning, so the child's name never leaves the building. The shirt has a different job. It shows which group a child belongs to and which adults are in charge, and that is a group signal. It works without anyone's name on it.

What should go on a kids' VBS shirt instead of a name?

Print what helps the week run and what the church wants seen all summer:

- **The theme artwork and VBS title**, so the shirt matches the decorations, music and photos.
- **The church name and the year**, so every time the shirt is worn it points back to your church.
- **A crew marker**: a shirt color, a crew name, a number or a symbol. One idea in Lifeway's security list is to assign an animal to each age group and split each group into colors that match the security bracelets. An animal or symbol on the sleeve gives a pre-reader something to recognize without printing anything personal.

When kids need to find their own shirt, after a decorating day or at the end of a messy craft, write the name inside, on the neck label or inside hem, with a fabric marker. Parents can still tell shirts apart, and nothing personal shows when the shirt is worn.

Can leader and volunteer shirts carry names?

Adult shirts are a different case, and the most useful words on them name a role. Lifeway's security list suggests that adult volunteers wear their VBS shirts every day and that the security team wear shirts reading SECURITY. Words like Crew Leader, Staff or Ask Me on the back tell a

lost child exactly whom to approach, which is the opposite of the risk a name on a child's shirt creates. VBS T-Shirts has leader shirt designs that pair with the kids' design, so the whole team matches the theme while standing out from the children.

Does leaving names off make the order easier?

Leaving names off makes the order much easier. A named shirt belongs to exactly one child: it has to be spelled right, sorted and matched on the first morning, and the walk-in who registers Monday at 8:45 has no shirt waiting. Shirts printed by design, color and size can be handed out from labeled boxes, and late registrants get one from the extras on day one, the same as everyone else.

How does VBS T-Shirts handle crew names and role text?

Every VBS T-Shirts design can be changed: any text, any colors, elements added or removed. A designer can add crew names, group symbols or role words like Crew Leader to the theme artwork, and nothing prints until you approve the design. Request a custom design or call 888-980-4827, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm Pacific.

VBS T-Shirts 888-980-4827 vbstshirts.com

VBS T-Shirts designs custom Vacation Bible School shirts for every VBS theme, plus leader and volunteer shirts.