

PART TWO

Growing God's Love



GROWING GOD'S LOVE IN OUR CHILDREN

We SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS believe it is our God-given right and parental duty to pass on our Christian faith to our children, bringing them up in the “nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4, KJV). This responsibility is emphasized repeatedly throughout Scripture. From Moses’ command about God’s laws, “Impress them on your children” (Deut. 6:7), to Paul’s admonition to “bring [children] up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4), the Bible is clear on this subject.

Raising children to develop a sincere and personal faith in Jesus Christ, equipping them to recognize and celebrate the presence of God in their lives, and modeling how to live in grateful response to God’s love and grace requires intentional teaching and nurturing. Knowing God is more than going to Sabbath school regularly, memorizing major Bible texts, or even attending church schools. Children need to know God as a loving God and understand the effects of sin and other fundamental beliefs of the Bible. However, many children easily misunderstand theological concepts. Christian authors Donna Habenicht and Larry Burton suggest the following reasons for such misunderstandings:¹

1. Theological concepts are often abstract and symbolic, and thus difficult to understand. If you ask kindergarteners or primaries to tell you how Jesus is “the bright and morning star” or what it means that “Jesus wants me for a sunbeam,” you might be surprised at their responses.
2. Children experience mental over-stimulation because too much television-watching and other mass media input clutter their minds, making it difficult for them to organize or assimilate ideas.
3. Teachers and parents sometimes place too much emphasis on memorization of Bible verses and stories without explaining the concepts they teach. Children may repeat the words mechanically, but have no idea what the verses mean.
4. Children also pick up a great deal of misinformation from their friends who probably don’t understand spiritual concepts either.
5. Children sometimes put in a word they know with unfamiliar words from the Bible and soon come up with incorrect ideas. One little boy prayed, “Give us this steak and daily bread, and forgive us our mattresses.”

So parents have the responsibility to help their children understand the fundamental beliefs of their church and learn how these beliefs can be lived out in their daily lives as they develop a closer relationship with Jesus. It must begin in a child’s early years, for this period includes the most “impressionable” time for knowing Jesus as their Friend.

Ellen G. White wrote: “It is God’s design that even the children and youth shall understand intelligently what God requires, that they may distinguish between righteousness and sin, between obedience and disobedience.”²

She also advised: “These things should be explained to the children in simple language, easy to be understood; and as they grow in years, the lessons imparted should be suited to their increasing capacity, until the foundations of truth have been laid broad and deep.”³

Yes, while young children don’t have the mental ability to understand theological ideas and doctrines as adults can, they are building a foundation for later theological understanding. Godly parents will do all they can to teach, explain, and provide interesting experiences that will help children understand theological concepts and Christian doctrines.

Well-known evangelist Billy Graham urges parents that “The only way to provide the right home for our children is to put the Lord above them, and fully instruct them in the ways of the Lord.”

Teaching the Fundamental Beliefs

So how do we go about teaching children our church's fundamental beliefs? How do we help them learn correct theological ideas? Here are a few suggestions. Remember, good teaching utilizes variety and interactive involvement.

1. Tell stories every chance you get. Children love stories—stories from the Bible, stories about the history of the Adventist Church, stories of missionary heroes, and others. Parents can help children understand the doctrines and beliefs of the church through stories.

One father, trying to teach a lesson about God's love and His great sacrifice of His Son for all of us, told the story of the watchman of a drawbridge whose little son had missed a step and was hanging over one side of the bridge. Suddenly, he heard the sound of the express train approaching the bridge at great speed. The father had to decide whether he should run up the tower to close up the bridge in order to save the lives of 400 passengers on the express train, or run to save his son. Finally, with tears in his eyes, he decided to close the bridge, leaving his little boy on the track to be crushed by the oncoming train.

After such a powerful story (that may not be suitable for all ages), don't stop there. Talk to your children and debrief them. Ask them questions, such as, "Is it easy to make such a sacrifice?" "Would you be able to sacrifice something you love dearly?" This is an excellent moment to talk about God's sacrifice of His Son and His plan of salvation.

Parents can also share their own from-the-heart faith story with their children. Imagine the impact on a child who listens to his dad telling how he became a Christian. A personal testimony carries considerable weight. When you share your journey to faith, you illustrate to your children that Jesus changes real people's lives today, not just the lives of people in Bible times. You can take this opportunity to talk about sin and the great controversy between good and evil, between Jesus and Satan. This is also a great moment for Dad to clarify what it means to be a Christian and encourage his child to have a relationship with Jesus.

2. Use object lessons and everyday events to teach Bible truths. Jesus used lots of parables and daily events familiar to people when explaining the truths of His kingdom. When we use objects children can understand, and illustrations familiar to them, they can identify with them and abstract concepts become concrete, meaningful, and better understood.

If you're trying to explain the doctrine of the Trinity, show them an egg and ask them to break it open to look at its composition. Ask them, "How many parts make up this egg?" Talk about the shell, the yolk, and the white and how they form one unit.

Or you may give children three colored strands of yarn—red, yellow, and blue. Ask them to braid them together. The three colors blend together to form a complete braid. Explain that the red piece of yarn is like God the Father, who loves us and forgives our sins; the yellow color is like God the Son, who created the world and died on the cross to save each one of us; and the blue is like God the Holy Spirit, who comforts us when we are discouraged and helps us enjoy a happy life by teaching us right from wrong. Three different strands, but they work together as one whole.

If a loved one or a friend of the family passes away, seize this opportunity to explain to your child about death as taught in the Bible.

3. Use art, music, or role-playing to teach religious concepts. Younger children can grasp religious concepts better through art, music, or role-playing than through words alone. Ask your children to draw a picture of the Bible story and then tell you about it. You may be surprised by their interpretations. Take the opportunity to explain the doctrine as well as correct misconceptions. Psychologist Habenicht found that more than one child has drawn Adam and Eve leaving the Garden of Eden in a car driven by an angel or Jesus. When you say "Adam and Eve were driven out of their beautiful garden," you set up young children for this kind of

misconception. Watch your words carefully, especially when teaching preschool children and young primaries.

You can also teach children songs that illustrate the Bible's doctrines. When learning about Creation, children can sing, "My God Is So Great," "The Rainbow," "All Things Bright and Beautiful," and others. Or children can role-play Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit and then having to leave the Garden of Eden when they disobeyed God. Take time to explain that sin is disobeying God and His rules. Give the children an opportunity to explain in their own words what they have learned.

4. Provide lots of hands-on experiences. Living as a disciple of Jesus means following Jesus' example. When children participate in hands-on ministries such as preparing food baskets for the needy in their community or packing clothes for flood victims, they discover the true meaning of compassion for others and the joy of self-giving as taught by Jesus. Such experiences provide children a deeper understanding of our belief about genuine Christian behavior and service to others.

5. Involve children in learning activities. Getting older children and teens involved in lots of activities is another effective way of teaching them the beliefs of the church. For example, you could cut newspaper clippings of terrible events such as the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, or the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and pass them out to children. Have children read the headlines and the brief stories and then discuss them. Allow children and teens to ask questions and lead them to explore what they know of these disasters and how they fit into the big picture of the great controversy between God and Satan. Relate these events to the promise of a better home with Jesus in heaven.

To help children understand the doctrine of spiritual gifts, get them to fill out a short spiritual gifts inventory. Then divide them into groups of two to four and ask them to share the results with one another. Discuss and help children explore and discover how they can use the gifts they have.

To teach the doctrine "Growing in Christ," connect children with God through prayer. Involve children and teens in different types of prayer activities: popcorn prayers, musical prayers, Scripture prayers, and prayer letters. These activities help to enhance and broaden their prayer experiences.

6. Use videos, DVDs, and other audiovisual resources. As the old adage says: "A picture is worth a thousand words." Particularly for this generation, children seem to be captivated by the screen, whether it's television, computers, or any number of handheld gaming or video devices. Parents can show a DVD or a short video that explains certain doctrines of the church. For instance, after seeing a video on caring for the earth and the environment, children and teens can discuss what it means to be a good steward for God. They can be led to discover the roles they can play in managing their money, talents, time, the environment, etc. Never miss the opportunity to debrief with the children after watching a video or a film. Such reflection and interpretation help youngsters understand important biblical truths.

Yes, life is busy. Families have complex schedules. The constant cry is "I don't have the time!" But connecting children to God should be our priority. We may not be able to "find the time" for this important task, but we can "make time" for connecting our children to God, the powerhouse of the universe, the God who loves them so much that He was willing to sacrifice His Son for them.

Let's be intentional in teaching our children to love and adore God. Let's help them understand biblical truths as expressed in the fundamental beliefs of our church, for nothing is more thrilling than seeing our children accept Jesus and continue to grow spiritually.

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TIME TO REFLECT

1. What were some of the questions, as a child, you would have liked to ask God?
2. What, or who, was the most helpful in your journey towards understanding more about God?
3. Were all your questions answered or do you still look for ways to learn about God?
4. Why is it important to understand how children develop? How should this reflect in the ways we treat children in church?
5. How can you help children explore their faith and find answers to their questions about God?
6. What "tools" in this section of the manual can help you encourage children to trust God?

LEARN MORE

- *How to Help Your Child Really Love Jesus*, by D Habenicht. Publisher, Review & Herald Publishing Association.
- *Teaching the Faith: An Essential Guide for Building Faith-shaped Kids*, by Donna Habenicht and Larry Burton. Publisher, Review & Herald Publishing Association
- *Child Guidance*, by E G White. Publisher, Review & Herald Publishing Association.
- *Testimonies for the Church*, by E G White. Pacific Press Publishing Association.
- Bible study materials are in PART FIVE – Resources.
- Teaching Resources
 - Children's Sabbath School Teachers' resources
<http://childmin.com/SS/index.html>
 - Mission stories and resources
<http://www.adventistmission.org/>
 - Children's Sabbath School Lessons
www.adventist.org then click on: Directories; Directory of General Conference Organisations; Children's Ministries; Links; Sabbath School Department
 - Art and craft resources and ideas for Children's Sabbath School
<http://childmin.com/Tools/index.html>
 - Crafts, puzzles and links to provide fun learning resources for almost every Bible story
<http://www.mssscrafts.com/>
 - Archive of ideas and activities
www.lightlive.org

¹Donna Habenicht and Larry Burton, *Teaching the Faith: An Essential Guide for Building Faith-shaped Kids*, Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2004.

²*Child Guidance*, E G White. Review & Herald Pub Ass, p. 81.

³*Testimonies for the Church*, E G White. Pacific Press Pub Ass, vol. 5, p. 330.

CHILD DEVELOPMENT AGES 0-14

UNDERSTANDING THE BEGINNER CHILD – 0-2 YEARS

Physical development:

- Grows very fast – by the time a child is two they are roughly half their adult height.
- Is busy learning how to control their body – loves to practise sitting, crawling, walking, waving, jumping and running.
- Can sing some simple songs, but may prefer listening to other people singing songs to them.

Needs:

- To have a variety of different actions to copy that includes moving around the room in different ways.
- To have interesting, relevant, clean and safe things to hold and explore during the session.
- To have opportunities for following simple and clear instructions such as where to place the objects they are holding, or what to do with them.
- To have activities during songs and stories so that the children stay connected to what is being said, even if they don't fully understand everything.
- To have stable, easy-to-clean toddler chairs which they can access freely on their own.

Intellectual development:

- Learn by copying adults and other children around them.
- Learn through exploring their world with all five senses – smell, taste, touch, hearing and sight.
- Have a very short attention span – so activities need to be changed every five minutes or so.
- Have a limited vocabulary, but understand more words than they can say.
- Believe whatever an adult says.
- Understand pictures of familiar things.
- Do not understand concepts of time and numbers.
- Love rhythm and rhyme and repetitive stories.

Needs:

- Teachers and parents need to demonstrate to the children whatever they are expected to do.
- To have a repetitive routine so that they can:
 - anticipate your responses
 - know what they are expected to do
 - learn about the rhythm of communication in an activity
 - learn to feel safe in a predictable setting

Repetition is a vital component for Beginner children. They need the same finger plays, songs and routines week after week. Some teachers make the mistake of wanting to provide a varied programme each week, because they think the parents will be bored, but this is a class for very young children, not the parents, and their needs must come first.

- To have as many senses stimulated as possible. Bring interesting real objects to the class wherever possible, that can appeal to the child's senses.
- To be given clear instructions about what to do. Use positive instructions such as 'Do this' rather than confusing negative instructions such as 'Don't do that'. Young children tend not to hear or understand a negative instruction - they focus on the main words in the sentence. Giving a clear positive instruction, one point at a time, shows respect for the child and gives them time to understand what you are asking them to do.
- To hear simple words and short stories about familiar things, such as families and homes. A story need only be 3-4 minutes long.

Social and emotional development:

- Beginners like adult attention and are eager to please teachers and parents.

- Young children may be shy around strangers and afraid of unfamiliar objects.
- They are self-centred and may not yet understand how their behaviour affects other people.
- They need to feel safe.
- They are unable to share spontaneously – if you do a sharing activity, make sure you have two identical items so that children feel ‘safer’ giving one away.
- They need consistent, loving discipline – being gently shown the right thing to do.
- They like to work at their own pace and don’t like to be hurried, so be prepared to show your love for them by being patient.

Needs:

- To be allowed to participate when they feel ready, without pressure or force.
- To have parents around in order to feel safe and to help manage their behaviour and emotional needs.
- To experience a warm and accepting atmosphere that helps him or her to have a good feeling about whatever happens in the church, class or group.
- To experience as little change as possible – only make one or two small changes to the programme or room each week.

Moral and Spiritual Development

- Anything pleasant is good and unpleasant is bad – no sense of right or wrong.
- Want to please parents and other significant adults.
- Learn about love, trust and obedience.
- Learn to say ‘No!’
- Experience awe and wonder in the later part of this age group.

Needs:

- To be loved and to know that adults can be trusted, as this is the very foundation of their love and trust in God. If the child is harmed, let down, feels alone or abandoned, this can have a significant impact on future relationships with others and with God. So if the child has any experiences like this, even accidentally, they need lots of love, comfort and reassurance as soon as possible.
- To have opportunities to obey and be rewarded for obeying immediately, so that obeying is associated with feeling good.
- To be given simple choices, when old enough, between two different possibilities, as this may reduce the ‘No’s!
- To have opportunities to experience beautiful things in nature, and to learn to love God’s creation.

Other practicalities:

- Encourage parents to stay with children in the Beginner Class. You will not be able to teach the class effectively if you are managing several lively toddlers on your own. Some teachers have a play time for the children at the end of the class so that parents can have a few moments of spiritual stimulation with other adults.
- Provide songs written in clear words on a flip chart for the parents to use.
- If possible, provide CDs of the music used in the group or class for parents to take home and play to the children during the week so that everyone is familiar with the songs you are using.
- If you are the Sabbath School teacher, take time to read the introduction to your lesson quarterly which often has very useful suggestions.
- Invest in quality materials for this class, and store them in clear boxes labelled with the Bible story name and quarter when it is used.
- Invite older members/teens to help you make visual aids and find resources for this age group.
- Purchase a pack of activity sheets for the Beginners from your Mission, Conference or Union. These are available for a small cost and include a different, simple activity for each week of the lesson cycle. All you need to do is copy one set per child onto paper or thin card, depending on the activity.

UNDERSTANDING THE KINDERGARTEN CHILD – 3-5 YEARS

Physical development:

- The Kindergarten child is still growing very fast.
- Likes to practice new physical skills and is very active and energetic.
- Long-sighted – needs to look at large, bright pictures and books.
- Is learning how to sing and enjoys fun action songs.

Needs:

- To have plenty of movement built into the programme.
- To have time for fine motor skill development (finger plays and crafts) as well as gross motor skills (large movements involving the whole body such as mime, moving around the room, and large actions to lively songs).
- To have clear, bright illustrations and decorations which are at a comfortable height for them to see.
- To have a good balance of movement and activity with quiet, reflective and listening times. Alternate between the two and be aware of signs that children need to move around. Some children that may seem disruptive, are letting you know they need to be more active, so use that knowledge and build it into your programme.

Intellectual development:

- They enjoy talking and chattering.
- Need clear boundaries and guidelines for behaviour. Be clear, specific and give simple positive commands ('Do this' rather than 'Don't do that'.)
- Memorise quickly, but forget easily too!
- Believe whatever they are told and understand things very literally.
- Are easily distracted and need to think of one thing at a time.
- Are still self-centred but are beginning to learn how to be kind, helpful and obedient.
- Enjoy multi-sensory learning.

Needs:

- Give children time to talk about the highs and lows of their week.
- Let children of this age work in small groups with an adult helper.
- Encourage them to memorise the verses, and check they understand what they are learning. Don't be too hard on them if they forget. Provide helpful prompts such as pictures.
- Involve as many senses as possible in every learning activity. The more senses used, the more the child will learn and remember.
- Give only one clear instruction at a time. Break down the task into simple steps and only give the next instruction when the child is ready for it. Have a sample of the finished product so that the children know what they are trying to make.
- Be ready to answer their questions about faith and God in simple ways. Think through your answers from their perspective and be careful when talking about death as a sleep. Some children have been afraid to go to bed in case they die. Tell them that death is a very special kind of sleep where we don't breathe or dream, and only Jesus can wake us up. Be clear that it is not like going to bed, or like the sleep that they know as children.
- Use lots of stories, but finish them in the session as continued stories will be frustrating for them, and they will forget the important details.
- Kindergarten children don't have a strong concept of time, so they don't understand if you try to explain which Bible story came before another. That's irrelevant to them. Wait till they are in the Primary class before spending too much time on this.

Social and emotional development:

- Starting to widen their social network and make friends outside of their family, at playgroups and nursery as well as preschool.
- Like to copy others, especially adults, teachers and older children.
- Want to please the adults in their world.
- Get excited easily.
- May want to be the centre of attention, or may be very shy.
- Need to feel safe and to be reassured if things seem threatening or uncertain.
- Need plenty of love and thoughtful, loving, grace-filled discipline.

Needs:

- To begin learning how to share and take turns.
- To have opportunities to mimic positive adult behaviour – dressing up as Bible characters and missionaries.
- To experience different cultures and places through dressing up and tasting different foods or making simple crafts. They cannot understand maps, but they can understand different clothes, food, homes etc, as they can relate that to their own experience.
- To have a calm atmosphere in the room, and to have calm teachers. Have a simple sign or sound when the children are getting too noisy. One teacher stops talking and puts her finger on her lips until everyone is quiet again. Another shakes a tambourine and the children sit quietly and put their hands in their laps.
- To know where they can find whatever they need to use in the session.
- To have two or three simple rules such as:
 1. Obey the teacher
 2. Be kind to the other children
 3. Be quiet and listen when other people are talking
- To have a clear and simple response when they disobey the rules. If possible, have an adult helper who can be with the child and help them to follow the rules. Often rules are broken at this age because a child doesn't really understand what they are being asked to do, so punishment can be confusing and unhelpful.
- To feel loved and safe all the time. Young children can easily be hurt if you rush them, misunderstand them, or yell at them, and they may not want to come back. Your love for them helps them to connect their experience at church with a loving God who cares deeply for them.
- Welcome the children into your group each session, and say good bye to each child personally. Send a card saying you missed them as soon as you can if they miss attending.

Moral and spiritual development:

- Want to please parents and adults and will obey to avoid punishment or pain. Things are 'bad' if they hurt and 'good' if they feel nice.
- Still able to be filled with wonder at even tiny things in nature.
- Are beginning to be aware of the loving community of the church and may be very trusting of others.
- Copy adults and will pretend to sing and preach. Like to pray short and simple prayers.
- Ask 'Why?'

Needs:

- To have thoughtful discipline that helps encourage positive behaviour. Consider all the developmental information about this age group when deciding if the child has really disobeyed, or just misunderstood, forgotten, or is not yet physically able to do what you asked.

- To have plenty of opportunities to go outside and see beautiful natural things. Bring flowers and animals for the children to see, and help them to notice the intricate details of petals, bark, vegetables, and little creatures.
- To be protected and safe in the church – be sure you have a thorough child protection policy and that it is enforced. Don't ever think that a child will be safe from predators in a church. Always be vigilant.
- To have opportunities to pray in the group if they want to, but not to be pressured to do so.
- To have their simple questions answered simply in a way they can understand. Always check that they have understood your answer by asking them to explain what you have said. Many children have been puzzled for years by misunderstanding what an adult has said to them! Think how a child hears Holy Ghost (Holey Ghost) or imagines being washed in the blood of a lamb!

Things to consider:

- The story of Jesus' birth fills small children with wonder and it is especially good if they can be involved in a nativity play at a time that suits your church community. Although we may not support all that the world describes as Christmas, we can take this opportunity to make a difference by helping communities understand the truth about Jesus' birth. Friends and relatives who may not normally come to church may come along to see a children's nativity. Being involved with a play of this kind helps the Bible to come alive for kindergarten children and helps them to fall in love with the Jesus who was once a child like them.
- Plan an outing once a year, with the families of kindergarten children, to learn more about creation – such as going to a farm, aquarium, zoo, forest or garden.
- Create a learning station in your class room where children can explore natural objects, and Bible stories in creative ways, or learn new ways to play that they find enjoyable.

UNDERSTANDING THE PRIMARY CHILD – 6-9 YEARS

Physical development:

- Likes to practise new physical skills and is very active and energetic.
- Still long-sighted and needs clear words and pictures to help them see things comfortably.
- Beginning to develop special skills, such as music, art and sport, and enjoys practicing and performing these skills.
- Able to sing quite well.
- Developing much finer hand-eye coordination for crafts and writing, etc.

Needs:

- To have plenty of movement built into the programme. Boys, especially, seem to need lots of whole body actions. For example – develop a multiple choice quiz and have children run to the corner that represents their response, or move in a different way depending on their response (stretch up high for 'yes' and bend down low for 'no')
- Use the letters and fonts used in school when writing out things for the children to read.
- Use lots of songs, learn new ones and keep up to date with the latest Christian songs for children, many of which are excellent. Invest in DVDs that have the words and actions on the screen if you are not so musical yourself. Paul Field, Ishmael and Doug Horley are some of the best names in the UK Christian children's music world.

Intellectual development:

- Curious.
- Thinking literally and needing pictures and objects to help them understand what is being taught.
- Is beginning to develop a preferred learning mode – visual, verbal or kinaesthetic (touch and movement).
- Thinks by doing things – actions help them to understand the lessons better.
- Beginning to read and likes stories - but be aware that a child may have reading difficulties and be sensitive to their needs.
- Beginning to enjoy group discussions.
- Good at memorising
- Still finding it hard to comprehend historical sequence. A Bible Time chart may be helpful – these are available from the Children's Ministries departments and have a time line strip of the Bible with characters that can be added in the correct places as you tell their story.

Needs:

- Still needs a very active lesson time. Children at school are used to moving around in the class and exploring things for themselves, and this needs to be incorporated into Sabbath School too.
- The more a child does, the more he or she will learn. They will soon forget *what you said*, but they will remember *what they did*.
- Tell good stories and give the children time to discuss the characters and the choices they made. A well-told instalment story, told chapter by chapter, can be a good attention-getter and encourage children to return each week.
- Make the most of their memories and encourage them to memorise key passages by using fun approaches. Contact the ABC or look on www.adventsource.org for books filled with fun ideas for helping children to memorise verses.
- Fairness is important – encourage the children to help you develop the best rules and consequences for your group and to write them out on attractive posters.

Social and emotional development:

- Want to interact with others and special friends are important, but need help developing appropriate social skills.
- Want to take part in meaningful activity and to try things out for themselves.
- Need plenty of love and thoughtful, loving, grace-filled discipline, but is also easily hurt and offended.
- Respect authority and long for adult approval and affection.
- Enjoy non-competitive group activities – crafts, non-competitive quizzes, re-enacting stories, etc.
- Are becoming more self-aware and are motivated by having their accomplishments recognised and by their own individual goals.
- Are easily excited.
- Are developing sympathy for others and a desire to help other people.

Needs:

- To feel welcomed and wanted. Welcome the children into your group each session, and say good bye to each child personally. Send a card saying you missed them as soon as you can if they don't attend.
- To have caring adults who will help them to form good friendships and to work together on a group project.
- To have opportunities to help others directly, and be involved in mission and outreach projects.
- To be free from the pressure of competition and to have their own attendance devices rather than a large class chart, which can feel threatening.
- To have their work valued and displayed.
- To have a varied programme moving from active phases to quieter periods.
- To know that they are loved by you and God no matter what they look like or what they can do – to experience unconditional love and acceptance that can help them to develop a Godly self-confidence.
- To be disciplined in private, in a respectful manner.
- To have their feelings valued and to experience teachers and parents who are willing to apologise to the child and ask for forgiveness when necessary.

Moral and spiritual development:

- Obey rules for rewards, and acts to please other people.
- Have a strong sense of fairness.
- Have a vivid imagination.
- Are beginning to do things on their own initiative.
- Ask 'Why?' and want to know the answers to religious questions.
- Take stories literally and believe whatever adults say. Is still thinking concretely.
- Begin to appreciate heroes and want to be heroes too.
- Beginning to appreciate self-esteem and enjoy feeling good about doing something well, even if no-one else notices.
- **By the age of nine most children have made subconscious decisions that will shape the course of their lives. They will be deciding whether church or God is important to them, so it is very important that anything to do with church is welcoming, interesting, and relevant to them, or they may decide to leave as soon as they are old enough to do so.**

Needs:

- To have a set of simple, easy to follow rules and to know what the exact consequences will be for disobedience.

- To feel they are being treated fairly. It may be best to structure quizzes in non-competitive ways and to make sure you give equal time to every child, even the quieter ones.
- To have opportunities to use their vivid imagination to dig deeper into the Bible stories. Encourage them to imagine with all of their senses.
- To have opportunities for creating their own response to a Bible story. You can supply a range of craft materials and let them make whatever they like in response to the story.
- To have questions answered clearly and honestly at a level they can understand. To be shown how to do their own simple research to find answers.
- To have positive Christian role models of the same gender.
- To have opportunities to value what they make, do and write, and to see that others value their work too, by having it displayed or presented.
- To begin to be involved in the wider church programme, perhaps being involved in some aspect of the worship service whenever possible.
- To have positive, happy and interesting times at church.

Things to consider:

- Some children in this age group make a decision for Jesus, so do give them the opportunity to make this choice if they wish. They can be part of a baptismal class until they are ready for baptism, and then join a spiritual mentoring group once they have been baptised.
- Have some social times with the children and their families – church picnics with Bible-based activities, games and film evenings, outings to zoos and farms, etc.
- Help each child to find something they are good at and try to find a way for them to use this gift to serve your church community.
- This is a great age group for being involved with a Kids in Discipleship ministry, so if your church hasn't explored this yet, ask your Children's Ministries department for more information and visit their websites.

UNDERSTANDING THE JUNIOR CHILD – 10-14 YEARS

Physical development:

- The Junior is very active, and can be noisy and restless.
- They like practising physical skills and demonstrating them to others.
- Rapidly developing into an adolescent. Some girls may have very early pubescence; boys tend to develop physically at a later stage.
- May be feeling awkward and self-conscious in rapidly changing bodies.

Needs:

- To have plenty of movement, variety and action built into the programme.
- To have moments of quietness and stillness, too.
- To have teachers of both sexes to provide good role models and spiritual mentors.

Intellectual development:

- Memorizes quickly, but needs motivation.
- Learns by being involved with an activity.
- Can become bored quickly.
- Likes facts and using maps reference books and the Internet.
- Can be very creative, likes exploring the potential of different materials.
- Enjoys working in groups.
- May be interested in technology and gadgets and this can be incorporated creatively into your programme.

Needs:

- To have extra motivation and creativity to help them memorise verses, such as presenting something to the whole church, or for a sponsored memory verse activity.
- To be stimulated to think for themselves and work things out together.
- To have teachers who understand their different learning modes (visual, verbal or kinaesthetic – touching objects and moving around) and create a session that involves everyone and their learning preferences.
- To have materials which are age appropriate and respect their maturity.
- To be able to have their own space and programme, so that they don't feel that the activities and room decorations are childish.
- To be encouraged to problem solve and look for lots of alternative possibilities.
- To be asked questions that stimulate them to think – why, how, could, what if?

Social and emotional development:

- Like to belong to a group.
- Like to have heroes, role models and dreams.
- Want respect – don't like to be spoken down to or bossed around and need to learn how to respect authority. Respect is learned when we are treated respectfully, it can't be demanded.
- Respond best to rules that have been created by the peer group.
- May want to generalise.
- Have to be actively involved during class time to maintain interest.
- Struggling to balance a desire for independence with a desire to be loved by caring and respectful adults. Need a close and healthy mentoring relationship with a positive, same-gendered role model.
- Taking on some responsibilities can help to develop their maturity and awareness of others' needs, and help them to develop leadership skills.

- Is passionate about things being fair, especially in games.
- Very sensitive to criticism and may often feel insecure, self-conscious or misunderstood.
- Feels things intensely, joy, anger sadness, affection, etc.

Needs:

- To belong to a group and be accepted by them. Prefers to work in small groups than to work on their own.
- To have heroes to stimulate their desire to do well and be significant in the world. It is important for them to learn about Biblical heroes and biographies of Christians who have made a difference in the world.
- To be genuinely respected at all times. Only discipline and talk about challenging things when you are alone with a Junior. Make sure another adult is in the room with you for child safety purposes.
- To be given responsibilities. Find a special responsibility for each Junior in your class, if possible, or rotate responsibilities weekly.
- To feel welcomed. Invite them to your home when you can and plan fun activities for your group outside of the class sessions. Be a friend, but don't try to be one of the group.
- To have someone they can trust. Be available and non-judgmental, but offer a range of thoughts and possibilities and perspectives when they come to talk to you.
- To be challenged when being disrespectful of others in the group, or outside of the group. Challenge racist, sexist and critical, judgmental comments when appropriate and gently explore other possible responses and perspectives.

Moral and spiritual development:

- Do things to please others and to be liked, but the peer group may now be more important than pleasing parents and adults.
- Begin to rebel against authority but also want to have a part to play and to do it well.
- Concerned about laws and rules; obeying those that make sense to them and improving those that don't.
- Developing a sense of who they are as individuals, and what they want to stand for.
- Need space to explore questions about faith and life.
- May wonder about their commitment to God.
- Can experience a profound relationship with God.

Needs:

- To have positive experiences with their peer group. Try to make sure that all the children are involved and have friends within the group.
- To have fair and flexible leaders so that they are less likely to choose to rebel against the teacher's authority.
- To be involved in creating the rules for the group and have the space to discuss different reasons for rules and our responses to wise boundaries.
- To have the space to discuss ideas freely and experimentally without fear of judgement or criticism so that they can develop their own sense of self, faith and life.
- To again be invited to make a decision to follow Jesus, and be offered the opportunity for baptismal studies, without force or pressure.
- To be encouraged to develop a personal relationship with God, by spending time studying the Bible in creative ways, praying, and having opportunities to serve others.

Things to consider:

- Holding a well run baptismal class using age-appropriate materials – see the Bible Study Resource section.

- Make sure that you have men involved in helping you to work with this age group, to help keep the boys interested and mentored.
- Developing a useful mission project for this pre-teen group in your local area.
- Encouraging the children to attend Church camps, or run your own church camp or junior retreat.
- Having social evenings for this group in your home, playing fun group games, watching appropriate movies (download Christian Movie guides from www.christianitytoday.com)
- Encourage this group to lead out in a worship service for the adults, or for the other children.

HOW FAITH GROWS

Have you noticed how children first draw people as 'stick persons'? This seems to be inbuilt in children from all cultures and races. Likewise, all children have been given by God an awareness of the supernatural. Authors respond to this, such as C S Lewis in his Biblical allegorical series of books on Narnia and J K Rowling in her non-Christian Harry Potter books.

Those who have studied how faith grows, such as Engel, a psychologist identify 10 faith steps.

1. aware of the supernatural
2. aware of Christianity
3. interest in Christianity
4. aware of the basic facts of gospel
5. grasp the implications of gospel
6. positive attitude to the gospel
7. aware of personal need
8. challenge and decision to act
9. repentance and faith
10. commitment ¹

Childhood is prime time for making a commitment to Jesus Christ, according to a November 1999 news release from Barna Research Group. This is hardly news to Seventh-day Adventists, to whom Ellen White wrote 110 years ago, "It is in these early years that the affections are the most ardent, the heart most susceptible of improvement" (*Review and Herald*, Dec. 17, 1889). Barna reports a nationwide survey to determine the probability of people accepting Christ as their Saviour in relation to their age. The report draws attention to a disparity between what we have been told and what we do. Out of every 100 people asked at what age they accepted Christ as their Saviour, for a majority it was before the age of 12.

5 – 12	75%
13 – 18	10%
19 – death	15%

www.barna.org

JAMES FOWLER'S 6 STAGES OF FAITH

The psychologist, James Fowler conducted a high level of research which led him to consider that there are six universal stages of faith. Faith growth is a process. Between each of the six stages there are transitional periods.

- **Foundation Faith. Stage 0. Ages 0-4**
The child receives their identity from their Mother. They learn to trust important people for food, nurture, security and love.

- **Unordered Faith. Stage 1. 3/4 – 7/8 years**
Different images bombard the child and they find it hard to distinguish between the real and unreal. Stories or information have an impact on the child according to the person sharing it. The big adult is the seriously important person.

Parenting quality is crucial at this stage as role models.

- **Ordering Faith. Stage 2. 6/7 – 11/12 years**
The child feels more in control of their life and wants to know the difference between fact and fiction.

Narrative is powerful and they can tell the difference between a DVD story and the world they live in. *This is the stage of 'belonging' and wanting to be a part of a faith group and commit to their beliefs.* Some adults do not progress beyond this stage.

- **Conforming Faith. Stage 3. 11/12 – 17/18+ years & adult**
The child needs to conform to the significant people in life. Relationships grow and with them the need to accept the beliefs and values of these significant people. By accepting their authority the maturing child aims to please them and find acceptance.

This is a challenging stage as the young person tries to juggle their faith development and wonders "Who am I?"

- **Choosing Faith. Stage 4. 17/18 – 30s/40s years**
Progressing from reflecting others' beliefs the person decides on their faith. "This is my belief and part of my unique being."

It is the years of deciding where everything has a place in the scheme of life. This is an important stage of faith where a person needs plenty of support, encouragement and good personal relationships.

- **Balanced Faith. Stage 5**
7% of Fowler's research group go on to this stage often resulting from trauma, failure and disappointment. In the light of pain and difficulty people become more open to the opinions of others and are willing to serve others.

- **Selfless Faith. Stage 6**
Recognising their place in the world community, they go out to change the world with a wide vision and set of values.

There is a deep commitment to find truth and to live it out among others who are to be served.²

"6 stages of faith" adapted from *Leading Children* by Penny Frank. Published by St Johns, Nottingham; Children's Ministry and C.P.A.S.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EXPERIENCE AND BELIEF

Children progress according to their faith or lack of faith heritage. The relationship between experience and faith, as outlined here, is clearly seen as being very dependent on the role of the significant person/people in a child's early life.

A relationship of shared trust, love and care



Security, responsiveness to others, dependability, openness, trust shown towards other people.	paves the way → for faith in	Seeing God as personal, trustworthy, consistent, dependable, gracious.
Being valued as a person.	→	Seeing God's love for individuals.
Acceptance of self and others.	→	Being aware of God's forgiveness, cleansing and renewal. New life in Christ.
Putting things right when a relationship is broken or wrongdoing committed.	→	Repentance and reconciliation.
Acceptance of punishment which is fair and does not lead to rejection.	→	Understanding the vicarious death of Christ.
Desire to preserve and enjoy relationships.	→	Dialogue with God. Obedience to God's will.
Mutual giving in relationships.	→	Service to God in response to his grace. ³

A relationship of shared trust, love and care is seen very clearly in the following 2 sets of 'keys':

11 KEYS TO GROWING IN JESUS

1. Show your child how to give his/her will to Jesus.
2. Help your child cultivate a friendship with Jesus.
3. Show your child how to become more like Jesus.
4. Give practical instruction for Christian living.
5. Show your child how to claim God's promises for his/her life.
6. Help your child to experience forgiveness.
7. Teach your child how to cope with difficulties.
8. Show your child God's steps for growing spiritually.
9. Help your child recognize Satan's counterfeits for God's steps for growing spiritually (his traps).
10. Focus strongly on what Jesus does for us, how He deals with sin, how He changes our desires, and how His perfect life covers our imperfections.

11. Share your own experience of growing in Jesus.⁴

12 KEYS TO ACCEPTING SALVATION

1. Pray for the Holy Spirit to speak to your child's heart.
2. Paint an attractive picture of Jesus for your children.
3. Cultivate joy in Jesus. Show His love through your own.
4. Build a strong foundation of biblical teaching for your children.
5. Help children become accountable to Jesus.
6. Enable children to experience the different aspects of coming to Jesus as they mature.
7. Define the vocabulary of salvation.
8. Explain the steps in salvation.
9. Help children make little decisions involving right and wrong as they grow.
10. Use everyday situations to teach spiritual lessons about salvation.
11. Invite your child to follow Jesus and accept His offer of salvation.
12. Provide opportunities to share his decision to accept salvation.⁵

THE MOST IMPORTANT GIFT

Dr Habenicht, counselor, teacher and author, has concluded:

"During the past several years my students and I have conducted more than 250 interviews with children and adolescents on the topic of salvation. We have been trying to discover how children develop their ideas and attitudes toward it. One of the questions we have used related to the assurance of salvation. If Jesus were to come today, we ask them, would He take you to heaven with Him? Children seem to go through different stages in their understanding of salvation. Until about 8 or 9 years of age, they seem to be very confident of salvation. Jesus will take them to heaven – no question about it! However, their ideas about salvation are strongly related to being good, to doing the right things. If you do the right things, they reason, you are good. And they believe that most of the time they do the right things.

Then the doubts begin to creep in. Eventually they aren't so sure Jesus will actually take them to heaven, and they begin to get very critical of their own behavior. 'I don't think Jesus would let me into heaven because I forgot to make my bed today.' Any little mistake on their part cancels salvation, an idea that seems to persist into early adolescence. But then they gradually begin to understand a little more about what Jesus does for them, how His grace relates to salvation.

I have concluded that it is vital for us as parents to really focus on helping our children understand what Jesus does for us, how He deals with sin, how He gives us a clean heart and changes our desires, and how His perfect life covers our imperfections. It is the most important gift we can give our children – the assurance of salvation."⁶

RESOURCES

ChristWise: Leader's Guide for Juniors, Teens, and Youth **Troy Fitzgerald** Review & Herald Publishing 2002

ChristWise is a revolutionary new baptismal course. Geared toward a variety of learning styles, it is story-based, Christ-centred, interactive, and age-tailored. The lessons explain the beliefs of the Adventist Church through stories, interactive questions, Bible marking, reflective and experiential learning, and interviews that involve the entire church in the learning process.

Other lesson sets seek merely to fill the mind with facts. ChristWise seeks to lead the student into relationship, then on to friendship, worship, discipleship, leadership, ownership, and finally to mentorship, so that the new disciple becomes involved in making new disciples for Christ. The learner becomes a teacher. More than a baptismal course, this is a curriculum for Christian discipleship.

ChristWise enables youth to mentor other youth, lead them to Christ, and prepare them for baptism. Field testing has shown that a 16-year-old can do the work of a pastor and teacher with even greater success. Use ChristWise in your church, and watch your young people come alive with commitment to Christ. Size: 8 1/8" wide x 10 5/8" high.

Also available:

[ChristWise: Discipleship Guide for Teens Paperback Book](#)

[ChristWise: Discipleship Guide for Youth Paperback Book](#)

[ChristWise: Discipleship Guide for Juniors Paperback Book](#)

From ABC website

For younger children:

New Series – Seventh-day Adventists Believe for Kids

The first book in the *Seventh-day Adventists Believe for Kids* series, *What We Believe*, is an introduction to Adventist beliefs for 5-8 year olds that adults can read and do with children.

The second book in the *Seventh-day Adventists Believe for Kids* series, *God Loves Me 28 Ways*, is the perfect book for 8-10 year olds to use as a daily devotional. Exciting stories that illustrate our beliefs, Bible texts to back them up, and activities kids can do on their own, all reinforce the fundamental beliefs of the Adventist Church. It is a book kids can read and do with little adult supervision

Also, now available in the *Seventh-day Adventists Believe for Kids* series, is an activity book, *Learn About God's Love*.

Step by Step by Jerry D Thomas. This book will help children ages 6-9 take their first steps in Christian discipleship. Includes tips and helps.

These are all available from the ABC.

Making Jesus My Best Friend: Baptismal Preparation for Younger Children *Claudio and Pamela Consuegra*. Review and Herald, 2005

This baptismal study guide will prepare children age 8-10 for a wonderful walk with Jesus. It offers lessons with activities that parents and children can enjoy together as a bonding experience. The activities include not only fill-in-the-blank but also word games, Bible crossword, and even a maze.

The authors use simple but effective object lessons from everyday life to explain basic doctrines such as the gospel, Sabbath, Second Coming, tithing, diet, dress, death, judgment, the gift of prophecy, and baptism. What Jesus does for us in the judgment, for example, is

like what a boy in any ordinary family might do for his naughty puppy who messed up the carpet.

Making Jesus My Best Friend will entice your child to orient his or her life toward heaven with the aid of the treasure map, the Bible.

My Place with Jesus – is a series of internet-based interactive Bible studies just for kids. www.myplacewithjesus.com

See further Bible study resource list in Part Five.

¹ "6 stages of faith" adapted from *Leading Children*, by Penny Frank. Published by St John's, Nottingham; Children's Ministry and C.P.A.S.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Children Finding Faith*, by Frances Bridger. Published by Scripture Union and C.P.A.S., p 75.

⁴ *How to Help Your Child Really Love Jesus*, by D Habenicht. Published by Review & Herald Publishing Association.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

COMMUNION

BIBLICAL COMMUNION

Pastors, and church leaders, must no longer overlook the place a child should have in the communion service. If an unbaptized adult can take part, why can a believing child not take part? The communion service is based on the Passover Supper which centres its meal on the questions a child asks regarding their ancestors' salvation from the angel of death and their salvation from slavery.

If, in the early Christian church, the Lord's Supper took the place of the Jewish Passover, why do we not include children?

- Could it be because the apostles took this for granted they never put it into the written record of the New Testament?
- Was it because the 'mass' took the place of the communion? Are we then following the Catholic church in not sharing the emblems?
- Are we following a centuries old Protestant tradition of a closed communion by only allowing adults to partake?

If Jesus challenges adults to have the faith of a child so they can enter the Kingdom of God, Matthew 18:5, why are we denying Christian children access to the communion table?

North American Division Children's Ministries statement on Children and Communion. Issued June 1, 1998.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual contradicts itself on the subject of Communion. On the one hand the manual states that Adventists hold open communion, meaning that one need not be a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in order to take communion with us. On the other hand, the manual states that children must be baptized before taking communion demonstrating that, in fact, we do not hold open communion. Some pastors point out that either we hold open communion or we do not. We cannot discriminate against any group and continue to make the claim for openness.

NAD Children's Ministries suggests that since the manual contradicts itself, parents and pastors should pay more attention to children on communion day. They should consider what is happening and the messages children take from communion.

In many churches, unbaptized children and youth stand around outside the church during communion. They enjoy being outside and talking with their friends. When they are older it is hard to coax them back inside to take part. Churches should consider the message they are giving when they exclude children from communion.

What About Taking Part Unworthily?

If we do not worry about all the adults who may be taking part unworthily, why are we assuming that kids are unworthy, that they don't understand, that they cannot set their hearts to rights during the sermon just as many adults do?

And who is responsible if they do take part unworthily? Their parents. So we need to leave that responsibility with the parents and educate parents to prepare children for communion.

Suggestions for Children Taking Part in Communion

1. At least once a year, have a programme for families, such as a simple Passover service, so children can experience and understand communion in its original context.
2. Hold a family seminar on communion. Discuss the issues and encourage parents to take responsibility for preparing their children for communion.
3. When very small children ask to take part, parents might break off a little of their bread to share with the child.
4. When older children ask to take part, parents might talk to them about the responsibilities of membership in the community of believers. Talk about stewardship/tithing, listening to the sermon in church, regular attendance, helping at church, etc. If the children feel ready to take responsibility for these things, grant them the right to take part in communion. Make communion a family event.
5. Invite the children to watch the footwashing.
6. Do not rush children into baptism just so they can take part in communion.

Children Learn About and Take Part in Communion

One Friday night at Palmerston North, NNZ, children between the ages of 5 and 12 years took part in a children's agape feast and Communion service, designed to teach them the meaning of Communion.

As the children entered the room they took off their shoes and the letter "S" was painted on their feet in black face paint – representing sin that would later be washed away. A welcome, prayer and songs were followed by the Lego Communion programme (Flashpoint, August 14, 2004). "The children were engrossed," says Tina Larsen, a Palmerston North church member.

"After a personal story from Pastor Lindsey Wells, Pastor Anton Van Wyk explained why we wash feet and talked about Bible times," she reports. "The Sabbath school teachers and pastors then proceeded to wash the children's feet, followed by the children washing each other's feet."

Pastors Wells and Van Wyk talked about the symbolic meaning of the bread and wine, which the children then partook of, and the evening closed with a musical item, prayer and supper.

Some 22 children from Palmerston's three church services attended. "One of the children was reported to have said the experience was 'the best night ever'," says Ms Larsen.

Scott Wegener
SdA Australian church paper, *Record*, No. 5, 2005

KIDS IN DISCIPLESHIP

God has BIG dreams for children living in these last days. God says, "I will pour out My Spirit on all people, your sons and daughters will prophecy, your young men will have visions and your old men will dream dreams." Joel 2:27.

God has dreamed throughout eternity of the experience children will have right before Jesus comes again. God plans to pour out His Spirit upon everyone... that includes children! God plans to give His children dreams of how they can be a pivotal part of this last day mission. God plans to lead our children to be active in sharing their talents and gifts in the worship, ministry and mission of their church.

Kids in Discipleship:

- Equips parents to mentor their children as empowered disciples of Jesus NOW!
- Supports parents in becoming the primary spiritual mentor of their children according to the Biblical model of Deuteronomy 6
- Takes the family on an intentional discipleship journey with Jesus Christ through a small group experience.

How do you get **K.I.D.** going in your church? You send a team of three lay-leaders, along with their pastor, to a three-day intensive training course that equips the team to lead this ministry in their church.

When the team has completed this training, they implement a three-step process to make the discipleship of children through the family an integral part of the congregation.

The First Step: Prepare the church to support the family in discipling the children. The team shares the Vision with the congregation through a four-part sermon series. The congregation is recruited to be prayer partners for the children and their families as well as mentors for children who are without a willing parent mentor. **K.I.D.** requires the support of the congregation in involving the children in the worship, ministry and mission of their local church.

The Second Step: Equip the parents and other committed mentors to be disciple-makers of their children. Parents, grandparents and any other willing mentors join a *Footprints in the Sand* small group. This 12-week small group equips the mentors to be disciples first and then to be disciple-makers of their children. A mentor cannot disciple a child to Christ without being a disciple first.

The Third Step: Mentor the children to be empowered disciples of Jesus NOW! The mentors invite their children to join them and other families in *Footprint for Kids*, a 32-week discipleship adventure with Jesus. The curriculum is designed for Primary and Junior age children, but some families bring younger and older children. These families meet once a week for a highly interactive Bible study in a small group setting. The children and their mentors experience the following seven steps of discipleship:

1. Build Your Relationship with Jesus.
2. Crown Jesus as Lord.
3. Know the Truth of Jesus.
4. Discover Jesus' Vision for You.
5. Share Jesus with Your Friends.
6. Lead like Jesus.
7. Become a Friend Like Jesus.

At the conclusion of each small group session of *Footprints for Kids*, mentors are provided with *Mentoring Moments*, a spiritual mentoring resource to follow up with the child outside of class

time. This resource is a tool to facilitate spiritual dialogue between student and mentor as well as to experience further application of the lesson for the week.

Over the last 4 years we have seen the following results in families involved in **K.I.D.**:

- Families becoming closer together spiritually.
- Families worshipping God in their homes.
- Children and their parents forming a daily, growing friendship with God through prayer and Bible discovery.
- Children, as well as parents, discovering the assurance of salvation and being sure of the Biblical foundation of their faith.
- Families discovering their spiritual gifts and using them in the worship, ministry and mission of their church.
- Children leading other kids to Christ.

Don MacLafferty – Director of the K.I.D. Centre

K.I.D. University is held each spring and autumn at Watford, England. For more information go to www.adventist.org.uk – Children's Ministries department.

BAPTISMAL GUIDELINES

What response do we give children when they ask to be baptized? How do we go about preparing them to accept God's grace and to walk fully in His light? What resources do we use to get our primaries and juniors ready for baptism? What do they need to know before baptism? What is the best age for baptism? We should not hesitate too long, for the child's decision will fade away. If we don't respond to their exciting decision to follow Jesus and be baptized, we may lose the golden opportunity to do so later.

Making a decision to follow Jesus is a serious step toward spiritual growth. *The Church Manual*, p 29 states that:

"Baptism is a spiritual relationship. It can be entered into only by those who are converted. Only in this way can the purity and spiritual calibre of the church be maintained. It is the duty of every minister to instruct those who accept the principles of the truth, that they may enter the church on a sound, spiritual basis. While there is no stated age for baptism, it is recommended that very young children who express a desire to be baptized should be encouraged and entered into an instruction program that may lead to baptism."

Ellen G White also recognizes that children do make serious decisions for baptism. She counsels the church in *Testimonies*, vol 1, p 169 that:

"Children of eight, ten or twelve years are old enough to be addressed on the subject of personal religion. Do not teach your children with reference to some future period when they shall be old enough to repent and believe the truth. If properly instructed, very young children may have correct views of their state as sinners, and of the way of salvation through Christ."

Affirmation of Faith

When a child makes a decision to become a follower of Christ, the Children's Ministries coordinator should encourage the church leadership to arrange a service of Affirmation of Faith for that child. Such a ceremony helps to affirm the child's decision and to let him know that the congregation rejoices with him/her for making such a commitment.

A sample ceremony

Song:

- Allow the child to choose a song that is familiar to him/her.
- It does not have to be a song from the hymnal; it could be a song from Sabbath School.

Introduction:

- Have the child sit in the front row before the ceremony.
- The Pastor or a Faith-Friend who knows the child best can introduce him/her to the congregation.
- Give a brief history of when, where, and what prompted the decision.
- Focus of remarks is about the child. You could say:

"I would like to introduce you to Bryan Nelson. Many of you have seen Bryan here at church. Last month at our Children's Retreat Bryan made a decision. He decided to make Jesus his friend, and wants to be one of His children."

Affirmation: – To be read or recited by the child to the congregation.

For example:

"Because I know that God loves me
I choose to live my life as one of His children,
Because Jesus died for me
I want to please Him through the way I live."

Faith Friend Introduced: – Explain their role.

For example:

"Having a friend to support you can mean the difference between success or failure. The Bible says that, 'If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!' (Eccl. 4:10).

Bryan has chosen his Sabbath School teacher, Mr Jerry Page, as his faith friend. A faith friend is someone who will encourage him in all aspects of his life, but most importantly, on his spiritual walk with Jesus."

– Faith-friend recites commitment to the child.

For example:

"As your faith-friend, I promise to support and care for you. Life you, I may make mistakes, but I know that God forgives me. I want you to know you can come and talk to me any time. I want to be your friend."

Congregation Response: – Get congregation to participate in the ceremony by raising their hands or standing as support.

For example:

"Bryan, there are many other people here who I know would also like to be your faith-friend. Would those of you in the congregation who would like to be a "friend" to Bryan please stand? Would those who are willing to encourage and support him with love; those who want to make a commitment to be positive and not criticize or condemn, but be a friend, please stand now."

Prayer: – The pastor offers a short prayer.

Shake Hands: – Give the *Affirmation of Faith* card to the child.

Children and Baptism

Children can understand that they belong to the family of God from an early age. Parents, teachers, and pastors should continually affirm and reinforce the child's sense of belonging in the community of believers. Pastors do this by acknowledging the child's presence when the entire church family worships together and involving them in worship instead of ignoring their presence. Involving children in service projects also binds them to the community.

A Child's Faith Development

The faith of a child develops in clear stages. At first a child's faith is experienced faith. During the primary/junior years, children develop a belonging faith. At this stage, faith is still experienced--it cannot be examined and discussed. But just as kids develop an interest in joining clubs, they begin to see the church family as a community. Parents, pastors, and teachers need to reinforce in children positive values for belonging to the community of believers. They need to answer the children's questions about what their church believes and instruct them in what it means to be a baptized member of the church.

At ages 8-12 children are naturally joiners. They want to join their church and take part in church life. Kids need an opportunity to act on this desire to participate. There are many ways they participate, one of which is baptism. Too many wrongly believe that children should not be baptized until they are of an age to understand fully the beliefs of their church. But by then kids may be more into pre-adolescent rebellion than into joining.

When Children Are Too Young for Baptism

Some children request baptism at age 8 or earlier. Parents, pastors, and teachers should take such requests seriously. The baptismal class for 8-year-olds can meet monthly or bimonthly for two years. Children should have a chance to study all the beliefs of the church as is developmentally appropriate. They will not get into word studies or into abstract concepts, but they need to know at least the Bible stories relevant to the concept.

Baptismal lessons for children need to be in two parts (a). Establishing a relationship with Jesus (understanding how they are saved), (b). Studying major beliefs in addition to salvation. This will need a minimum of 20 lessons. The lessons should involve active study that relates the beliefs to life. This is included in the Kids in Discipleship ministry Bible studies.

Parents should not assume that the church is responsible for grounding their child in Adventist beliefs. They should ask the pastor how many classes he/she takes children through, what topics they will take up, and when they plan for the baptism. If the pastor plans for only 10-12 lessons, the parents can continue the lessons at home. In some cases, the parents may need to do all the preparation for baptism.

SIMPLIFIED BAPTISMAL VOWS

1. I believe in God the Father; in His Son, Jesus Christ; and in the Holy Spirit.
2. I accept the death of Jesus to pay for my sins.
3. I accept the new heart Jesus gives me in place of my sinful heart.
4. I believe that Jesus is in heaven as my best friend and that He gives me the Holy Spirit so I can obey Him.
5. I believe God gave me the Bible as my most important guidebook.

6. By God living in me, I want to obey the Ten Commandments, which include the observance of the seventh day of the week as the Sabbath.
7. I want to help as many people as possible to be ready for the soon coming of Jesus.
8. I believe God gives special abilities to His people, and that the Spirit of Prophecy is given to His chosen people.
9. I want to help God's church with my influence, effort, and money.
10. I want to take good care of my body because the Holy Spirit lives there now.
11. With God's power, I want to obey the basic principles of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.
12. I want to be baptized to show people I am a Christian.
13. I want to be a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and I believe this church has a special message to give to the world.

(Written by Steve Case)

By NAD Children's Ministries Department

TELL A CHILD, TELL THE WORLD

A Passionate Teen Teacher

In the lowlands of Bolivia, Oscar Choque, age 14, has a passion for children. He loves teaching kindergarten children in the Sabbath School every week. In fact, Oscar has a vision to be a children's leader some day. Hence, he finds every opportunity to attend every teacher training seminar organized by the conference or union each quarter. Though his family is unable to finance his fares and fees, Oscar is not easily disheartened. He does all types of odd jobs to earn enough money to get himself to these seminars. In April 2005, Oscar sold potatoes to finance his trip to the Children's Ministries Leadership Seminar in Cochabamba where he met the General Conference Children's Ministries Director, Dr. Linda Koh and South American Division's Children's Ministries Director. He shares his dream with them. Yes, he wants to be a Children's Ministries leader in the future. Wow! What a vision! What passion!

Giant Prayer Warrior

Barbara Beatriz Reis from Bel Horizonte, Brazil, is only seven years old. But she is a giant prayer warrior. She loves intercessory prayer. When she met Mr. Pedro for the first time and found that he was battling against a serious illness, she immediately told him that her friend Jesus would listen to their prayer and would cure him. Mr. Pedro, who was not a Seventh-day Adventist, was really impressed by her simple, but strong faith. She would go to his house to pray for him every day for several days. He got well eventually and Barbara's prayers triggered his interest in learning about the Adventist faith. Today he is baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

We Don't Have a Regular Family Worship...

We don't have regular family worship - in periods, family worship works fine then in periods it does not work. But we always have family worship on Friday and Saturday evenings. Upon our arrival my father-in-law was at the airport to pick us up with our two youngest kids and as soon as we got into the car our youngest boy who is 7 said that they had a story to tell us, and that they wanted to tell it to us at a family worship that day. None of our children have ever requested to have family worship, and that they wanted to tell a story - not only a story, but an experience they had on the Sabbath while we were together in England. My husband and I looked in amazement at each other. I felt in my heart, that this was God's answer to my prayers. I felt he was telling us to continue with K.I.D in his power and start anew with family worship every day. When we got home our children went outside for a while, we unpacked and got supper ready. As we were eating, our son asked, "Mum, when is it time to tell our story - to tell about the ball that got lost?" I told him, we would have family worship after supper. When the dishes and leftovers were cleared away we sat down

for worship and our 7-year-old told this story. On Sabbath after church they went out to play. Their grandfather had lent them a ball to play with but then they had lost it and could not find it again. They decided to pray and ask God to help them find the ball. After some searching, their prayer was answered and the ball was found. At this point I thought the story had ended, but he continued, "Mum, then we prayed again and thanked God for helping us find the ball." After he finished his story, we read about the lost coin and then prayed together. We have decided to buy a note book where we can write down experiences like this, a book where our children also can draw a picture of God's answer to prayer.

The Holy Spirit had already travelled ahead of us and prepared a family worship! God is with us. In our team we have decided, that we will gather all experiences like this and use them when we tell our congregation about K.I.D.

Yes, surely God is with us, and that is why Kids In Discipleship ministry is so exiting.

Kids In Discipleship Makes a Difference

Vilde is an active 10 year old 5th grade girl at the Lille-hammer SDA Church School, which is a missionary school in Norway where several of the children do not belong to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. She is the oldest of three sisters and in her spare time loves football, skiing, snowboarding and attending Kid's In Discipleship small group with her mother. This is Vilde's story about how she shared her faith and what she believes in with a non Adventist friend in the 7th grade at her school.

"One day as the girls were lined up to go into the gym class I heard Lisa say: 'I just want to die!' I asked her why she would want to die and she answered that she was just tired of gym and everything; she just wanted to die so she could go straight to heaven and be with Jesus. I told her; 'But that is not what happens when you die, the Bible tells us that when we die we will sleep in our grave until Jesus comes back and that is when he will take all those who love him and have given their hearts to him with him to heaven.' She was really surprised and asked me how I knew this and where this was written. I told her I had just studied this in our KID small group and I would find the Bible text and give them to her the next day. I went home and found the lesson and the paper where I had written down all the Bible texts and went through it again to find the texts that I could give to Lisa. I wrote them down and the next day I gave them to her. She has not said anything about it after I gave her the paper but I am going to ask her if she has read the texts and what she thought of them."