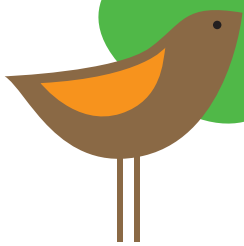


How a Child's Faith GROWS



How do we help children grow in their relationship with God? We take a look at the key stages of faith development in a child's life.



It is helpful to think of faith as being made up of three parts:

- Faith as believing – knowing what we believe and learning foundational truths. This combines receiving knowledge with believing it.
- Faith as relationship – relating with the One in whom and about whom we believe.
- Faith as action – being able to put into practice what we believe.

Children need the opportunity to experience all three of these elements, and they have a capacity for all three, although each element will look different at different ages.

The early years

As people made in the image of God, all of us are spiritual beings. Spiritual formation begins at birth, if not before (Psalm 139). God's intention is that children (especially children from





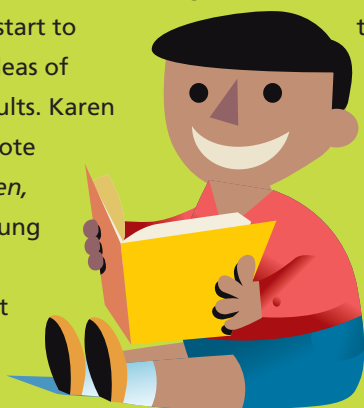
HOT TIPS

Christian homes) should be raised within the community of faith, never knowing a day lived without the awareness of God's presence and involvement in their lives.

According to Francis Bridger, author of *Children Finding Faith*, the foundations of faith are laid early and involve learning to trust. Significant, trustworthy adults in a child's life are in a position to enable a child to trust God. Awe and wonder is a key feature in the lives of under 5s and is a great way to introduce them to the Creator God who loves them.

Lower primary years

Fantasy can still seem as real as real life - Santa and Jesus happily co-exist. However, it is at this age that children start to take on the ideas of significant adults. Karen Mane Yust wrote in *Real Children, Real Faith: Young children have two important strengths operating for them as*



they learn about the world and their role in it: keen observational powers and imagination. They 'try on' roles and behaviours of familiar people and characters.

Upper primary years


A child's ability to distinguish between fact and fiction is fairly well developed and they are keen to question. They will want to know

how we know that the stories of Jesus are true. They want to see that what we believe has an impact on how we behave.

Over 11s

For many young people it's no longer enough to simply accept things because they know the people who are telling them. They need to work it out for themselves, and come to the point of knowing that the God of their family is their God, and that they love Him and want to continue following Him throughout their life.



There needs to be a change of heart in response to God's Spirit. As Paul wrote: "For you are not a true Jew just because you were born of Jewish parents or because you have gone through the Jewish ceremony of circumcision. No, a true Jew is one whose heart is right with God. And true circumcision is not a cutting of the body but a change of heart produced by God's Spirit." (Romans 2:28-29, NLT) 

This article is adapted from **Top Tips on Encouraging Faith to Grow** (Scripture Union, 2008) by Ruth Hassall & Piers Lane.



- 1 Accept that the family is the primary place for children to learn about God. Ask God to help you, and He will!
- 2 Work hard to strengthen the links between home and church. Be familiar with what your children are taught in church, and reinforce what they have learnt.
- 3 See the whole of life as an opportunity for faith development. Look out for the teachable moments in everyday life.
- 4 Don't be afraid to testify about God (His provision, His goodness) in front of your kids.
- 5 Relationship is key – stay connected with your kids.
- 6 Be an authentic Christian. Your children will not do what you say; they will do what you do.
- 7 Have age-appropriate expectations.
- 8 Don't be scared of hard questions or having to have the right answer - 'I don't know, let's find out together' can be a very effective response.