

How to Talk to Your Child About God

Mom, where did God come from? Did He have a father and mother?" asked five-year-old Susan. "Dad, was God really tired after creating this world and everything in it in six days?" asked six-year-old Kurt.

Questions, questions. Children are loaded with questions. That's the way God made them. "The crucial years between four and twelve, (are) when children form their most basic ideas about God and religion," says psychologist David Heller, *Talking to Your Child About God*, (Dust cover). If you want your children to enjoy talking to you, listen carefully to their remarks. Never put them down and don't be in a hurry. Take time to visit with them. Use eye contact when conversing with them. Physical contact: natural touching — hand on a shoulder or arm has a powerful bonding effect. Ask questions: "How would you feel, Sally, if Jesus were to invite you to sit on His lap?" (Then listen attentively.)

Ellen White says we "should avoid tedious remarks. Short remarks and to the point. . ." *Child Guidance*, pp. 34, 35. She says, "Mealtime should be a season for social intercourse and refreshment." *Ibid.* p. 387. Often use the phrase: "This is what I believe." "So Tim told you that the Sabbath is for the Jews. The Bible says that 'the Sabbath was made for man.' I believe the seventh day is the Sabbath, as the fourth commandment states."

Larry, age nine, was asked to straighten up his room and vacuum the floor. "It will be sundown in 30 minutes," said Mother. "I think God likes my room just like it is," replied Larry. "But remember, Larry, Jesus folded His burial clothes when he arose from the tomb." "O.K., Mom," said Larry.

Be sure to share your spiritual journey: "Susie, let me tell you how

I decided to be a Christian. It was at Junior Camp one summer when I was 11 years old," etc. Tell lots of stories — answers to prayer, lessons you learned through pain and sickness, etc. Encourage curiosity, imagination, and spontaneity. Jesus loved children. He said, "Unless you . . . become as little children you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven" Matt. 18:3, NKJV. Characteristics Jesus valued in children were honesty and simple faith. The children believed what Jesus said.

Love and trust in the home are the foundation of a child's spiritual life. Without love in a parent-child relationship, God will seem distant and nebulous. Talk to your children about God's care for His creation — how He feeds the birds and sends rain and sunshine to make the flowers grow. Talk about how God provides for us: He gives us mothers and fathers, He helps us sleep at night. Emphasize God's loving nature. Friends sometimes let us down, but God is truly dependable.

Erik Erickson says that basic trust is the foundation for all child development. "Trust, then, becomes the capacity for *faith*. . ." *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, p. 106. We should acknowledge to our children that no one has all the answers about God. But our best source of information about God is the Holy Scriptures. This is why we go to Sabbath School and church.

Joan was trying to memorize her memory verse: Eccl. 12:13. "Mom, are we really supposed to be afraid of God? It says here to 'fear God, and keep His commandments.'" Joan's mother replied, "To fear God, in this text, means to respect and reverence God. Yes, we should fear to sin against God. If you really want to know what God is like, look at Jesus."

Serious discussion about God can begin when your child is old enough to form ideas. But even when the child is a babe in arms, you should sing Sabbath School songs to him or her, and pray. "Education begins with the infant in its mother's arms." *Child Guidance*, p. 26.

As children grow older talk about God's daily blessings. Adapt your interaction to their age and development. "Mommy, please leave the light on in my room. I'm afraid of the dark," said three-year-old Marie. Instead of lecturing her about bravery, she sat down on the bed and took her hand. "Marie, Mother is going to ask Jesus to send a big strong angel to protect you and comfort you." So Marie's mother prayed earnestly for an angel's presence to comfort her daughter. After prayer she asked Marie if she still wanted the light left on. "No, Mommy," she said, "you can turn it off." Learning to pray is a giant step in leading a child to Christ. My first memories of prayer were kneeling beside my bed and repeating my mother's prayer after her. Soon I was talking to Jesus as my Friend.

Conversion is an important goal. "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." *Ibid.*, pp. 490, 491. "It is a mistake to set an arbitrary age for conversion. . . God's Spirit does work with the individual in conversion." Clifford Ingle, *Children and Conversion*, p. 95. As parents, we should watch for signs that our child is under conviction by the Holy Spirit. Talk to your child and to your pastor.

