



TALKING WITH CHILDREN IN CHURCH





Will you lead the children's talk on Sunday please?

Oh help! Perhaps that is your first response.

Many people may be comfortable talking with children in a small group but in church! In front of everyone?

We probably all have a memory of a children's talk 'gone bad'. So here's a resource to help you consider the WHO? WHY? WHERE? WHEN? WHAT? And HOW of talking with children in the context of Sunday worship. However, many of the practical tips will also apply to talking with children about faith in any setting – home, classroom, kids clubs and small groups too.

It's important to consider this topic of talking with children within the bigger context of how we welcome children and families generally.

See the 'Kids Friendly Sunday' package of resources for many practical ideas for welcoming and encouraging children's involvement in the worship service.



Also check out our website regularly www.kidsfriendly.org.nz and please do not hesitate to contact us for resources, ideas, workshops and encouragement. ☺



"The nurture of children in church is much more than Christian education. Children learn by watching and imitating adults and by projecting themselves into imaginary worlds. Clergy and worship committees must give serious thought to making the Sunday worship truly accessible to children and educating

parents and other parishioners to see children as fellow-worshippers, not as intruders who have to be hushed or distracted so that adults are left free to pray!"

Gretchen Pritchard-Wolff "Offering the Gospel to Children"



WHO?

Do we understand who we are talking to and with?

Children are spiritual beings and are able to talk about faith. A helpful book is: "**Children's Spirituality – what it is and why it matters**" Dr Rebecca Nye, Church House Publishing (available in the Kids Friendly collection in the Hewitson Library)

The following ideas are drawn from her book.

1/ Children are human beings, made in God's image, i.e. spiritual.

- Spirituality is a common natural feature of children's lives.
- Children are not empty vessels waiting to be filled by adults knowledge and "truth".

2/ Childhood spirituality is found in the everyday.

- Children are full of awe, wonder, discovery, imagination and accepting of mystery. They experience feelings before they have the words to explain them.
- Childhood is a fertile ground for developing spirituality.
- Many people have their first memorable and lasting spiritual experience as a child.

3/ Spirituality of childhood is carried on into adulthood i.e. spirituality is a continuum.

- Children respond differently to adults: (0-2yrs) Sensor motor, (3-6yrs) feelings and images, (7-10yrs) stories and patterns, (11yrs+) abstract ideas, putting it together.
- Children were blessed by Jesus 'for such is the kingdom of heaven'. They were accepted, welcomed, valued and encouraged to form spiritually – 'do not hinder them'
- Jesus challenged adults 'to become like little children' (Matthew 18v3)
- We too can learn from children and this is enhanced when we meet as a whole family of God.

Spirituality is: '**God's ways of being with children and children's ways of being with God**'



WHY?

Why should we invest time and effort in talking to and with children?

Our acceptance and understanding that children are spiritual beings will challenge and inform:

- the **CONTENT** of all our ministry with children
- our views on **CHILDHOOD**
- our **RELATIONSHIPS** with children

THIS IS CHALLENGING! HARD WORK! But...

"What matters most is that you develop your own habits of recognizing when spirituality is and isn't able to flourish in your local context".

HOW? WHAT? WHERE? WHEN?

Dr Rebecca Nye shares a 6 point checklist (**S.P.I.R.I.T**) to help us evaluate and nurture children's spirituality in all settings of ministry.

Space

- Physical space: invite children into spaces that are special, loved and cared for e.g. the worship sanctuary.
- Emotional space: create spaces where children feel safe to speak.
- Auditory space: Allow space (up to 7 seconds!) following an open question for children to respond. Respect silence.

Process not product

Spiritual life is an ongoing journey, not something to be finished or get prizes for. Be careful about fixed learning outcomes (the 'right' answer) within the guise of a process e.g. children sharing in church. Don't reward their contributions with products.



Imagination

Encourage imagining as it helps children/us to go deeper. Jesus often chose an imaginative style in stories. Don't dismiss apparently crazy comments or suggestions made by children as trite. Sometimes adults' creativity/ imagination can limit children's explorations.

Relationship

Relationship is at the core of spirituality - with God and also with one another - as Christians in community.

Sharing and respect involves treating each person's spiritual perspective as valuable, regardless of age or knowledge. Listen and respond respectfully.

Intimacy

'Feeling safe' can be hindered by irregular attendance, not knowing each other, inconsistent leadership and teaching styles, fear of being judged or laughed at being expected to respond the same way as everyone else. Consider how much intimacy (safe sharing) is possible during a "children's talk".

Trust

Trust the process of God working in children. Be comfortable with different kinds of knowing. Be aware of an inclination to control, be authoritative, telling children what to believe or letting your personality get in the way.



Three helpful questions:

1/ Is there room for greater ***trust in God*** in this process?

2/ Is there room for greater ***trust in the child*** in your approach?

3/ Is this approach signalling ***trust in the faith***? (Bible, liturgies, doctrines)



Practical Tips and Considerations for Children's talks

YOU are 'the story'. Children will remember feelings and relationships more than content. The way you look at them, speak and share with them, tells the greatest story of God's love for each child. It is an awesome privilege and responsibility.

- Be YOURSELF. Use your strengths, be authentic.
- Create a sacred space and time. Invite children to the front (unless there's very few and it would make them feel awkward). Mark the beginning and end of this time with a ritual like lighting a candle, having a special box with items in it, or saying with hand actions "it's time to open the Bible."
- Design your delivery according to your audience i.e. numbers of children, familiarity, ages, behaviour e.g. if there are many children you will need more structure and you may need to be elevated on a platform or stage to be seen and heard. This makes it harder not to feel 'on show'. For smaller groups, invite the children to gather around you and if possible sit at the same level which suggests we are all learners together. Colourful cushions or a mat can help define a space for this special time together. If there are few or no children you may like to leave them in their seats with their parents and have an all-age focus for your story (invite adults to participate too). If there's a history of difficult behaviour, you may like to leave children in seats with their parents, or invite parents upfront to sit with their children.
- Keep it short, simple, with one clear message.
- Use visuals, props, interaction and questions.
- Minister/leader may need to educate/inform the congregation about the purpose of children's time i.e. it is not infotainment! Encourage all to join in the sharing activities.
- Practise, practise, practise!



Purpose, Planning, Preparation, Props, PowerPoint, Participation

- If the purpose is for the minister to establish a regular relationship with children it can be valid to just have a listening and talking time e.g. Rev Mark Chapman, Clevedon, has a sharing time with children asking them how their week has gone and finishes with prayer and a reminder: 'You know God loves you and you're special? So say after me: 'I'm special and God loves me!' "
- Consider linking the talk with the children's teaching theme, rather than the adults' sermon (ideally try to have both children and adults exploring the same theme then everyone benefits, Children's curriculum often has ideas for "in church" time, (see the resource list for weekly lectionary based ideas.) or contact Kids Friendly for more ideas and resources.
- Observe others, read examples and adapt for your context. All-age resources are often very applicable.
- Communicate well in advance with the worship leader/minister to know what he/she is teaching.
- Know the time slot and length and stick to it!
- Prepare well, especially the introduction and questions. (See below about questioning.) Have as few notes as possible and 'tell' rather than read. PRACTISE!
- Props - make sure they are big enough. Where will you store/display them - before, during, after?
- PowerPoints can be used to project pictures from a book, or a photo of a prop so all can see.
- Participation and interaction – give clear instructions. Invite rather than demand (rule of thumb: ask 'would adults be comfortable doing this?' Is it childish rather than child-like? Is it gimmicky?)

Questions - open, closed, wondering

Closed questions usually require a 'right' answer or can encourage an unhelpful crowd response e.g. Have you had a good week? Who helped the man that was beaten up?

Open questions encourage thought and different responses e.g. Has someone got something good to share about their week? How did the Good Samaritan show kindness?



Wondering questions have a wide range of applications and contexts for all ages. Wondering invites children into a freer thinking space. It helps children to explore what they think and feel and not to arrive at the conclusion that the adult has planned in advance.

These kind of questions help form the habit of wondering.

Wondering frees us and children from right and wrong answers.

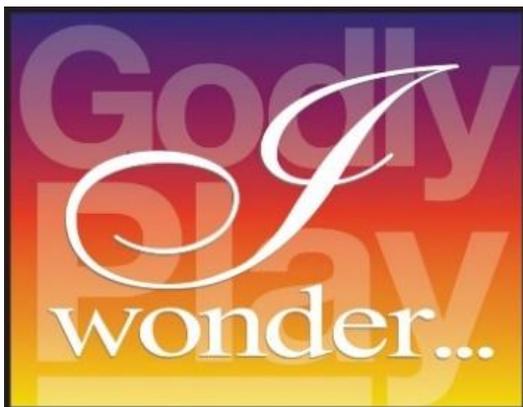
When children respond, value all contributions and hear everyone. Avoid labelling their answer or contribution as good or bad, right or wrong.

It's about "letting go and letting God."

The Godly Play style of storytelling offers some excellent wondering questions e.g.

- * I wonder what you like best about this story?
- * I wonder which is the most important part of the story?
- * I wonder which part of this story is also about you?

Want to know more about Godly Play?



<http://www.godlyplay.org.uk/> - offers information on Godly Play, where to order materials, courses (now also available in NZ) and further reading on the spirituality of children.

<http://godlyplay.org.au/>



RESOURCES

BOOKS: (* Available from the Kids Friendly library and Hewitson Library)

- CHILDREN'S SPIRITUALITY – WHAT IT IS AND WHY IT MATTERS*, Dr Rebecca Nye, Church House Publishing, 2009
- TALKING ABOUT SOMETHING IMPORTANT, Stan Stewart and Pauline Hubner, JBCE, Australia and NZ, 1981
- TOP TIPS ON ALL- AGE WORSHIP and SHARING BIBLE STORIES*, Scripture Union
- ALL AGE WORSHIP*, Rosie Staite, Tried & True resources 2013
- A CHURCH FOR ALL AGES – A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO ALL-AGE WORSHIP, Peter Graystone and Eileen Turner, SU
- ALL- AGE WORSHIP*, Lucy Moore. BRF, 2010
- WRIGGLE–STORIES AND MORE*, Tom Kerr, UCA, 2001
- CHILDREN IN WORSHIP, CONGREGATIONS IN BLOOM*, Rev Caroline Fairless

WEBSITES:

- www.sermons4kids.com – for stories and activity sheets based on the lectionary- including wonderful PowerPoint stories with art by Henry Martin
- www.barnabasinchurches.org.uk – look under 'Ideas to Use' for talks with props for all age services (e.g. Sharing the story of Holy Week with a single piece of A4 paper.)
- www.ministry-to-children.com - free resources and ministry ideas to use. Complete Sunday school, Bible, Children's Church lessons ready to use or adapt.
- www.childrensermons.com - over 100 5 minute sermons for children each with a summary and a bible reference.
- www.bibleforchildren.org – colourful Bible stories.
- www.childrenatworship.org – website that supports the book and work of Rev Caroline Fairless.
- www.lostsheep.com.au – Bright cartoon pictures, Bible stories with "downunder" humour. Download individual stories for \$10 including PPT and presenters booklets. Supporting activity sheets and additional ideas. Try the FREE sample of Cecil the Sheep (the Parable of the Lost Sheep).



KIDS FRIENDLY Resourcing, Coaching and Training

<http://www.kidsfriendly.org.nz/resourcing/>

- A Kids Friendly Welcome
- Kids Friendly Worship – lots of practical ideas and local stories for encouraging children’s involvement in the worship service. <http://www.kidsfriendly.org.nz/worship-together/worshipping-with-children/>
- Kids Friendly website: www.kidsfriendly.org.nz - check out our resource rich website.
- Contact us, your Kids Friendly team, for resources, ideas, training and encouragement. 😊

CONTACT:

To contact a Kids Friendly Coach or Advisor

Check our website:

<http://www.kidsfriendly.org.nz/about/contact-us/>

