

CHILD AND YOUTH EVANGELISM

DESCRIPTION

Jesus said, “Let the children come to Me, and do not hinder them.” In response, Adventurers and Pathfinders were established to bring children and youth to Jesus. Club ministry provides an opportunity for young people to learn about God, and to be mentored by older Christians. This is why Adventurers and Pathfinders are not just for SDA young people, but also for other youth. Club ministry is much more than entertainment; it provides relationships, experiences, and curriculum embedded with the goal of evangelism, strengthening forever friendships with our Savior, Jesus Christ.

PARTICIPANTS

Parents and staff engaged in child and youth evangelism

RESOURCE MATERIAL

- *The Desire of Ages*, by Ellen White. Chapter 56: “Blessing the Children”
- *Steps to Christ*, by Ellen White. Or *Steps to Jesus* (modern English version)
- *Journal of Adventist Education*

WHAT YOUR PARTICIPANTS WILL LEARN

1. How to teach theology to children
2. Six important theological concepts for children
3. Steps to Jesus for children

WORKSHOP CONTENT

KEY TEXTS

- Psalm 94:12 “You shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.”
- Matthew 19:13-15 “Then the little children were brought to Him that He might put His hands on them and pray, but the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.’ And He laid His hands on them and departed from there.”
- Matthew 9:36-38 “But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, ‘The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.’”

EXCERPTS FROM THEOLOGY FOR CHILDREN

Keys to Theology for Children

- › Teach simply, but always teach accurately.
- › Increase complexity as your students’ thinking matures
- › Check your students’ thinking for misconceptions.
- › Teach important doctrines thoroughly so children understand what they believe.

The child’s home provides a very important foundation for theological and doctrinal ideas. Children associate many ideas about God with the way they feel about their parents and relate to them. Children also hear many comments about theological issues at church and at school which influence their thinking.

MENTAL DEVELOPMENT AND THEOLOGICAL IDEAS

Children’s stages of mental development will influence what theological ideas they can understand and whether they associate doctrines with a particular church. Research on children’s thinking about churches shows that before age seven, most children have no understanding of what it means to belong to a certain church or what that church believes.

CHECKING CHILDREN'S THINKING

To understand what your students are thinking, first study child development. Knowing the kind of thinking most children do at a particular age will help you identify ideas that might be confusing. You will also be able to listen with greater understanding.

Listening to your students' conversation is very helpful. Listen to the meanings they give to stories and events. Listen to how they sing songs. Listen to their answers to questions. Careful observation will give you invaluable insights into their thinking.

Talking with your students informally will also help you to find out what they are thinking. Ask questions about common religious words and ideas. If they give you pat answers, be wary. These are not evidence

of much insight and understanding.

Pursue an idea further. Ask them what they think a word really means. Often children can express their religious ideas better through art, music, or role-playing than in words.

Ask your students to draw a picture of a Bible story. You may be amazed at their interpretations. Then you will have an opportunity to clarify any misconceptions. After a child has drawn a picture, ask him or her to tell you about it. Just say simply, "Tell me about your picture." Never make fun of what the child says or has drawn. If the explanation reveals misconceptions, note these for future reteaching. Never belittle or embarrass a student because of a misconception.

LEARNING CORRECT THEOLOGICAL IDEAS

1. Be sure that you understand clearly what you are trying to teach your students. If you are fuzzy about the meaning of salvation, you will have difficulty explaining it.
2. Use easy-to-understand words. Avoid complicated religious phrases and symbolic explanations. On the other hand, be sure your simple explanation is doctrinally correct.
3. Use familiar objects and everyday events to teach Bible truths.
4. Use illustrations familiar to the child.
5. Explain the Bible lesson using objects to handle or visuals to see.
6. Illustrate your teaching with stories.
7. Do not rush the students. Use short periods of instruction. Teach in small chunks. Give the students time to digest what they are learning.
8. Don't confuse the students with many ideas at a time; teach one idea well before moving on to another.
9. Teach the same idea in many different ways. Strive for real understanding of a few very important ideas rather than encyclopedic knowledge with little understanding. Teach an important idea in ten different ways, instead of teaching ten different ideas.

10. Don't talk too much. Avoid long, tedious explanations and prayers, or children may become bored with religion.
11. Give the students an opportunity to explain in their own words what they have

learned. Wise counsel from an inspired source makes the point very clear: Make sure your scholars understand you. If they cannot comprehend your ideas, then your labor is lost.

IMPORTANT THEOLOGICAL CONCEPTS FOR CHILDREN

The same inspired source gives us important counsel about the theological ideas children need to understand. The chart summarizes this information. Notice that the theological concepts mentioned first and most often are fundamental to understanding grace. They are the essentials. Teach them often and in many different ways.

Theology for Children, From Ellen G. White

Theological Idea	What to Teach	References
God the Father	God is a loving father who wants loving obedience from each child. God is love. God cares for children. Angels help us.	<i>Child Guidance</i> 487, 548; <i>Testimonies</i> vol. 8, 320; <i>Adventist Home</i> 321
Law of God	Children should love God and obey His law. They need to understand what is right and what is wrong.	<i>Child Guidance</i> 43, 81, 89, 490
Life of Jesus	Tell your students about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection as soon as they can understand. Associate every lesson with Christ. Help them understand that God shows His love through Jesus.	<i>Child Guidance</i> 487, 494; <i>Adventist Home</i> 320, 321; <i>Testimonies</i> vol. 8, 320
Scripture	The children should learn to love the Bible as the rule of life. The Holy Spirit will help them understand. Reading the Bible is very important.	<i>Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students</i> 172
Salvation	Teach the Plan of Salvation simply. Disobeying God's law is sin. Jesus will forgive sins; help your students believe that He does. They should ask daily. Invite them to give their hearts to God.	<i>Counsels on Sabbath School Work</i> 78, 80; <i>Child Guidance</i> 490, 491; <i>Messages to Young People</i> 15; <i>Testimonies</i> vol. 5, 520.

Salvation	Help them to understand that Jesus loves us so much that He came to live on Earth and to die so we might be forgiven. Teach with love and tenderness. Explain about the Day of Atonement and forgiveness.	
Victorious Life	Help your students look to God for strength. He hears their prayers. If they believe and trust God, He will send the Holy Spirit. Encourage them to thank God for His goodness and to use the Bible as a guide and help. With God's help, they can be true to Him in all circumstances. Explain how to obtain eternal life.	<i>Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students 109, 50, 131; Testimonies vol. 2, 287; Child Guidance 146, 147, 172, 173</i>
Creation	Nature is God's second book. Rightly understood, it teaches many different lessons: God's care, love, creation of the world, sin and suffering, the new earth. Provide a strong foundation on creationism.	<i>Testimonies vol. 8, 326, 327; Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students 185-190; Education 99-120</i>
Healthful Living	Teach about self-control and self-denial, the laws of health, and the function of the human body. Help your students understand that many kinds of illness are caused by what one does.	<i>Testimonies vol. 3; 567; Child Guidance 104, 362</i>
Heaven	Describe the glories of heaven and how to enter the Holy City.	<i>Child Guidance 486, 487</i>
Pillars of Faith	Help your students understand the pillars of the faith, the reasons why Seventh-day Adventists are separate and distinct from the world.	<i>Testimonies vol. 5, 330, 331</i>
Prayer	Teach your students how to pray clearly, distinctly, and simply. Help them memorize the Lord's Prayer.	<i>Child Guidance 522, 523</i>
Reverence in Worship	Teach your students to have the highest reverence for God and His house. Describe proper deportment in the	<i>Child Guidance 541, 542; Testimonies vol. 5, 494</i>

Reverence in Worship	sanctuary and in other religious settings.	
Sabbath	Teach your students about Sabbath observance and preparation and about the importance of attending worship services. Explain that keeping the first day of the week as Sabbath is not true Sabbath-keeping since it contradicts God's law.	<i>Child Guidance 530; Testimonies vol 6, 193, 356; Education 251</i>
Service	Teach your students to be helpful to others, starting with their own family. Encourage missionary activities.	<i>Adventist Home 286, 486, 487</i>
Stewardship	Teach your students to deny self and give to others or earn money to help others. Help them understand the need to return tithe and offerings. Center birthday celebrations around God's blessings.	<i>Counsels on Sabbath School Work 139-143</i>

The first six theological ideas are stressed many times by Ellen White. Over and over, she indicates that we should teach our children that God is their Father, that He and Jesus love them very much, and that they should study the Bible and obey God's law. When they do wrong, Jesus, who died to save them, will forgive their sins, and help them live a victorious life. They will be filled with the Holy Spirit and the grace of their Savior.

The remaining theological ideas are in alphabetical order. Ellen White specifically mentions that each of them should be taught to children, but they are mentioned less frequently than the first six, ideas which are really the core of learning about salvation. Teach these doctrines frequently and thoroughly. Begin with very simple ideas for young students. Little by little, add more information as their mental ability matures.

Be sure older students understand what God's Word teaches about these doctrines and what they mean in everyday living by the time they complete elementary school. This will give them a sure foundation for the future.

- › The above is from a *Journal of Adventist Education* February/March 2004 article excerpt from the book *Theology for Children* by Donna J. Habenicht and Larry Burton, <http://circle.adventist.org/files/jae/en/jae200466033506.pdf>.
- › Below: "Salvation: Helping Your Students Embrace God's Grace," *Journal of Adventist Education*, Dec 2003/Jan 2004, pp. 14-20. <http://circle.adventist.org/files/jae/en/jae200366021407.pdf>

STEPS TO JESUS

Leading students to Christ and helping them to grow in Him is the most important thing that you as a teacher can do. It should be the point of everything, the goal of all activities and relationships. This has several steps: (1) preparing them for salvation experiences; (2) introducing them to what Jesus did for them on the cross; (3) inviting them to accept Jesus as their personal Savior; and (4) showing them how to grow closer to Jesus, become more and more like Him, and to solve problems God's way.

- a. **Provide sound Bible teaching and love.** The Bible provides a foundation for faith and discipleship. (2 Timothy 3:15). Love provides a basis for the relationship with God (1 John 3:1, 16).
- b. **Help children to know that they are accountable to God.** Children are first accountable to their parents (or other caregivers), then to their teachers. They say things like: 'My Dad won't let me, "It's against the school rules.' Share with them the idea that they are also accountable to God.
This is an important step in readiness to accept Christ's sacrifice. You would know that they have made the transition when you hear an early teen say, 'I really wanted to skip church and hang out with my friends, but something whispered to me, 'Jesus will miss you if you don't stay,' and I knew I couldn't disappoint Him.' A younger child might say, 'I think I need to tell Josh I'm sorry. That's what Jesus would want me to do.'
- c. **Help your students experience different aspects of coming to Jesus:** Joyfully experiencing God's love and trusting Him; feeling guilty, being sorry, and confessing wrongdoing; forgiving others; making an effort to change their behavior; helping others; reading the Bible, and praying. Start nurturing these experiences for the very young. Look for child-friendly books about God's love.
- d. **Teach your students how to make little decisions** between right and wrong from when they are very young. Your youngest students are making decisions already about right and wrong every day. Their consciences have begun to speak, and they are already moral creatures who know that some actions are right and some wrong. Encourage them to do the right thing.
- e. **Encourage your church to be a warm, caring community for children.** Challenge the adults to learn the names of all the youth and to greet each one whenever they see them. This simple strategy will begin to build relationships between adults and children. Encourage the adults to mentor the young people, engaging them as assistant greeters and junior deacons and deaconesses.

PRAY FOR THE HOLY SPIRIT TO SPEAK TO YOUR STUDENTS' HEARTS.

It is the Holy Spirit that convicts the heart and mind. Only He can convert a child. Help your students understand the vocabulary of salvation. Words like sin, Savior, salvation, grace,

Holy Spirit, and forgiveness may be foreign to them. Interpret each term with simple words children can understand. Some Bible stories are especially helpful: Nicodemus, Philip and the Ethiopian, Jesus and the woman at the well, and Jesus and the woman caught in adultery.

LEAD YOUR STUDENTS THROUGH THE STEPS TO SALVATION.

Be sure they understand each step. Show them in the Bible what Jesus will do and what they must do.

- a. **Begin with God's love** (John 3: 16–17, John 4:8). God loves everyone. He made a perfect world full of love, but the first people in our world chose to disobey God. That is how sin began.
- b. **Everyone does wrong things.** We are all sinners. Because of this, we cannot see God or talk to Him face to face. Death is our punishment for doing wrong. No one can be good enough to live in heaven. Be sure children recognize that they are sinners (Romans 3:23; 6:23).
- c. **Jesus died on the cross so we do not have to die forever, so someday we can live in heaven** (John 3:16). Jesus loves us so much that He was willing to die in our place. Then Jesus came back to life again as our Savior from sin and death (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). When you confess your sins and ask God for forgiveness, all your sins are forgiven (Isaiah 1:18; Psalm 51:10; 1 John 1:9). God will never remember them again (Isaiah 43:25). They are gone! That is grace. We do not deserve to be forgiven, but God does it anyway because Jesus died for us.
- d. **Ask your students if they would like to accept the gift of salvation that Jesus offers.** Help each child to be in a saving relationship with Jesus by accepting or affirming Him as his or her Savior (John 1:12, Revelation 3:20). Help each student pray a simple prayer, “I am sorry for doing wrong things, Jesus. I believe You died for me. I want You to be my Savior from sin. I want to be part of your family.” Remind them that this is all they have to do. Salvation from sin is a gift from Jesus.
- e. **Help your students to feel assured of salvation** (John 3:36, Hebrews 13:5–6). Tell them, “You are now Jesus’ child; you will have a place in His kingdom, in heaven. You are a new person who doesn’t want to do wrong because you love Jesus and Jesus loves you” (2 Corinthians 5:17).
- f. **As you take your students through these steps,** help them find the Bible texts and underline them. Use pictures, drawings, or objects to help explain, or ask them to make their own booklets with drawings to illustrate each step.
- g. **Show your students how to grow in a new life,** through prayer, asking Jesus to help them overcome sin, telling others about Jesus, and reading the Scriptures.

CONVERSION LEADS TO CHANGE IN LIFESTYLE.

This will be noticeable even for children. After all, “Even a child is known by his doings” (Proverbs 20:11). Conversion to God is essential in areas such as study, faithful work, obedience, unselfishness, helpfulness, and kindness. However, we must not expect perfection. Explain to your students about the two natures (the old and the new) struggling inside. God is stronger than Satan, so the new can be stronger than the old. It is very important to explain what your students should do when they sin: confess, believe God forgives, and ask for help.

- a. **Do not be afraid to ask for a decision.** The Holy Spirit is responsible for the results.
- b. **Avoid pressuring your students to make a decision.** Depend on the Holy Spirit to work on each one’s heart.
- c. **Use natural situations for decisions about salvation** Be alert for the student being convicted by the Holy Spirit. This may happen during class time, worship, or prayer, while riding in the school bus, or when just talking together. Ask your students to make a decision inside (one that no one knows about) before asking for a public decision. The student who makes a decision “inside” may be able to tell you about it afterward. This way, it is a personal decision. Peer pressure is not involved.
- d. **Be alert for lessons that lead naturally to receiving Jesus.** The Holy Spirit speaks to each heart continually. Be aware of His leading. Some of the following suggestions might lead to a decision opportunity. Prepare small cards asking for a decision. Prepare small cards with appropriate Scripture verses for students to sign and place in their Bibles as a reminder of their decision. Sing songs about coming to Christ. Tell a modern-day story that illustrates salvation.

SHARING THEIR DECISION

Encourage students to share their decision with someone else, perhaps parents or grandparents unless they are known to be extremely opposed to Christianity. If the latter is the case, suggest that students wait until later to share with these people. They can share with the pastor, the Sabbath School teacher, Adventurer or Pathfinder leader, or some other interested adult. Encourage children to share their decision with their peers. This reinforces the decision.

SUPPORTING THEIR COMMITMENT

An invitation to accept Christ and to give oneself to Him should not be so easy that acceptance is not genuine. On the other hand, it should not be so difficult that the child never responds. Some children will not respond to a general invitation. They need an adult to take a personal interest and to give a loving, one-to-one invitation. You might be that adult. Be alert for students who need a personal invitation. Some teens are still waiting for the personal touch.

Do not judge the genuineness of a student's commitment by his or her emotions. All children do not react with the same emotions. If a child cries in response to an invitation, quietly hand him or her a tissue and wait silently. Remember, some children do not show violent emotions, but this does not mean they are not converted.

Some of your students may feel troubled about past sins. They may feel convicted to make restitution but may not know how. Help them find the Bible instructions and promises for forgiveness. You can offer to go with the child to confess. An older child might need to be encouraged to make a long-distance call or write a letter to a former teacher or speak to a friend or sibling. Whatever you do, do it with love. Never blame, berate, or express shock. Remember, God accepts all repentant sinners with love, but He often shows that love through you.

IN CONCLUSION

As teachers, we are privileged to be partners with God for the salvation of every student in our classes. If we pray for each one and watch for opportunities to show God's love and speak of His grace, the Holy Spirit will prompt us to words or actions at precisely the right moment and we will experience the thrill of seeing a student respond to the call of the Spirit.

- › The above is adapted from "Salvation: Helping Your Students Embrace God's Grace," Journal of Adventist Education, Dec 2003/Jan 2004, pp. 14-20.
<http://circle.adventist.org/files/jae/en/jae200366021407.pdf>

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- Explore and share resources for child and youth evangelism.
- Additional resources are located at the close of this presenter's manual.

"Too much importance cannot be placed on the early training of children. The lessons that the child learns during the first seven years of life have more to do with forming his character than all that it learns in future years." (Child Guidance, 193).

"It is still true that children are the most susceptible to the teachings of the gospel; their hearts are open to divine influences, and strong to retain the lessons received. The little children may be Christians, having an experience in accordance with their years. They need to be educated in spiritual things, and parents should give them every advantage, that they may form characters after the similitude of the character of Christ." (The Desire of Ages, 515).

"Children of eight, ten or twelve years, are old enough to be addressed on the topic 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." (Child Guidance, 490).

"In the children who were brought in contact with Him, Jesus saw the men and women who should be heirs of His grace and subjects of His kingdom, some of whom would become martyrs for His sake.

He knew that these children would listen to Him and accept Him as their Redeemer far more readily than would grown people, many of whom were the worldly-wise and hardhearted. In teaching, He came down to their level. He, the majesty of heaven, answered their questions and simplified His important lessons to meet their childish understanding." (Evangelism, 579).

"In the closing scenes of earth's history, many of these children and youth will astonish people by their witness to the truth, which will be borne in simplicity, yet with spirit and power. They have been taught the fear of the Lord, and their hearts have been softened by a careful and prayerful study of the Bible. In the near future, many children will be endued with the Spirit of God, and will do a work in proclaiming the truth to the world, that at that time cannot well be done by the older members of the church." (Counsels to Parents, Students and Teachers, 166, 167).

"Those who love God should feel deeply interested in the children and youth. To them God can reveal His truth and salvation. Jesus calls the little ones that believe on Him, the lambs of His flock. He has a special love for and interest in the children... The most precious offering that the children can give to Jesus, is the freshness of their childhood." (Reflecting Christ, 373).

"Parents whose children desire to be baptized have a work to do, both in self-examination and in giving faithful instruction to their children. Baptism is a most sacred and important ordinance, and there should be a thorough understanding as to its meaning. It means repentance for sin, and the entrance upon a new life in Christ Jesus. There should be no undue haste to receive the ordinance. Let both parents and children count the cost. In consenting to the baptism of their children, parents sacredly pledge themselves to be faithful stewards over these children, to guide them in their character building. They pledge themselves to guard with special interest these lambs of the flock, that they may not dishonor the faith they profess." (CG, 499).

"Helping Children Connect Personally With God.

Encouraging children to develop a personal devotional life is vital to connecting them with God for the rest of their lives. Communicate with your students' families to encourage them to help the children experience personal time with God. Show your students how to experience 'God Time' through reading and memorizing one verse in the Bible, doing the suggested activities in the Bible lesson, talking with God using the prayer model they have learned, writing, or drawing a response or idea in their journal, singing praises with a tape/CD, listening to God's impressions, or responding to God through nature experiences. An important part of their daily connection with God is learning to give their will to Jesus every day and experiencing grace and forgiveness, as well as how to forgive. Their 'God Time' is made to order for these experiences. They need to experience getting rid of the guilt—burning it or throwing it into the bottom of the sea, as God promises to do. Encourage them to

focus on praising God when tempted to think about the guilt. Provide experiences that show them what to do at home." JAE, Oct/Nov 2004, p. 9. <http://circle.adventist.org/files/jae/en/jae200467010506.pdf>.

"Answering Questions About Prayer and Worship.

So-called 'unanswered prayers' raise the most questions with children. Think carefully about how to respond to situations where a child was hurt or even killed in an accident or as the result of violence, or a parent died or left the family through divorce. Understanding tough times is difficult, especially for children who tend to see God as a Giver and Protector. They wonder: Doesn't God send angels to protect people? Then why did this terrible thing happen? Children need to gradually come to understand that there is an Evil One roaming the world and that he is the one responsible for all bad things. God is the solution to the evil, not the problem. Be careful how you say things. Do not subtly blame God for hurricanes, wars, deaths, or family break-ups. The Evil One is at work in all of this, and God's people are not immune to his strikes. You can help teenagers—and perhaps some younger students—to understand, through searching and prayer, that we may not know all the answers to our questions until eternity when we can ask God directly. We must trust God in everything. He will see us through the difficulties. If children continue blaming God for what happened, bitterness may fill their lives, and they will reject God.

"Be careful with often-used Christian phrases such as: 'It was God's will', 'God permitted it.' They are very hard for children to understand. Simply say, 'Jesus is right beside you. He will carry you in His arms. He loves you and is crying, too. Je-

sus hates the bad things that happen. Satan is to blame for the bad things.' Think through your own feelings and theology carefully. When you work with children, these difficult questions are sure to arise. Try to translate the thoughts God gives you into children's language, considering what

you know about your students' thoughts and feelings. Then you will be prepared for the tough questions. When the questions come, breathe a prayer for God to give you the right thing to say and do." "Connecting Children With God Through Prayer and Worship," JAE, Oct/Nov 2004, pp. 9-10.