

Building faith in your 0 to 1-year-old

There is so much joy in caring for a newborn, as well as tiredness and hard work! It's a precious time, and just being there to care for them and meet their needs is building a foundation of love and trust on which their faith will grow.

There are some significant elements that help children to grow in their faith - here are some ideas for this particular stage of your child's development.



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Home

Babies need to feel loved and safe. Offering warm touch, smiles and eye contact as you meet their physical and emotional needs creates a deep sense of security. You are showing them God's love as you care for them!



Prayer

Pray over your child as they sleep or feed. You can use a scripture that becomes part of your routine. For example, "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace." (Numbers 6:24-26)

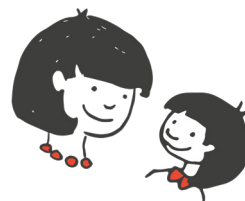


Be real

Keeping up your own relationship with God can be difficult at this stage. What worked before probably doesn't now! It's important to be kind to yourself and find different ways to connect with God – like listening to the Bible (perhaps while you do something else) instead of reading it, or using the time when pushing the pram to have a conversation with him.

Trust

Babies develop trust as their needs are met and they experience the security of being loved.



Be intentional

Play worship music or speak words of truth over your baby. You will be developing a habit that will change the atmosphere of your home now and into the future.



Inspire a faith that lasts



Belong

Going to church with a baby can be tough (and you may not be able to participate in a service in the way you used to) but relationships are so important. Keep connecting. Church can be the place where you find support and meet others on the same journey. At the same time, your little ones get to experience the love and care of God's family.

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Check out our website to find out more about the elements that build faith, as well as a variety of books, videos, resources and blog posts. kitchentable.org.uk

Building faith in your 1 to 3-year-old

Toddlers are beginning to learn that they are a separate person from their parents with a mind and will of their own. As they grow in independence and explore their world, you are the person who provides boundaries as well as affirmation.

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Putting boundaries in place keeps children safe and is the beginning of understanding right and wrong. It takes courage for parents to set and maintain boundaries but it creates an essential sense of security.

What you choose to enforce sends your child a message about what you think is important. For example, is telling the truth high on your values list? Then you will want to encourage that in your child.



Prayer

This is a great time to get into the routine of praying at mealtimes and before bed. Simple, short prayers are best and your child may enjoy shouting 'Amen' at the end. As they grow they can repeat some of the words after you.



Be real

Holding it together can be really challenging when toddlers tantrum (especially in a public place). They are learning to say 'no' and you are probably learning the same thing! It may help to know that you are not alone and that this is a normal stage of development. Try not to take it personally. Ask God to help you grow in patience as you seek to establish consistent boundaries.

Discovery

As toddlers explore and learn about the world around them they need boundaries but they also need the space to discover. The joy of finding out new things can be built into their developing understanding of God.



Be intentional

Most children love story time and reading Bible stories is a great way to introduce them to God's world. At this age children are great explorers and you can very naturally talk about God's creation as you take a walk and kick the autumn leaves or spot the new growth of spring.



Inspire a faith that lasts



Belong

Church can be fun and exciting! There's often space and music, new faces and other children. Try not to worry too much about your child running around or making lots of noise. They will learn from the freedom and enjoyment they have with their church family, feeling at home in God's house.

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Building faith in your 3 to 5-year-old

Children are learning lots as they play and there is beauty in their creativity. Their imaginations and physical capabilities are growing and they are beginning to have a sense of time – the past and future. You may find that they swing from being independent to wanting to be cared for as a 'baby'. They are still looking to you as their safe place.

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Help your children work through their feelings and emotions by playing with them, giving focused attention and offering language to help them talk about how they feel.



Prayer

Simple prayers still work well at this stage. A good structure might be 'thank you', 'sorry' and 'help'. You can link those prayers to their growing understanding and encourage them to pray for their family and friends.



Be real

They love to copy what you are doing, so why not read your Bible in front of them or pray out loud so they can get a glimpse of your relationship with God. They may well join in – and they are seeing what matters to you in a very natural way.

Identity

As you play and pray, you are building your child's sense of who they are and their great worth in God's eyes.



Be intentional

At this age children enjoy pretend and imaginative play – you could act out a Bible story together. When they've shared a toy with a friend or sibling, your praise will build their sense of worth. As you say 'that was a kind thing to do', you are building their values around God's character. Share foundational Bible truths in simple ways – who Jesus is, what God is like. Talk to them about who they are – made and loved by God.



Inspire a faith that lasts



Belong

Spending time with other families from church helps your children develop relationships with their peers but also with adults who can help invest in their faith journey too. You are creating a network of support. Fun and adventure can be built into these times as you do things together with another family (or two!).

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Building faith in your 5 to 7-year-old

As children start full-time school their world is expanding rapidly. Friendships are becoming important. They understand that games have rules and fairness matters a lot. Children's temperaments and personality characteristics are now more evident. They may be more physically active and increasingly capable but may need encouragement to concentrate on tasks at home or school.

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Giving an instruction can take a few seconds but training – explaining why something is important or why there are consequences to behaviour – takes time and is pretty repetitive! Remind yourself that you are laying good foundations when you find yourself repeating the same words again (and again). As children develop they are more able to respond to calm reasoning and thrive on praise and encouragement.



Prayer

At this age, children are growing in their understanding that God has a purpose for their lives. You can pray with (and for) them and encourage them to chat to God themselves. Help them to think about how God can speak to them and use them now. Sharing stories of different Bible characters (Samuel, Naaman's servant girl) or other heroes of the faith (Mother Teresa, William Booth) will link into their strong sense of fairness and right and wrong.



Be real

Every parent will have times when you feel you've got it wrong – whether it's over-reacting to your child's behaviour, or being too rushed to listen to their worries. At those times your apology matters. As you explain why you've said sorry and why we need to forgive one another, you are giving them a glimpse of God's heart of forgiveness and restoration and they are learning that it's OK to make mistakes.

Purpose

Children find joy and purpose in creating (a drawing or a Lego construction) and achieving (learning to read or swim) and you can encourage them to see their growing abilities and interests as part of God's purpose for them.



Be intentional

Traditions create memories and a sense of security. You may use Christian seasons, such as Lent, Advent, Christmas and Easter to introduce specific activities or simply make Friday 'pizza night' in front of the TV. The memories traditions create can be the 'glue' that keeps you close as you look back with thankfulness and 'remember when...'!



Inspire a faith that lasts



Belong

Older children can have a really positive influence. Can you identify anyone who would be a good friend and role model for your child? Someone your child already looks up to? Perhaps you could invest in that relationship by inviting them for a meal, or going on a family walk together.

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Building faith in your 7 to 9-year-old

Children are becoming aware that not everyone is like them. They'll begin to understand that other people have different opinions and expectations and not everyone believes in God. They may begin to identify with others and be influenced by them, especially friends and celebrities.

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Home

Your child will be trying to find their place in their friendship groups and the world. They may have a greater sense of justice, acceptance, fairness and compassion for others. Working with your child's temperament and interests to help them express themselves is so valuable at this stage.



Prayer

At this stage children may be able to concentrate for longer and can become absorbed in something they're interested in. Finding ways to connect with God through a game that grabs them, such as Scripture Union's Guardians of Ancora, may work well for your child. You can help them to develop their own relationship with God as they use some age-appropriate Bible reading notes or you share everyday stories of how God speaks to you.



Be real

Talking about different people's opinions, values and beliefs and how they may differ from yours, helps your child to understand and respect others. It also reinforces that they don't always have to be influenced by or have the same views as others.

Influence

Even though there is so much vying for your children's attention and influencing them, you can be louder than all the noise. Remember you are the greatest influence in your child developing faith!



Be intentional

Peer pressure can be a very strong and real issue your children face. You can help them to not do things just because their friends are by helping them to form their own opinions. When you take time to watch or read something together, you can help them to explore the themes from the perspective of your faith and values.



Inspire a faith that lasts



Belong

As your children are becoming more aware of others around them, could you connect them with other trusted adults in your church community? Perhaps they could regularly send a card or letter to an older member of the congregation and swap prayer requests. Investing in these relationships now can help create a sense of family and also provide other adults to support your children as they grow older.

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Building faith in your 9 to 11-year-old

At this stage, children will be beginning to experience physical and emotional changes. Although advice from their friends will become increasingly important in the years ahead, they are still looking to you for guidance. As you give them greater responsibility, you are showing that you trust them. It builds their confidence and your relationship.

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Home

Give them opportunities to help at home. You are helping to develop both their abilities and their character. As they approach secondary school, they may be pushing previously set boundaries as they look for greater independence. They are more self-aware and it's respectful to talk through rules and consequences and bring correction when they are on their own with you, rather than in front of others.



Prayer

You can help your children to find their place in the bigger picture of God's plan by praying for wider issues and things they are interested in. This may tie in with an organisation or family your church supports elsewhere in the world.



Be real

As your children transition to secondary school we can feel that we're not needed. But that's not true! Providing a safe place for them to talk, ask questions and find themselves is more valuable now than ever.

Responsibility

Children are becoming more responsible and co-operative. As they find a part to play and are trusted to serve, they're developing character traits that will stand them in good stead for the teenage years ahead. You're helping them learn that even though there are ups and down, it's important they continue to play their part.



Be intentional

Your children may have difficult questions and even questions that challenge your views. Try not to feel threatened or be defensive, but instead explore these questions together, listen to their opinions, look for answers in the Bible and encourage them to talk to other people at church. Encourage them to find their own ways of connecting with God – maybe through worship music, reading an age-appropriate Bible or exploring creation.



Inspire a faith that lasts



Belong

Your role as a parent may be changing but your relationship is as important as ever and it's good to find ways to serve together in areas that interest them and help them connect with God, perhaps on a project supporting vulnerable people or on the church welcome team. Doing things on a team with others will help them build relationships and this can help them stay connected even if they become bored or uninterested in church services or meetings.

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