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the theory and practice of lifelong faith formation

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Parents & Faith Formation

- 3 What Makes a Good Parent? - A Scientific Analysis Ranks the 10 Most Effective Child-Rearing Practices
By Robert Epstein
- 8 How Igniting Our Children's Sparks Can Support and Save Our Children and Their Future
Peter L. Benson
- 17 And a Little Child Shall Lead Them: The Advent and Event of Parenting as Spiritual Journey
Dawn M. Alitz
- 26 Nurturing the Faith of Parents
Catherine Stonehouse and Scottie May
- 32 Parents and "Sticky Faith"—Building a Lasting Faith in Young People
Kara E. Powell, Brad M Griffin, Cheryl A. Crawford, and Chap Clark
- 36 The Parenting Environment
Barna Research & Orange (A Division of rethink Group)
- 41 How to Pass Your Faith to Your Kids
Jim Burns
- 44 Resources



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Lifelong Faith

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Welcome to the Fall 2011 issue of *Lifelong Faith* on the theme of “Parents & Faith Formation.” The insights and wisdom in this issue can provide solid direction for working with parents and developing programs, strategies, and resources for supporting and equipping a parents.

Robert Epstein presents an analysis of research studies to determine the ten most effective child-rearing practices. These ten findings could form the basic content for parenting workshops, resources, and guidance.

Peter Benson captures the research that the Search Institute has done on thriving in childhood and adolescents by identifying the Sparks that enable a person to thrive in a changing world. Churches need to find ways to help parents identify and support the Sparks in their children’s lives.

Dawn Alitz draws on her interviews and focus groups with parents to present insights to parenting as a spiritual journey. Throughout her article are important insights that need to be incorporated in every church’s ministry with parents.

Catherine Stonehouse and **Scottie May** offer a variety of practical suggestions for nurturing the faith of parents based on their research study with children and their parents. Their ideas can form the basis for intentional strategies that churches can use to foster the faith growth of parent.

Kara Powell and her colleagues at the Fuller Youth Institute have just concluded a research study on what makes for “sticky faith” in adolescents and college-aged young adults. At the center of their findings are the critical role of parents—modeling faith, teaching faith practices, and engaging in faith conversations with their children.

Barna Research and **Orange** conducted a 2010 study on parents’ views of church and their relationship with churches. The excerpt from the study focuses on five findings from the parenting environment with lots of clues into how churches can respond more effectively to parents and families.

Jim Burns concludes this issue with ten practical ways parents can pass on faith to their children and teens.

There are lots of resources recommended throughout this issue for your review.

I hope this issue prompts your church to create or strengthen an intentional plan for equipping, supporting, and resourcing parents. We should remember each day that ***parents are the most important factor in the healthy development and faith formation of their children and adolescents!***

John Roberto, Editor



What Makes a Good Parent?

A Scientific Analysis Ranks the 10 Most Effective Child-Rearing Practices

By Robert Epstein

Amazon.com lists an astounding number of dieting books—more than 16,000. But parenting guides far exceed that number: there are some 40,000 of them, including books such as Jane Rankin's *Parenting Experts*, that do nothing but evaluate the often conflicting advice the experts offer. People, it seems, are even more nervous about their parenting than they are about their waistslines. Why is there such chaos and doubt when it comes to parenting? Why, in fact, do most parents continue to parent pretty much the way their own parents did—or, if they disliked the way they were raised, the exact *opposite* way? Shouldn't we all just find out what the studies say and parent accordingly?

A growing body of research conducted over the past 50 years shows fairly clearly that some parenting practices produce better outcomes than others—that is, better relationships between parent and child and happier, healthier, better functioning children. And just as we use medical science cautiously and strategically to make everyday health decisions, we can also make wise use of research to become better parents.

A new study I conducted with Shannon L. Fox, a student at the University of California, San Diego, compared the effectiveness of 10 kinds of parenting practices that have gotten the thumbs-up in various scientific studies. It also showed how parenting experts rate those practices and looked at just how many parents actually use those practices. In other words, we compared three things: what experts advise, what really seems to work and what parents actually do.

Our study confirmed some widely held beliefs about parenting—for example, that showing your kids that you love them is essential—and it also yielded some surprises, especially regarding the importance of a parent's ability to manage stress in his or her own life.

Robert Epstein PhD, a longtime researcher and professor of psychology, is a contributing editor for *Scientific American Mind* and former editor in chief of *Psychology Today*. His latest book is *Teen 2.0: Saving Our Children and Families from the Torment of Adolescence*.

(This article is reprinted with permission from *Scientific American Mind*, November/December 2010)

10 Important Competencies

To figure out which parenting skills were most important, we looked at data from about 2,000 parents who recently took an online test of parenting skills I developed several years ago (accessible at <http://MyParentingSkills.com>) and who also answered questions about their children. Parents did not know this when they took the test, but the skills were organized into 10 categories, all of which derive from published studies that show that such skills are associated with good outcomes with children. The 10 skill areas measured by the test were also evaluated by 11 parenting experts unknown to Fox and me, and we in turn were unknown to them (in other words, using a double-blind evaluation procedure).

On the test, parents indicated for 100 items how much they agreed with statements such as “I generally encourage my child to make his or her own choices,” “I try to involve my child in healthful outdoor activities” and “No matter how busy I am, I try to spend quality time with my child.” Test takers clicked their level of agreement on a five-point scale from “agree” to “disagree.” Because all the items were derived from published studies, the answers allowed us to compute an overall skill level for each test taker, as well as separate skill levels in each of the 10 competency areas. Agreement with statements that described sound parenting practices (again, according to those studies) yielded higher scores.

The 10 kinds of parenting competencies, which we call “The Parents’ Ten,” include obvious ones such as managing problem behavior and expressing love and affection, as well as practices that affect children indirectly, such as maintaining a good relationship with one’s co-parent and having practical life skills.

In addition to asking test takers basic demographic questions about their age, education, marital status, parenting experience, and so on, we also asked them questions about the outcomes of their parenting, such as “How happy have your children been (on average)?,” “How successful have your children been in school or work settings (on average)?” and “How good has your relationship been with your children (on average)?”

For questions such as these, test takers clicked on a 10-point scale from low to high. With scores in hand for each parent on all “The Parents’ Ten,” along

with their general assessments regarding the outcomes of their parenting, we could now use a statistical technique called regression analysis to determine which competencies best predict good parenting outcomes. For an outcome such as the child’s happiness, this kind of analysis allows us to say which parenting skills are associated with the most happiness in children.

Fast Facts Essential Parenting Skills

1. Decades of research reveal 10 essential parenting skill sets. A new study of 2,000 parents determined which skills are most important to bringing up healthy, happy and successful kids.
2. Giving love and affection tops the list. Then comes a surprise: managing stress and having a good relationship with the other parent are more helpful than some child-focused behaviors.
3. All types of people are equally competent at child-rearing—and anyone can learn how to be a better parent with a little effort.

Love, Autonomy and Surprises

Our most important finding confirmed what most parents already believe, namely, that the best thing we can do for our children is to give them lots of love and affection. Our experts agreed, and our data showed that this skill set is an excellent predictor of good outcomes with children: of the quality of the relationship we have with our children, of their happiness, and even of their health. What’s more, parents are better at this skill than they are at any of the others. We also confirmed what many other studies have shown: that encouraging children to become independent and autonomous helps them to function at a high level.

But our study also yielded a number of surprises. The most surprising finding was that two of the best predictors of good outcomes with children are in fact indirect: maintaining a good relationship with the other parent and managing your own stress level. In other words, your children benefit not just

from how you treat them but also from how you treat your partner and yourself.

Getting along with the other parent is necessary because children inherently want their parents to get along. Many years ago, when my first marriage was failing, my six-year-old son once led me by the hand into the kitchen where his mom was standing and tried to tape our hands together. It was a desperate act that conveyed the message: “Please love each other. Please get along.” Children do not like conflict, especially when it involves the two people in the world they love most. Even in co-parenting situations where parents live apart, it is crucial to adhere to practices that do not hurt children: to resolve conflicts out of sight of the children, to apologize to one another and forgive each other (both can be done in front of the kids), to speak kindly about the other parent, and so on.

Stress management is also important for good parenting, just as it is vital in all aspects of life. In our study, parents’ ability to manage stress was a good predictor of the quality of their relationship with their kids and also of how happy their children were. Perhaps more telling, people who rated themselves as great parents scored more highly on stress management than on any of the other nine parenting competencies. There is, possibly, a simple lesson here: parents who lose their temper around their kids know that that is bad parenting. Keeping calm is probably step one in good parenting. Fortunately, stress management practices such as meditation, imagery techniques and breathing exercises can be learned, no matter what one’s natural tendencies. People can also learn better organizational skills and even ways of managing stressful thinking.

Keeping children safe—a matter of almost obsessive concern among American parents these days—seems to have both positive and negative outcomes. On the bright side, in our new study safety skills did contribute to good health outcomes. But being overly concerned with safety appears to produce poorer relationships with children and also appears to make children less happy. A recent study by Barbara Morrongiello and her colleagues at the University of Guelph in Ontario shows how complex the safety issue can be. In their study, young people between the ages of seven and 12 said that even though they were generally conforming to the safety rules of their parents, they planned to behave like their parents when they grew up, even where their parents were, by their own standards, behaving

unsafely. Had they detected their parents’ hypocrisy?

Another surprise involves the use of behavior management techniques. Although my own training in psychology (under the pioneering behavioral psychologist B. F. Skinner) suggests that sound behavior management—providing lots of reinforcement for good behavior, for example—is essential for good parenting, our new study casts doubt on this idea. Behavior management ranked low across the board: it was a poor predictor of good outcomes with children; parents scored relatively poorly in this skill area; and our experts ranked it ninth in our list of 10 competencies.

In general, we found that parents are far better at educating their children and keeping them safe than they are at managing stress or maintaining a good relationship with the other parent, even though the latter practices appear to have more influence on children. Getting along with one’s co-parent is the third most important practice, but it ranked eighth on the parents’ list of actual abilities. Even more discouraging, stress management (number two in importance) ranked 10th.

Who Make Good Parents?

Setting aside “The Parents’ Ten” for the moment, our study also shed some interesting light on what characteristics a good parent has.

A general parenting ability appears to exist—something like the “g” factor that exists for intelligence. The “g” factor for parenting emerged very strongly in our study using a statistical technique called factor analysis, which organizes large amounts of test data by clustering test items into a small number of highly predictive variables. Some people just seem to have a knack for parenting, which cannot be easily described in terms of specific skills.

We also found that a number of characteristics that people often associate with good parenting are probably not very significant. For example, women appear to be only a hair better than men at parenting these days—a huge change in our culture. Women scored 79.7 percent on our test, compared with 78.5 percent for men—a difference that was only marginally significant. Parents who were older or who had more children also did not produce significantly better parenting outcomes in our study. Parents seem to perform just as well whether or not

they have ever been married, and divorced parents appear to be every bit as competent as those who are still married, although their children are somewhat less happy than the children of parents who were never divorced.

Neither race nor ethnicity seems to contribute much to parenting competence, and gays and straights are just about equal in parenting ability. In fact, gays actually outscored straights by about one percentage point in our test, but the difference was not statistically significant.

One characteristic that does seem to make a difference is education: generally speaking, the more the education, the better the parenting. This might be because better educated people also work harder to improve their parenting skills through parent education programs (confirmed by our data). It is also possible that good parents—those with a high parenting “g”—are also generally competent people who are better educated. In other words, the “g” for parenting might be the same as the “g” for intelligence, a matter to be explored in future research.

The bottom line on such findings is that if you really want to know about an individual’s competence as a parent, you should measure that competence directly rather than default to commonly held stereotypes. In the U.S., after all, women did not get the vote until 1920 because of faulty assumptions about female limitations. I believe this is one of the main lessons of our study: there is simply no substitute for the direct measure of competence.

Perhaps the best news is that parents are trainable. Our data confirm that parents who have taken parenting classes produce better outcomes with their children than parents who lack such training and that more training leads to better outcomes. Training programs, such as the evidence-based Parenting Wisely program developed by Donald A. Gordon of Ohio University, can indeed improve parenting practices. Programs are available in major cities around the country, sometimes sponsored by local therapists or state or county agencies. The National Effective Parenting Initiative, which I have been associated with since its inception in 2007, is working to make quality parent training more widely available (see <http://EffectiveParentingUSA.org> for additional information).

The Parents’ Ten

Here are 10 competencies that predict good parenting outcomes, listed roughly in order from most to least important. The skills—all derived from published studies—were ranked based on how well they predict a strong parent-child bond and children’s happiness, health and success.

1. **Love and affection.** You support and accept the child, are physically affectionate, and spend quality one-on-one time together.
2. **Stress management.** You take steps to reduce stress for yourself and your child, practice relaxation techniques and promote positive interpretations of events.
3. **Relationship skills.** You maintain a healthy relationship with your spouse, significant other or co-parent and model effective relationship skills with other people.
4. **Autonomy and independence.** You treat your child with respect and encourage him or her to become self-sufficient and self-reliant.
5. **Education and learning.** You promote and model learning and provide educational opportunities for your child.
6. **Life skills.** You provide for your child, have a steady income and plan for the future.
7. **Behavior management.** You make extensive use of positive reinforcement and punish only when other methods of managing behavior have failed.
8. **Health.** You model a healthy lifestyle and good habits, such as regular exercise and proper nutrition, for your child.
9. **Religion.** You support spiritual or religious development and participate in spiritual or religious activities.
10. **Safety.** You take precautions to protect your child and maintain awareness of the child’s activities and friends.

Where Experts Fail

Although parenting experts do indeed offer conflicting advice at times (perhaps because they don't keep up with the studies!), our experts generally did a good job of identifying competencies that predict positive outcomes with children. There were two notable exceptions: First, they ranked stress management eighth in our list of 10 competencies, even though it appears to be one of the most important competencies. Second, our experts seemed to be biased against the religion and spirituality competency. They ranked it rock bottom in the list of 10, and several even volunteered negative comments about this competency area, even though studies suggest that religious or spiritual training is good for children.

Historically, clinicians and behavioral scientists have shied away from religious issues, at least in their professional lives; that could explain the discomfort our experts expressed about religious or spiritual training for children. Why they were so far off on stress management is truly a mystery, however, given psychology's long interest in both the study and treatment of stress. I can only speculate that stress management is not widely taught in graduate programs in psychology-related fields as an essential component of good parenting. It should be.

Bringing It Home

Tempering one's parenting with relevant scientific knowledge can truly have great benefits for one's family. It can reduce or eliminate conflict with one's children, for one thing, and that in turn can improve a marriage or co-parenting relationship. It can also help produce happier, more capable children.

I have seen how this works in my own parenting. I am a much better parent with my younger children (who range in age from four to 12) than I was with my older two (now 29 and 31). The more I have learned about parenting over the years, the more loving and skillful I have become, with obvious benefits.

These days I really do hug my children and tell them I love them several times a day, every day, without exception. When love is never in question, children are much more understanding and tolerant when a parent needs to set limits, which I do

regularly. I have also learned to stay calm—to improve the way I react to things. When I am calm, my children are, too, and we avoid that deadly cycle of emotional escalation that can ruin relationships.

Most important, I am much more a facilitator now than a controller. While building my own competence as a parent, I have also put more effort into recognizing and strengthening the competence of my children, helping them to become strong and independent in many ways. My 12-year-old son is now a calm, helpful role model to his three younger siblings, and before I get out of bed these days, my 10-year-old daughter has sometimes already made scrambled eggs for all of them—and cleaned up, too.

Further Reading

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Smith, Charles A., editor. *The Encyclopedia of Parenting Theory and Research*. Chicago: Greenwood Press, 1999.

To take the author's parenting test, visit <http://MyParentingSkills.com>



How Igniting Our Children's Sparks Can Support and Save Our Children and Their Future

Peter L. Benson

Parenting children and teenagers today isn't easy. It never has been, but it's getting even harder. For the first time in many generations, parents are finding themselves dealing with overwhelming local, national, and international crises like global warming, terrorism, and financial uncertainty while at the same time wondering how they're going to raise kids who are happy and successful. The world is changing so quickly. How can we help our teenagers succeed when the future appears unpredictable—and downright scary?

I'm troubled by the many challenges our young people face today. I'm concerned about the parents who are doing their best to help their children grow up safely and achieve their true potential. That's why I've been an advocate for families and have been doing research on children, youth, and parents for more than thirty years.

I know about the difficulties—everybody does—but what I've been more interested in is what helps teenagers, their parents, and families succeed. Through my work at Minneapolis-based Search Institute, I have discovered a key way that will help all teenagers succeed, a way that makes the path clearer and brighter for each young person, for each parent, and for every family.

I call this new way of changing our attitude toward teenagers from negative to positive SPARKS.

- SPARKS are the hidden flames in your kids that light their proverbial fire, get them excited, tap into their true passions.
- SPARKS come from the gut. They motivate and inspire. They're authentic passions, talents, assets, skills, and dreams.

Peter L Benson PhD was the president and CEO of Search Institute. Peter was known internationally as a leading authority on children and teenagers and the processes that help them flourish and thrive. He was the creator of the Developmental Assets framework and the author of numerous research studies and books. Peter was a leading advocate for children and teenagers in the U.S. and around the world.

(This article is reprinted with permission from the Introduction in *Sparks: How Parents Can Help Ignite the Hidden Strengths of Teenagers*. Peter L. Benson. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008)

- SPARKS can be musical, athletic, intellectual, academic, relational—anything from playing the violin to enjoying work with kids or senior citizens.
- SPARKS can ignite a lifelong vocation or career, or balance other activities to create an emotionally satisfying, enriched life.
- SPARKS get kids going on a positive path, away from the conflicts and negative issues—violence, promiscuity, drugs and alcohol—that give teens a bad name and attract so much negative energy.

All our kids have SPARKS. But before we find out more about sparks and how to ignite them, let's take a closer look at the challenges our teenagers really face these days.

The State of Teenagers Today

Because the world is changing so rapidly, it's easy for parents to become confused and baffled. Our teenagers have become technological whizzes. They're talking on the cell phone while IMing (instant messaging) on the computer and studying for history at the same time. We ask them a question, and they don't respond because they can't hear us. Their ears are clogged with headsets or ear buds from the MP3 players hidden in their pockets. We try to connect with them, but they're out the door, with either a jam-packed schedule or a desire to be anywhere but at home.

The Plugged-In Generation

As parents, we're aware of the technological revolution, but most of our teens know far more about it than we do. They've grown up with it. They've never lived in a time when it wasn't a normal part of their daily lives. There's been nothing for them to adjust to. In fact, most teenagers think technological devices are things they need, not just want. Many teenagers today have a cell phone, a computer (or access to one), a video game console, an MP3 player (many of them equipped with Internet and video capabilities), and their own TV. Many use all this hardware simultaneously. When today's teenagers are awake, most of them are plugged in to something electronic.

At some point, you may have fought against these technological contraptions, raising questions about how your teenager was going to get her homework done—or even how she was going to develop normal social skills, such as talking to someone face-to-face or using a phone to ask questions and listen, instead of zipping off a cryptic message. You've been concerned about your teen being contacted by pedophiles and other online predators. This is awful, scary stuff, totally new and different from anything we've experienced before. We're living in a brave new world driven by technological power, and the technology itself seems to be changing every three to six months.

If we look at technology objectively, however, we can see that it's not all bad, not by a long shot. All our teenagers' technological savvy has actually had many benefits. Through the Internet and social networking sites, such as Facebook and MySpace, teenagers are connecting with teenagers around the world. They have access to television broadcasts from other countries through cable, satellite TV, and the Internet. This has led to teenagers tapping into teenage culture in other countries. Teenagers interested in Anime and Manga get most of their information from Japan and other Asian countries. Those interested in sports may root for Italy, France, or Brazil (not the United States) for the soccer world cup or for South Africa or England for the rugby world cup.

Some teenagers have embraced the food of foreign cultures and have become fond of Thai, Indian, Mexican, or Ethiopian cuisine. Some wear clothing and hairstyles that are chic with teenagers from far, far away. If you ask teenagers about their favorite music, don't be surprised if they mention a band from South Africa, Argentina, Germany, or even Saudi Arabia. They watch musical groups on YouTube, and they get ideas from people all over the world. To teenagers today, their world is the world.

The globalization of teenagers has led them to be comfortable with diversity, and many embrace multiplicity. A number of teenagers speak more than one language, with some of them starting a second language in preschool or kindergarten. In Southern California, more than ninety languages are spoken in the public schools. In Chicago, the number is 118. In New York City, the number is more than 120.

For some teenagers, a favorite prank is lifting a classmate's cell phone and having a bilingual (or trilingual) friend reprogram it into Mandarin Chinese, Arabic, or Russian before slipping it back to

the unsuspecting teenager. The teen then cannot use the phone until he finds someone who can translate it back. Or he learns the language!

Many teens today know people of different ethnicities, races, religious traditions, political ideologies, abilities, and socioeconomic statuses. One group called themselves the “mini United Nations” because the four guys were of four different races and had four different religious beliefs: a Somali Muslim, a Caucasian Christian, a Jew, and an Asian Buddhist. This was a group of friends in a public high school—in Minnesota of all places. To these teenage boys, this group of friends was as natural as the jock or nerd group.

A Widening Gap

Yet while many teenagers are comfortable with diversity, they also recognize a growing chasm between two main groups of their peers. The rich are richer (and own fascinating technological gizmos that other teens all want). The poor are poorer. The smart are smarter (and taking college-level courses as early as seventh grade). Many struggling teenagers find themselves getting farther and farther behind.

There are other big chasms as well. Teenagers today know more kids who are depressed, who struggle with mental illnesses, who are trying to overcome learning disabilities, or who live in abusive or neglectful homes. Some teenagers are willing to help out, giving a poorer student the coat off their backs—only to come home to an irate parent who spouts about the high cost of clothing. They also find themselves trying to hang on to their friends (and figure out where they belong) as teenagers move away, transfer to another school, or head to an inpatient facility for a short stint to deal with mental illness or traumatic abuse.

The gap widens as many of the more affluent and privileged young people begin competing earlier and earlier. Today at middle- and upper-class preschool bus stops, many parents talk about trying to get their five-year-old kids into special language classes or elite college prep schools. With the growing competitiveness, kids are finding themselves needing to choose whether to attend an art school or a more technical school in fourth grade, seventh grade, or ninth grade, instead of waiting to make those decisions during their senior year in high school. Others find themselves on the path of being home-schooled for a number of years,

attending a public school for a while, and then ending up in a private school—all before turning eighteen. Choosing what to do after high school no longer is the first big decision for teenagers today.

Instant-Results Living

For many teenagers, days are filled with smaller decisions, and many of these choices have become impulsive. Teenagers today are now part of the “want-it-now generation.” They don’t have time to wait, and they’re surrounded by devices and environments that feed their impatience and restlessness. They’re used to instant messaging, and many think e-mail is too archaic, too slow, too 1990s. Many find TV boring. Why sit in front of a box when they can view down-loaded TV podcasts and movies on their video MP3s—or watch clips on YouTube? All this instant access to the media makes it harder for parents to know what teenagers are watching—and when. How do you monitor a handheld device that goes with a teenager everywhere, including to bed?

Teens’ expectation of quick results and instant downloading has resulted in a lot of teenagers having a sense of entitlement. Teenagers no longer believe that only certain groups should have access to certain things, based on age or authority; no, in the brave new world of open sources, everyone should have access to everything with no thought of earning it. Many expect something for nothing, and many can get a lot without doing much.

A lot of what teenagers want does have a price tag attached to it, and teenagers buy things off eBay, Amazon, iTunes, Craig’s List, and Internet sites from around the world. One parent lamented how her teenage daughter’s holiday wish list included items that could only be ordered online—and only from overseas.

A few groups of teenagers have special problems. For example, affluent young people sometimes wind up rudderless, believing that they don’t need to do anything in life except enjoy it. Many party all the time, experiment with drugs, and often end up in despair—or in trouble.

This kind of problem is also fueled by our celebrity-driven culture. Who hasn’t read the headlines about Britney Spears, Paris Hilton, and Lindsay Lohan, who spend most of their time partying and making headlines for outrageous behavior? Or about the professional athletes making headlines with their drug use, acts of violence, and

arrests? Today many teenagers think that their worth is measured by how famous they can become. They brag about the number of hits their videos receive on YouTube, and they quickly learn that the more outrageous the content is, the more people want to watch.

What's even more frightening, however, is teenagers' lack of a long-term perspective. Very few people become millionaires, famous artists, acclaimed actors, or professional athletes. Yet ask teenagers if they think it's possible that they will become a millionaire, and most will say yes.

Jaded Naïveté

The events of September 11, 2001, changed not only us adults but also our children. Many teenagers today say that September 11 was a wake-up call. Only 14 percent of teenagers say, "I think the world is becoming a better place." They're worried about terrorism and the threat of global war. Among teens with a variety of political beliefs, some want to fight while others long to reach out and make peace. "About half admire America, while half don't," says Chip Walker of Energy/BBDO, which conducted research on teenagers. Some teens believe in a strong military presence and want to enlist when they're old enough. Others say the United States has been meddling too much in international affairs and causing tensions between countries to rise—instead of ease.

Although a number of teenagers stay up-to-date on current events, most are unsuspecting and naive. They're used to lock-down drills and bomb threat preparations at school, but they leave their electronic gizmos out in places where anyone can take them (and sometimes do). Although many feel unsafe in the world, they feel overly safe in certain locations, such as in teen hangouts or most teenagers' homes— or when driving cars into any kind of neighborhood.

Sexually, they're overexposed. They can easily access R- and NC-17-rated movies on the Internet—even when parents put on Internet blockers. Pornography, hard-core pornography, is prevalent through these technological devices, which has led teenagers to dance in grinding styles, creating an uproar at school dances and with most adults. Some fashions have become much more slinky and provocative; there are more miniskirts, halter tops, and bare midriffs, leading to tighter dress codes at school, but not everywhere in the community.

For some teenage boys and girls, a hookup (a brief and casual sex encounter) can be a part of their day, like going to school. Yet while many seem jaded about sexuality, they also seem naive about date rape, sexually transmitted diseases, and the strong emotional bonds that can form from sexual intimacy. They're clueless about the depth and dimension of true intimacy as well as the conflict that can result from meaningless sex without true love or trust.

The State of Parents Today

Many grandparents shake their heads and wonder how their adult children can possibly parent well in a society that, in many ways, has run amok. Parents and grandparents have much to be concerned about. Researchers now predict that our kids will be the first generation that will not exceed the economic lifestyle of their parents, and our kids will also be the first generation in which many will not live as long as their parents, due to the high rates of obesity, diabetes, and other illnesses that result from living a sedentary, poor-diet lifestyle.

Stressors on Parents Today

All parents today—even those who are middle class or wealthy— are feeling the strain of a declining economy. Most parents are working harder, working multiple jobs, or trying to get an educational degree while also working and raising a family. Families with two parents often have both parents working different shifts (so that kids are more likely to have the presence of one parent, even though the parents rarely see each other), while single-parent families are often feeling isolated, more broke than usual, and in a state of perpetual financial anxiety.

Adding to the stress is the intensity of family schedules. Unlike the generation before us, family life doesn't necessarily revolve around one person—the old fashioned breadwinner, usually the father—but around every family member instead. This often means juggling two careers; two jobs; kids in school with special after-class activities; huge drop-off, pickup, and commuting conflicts; and an abiding sense of tension and stress. There's just not time for everyone to do what he or she needs to do with family members running simultaneously in so many different directions.

Temptations Facing Parents Today

Because of the stress of being a parent today, many parents are finding themselves tempted to parent in ways that aren't always helpful to their kids' development. Some parents are helicopter parents, hovering closely over their teenagers to ensure that they're safe and doing the right thing. Others are demanding parents, expecting their children to be self-sufficient too early—four-year-olds caring for babies and eight-year-olds cooking (by using the microwave) to feed two or three younger siblings.

It's also tempting to slack off and let the mass media and media technology become the sole preoccupations of our teenagers, especially when that's what kids clamor to do all day. Sure, why not step back and let them post photos, make videos, watch movies, and play games 24/7? Unfortunately, too many teenagers are both spending and revealing too much of their lives online, and their parents don't even know it.

Isolation of Parents Today

Many parents feel pulled in opposite directions. They work, keep up a home, get their kids to medical appointments, and attend to school, extended family, and other activities that often lead them to wonder how they can do it all—or even do a little—in a decent manner.

This kind of stress and pressure also leaves parents feeling really isolated and alone. In a study Search Institute conducted with the YMCA of the USA, the number-one finding was that most parents felt isolated, even if they were married. Fifty-three percent of parents say they don't have any sources of support. One-third of parents said they could name only one source of support, even though research consistently shows that parents are more effective when they have lots of practical help and encouragement.

Busyness is only one barrier keeping parents from connecting with others. Another is fear for their kids' safety. A U.S. Census Bureau report found that nearly one out of every five children is kept inside because parents feel that their neighborhoods aren't safe. Yet, as the study pointed out, the crime rate has fallen, and most neighborhoods are actually safer than they were ten years ago. The problem is that we've become a fear-driven society. So much is changing, and so many bad things are happening,

that it's difficult to know how to protect our children while also giving them the opportunities to grow and succeed in life.

When parents are intentional about connecting with other people, they often run into the "values tension." They discover that other parents hold different beliefs, and they're not always sure they want their children to be exposed to (or to take on) those values. Or they may run into parents who don't seem to value much of anything at all. They're disturbed that their teenagers may be highly attracted to parents who happily let them do whatever they want and to kids who have no boundaries.

Building a supportive community has become hard, and busy parents often end up focusing more on what they can control, such as their home environment, the choice of school that their child attends, and the activities that their children get involved in. Those things are important for raising healthy kids, but parents should not be doing this alone. They need community. They need support. They need others they know they can turn to—and trust.

Thus too many parents believe that if they want to get something done right, they need to do it themselves. They become super-parents, attempting to do it all and driving themselves to exhaustion.

SPARKS: What Children and Teenagers Need to Succeed

All parents worry. It is a big and complex world to which we are introducing our children. As we try to be good parents, there are two things all of us want for our kids. We want them to know, and know deeply, that at their very core there is something good and special about them. We want them to see themselves as persons of worth, of value to the world. You and I know, as adults, what a precious gift this perception is to a person; many of us struggle with a lack of it all our lives. The second thing we want for our kids is to have the courage to put their gifts into play.

The concept of spark speaks powerfully to these universal wishes. A spark is something inside your teenager that gets him excited. It's something that makes your teenager want to jump out of bed in the morning. Spark is the thing that gives teenagers (and actually all people) meaning.

Despite all the stressors, barriers, and difficulties, a spark is something that works. Whether teenagers live in a two-parent or one-parent home, whether they're poor or rich, regardless of their race, a spark is something that works for all kids. A spark has the power to change the course of a teenager's life for the better.

We need to help our kids find their own sparks. We need to listen closely to what genuinely excites our teenagers. It may start with a passion for the electric guitar, tinkering with a car, shooting hoops, or another choice that we might never on our own have thought of as a way to ignite our child's inner flame. Allowing young people to follow and develop their sparks can open up other dimensions inside them that they didn't even know were there.

Why Sparks Matter

My colleagues and I at Search Institute have designed several national studies to document how sparks make a difference in the life of a teenager. What we found is this: compared to youth without sparks, youth with sparks who also have several people who know and support their sparks

- Have higher grades in school
- Have higher school attendance rates
- Are more likely to be socially competent
- Are more likely to be healthy physically
- Are more likely to volunteer to help other people
- Are more likely to be good stewards of the earth and its resources
- Are more likely to have a sense of purpose
- Are more likely to report that "I am on the road to a hopeful future"
- Are less likely to experience depression
- Are less likely to engage in acts of violence toward others

Isn't this what we want for our teenagers?

We want our teenagers to grow up well. We want them to be happy and find meaningful ways to live their lives. We want them to succeed—in all areas of their lives.

Our extensive research into the lives of teenagers shows us that a life grounded in sparks enables a person to thrive in a changing world. Teenagers with spark feel good about themselves. They have a zest for life. Parents say that teenagers

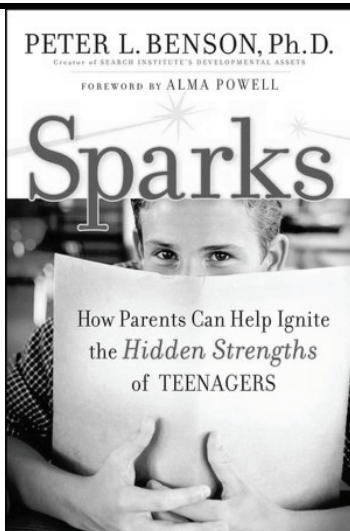
who are pursuing a spark are much easier to live with because they have a sense of purpose, a reason for being. They are on a path to a hopeful future. Even though the teen years still have their ups and downs and difficult moments, this transitional period is more meaningful and fulfilling when a teenager has a spark.



The Top Ten Sparks Categories

Want to know more about what kids around the country say their sparks are? Here's a list of the top ten sparks categories, with a few examples.

1. **Creative Arts:** Participating in or leading art, dance, drama, music writing, or other creative activities.
2. **Sports:** Participating in sports, athletics, or other physical activities.
3. **Technology:** Using computers, electronics, or other types of technology.
4. **Studying or Learning:** Studying, reading, doing research, or other ways of learning.
5. **Nature or the Outdoors:** Being in nature, caring for animals, or participating in outdoor recreation.
6. **Religion or Spirituality:** Doing religious or spiritual activities, or learning about religions and spirituality.
7. **Service and Activism:** Serving others, participating in politics, or working on social issues.
8. **Construction and Engineering:** Doing construction, architecture, or other types of mechanics or engineering.
9. **Teaching:** Teaching, leading others, or public speaking.
10. **Entrepreneurship:** Being an entrepreneur, running a business, or inventing things.



Sparks: How Parents Can Help Ignite the Hidden Strengths of Teenagers

Peter L. Benson. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008

In this practical book, Dr. Peter Benson, a leading authority on childhood and adolescence, describes a simple yet powerful plan for awakening the spark that lives inside each and every young person. Sparks—when illuminated and nurtured—give young people joy, energy, and direction. They have the power to change a young person’s life from one of “surviving” to “thriving.” Grounded in new research with thousands of teenagers and parents, Sparks offers a step-by-step approach to helping teenagers discover their unique gifts, and works for all families, no matter their economic status, parenting situation, or ethnic background. The simple steps are: 1) Recognize the Power of Sparks, 2) Know Your Own Teenager, 3) Help Discover and Reveal Your Teen’s Sparks, 4) Be the Captain of Your Teen’s Spark Team, and 5) Keep Your Teen’s Spark Lit.



Innovation from Within

Peter L. Benson

Check out Dr. Peter Benson’s TEDxTC presentation about SPARKS on the Search Institute website: <http://www.search-institute.org/sparks>.

Parent Further Website Search Institute

www.parentfurther.com

www.parentfurther.com/parenting-matters/sparks

Sparks Search Institute

www.search-institute.org/sparks



15 Thriving Indicators

Theoretical Measurement Markers of Thriving in Adolescence

Search Institute has developed a list of 15 "thriving indicators," or constructive behaviors, postures, and commitments that societies value and need in youth. These indicators serve as a way of evaluating and analyzing program success based on positive outcomes, instead of negative ones; in other words, they allow us to talk about what's *right* with kids, instead of what's "wrong" with them.

Elements of Thriving	Measurement Markers of Thriving
1. YOUNG PERSON	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Spark identification and motivation. Young person can name, describe interests and sparks that give them energy and purpose, and is motivated to develop their sparks.2. Positive emotionality. Young person is positive and optimistic.3. Openness to challenge and discovery. Young person has intrinsic desire to explore new things, and enjoys challenges.4. Hopeful purpose. Young person has a sense of purpose and sees self as on the way to a happy and successful future.5. Moral and prosocial orientation. Young person sees helping others as a personal responsibility, and lives up to values of respect, responsibility, honesty, and caring.6. Spiritual development. Young person affirms importance of a sacred or transcendent force and the role of their faith or spirituality in shaping everyday thoughts and actions.
2. YOUNG PERSON'S DEVELOPMENTAL CONTEXTS	<p>Opportunities & Supports. Young person experiences chances to grow and develop their sparks, as well as encouragement and support in pursuing their sparks, from multiple life contexts.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">7. Family Opportunities & Supports8. Friends Opportunities & Supports9. School Opportunities10. School Supports11. Neighborhood Opportunities & Supports12. Youth Organizations Opportunities & Supports13. Religious Congregations Opportunities & Supports
3. YOUNG PERSON'S ACTIVE ROLE IN SHAPING CONTEXTS	<ol style="list-style-type: none">14. Youth Action to develop and pursue sparks. Young person seeks and acts on adult guidance, studies or practices, and takes other actions to develop their sparks and fulfill their potential.
4. DEVELOPMENTAL CONTEXTS ACT ON THE YOUNG PERSON	<ol style="list-style-type: none">15. Frequency of Specific Adult Actions. How often adults do concrete things to motivate, enable, and push young people to develop their sparks and connect them to others who can help.

Additional Constructs Measured in Thriving Orientation Survey

POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTAL OUTCOMES	<p>Life satisfaction. Young person feels good about their life.</p> <p>Positive health perceptions. Young person feels strong and healthy.</p> <p>Contribution to social good. Young person volunteers or does things to make their world a better place.</p> <p>School success. Young person earns a B or higher average in school.</p> <p>Values diversity. Young person considers it important to know people of different races.</p> <p>Leadership. Young person has been a leader in a group or organization in the last 12 months.</p>
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Activity Checklist



Activity	Done it!	Activity	Done it!
Strummed a guitar, played a piano, or beat on a drum		Painted a picture, molded something out of clay, or drew a picture	
Saw a band concert, listened to an orchestra, or sung in a chorus		Attended a play or a musical	
Read or heard poetry, then wrote his/her own		Read or heard a story, then wrote his/her own	
Saw a new kind of dance, like ballet, flamenco, ballroom, or modern		Learned words in a language other than your family's main language	
Learned how to cook or bake something		Learned how to build or repair something	
Ran in a race		Tried a team sport, like soccer, basketball, or softball	
Tried an individual sport, like tennis or gymnastics		Tried to find star constellations	
Went hiking or rock climbing		Saw or participated a parade	
Went to an art or science museum		Went to a children's museum	
Went swimming or boating		Helped with planting, weeding, and watering a garden	
Helped choose a pet to adopt and care for		Went horseback riding	
Visited a farm or a zoo		Danced to music in your own home	
Played age-appropriate games on the computer		Told a joke or put on a play	
Took photographs or made a video		Visited a synagogue, mosque, church, or other place of worship	
Volunteered to help people or animals in need		Picked up litter to make the neighborhood look nicer	
Went camping		Tried karate or tai chi	
Tried sewing or knitting		Sang or rapped	



And a Little Child Shall Lead Them: The Advent and Event of Parenting as Spiritual Journey

Dawn M. Alitz

When I became a parent, I found myself stretched in many ways—physically, emotionally, socially, and not least of all, spiritually. I looked to my congregation for help and assistance with questions of faith and parenting, but initially I did not find what I was seeking. As time went on, I wondered if other new parents—who were clearly experiencing physical, emotional, and social changes similar to my own—might also be experiencing the spiritual questions I had encountered. Years later, I found myself working as a ministry professional who wanted to engage new parents in the life of the church, but found that task difficult. As a new parent, I hadn't known what questions to ask or where to begin to process what I was experiencing; as a ministry professional, I didn't know how to communicate the information I thought new parents ought to know in a way that was accessible and meaningful. I did not know how to “make accessible the traditions of the religious community” nor “make manifest the intrinsic connection between the tradition and transformation” (Boys 1989, 193).

Today we realize that parents have a clear role in nurturing the spiritual life of their children, but as ministry leaders we are often unsure how to nurture and guide the parents in this role. In order to learn how best to lead, I felt that I needed to listen deeply to men and women who have recently encountered this phase of life to see what spiritual or theological questions or experiences they might be facing. I wanted to hear how they were making meaning out of these experiences and where they turned to find answers.

The Conversations

Each parent that I spoke with had a unique story. Each one had been transformed in some way by becoming a parent, although not all of them equated this with a deepening of faith. Some of the transformations were personal, others were relational; some spoke of the transformation in the past tense, while others spoke of a

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change that was in process. Within these unique statements, however, they shared questions of identity, ability, and faith that they had been asking through this journey.

There were times that I was really excited and there were times when I weren't. I would lay in bed awake sometimes at night just kind of saying am I ready for this? Do I want this? I mean there wasn't anything I could do to change it, but I had to convince myself that it was good. (Donovan)

I think it's probably moments like [my child's illness] that you have more of a connection to God, when you have scary moments, just because at that point, who do you turn to? (Alan)

Questions such as these—Am I ready? Who do you turn to?—are not questions with simple answers. They express emotions and beliefs that lie at the very core of a person's existence; ones that require both self-reflection and relational support to explore and resolve. And yet, several of the parents that I spoke with shared that this was the first time that they had explored these questions with anyone, including self-reflection or conversation with their spouse or faith community. Once encountered, these questions drew each one of the participants to say that they had been changed in some way. Phoebe is a pastor who found herself learning through our conversation.

I feel like God saved me from myself. And I think that is the biggest thing I've learned—is that who I think I am, might not be who I really am. . . Yeah, I think it will be God working through being a parent. I mean, I just, I am very, very, dedicated to being the best mother I can be and discerning that and praying. That's my daily prayer—that I will be wise. (Phoebe)

Several parents being interviewed indicated that they were giving greater value to their faith through this event of parenting. Making new commitments to their own faith journey, as well as an attachment to the faith community, either became more important, or—for those who were already deeply involved—solidified. Becoming a parent appeared to give greater value to these parents' faith even if they could not actually attend worship due to fatigue or schedule, or had not considered this to be important prior to having children. Some chose new churches,

looking for communities that would provide programming for their children and/or support for themselves as parents. Others started paying closer attention to their own faith lives so that they would be prepared to answer their children's questions. These parents were hungry for conversations of meaning, although they most likely would not have asked for or initiated these conversations on their own. Congregations need to be communities of people who are intentional about initiating the faith conversations at key times of life and transition.

Matters of Language

How do parents describe their parenting experiences? As I was beginning this research, Annette Mahoney and Aaron Swank of Bowling Green University were completing the first round of their research on parenting and sanctification. For a portion of their survey instrument they used pairs of words and asked parents to rank their experience in term of these words. After their first round of research, Mahoney and Swank made the decision to adjust this scale because they realized that the pairs were neither necessarily mutually exclusive nor opposite of one another. For this reason, I made the decision not to duplicate this portion of their research as I originally intended; however, I wondered if this particular set of words would be used by the parents without prompting.

From the list of thirty words used in that research, only the following seven were found in the interviews I conducted: *blessed, rewarding, routine, mysterious, miraculous, awesome, and happy*. These words were not used as often nor by as many people as I had anticipated. So, if parents in this sample didn't use the words that the Bowling Green University group gathered—a list, I might add, that contains many words that we might well hear in a typical church service or class—what words did they utilize?

One of the words that these parents used often was **balance**. Six respondents used this word a total of fourteen times as they described trying to find equilibrium in their new lives as parents, or in what they hoped that faith would provide for their children. Between the lack of sleep, needing to work, and navigating the learning curve on what it meant to be a parent, these adults found themselves renegotiating their life partnerships, work commitments, and other parts of life that may have

previously seemed stable. A second use of the word balance had to do with providing the children with a rounded education—something that attended to their spiritual needs. The parents weren't always sure what those needs might be, or how they would know if they were being met, but they thought that the church was a good place to have those needs addressed.

Another word that stood out in these interviews was *surreal*. Five parents used this word a total of seven times. Surreal was almost always used to describe the birth of the baby, and often was preceded in usage by a pause as the speaker looked for what word to use. I asked a couple of people to share what they thought that word meant, and their responses indicated something that was unbelievable and yet powerful.

Some of the words used most frequently describe the difficulty of parenting. *Tiring* was mentioned sixteen times by nine parents, *stressful* twenty times by six parents, and *overwhelming* twelve times by six parents. These descriptions were quite vivid in use: exhaustion to the point of hallucination was mentioned by two different fathers.

I remember I was laying in our spare bedroom trying to catch a couple winks and I remember thinking that [my child] was in the bed with me and somehow she got lost in the sheets, or just lost in the bed, and I couldn't find her. I remember getting up, I had the pillow on my side, going downstairs in a frantic state of mind, where's [my child], where's [my child], and I'm looking at [my wife] saying where's [my child]? And [my child's] on her lap, head's out there just looking at me. And she says go back to bed, [my child's] in my lap. (laugh) And that didn't happen just once, it happened twice, and maybe a third time. (B)

Unlike the Mahoney and Swank list, where only one word—biological—would allow the participants to name the everyday difficulties or physical exertions of being a parent, the parents I interviewed emphasized these aspects of parenting. In the book *Minding the Spirit: the Study of Christian Spirituality*, Meredith B. McGuire cautions readers against thinking about religion or spirituality in purely theoretical or intellectual terms that diminish the importance of physical realities.

Lived religion is constituted by the practices by which people remember, share, enact, adapt, create and combine the stories out of which they live. And it comes into being through the often-mundane practices by which people transform these meaningful interpretations into everyday action. Human bodies matter, because those practices . . . involve people's bodies [author emphasis], as well as their minds and spirits. (McGuire, 119).

If we as religious educators and faith community leaders do not acknowledge the physicality of parenting, we may also end up denying the physicality of giving birth and caring for young children, with all of the spiritual and theological insight that this journey might offer. My research suggests that new parents deeply experience the physicality of birth and parenting but are unable to connect this physical experience with Christian theology. This is a wonderful opportunity for conversations that bring out the incarnational Jesus, God with skin, needing to eat, sleep and pray, walking among us.

Not all of the words used described difficulties of parenting; the interviewees also spoke of *joy* (eleven times by seven people) and *love*. Joy is a word that I gave them through a question—what is your greatest joy in parenting—and as each parent answered, their words would become animated.

I think just the joy of having [my child] and the joy of being a parent. I would hope that people could see how much we enjoy having him there and how much we want him to enjoy church as much as we do. The flexibility in how church can be fun and you can laugh, when he does something silly or makes noise. But just the joy of us as a family. (Susan)

Their use of love is more difficult to quantify or describe. Although the actual word was used many times, how it was used and what it meant was often quite varied. Some parents spoke of loving what their children did, how their children lightened their lives—but some also talked of a deeper sense of love.

And the morning he turned, it was his second birthday, I went in to get him up out of bed and I was just I was just going to be so happy and "Happy Birthday" and blah, blah, blah, and all I could do was cry because I was just so

overwhelmed by how much you could love somebody and I just cried and cried. (Brenda)

Language of Men

There were several words or ideas that were expressed almost solely by the male respondents. David Murrow, in *Why Men Hate Going to Church* identified several similar terms and ideas in his book. He notes that feeling **incompetent** is a deterrent to men attending church. I found this was also key part of the labor and delivery experience conveyed by the male respondents. While these fathers didn't leave their wives during childbirth, they felt strongly enough to share their stories of being helpless or not knowing what to do. In the Christian tradition, we have many stories of men who grew in faith through times of perceived incompetence and helplessness (for instance in the case of Abraham, Zachariah, or Joseph). Sharing these stories with new fathers may have the ability to change a strong experience of incompetence or weakness into an opportunity for spiritual growth rather than seeing it as a failure. This will give them a new, stronger base from which to teach their sons and daughters about a life of faith.

A second theme that connected with Murrow's research is **hypocrisy**. In two different focus group conversations, men brought up the hypocrisy they see between what they think is happening in church and how that is lived in real life. This especially came to light as we had conversations regarding godparents and baptism. These men wanted to select people who would act as moral and spiritual guides for their children, while their wives selected close friends or family members who, it seemed, did not always fit that description. The discrepancy seemed to stem from a difference in how this role was perceived: the women wanted to select people who they believed would be more likely to be a part of the child's future (often a relative or close family friend), while the men seemed to be looking for role models. In these two focus groups, the conversation on selecting sponsors or godparents for the baptism ceremony became a very animated conversation. In a way, I sensed that this was an occasion in which the fathers wanted to assert their spiritual leadership in the family and, at least in two cases, they were not allowed to do so. From the conversations that I experienced, this would be an excellent topic to talk through in a baptism session.

A third idea, not as clearly connected with Murrow's findings, is **responsibility**. Fathers felt the weight of responsibility, providing for their families, and insuring a future of possibilities for their children. This was true even if their wives planned to return to work. There was a sense of narrowing of roles, or a desire to return to more traditional roles, that happened as the men took the mantle of fatherhood. Terrence Real gives psychological insight regarding men as they have been raised to relate to control and responsibility.

Traditional masculinity teaches men to feel both an entitlement to control and also the burden of unrealistic responsibility. How hard you may have tried pales in importance next to how well you think you did. I have said that for men, performance-based esteem [author emphasis] takes the place of healthy self-esteem, but even that puts it too gently. To be more precise, one would need to speak of results-based esteem. Most men have little faith that they will be cherished merely for their efforts. (Real 2002, 210)

Having to watch their wives in pain, trying to assert influence over the baptismal godparents, and living up to their own ideas of the responsibility of providing for a family—all issues of control and responsibility—were difficult items for these men that were brought to the fore through fatherhood. While they all told me—in their own words—how hard they were working, I'm not sure that they were convinced it was enough. Christian communities have much to share in this area in the exploration of grace, forgiveness and the idea of vocation. Striving to be a good father can be a spiritual practice in itself, not to gain perfection, but to take part in God's working in the world.

This sense of responsibility, in fact, also had a religious element. As related to faith, this responsibility was strong enough to bring these fathers back to church even if they had negative memories of their church life as children. In the focus groups, several men shared that, as children, church was at best uninteresting and unimportant—a chore. But within their comments about their childhood experience, there was also sense that taking children to church was something that good fathers did; they understood that the faith of their children somehow rested with them. These fathers indicated they wanted something different from the

faith community for their children—something that would be inviting and engaging, something that developed an active and living faith. As much as I heard that the fathers wanted this for their children, I also sensed that they wanted it for themselves and their children were providing new opportunities for them to seek this.

I found that I was worrying about how I acted and how I talked after I had kids, because before that, really it's just you and your wife, and she married you, you know, knowing how you are. But you might not want to be doing and saying the same things if there are kids around, whether it be swear words or where you are going, what you do on your days off, whether you sit around and watch TV all day on a Sunday watching football. I didn't want my son to look at me like, well gee, that's what dad does. That's what I should do too, you know. (father in a focus group)

In their conversations, I noted some similarities with the language of conversion utilized by Stanley Grenz.

Conversion is that life-changing encounter with the Triune God which inaugurates a radical break with our old, fallen existence and a new life in fellowship with God, other believers, and eventually with all creation. (Grenz, 179)

As some of the fathers in the male focus group talked about their children, they noted how children changed their outlook, and how they, as fathers, were invited to look anew at how they were living and acting in the world. Grenz goes on to speak of repentance in terms of an intellectual change which allows us to see our sins, an emotional change that causes us to regret past actions, and a volitional change that causes us to act in new ways. Children appeared to have the ability to bring all of these out in many of the men that I spoke with. They were, in fact, spiritual agents in the lives of their fathers. And, while the conversations rarely moved into theological language, it did move into relationality as the fathers talked together about what they wanted to change and how they wanted to father; a sense of community was being developed. Since all of these fathers in the focus group were part of a congregation, there was an underlying, if not always explicit, sense of faith being a piece of what they were working with. But it wasn't until the specific

faith/spiritual/religious topics were introduced to the group that they named this element out loud and engaged them in conversation. Finding ways to claim out loud the conversions that our children lead us to, and exploring the conversion in terms of “to what” and “for what” are important topics for the faith community to consider.

Along with and related to responsibility is a sense of **goal**. The men tended to talk about their goals for their children and families.

The responsibility is kind of like the saying, great opportunity great responsibility. So much because my child is a person, I can do so much good or bad, and I have the ability to shape her to be either a sloth or a great leader, or a great contributor, and/or. So it gives me great joy that if we do something right and God's help we can produce something that is a true wonder. (BJ)

This again relates to some of the issues of modern masculinity that Terrence Real has explored.

In modern culture, heroism has been stripped of virtually all of its spiritual significance. Removed from morality as well as from human community, heroism in our society has become a secular, individual achievement. . . . Both in our own lives and in the spectacles around us, we still search for higher meaning in achievement. We still equate performance with virtue. (Real 1997, 168)

For some of these fathers, I wonder if they are seeking their virtue, and perhaps spiritual significance, through the lives of their children. If their children turn out well (if the goals of parenting are met), then they have succeeded as fathers. In talking about his ability to shape her, BJ doesn't mention other forces in his daughter's life—including her own ability to eventually make decisions—that might shape her in a different way. There is no sense that he might do an excellent job of fathering and yet have a daughter that somehow does not meet his goal of leader and contributor. Biblically, this is an area that may need to be reframed. Verses such as the following from Proverbs 22:6, are well-known and oft-quoted: “Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray.” Does this mean that if the child does “stray” that the parent did not “train in the right

way?” Parenting is not a clear antecedent consequence process that produces a clear goal at the end; it is more of a journey in which, at best, parents can be faithful guides and companions. They are not the sole purveyors of the final outcome. Finding ways for our communities to explore and express fatherhood in the present, as a good journey toward a mature, faithful person and relational outcome for the father will set a stronger model for children than allowing the parents to believe and attempt to control an imagined perfect person in the future.

Finally, with the exception of the male pastor, the men were the least likely to mention God directly. They used language that related more to morals or good behavior rather than faith. I’m not sure if these men lacked a theological language, or if, in their past, church had become a place strongly related to “good behavior” and so they brought that language to bear in our conversations. Whatever the reason may be, the men seemed to be less comfortable with theological or spiritual language than the women. This is both an area for future exploration (to see why this language is not used) as well as an opening opportunity for conversation.

Language of Women

Women were more likely to speak about the incredible *love* they felt for their child, and it was not uncommon for tears to accompany their conversation about this point. These mothers felt a physical love and connection to their children that went beyond the connection due to childbirth. This was present even for Donna, who had adopted her child.

Women were also the only respondents who spoke of their congregations with the term *family*. This follows the description of roles given by Terrence Real.

Traditional socialization teaches girls to filter their sense of self-worth through connection to others, often at great cost to themselves, while it teaches boys to filter their sense of self-worth through their performance. (Real, 43)

Following Real’s lead, I would assert that women have been trained to use language of relationality; when the relationship with the church was strong, it was described as family—typically one of the

strongest bonds we acknowledge. Although the men were certainly aware of the communal aspects of their congregations, they did not connect this with the more intimate word of family. Most of the men were more interested in knowing how they could participate, or articulating what their children or spouse needed than building relationships—especially relationships that would be intimate enough to be called family. David Murrow also notes that for men, relationships take more time (perhaps, according to Real, due to the observation that they do not have the relational skills or language of women). Of the fathers I spoke with, only one had been in his congregation for a long period of time. This father did speak of the deep relationships of the group, although he did not use the term family. For the other fathers, it could very well be that they had not been in community with these people for long enough to build deep relationships. The women tended to have longer histories with the congregations, (often the men joined churches that their wives either already attended or they allowed their wives to select the church) or had found ways to build relationships through groups or service opportunities.

A second topic that only came up for the women was a *desire for their spouse to grow more deeply in faith, attend church, or pray with them*. Several women mentioned that they wanted to have faithful men in their lives, wanted to share the intimacy of prayer and worship with their intimate partners, but didn’t know how to change that aspect of their husband’s lives without damaging their marriage relationship. This is a wonderful reminder that communities of faith need to take an active role of supporting couples and parents in their spiritual growth. Having a third party (conversation partner, small group or class) encourage this growth means that the wife is able to journey with her partner on the spiritual journey rather than taking the role of leader or fixer.

Parenting as a Spiritual Endeavor

While all of the interviews contained language and experiences I would describe as spiritual, only some of the interviews expressed them with words that people in general would automatically associate with a specifically Christian context. For instance, of the

twelve individual interviews, the women were more likely to use the words God or Jesus. The only two men who used these terms often in their stories were the male pastor and the church youth worker. The words and topics that most parents used relate more to the type of spirituality that David Perrin describes in his book *Studying Christian Spirituality*. Perrin gives this starting definition of authentic spirituality.

Authentic spirituality, therefore, is not merely the way an individual generates meaning in life to feel good about his or her self and world. Authentic spiritualities involve the integration of all aspects of life in a unified whole. (Perrin, 17-18)

The parents I spoke with were in various stages of trying to integrate all of the aspects of life, which now includes parenting. While their language did not express explicit Christian faith and spirituality, they did seem to be describing spiritual encounters. Perrin lists four primary characteristics that he would include in his working definition of a humanist spirituality that relate to what I was hearing (Perrin, 18-19). I share two of these characteristics here.

The first characteristic of spirituality that Perrin describes is that of a *fundamental capacity in human beings to seek out meaning, values, and purpose in life*. He includes such endeavors as being empathetic, thoughtful, and self-sacrificial. Perrin claims these characteristics become Christian in nature when “. . . the Christian God is the ultimate concern of one’s life; self-transcendence refers to modeling one’s life after the life of Jesus; and the “spirit” in spirituality is identified with the Holy Spirit” (Perrin, 26).

In the following excerpt from one of the interviews, this father is describing how parenting has changed him in a way I would connect with this first characteristic of humanist spirituality.

I’ve got a sense of something of belonging to something larger than myself. Also contributing more, being able to give 110% when you feel like you’re just, can’t give any more. Like when [child] was born, those first two weeks, how could I even do that? You don’t get a choice, you just do it. Knowing that you can do that, that people are able to, if they want to, do that. Whatever endeavor that they try. (BJ)

This particular father is expressing his experience of being stretched and rising to a challenge. He now recognizes the ability of people—himself included—to go far beyond what is thought possible. However, within that experience (and the context of an interview talking about God experiences of parenting), he doesn’t mention any connection with God, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit as a source of strength or model for perseverance. In other words, he does not articulate or name that he is being supported in this act of parenting by God. This is an opening for conversation regarding what it means to have God as the giver and sustainer of life, who calls us into our fullness of gifts.

Another characteristic is a *lived reality that is shaped into a way of life*. Perrin describes this characteristic.

Even the athletic way of life could be described as a spirituality within this understanding, for it requires commitment, discipline, and frequent repetition of particular skills. . . . Depending on what meaning, values, or purpose in life people have chosen, they will focus their activities and choices to nurture these. (Perrin, 26)

Parents expressed this in a number of ways, including renewed commitment to worship attendance and awareness of responsibility. One father tells how he and his wife reprioritized everything in their lives to prepare for this child.

I just think that it’s a miracle how this nine-month pregnancy is just right for easing us into parenthood. It’s just enough time to get us ready. Nothing can really get you ready, but it certainly does help focus you. And I learned, before my wife got pregnant I was in a band, and I was practicing a lot, she was taking swimming lessons, and we had all kinds of things going on in the evenings all the time. And then this baby is coming. I was on a neighborhood committee and then it was hard, but probably a month before [child] was born, I was calling people and saying I’m quitting the band, I’m quitting the neighborhood committee. (laugh) and all these things. We had to decide what is an extra in life and what is an essential in life, and clear ourselves and get ready for this baby. (Christopher)

This couple took time to reevaluate the values and sources of meaning in their lives as they

prepared for the arrival of their child. In this particular quote, Christopher does not connect this verbally with his faith in an explicitly Christian manner—there was no mention of God’s leading, or a sense of stewardship, or any words that would alert the listener to a religious context. But as I listened to the conversation, there was a sense that when one lived into the reality of concentrating on the essential things, something holy happened. In fact, at times in the various conversations, it sounded as though the children were the ultimate thing in life—that the child’s happiness and wellbeing were more important than anything else in the world, including their parents, other children, or God. This is an opportunity for the faith community to have conversations regarding God as the ultimate love, and wondering what it might mean if we think about God creating these children for the sake of the world.

Summary

I do believe that the advent and event of parenthood does, at the very least, hold the potential to enrich the faith life of a person. During this time adults find themselves in situations in which they have little control—even of their own bodies—and in which the very life of another human rests in their hands. It is also a time when infants, mostly helpless and unable to communicate, have the ability to break open the possibility for spiritual growth of the adults around them. There is fodder for a great deal of spiritual or existential conversation within those pieces, even without the psychological or social changes that occur. However, these respondents – who were all connected to a church in some way – did not automatically connect the parenting experience with their Christian spirituality or faith community in an integrative way. The church was named more as a transactional community (one that could provide service) rather than one of transformation and understanding. Therefore, if no faithful conversation occurs, conversation that connects the experience of the parent to the larger story and activity of God, the questions may not be asked that lead into a deeper theological awareness or connection. The parent may not experience the fullness of what it means to be in a relationship with this “other,” meaning either their child or their God. Currently the church is rarely there in the way these parents need. We ought to be engaging them in the

God conversations, meeting them where they are with the language they are familiar with, listening to their stories and proclaiming to them where God is already present and acting in their midst. When we are able to do this, we empower them to nurture the faith of their entire family – both themselves and their children.

Future Implications

In closing, I want to claim the realization that the more I spoke with these parents, the more I realized we have much to learn about the people in our faith communities. People of differing family systems, income levels, cultural settings, or religious affiliation may experience moments of holiness or sacredness in more ways than are identified here; moments that are not named by either the person or the church. I assert that parents need caring conversations with others who are willing to share their thoughts about the presence of God in the midst of this particular journey in order to realize the spiritual transformation that is already in process.

Almost all of the participants discovered something new about themselves as parents, their faith, perception of God, or their relationship with the church or children within the confines of these brief interviews. Despite the fact that I was speaking with total strangers, there was often a sense of bonding, of holy ground even, as we talked about these communities of faith and our children. I mention this as an area for future research because I do not believe that we, as religious educators, have spent enough time listening to the realities experienced by the people in our faith communities. Just having the conversation, and helping them make the connection between their daily life and the meta-narrative of our scriptures may not only deepen the faith of those we work with, but also hold the possibility of grounding our theological academic work in the real stuff of life.

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Additional Parent Reflections

Balance

Balancing my life. She stays at home with him all the time, and I'm gone all the time. You know when I come home I'm tired and I just want to sit and relax a little bit and I just don't have any more energy to give out. . . . I just don't know if I—a lot of times I don't have any more energy to give and that's been my greatest challenge has been mustering up that extra energy to give to them. (Donovan)

Surreal

You know when they laid him in my arms for the first time, it was so surreal. Is this really mine? You know what I mean? You don't even think that it's real. (Marie)

Incompetent

Oh man, even before that, it was pretty emotional just being there during the delivery. You know I can't really do anything, I'm kind of helpless (laugh) I mean I can offer up a hand, or I can help with breathing, but guess what—my wife's the one doing all of the work, so and so for me I was a little sad that I couldn't take some of that pain away. (Alan)

Responsibility

Well it's just all of a sudden, that you're not responsible for just you and your wife. There's another living thing that can't do anything. And it's completely dependent on you for absolutely everything. So it made you responsible real fast. (focus group participant)

Church Experience as Child (Male)

When I was a kid growing up, we went to church every Sunday. I remember asking my dad that same question: why do we have to go to church? Because I say so, you know, that's the only answer I got. And you will do it. You didn't have a choice. If he would have—maybe he didn't know the answer to it but if he would have at least sat down and said, well here's why we go to church and here's why you should pay attention in church. I never got that, and me as a kid, you know, I'm like, well then I'm not going to pay attention and as soon as I had a chance not to go to church I didn't go to church anymore. (focus group participant)

Spiritual Spouse

I'd like to try to get my husband, get him, not more interested, but more involved and not pry not push it on him. And just have it be easy because he's stand offish if I demand too much. . . I just wish that he'd step out of his box a little more. He's straight forward, hunting, got stuff to do, but I think, I don't know, I mean he did come to a service once, and the boys were acting up so he went to the nursery and watched them and he thought he was getting out of it. (Anna)



Nurturing the Faith of Parents

Catherine Stonehouse and Scottie May

From *Listening to Children on the Spiritual Journey*

As social beings we need a network of persons to support and nurture us. Parents alone were not adequate for the task in biblical times, nor are they today. A partnership between the home and the church is necessary for the effective nurture and formation of the people of God—children and parents alike.

Will the church, the faith community, be there for families today? How can a church provide the nurture that families need? What follows is not a full plan for the nurture and support of parents, but several crucial elements for such a plan.

Often when church leaders make plans for equipping parents they think in terms of workshops or courses focused on parenting challenges and skills. The vibrancy of parent's faith significantly influences the spiritual formation of their sons and daughters. As children see and sense their parents' love for Jesus, a love that flows out in everyday expressions of compassion for others, they are drawn to the "Christian faith-life." Although "how to" workshops are helpful and parents respond to them, they are not the basic need of parents. Providing an environment in which moms and dads come to know and grow in their relationship with Jesus is the best gift a church can give to children.

Nurturing a Vital Faith through a Growing Relationship with Jesus

What do the young parents in our churches think it means to be Christian? For some, is being a Christian a Sunday event: if they show up for church fairly regularly, that's it? Or are they assuming they are Christian because sometime in the past they prayed a prayer to accept Jesus as their Savior and that's all that matters? What is their image of God: a sugar daddy in the sky who hands out goodies and doesn't care what they do?

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(This excerpt is reprinted with permission from Chapter Eight in *Listening to Children on the Spiritual Journey*. Catherine Stonehouse and Scottie May. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010)

Or is God an angry judge they try hard to please but never love? Do they know they can have a personal, growing relationship with Jesus? Do they know that being Christian means being a lifelong disciple of Jesus and in that relationship experiencing challenge and joy as they become more and more like him? Do they know that God has a place for them in the story of what the Trinity is doing in our world and that life takes on new meaning as we partner with God?

When parents are unsure of their relationship with God or never discovered the joy of growing, life-changing relationship with Jesus, the nurture of their children's faith will be hindered. Establishing their relationship is an essential first step, a step in which church leaders or other mature Christians can play a key role. As you consider how well your church is fulfilling that role, reflect on these questions:

- Where are the parents of our church in their relationship with God, in their understanding of what it means to be Christian?
- What opportunities do we offer for them to come to know Jesus and enter into a life of discipleship?
- Is anyone praying for these young people?
- Do we provide settings and relationships where they can sort through the misunderstandings that hinder their spiritual growth?
- How could we more effectively lead parents into or support them in a growing relationship with Jesus?

Nurturing a Vital Faith through Worship

Regular participation in worship with the people of God is an important means of keeping one's faith alive and growing. Although there are many different forms of worship, the focus of true Christian worship is God. The human heart longs for a God who is both transcendent and immanent. The potential to reach beyond oneself and to experience the transcendent is part of what it means to be a spiritual being. We need to discover the wonder that the almighty transcendent one has chose to meet with us, walk with us, and live in us. There is mystery in this reality that leads to awe and wonder.

As parents experience the awe and joy of God's presence they are more able to enter into that divine presence with their children in the home and to talk with them about their great and loving God.

The church faces the challenge of drawing families into such worship opportunities. Families will probably feel more welcome if they can be active participants rather than passive observers, where the whole person is involved, where people of all ages respond to God with awe and mystery. For parents to feel comfortable guiding their children as they worship with the congregation, pastors and worship leaders can help them learn the purpose of each worship element from the call to worship to the benediction. Brief explanations can be printed in the worship folder or, as element occurs in the service, simple instructions can be offered such as, "Now is the time when. . . ."

Intentional Intergenerational Nurture

In recent years medical doctors, psychiatrists, counselors, and professionals who serve children and youth have become deeply disturbed by the number of North American young people who are not flourishing. This is evidenced by the growing number in need of counseling and medication and the increase of violence among teens and even children. In 2002 a group of these concerned professionals came together to examine significant recent research from several different fields with the goal of trying to identify what is important for the thriving of the young. From their study they concluded that human beings are biologically "wired" to need connections. We cannot thrive if deprived of close connections with other people and deep connections to moral and spiritual meaning.

These researchers claim that children and youth need to be part of a community that provides those connections, a community with the following characteristics. A social institution that

- includes children and youth
- treats children as ends in themselves
- is warm and nurturing
- has the core of its work performed largely by nonspecialists
- is multigenerational

- has a long-term focus—building lasting relationships and trust
- reflects and transmits a shared understanding of what it means to be a good person
- is philosophically oriented to the equal dignity of all persons and to the principle of love of neighbor (*Hardwired to Connect*, 34)

Does this list of characteristics describe your church? Would you like it to? If the church does not offer these connections for our youth, who will?

One of the beauties of the church is that it can be an intergenerational community bringing people of all ages, including the elderly and the young, together to learn about God and life from each other. In Deuteronomy 6, which was addressed to the whole nation of Israel, we see God’s intention that the whole community, persons of all ages, have a part to play in passing on the faith to the next generation, in providing spiritual nurture for children, youth, and adults. Unfortunately, in many North American churches today that coming together is not happening. Children, teens, and adults all worship and learn in different settings, with very few opportunities to know and influence one another. Many of the practices that used to bring the generations together have been dropped from the life of the church in recent years. Although the whole faith community suffers from this lack of intergenerational connection, children and youth suffer most.

Christian nurture is aided when the faith community lives life together as much as possible—loves, exhorts, laughs, prays, learns, weeps, and grows with each other—doing the very things that God intends for his people to do. In such experiences children and youth will be connecting with the faith family and with moral and spiritual meaning. And parents will have the support they need to thrive as well. They will be able to learn from others and know that the whole weight of the faith formation of their children is not on their shoulders alone. Wishing for such an intergenerational faith community will be enough; it will take intentional planning on the part of church leaders.

Support and Equipping for Parenting

Some young parents have had wonderful models to learn from in their homes, extended families, or churches. But others know only that they do not want their children to experience what they did. Many moms and dads are learning all they can about parenting, while others don’t know where to turn for help. The parents in our churches are at very different places in their parenting skills. However, all of them will profit from a church that listens for their joys and struggles and supports them in being the moms and dads they want to be for their children.

We need to always remember that parenting is no easy, no matter how much we know or how good our models have been. We must avoid the “ten easy steps to perfect parenting” approach. If in a conversation or workshop we communicate, “This is easy. You can do it and fix the problem,” we set parents up for discouragement and defeat. If the “easy steps” don’t work when the parent tries them, the mom or dad may feel like a failure. And since the practice was supposed to be easy, they may be ashamed to ask for help.

The wise approach when equipping parents is to acknowledge the challenge of working with our children and learning new ways of relating to them. Give parents time to share their frustrations and what has bombed, as well as their joys and examples of when new approaches worked. With that kind of openness and support, parents will have the courage to try new, knowing that they will have help when things don’t go well. We also want to avoid laying a heavy load of “oughts” on parents. That can be overwhelming, convincing young mothers and fathers there is no way they can measure up, so why try?

Basics of Christian Parenting

Playful activities between infants and their parents and the way in which they discipline their toddlers are laying down response patterns within the child’s brain that are foundational for empathy and compassion. In these and other everyday interactions between parents and children, spiritual formation is taking place. But if parents are not providing these basics, formative opportunities are

being missed. The church can serve parents well by helping them see the significance of their everyday interactions with their child and assisting them as they learn how to relate with their little ones. These responses are learned most easily, and formative practices are more likely to become a way of life, if parents begin to use those skills when the child is young. The church's partnership with parents should therefore begin early.

The faith community can nurture parents as they develop good-enough basic parenting skills. And when they discover that even the simple care of their children is formative, they realize that parenting is significant and that spiritual formation is a normal part of Christian family life, not just something extraneous to be added on.

Faith-Talk

From church leaders we repeatedly hear of Christian parents who feel incompetent to nurture their children spiritually because they themselves were not nurtured as children. They lack experience and knowledge. Yet, they want their children to have what they did not: spiritual formation in their home where the faith is lived. How can the faith community help parents learn to talk comfortably with their children about their faith?

Getting Comfortable with Faith-Talk. Many young people may have seldom talked about their relationship with God or their spiritual questions. They need a safe place where they can begin talking about their faith. That might be in a small group of moms, dads, or couples meeting with an understanding leader who can guide them to begin sharing their faith stories. Acknowledging that learning to talk comfortably about our faith is not easy may help persons be willing to try in their group of supportive friends. As the group becomes comfortable talking with one another about their questions, their needs, and how God has been with them and helped them during the week, the parents are being prepared for their faith-related conversations with their children.

In small groups or gatherings of moms and dads, it would be helpful for young parents if others who are little farther down the road in family faith-talk told their stories, sharing what had been hard for them and what helped them become comfortable talking about God in the home. They could also provide tips for the young parents, introducing simple ideas like encouraging families to go on

nature walks to notice things God has made. And role-playing parent/child faith conversations could be helpful. After watching the role-play the group could discuss the strengths of what they observed and other possibilities. Practicing faith-talk through role-playing with supportive peers who will encourage and pray for them can help parents become comfortable speaking about their own spiritual journeys. The small group can be an ongoing source of support and insight when parents feel free to discuss the challenges they face and to learn from one another.

Faith-Talk Starters. Fortunately, tools are also available to help parents initiate family faith-talk. Faith-talk can also be prompted by questions that parents ask their children. Karen-Marie Yust suggests developing open-ended questions to trigger meaningful conversations: "How do you think God feels about war?" "What would Jesus do on Christmas?" "What do you think God is like?" "Where would Moses sit if he came to eat lunch at your school?" "When have you felt close to God?" Older children may be encouraged toward faith-talk when asked a question like, "What would you like to ask God? Faith-talk can also be initiated by questions and concerns that a parent had when he or she was a child. Knowing the questions their parents wondered about could give boys and girls permission to raise their questions in the family.

Processing Questions

During our research we heard our young subjects asking challenging questions about God, faith, the Christian life, and their own personal problems and relationships. How those questions are handled can make a difference in whether children accept God's story as their own and experience the joy of joining God's kingdom work. Their questions must not be taken lightly. How do church leaders effectively answer children's faith questions? How can we join children in exploring these questions so that we all grow in faith and understanding? How can the church equip parents to deal with tough questions?

Parents Taking on the Challenge. Parents do not have to be "answer people." "I don't know" or "I've never thought of that" are perfectly okay when they are honest responses. There are times when it is helpful to put the question right back to the child: "What do you think?" And we encourage the child's search for understanding when we join them in

seeking new answers. When we honestly acknowledge the limits of our understanding, it is important to also name what we do believe about God and lay that beside what we don't yet know for certain.

When children experience the death of a family member or friend, they raise many questions. The way parents respond when asked, "Why did God let Grandpa die?" matters. If the answer the child hears is that God loved Grandpa so much that God took him to heaven so they can be together, the child's next question may be, "Why does God love Grandpa more than me?" It is best to give children the physical facts about the disease and death and be careful not to speak of God taking the loved one away. Since children frequently ask questions about death, perhaps a hospice chaplain could be invited to hold a session to help parents and teachers know how to deal with such questions. When children are dealing with terminal illness and death of a close family member or friend, the church should be sure that they have the support of a hospice chaplain or someone who understands how children grieve.

Hard Questions. Some boys and girls ask very hard questions. Sometimes their questions can feel alarming and seem overwhelming because of their intensity and their depth—even from very young children. It is important for parents to walk with them through their struggles.

Children also wrestle with painful life issues that can make them question the character of God. Peter (age eight) was burdened by painful choices that his father made: he had left the family eighteen months earlier. Peter had been praying diligently for his return. He repeatedly asked why God let him leave. His mother told the interviewer, "He wanted to know why God doesn't answers his prayers and bring back his dad." Even though she knew that God's promises never fail and were true for Peter, she stated, "I hate it as a parent to see that struggle when he's questioning. . . It's just so hard to explain those harder elements of suffering." Families like Peter's need the support of ministry leaders who have thought about how to assist children with their questions when they are going through divorce and other family problems. When the crisis comes, they need to be available to parents, prepared to help them think through how to respond to their children's questions, and ready to pray with them for their children in their struggles.

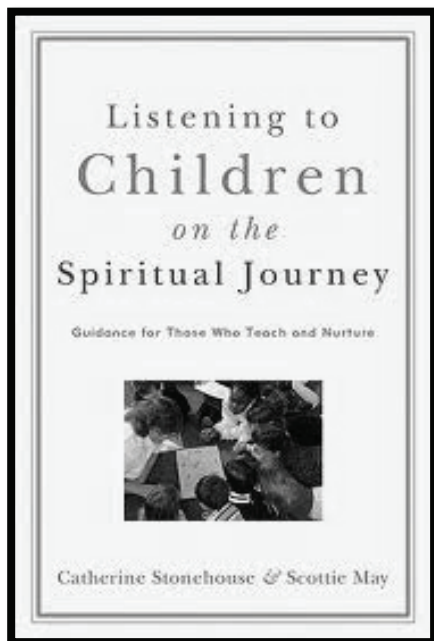
Bi-Cultural Families

In most if not all parts of the world, including North America, we live in cultures that are not Christian. Being Christian, a faith follower of Jesus, requires that we and our children become bicultural. Karen-Marie Yust in her book *Real Kids, Real Faith* challenges us to help our children live as two-culture kids, drawing their identity from the *Christian* culture, even as they live in the *world's* culture. As a church we can help families become bicultural as we give them a place of spiritual nurture, as we lead them into the drama of Scripture to meet God and discover their place in God's story. The church can also be a place where parents and their children look at their culture through the lenses of God's perspective. When a vital faith community takes seriously the challenge of living as Christ followers in the world, we give one another the gift of seeing what the Christ like looks like lived through differing personalities and in varied settings.

But unfortunately, it's often hard to see a difference in the lifestyle of Christians compared to those who claim not to be followers of Jesus. Marva Dawn realizes that living the practices that nurture the spiritual life of the family is "difficult—and made even more so by a contradictory culture; that is precisely why spirituality is so often reduced to a quick-fix technique. Instead, these practices for nurturing children will require our whole lives and the entire life of our churches." (Dawn, 83) We want to offer young parents more than "quick-fix techniques."

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Listening to Children on the Spiritual Journey

Catherine Stonehouse and Scottie May (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010)

Throughout more than a decade of field research, Catherine Stonehouse and Scottie May listened to children talk about their relationships with God, observed children and their parents in learning and worship settings, and interviewed adults about their childhood faith experiences. *Listening to Children on the Spiritual Journey* weaves together their findings to offer a glimpse of the spiritual responsiveness and potential of children. It provides insight into children's perceptions of God and explores how they process their faith. It suggests how adults can more effectively relate to and work with children to nurture their faith. Chapters include: Why Listen to Children?, Knowing God in Childhood, Experiencing God in Everyday Life, Children Experiencing God at Church, The Formative Power of God's Story, Let the Children Come: Loving, Knowing, and Following Jesus, Celebrating Compassion, and The Church Partnering with Parents.

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Parents and “Sticky Faith”—Building a Lasting Faith in Young People

Kara E. Powell, Brad M Griffin, Cheryl A. Crawford, and Chap Clap

Parents often see big changes in children during the first year in college, but one change that often catches them off guard is a diminished commitment to their faith. In fact, various studies of young adult Christians have shown that by the time they receive their diploma four years later; approximately 40 to 50 percent of them will have abandoned their faith. Even those actively participating in church youth groups in high school, who, when polled the year before college, claimed they had every intention of sticking with their faith—approximately 80% in one study—aren’t immune.

How does such steadfast faith become so quickly unstuck? That’s what Fuller Seminary faculty members Drs. Kara Powell and Chap Clark, along with a team of graduate students, set out to discover over a six year period with the College Transition Project. Conducted by the Fuller Youth Institute (FYI), the Project included qualitative and longitudinal quantitative studies of 500 Christian youth group members following high school graduation that tracked individual and collective journeys during the first three years of college.

The research results are the impetus for the latest book by Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids*, a guide for parents of kids of all ages (from preschool to college), providing practical and developmentally appropriate suggestions on building faith that will stick through college and beyond.

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(This article drawn from resources online at <http://stickyfaith.org> and from Chapter Six in *Sticky Faith: Youth Worker Edition*. Kara Powell, Brad Griffin, and Cheryl Crawford. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011)

Whatever the age of the child, say the authors (who stress it's never too late or too early to start building Sticky Faith), parents need to understand a few broad and fundamental concepts, including:

- Even more important than parental support throughout childhood, the research suggests that Sticky Faith depends on how parents express and live out their faith. Parents' own faith is one of the primary influencers on their kids' faith. Attend church just a couple of times a year? Expect the same from your kids.
- When asked what it means to be Christian, one-third of college juniors (prior youth group attendees) listed answers related to "doing" the faith—a lifestyle of external behaviors insufficient to sustain their faith. Instead of the "Gospel of Sin Management"—that is, a long list of dos and don'ts that defines being a Christian—parents need to focus on teaching how to trust (not just obey) Christ along with teaching how he leads, guides, and changes us from the inside.
- Kids need to develop a strong personal identity for faith to stick and community helps do just that. Whether it's family or friends, building "social capital" into kids' lives creates a network of caring supporters who aid in the self-discovery process and keep kids connected to faith for the long haul. Build a 5:1 (or 7:1, or 10:1, or whatever you determine works best for your family) sticky web adult to child ratio for mentoring your kids since other adults are often able to speak to them in ways you cannot as the parent.

Nurturing a Sticky Faith

Imagine a photo of high school seniors who have been attending a local church in your community. Now take a red marker and place an "X" over almost half of their faces. According to a handful of research studies, those students with a red "X" represent the almost 50 percent of youth group graduates who drift from God and from the church after high school.

What can parents or grandparents do to help teenagers have faith that lasts?

1. **Share verbally about their own faith journeys.** Stop lecturing kids or interviewing them; instead, share organically about your own faith. Use time in the car, recent current events, or dinner discussions as a chance to share how your own faith is growing, or ways that your faith impacts your everyday life. Include both a sense of your present religious experiences and insights as well as highlights of your faith journey in the past.
2. **Ask their children who they will turn to when they have doubts.** Doubt in and of itself isn't toxic; it's unexpressed doubt that turns toxic. One of the repeated themes in the research was the importance of parents giving their kids space to wrestle with tough faith questions until they pinned down their own answers. Giving permission for independent thought leads to stickier faith.
3. **Connect their sons and daughters to at least five caring adults.** Kids need to develop a strong personal identity for faith to stick and community helps do just that. When kids know specific adults who are "on their team," they have a web of support to catch them when they fall and keep them connected to faith for the long haul. Using the scaffolding of existing relationships with extended family, neighbors, friends, coaches and teachers, build a 5:1 (or 7:1, or 10:1, or whatever you determine works best for your family) sticky web adult to child ratio for mentoring your kids. Other adults are often able to speak to them in ways you cannot as the parent.
4. **Reinforce that their faith is bigger than any moral failure or mistake.** The students in the Sticky Faith study tended to view their faith as a list of behaviors, akin to what Dallas Willard calls the "gospel of sin management." Tragically, when students with that view of their faith fail, their feelings of guilt cause them to run from their faith and the church, just when they need them the most. A faith that sticks is one that

is based not primarily on behaviors, but on inner life change.

5. **Talk to high school juniors and seniors now about life after college.** Only one in seven youth group graduates felt their faith was ready for what they faced after high school. As part of practical discussions on issues such as managing money and time, help high school upperclassmen plan a schedule that will include church attendance. Forty percent of college freshmen report difficulty finding a church, so help them make the connection before arrival for a smoother and stickier transition. It's never too early to start building Sticky Faith in your kids.

Having Sticky Faith Conversations at Home

Through our College Transition Project research we explored all kinds of factors that may be related to faith formation in students' lives. In the midst of a host of factors that do seem to help develop Sticky Faith, some of our most intriguing findings point to the role of parents and family conversations about faith.

Parents are usually the most important spiritual influence in their kids' lives.

While we believe in the power of adult mentoring, it's challenging to point to a Sticky Faith factor that is more significant than students' parents.

Following his nationwide telephone survey of 3,290 teens and their parents, as well as 250 in-depth interviews, sociologist Dr. Christian Smith concluded, "Most teenagers and their parents may not realize it, but a lot of research in the sociology of religion suggests that the most important social influence in shaping young people's religious lives is the religious life modeled and taught to them by their parents."

Of course there are exceptions. Your own faith might be vastly different than your parents'. Plus we've met plenty of parents whose kids end up all over the faith spectrum. But parents are more than

an initial launch pad for their kids' journeys; they continue to shape them as ongoing companions and guides.

Most parents miss out on opportunities to talk about faith with their kids.

At Fuller Seminary, we have great respect and affection for the Search Institute, a research center devoted to helping make communities a better place for kids. According to Search's nationwide study, 12% of youth have a regular dialog with their mom on faith/life issues. In other words, one out of eight kids talks with their mom about their faith.

It's far lower for dads. One out of twenty, or 5%, of kids have regular faith/life conversations with their dad.

One more interesting statistic: Approximately 9% of teenagers engage in regular Bible reading and devotions with their families. So not even one out of ten teenagers looks at Scripture with their parents. When it comes to matters of faith, mum's usually the word at home.

The best discussions about faith happen not just when parents ask questions but when parents share their own experiences too.

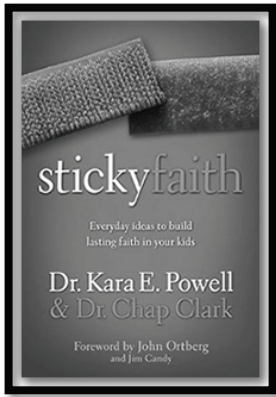
That relatively small group of parents who do talk with their kids about faith tend to default to asking their kids questions.

- What did you talk about in church today?
- How was youth group?
- What did you think of the sermon?

Depending on the personality and mood of the kid, responses usually range from grunts to "the usual". Not very satisfying for the parent or the kid.

Our research shows that asking these questions can pay off. But as vital to Sticky Faith is that parents also *share about their own faith*.

In other words, parents shouldn't merely interview their kids; they need to *discuss their own faith journeys* including both ups and downs.



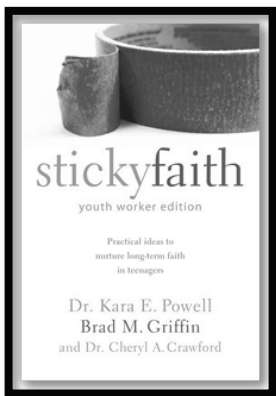
Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids

Kara Powell and Chap Clark (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011)

Nearly every Christian parent in America would give anything to find a viable resource for developing within their kids a deep, dynamic faith that “sticks” long term. Research shows that almost half of graduating high school seniors struggle deeply with their faith. Recognizing the ramifications of that statistic, the Fuller Youth Institute (FYI) conducted the “College Transition Project” in an effort to identify the relationships and best practices that can set young people on a trajectory of lifelong faith and service. Based on FYI findings, this easy-to-read guide presents both a compelling rationale and a powerful strategy to show parents how to actively encourage their children’s spiritual growth so that it will stick to them into adulthood and empower them to develop a living, lasting faith.



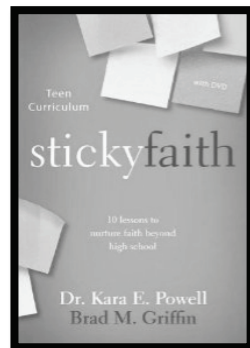
Sticky Faith Parent Curriculum, a video-based study, gives parents practical, tested ideas that launch kids of all ages into a lifelong journey of faith and service. Through personal, real-world experiences of research and sharing, the *Sticky Faith Parent Curriculum* enables parents to instill a deep and lasting faith in their adolescents.



Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids

Kara Powell, Brad M Griffin, Cheryl A. Crawford (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011)

Recent studies show that 40-50 percent of kids who are connected to a youth group throughout their senior year will fail to stick with their faith in college. As youth workers are pouring their time and energy into the students in their ministries, they are often left wondering if they’ve done enough to equip their students to carry their faith into adulthood. The Fuller Youth Institute has done extensive research in the area of youth ministry and teenage development. In *Sticky Faith*, the team at FYI presents youth workers with both a theological/philosophical framework and practical programming ideas that develop long-term faith in teenagers. Each chapter presents a summary of FYI’s quantitative and qualitative research, along with the implications of this research, including program ideas suggested and tested by youth ministries nationwide.



Sticky Faith Curriculum for Teenagers, a 10-session book and DVD study, gives youth workers a theological and philosophical framework alongside real-world, road-tested programming ideas. The study is designed to help high school students develop a solid foundation that endures through the faith struggles they will face in college. It enables youth leaders to impact to their students with a faith that sticks.



Stick Faith Website
Fuller Youth Institute
<http://stickyfaith.org>



The Parenting Environment

Barna Research & Orange (A Division of rethink Group)

From *The State of the Church & Family- 2010 Report*

The *State of the Church & Family Report* is a research-based examination of U.S. parents, and how these families interact with local churches and faith communities. The basis of the report is a scientific, nationwide study of parents, conducted by the Barna Group and commissioned by Orange. Interviews were conducted with individuals who currently have young children under the age of 18 living at home (no empty-nest parents were included). The first part of this brief excerpt from the report presents the five conclusions of the Orange team on the findings about the “Parenting Environment.” The second part presents two important findings: “Developing Plans for Children” and “Finding Guidance” that will be particularly helpful in guiding churches in their ministry with parents.

1. Parents see the value in a wider circle.

It is incredibly good news for church leaders that most parents—churched and unchurched—see the value in a wider circle of influence for their children. While parents may find they have enough input from other parents their age, they certainly are open to wider influences for themselves, and clearly see the need for their children to have adult influences in their lives.

Even though many parents do not instinctively gravitate toward the church as a resource, most parents think the church could be helpful in creating a parenting plan. That provides opportunity.

Churches that continue to elevate community and activate the family will continue to help parents see that the faith community can be part of the wider circle.

2. Parents need a partner to turn intention into cohesive action.

The data shows that more people have a desire to do something for their children than are actually doing something for their children. And even among parents who are taking action, there’s no strong indication that what they are doing is strategic or has a long term goal in mind.

These findings are excerpted from *The State of the Church & Family Report: How Parents Are Rethinking Their Connections with Churches* (2010 Annual Report). Orange, a division of the rethink Group (www.whatisorange.org). You can order the digital reports online from the Barna Group at www.barna.org.

In a sense, this should be no surprise, because it's always hard to turn intention into action. Just try to move from wanting to lose weight to losing weight. It's not easy.

And yet parents take action all the time. They join the local YMCA. They find piano teachers and enroll in softball and dance lessons.

They find partners to help them raise a family every year. While that may not have a long-term goal behind it either, it's at least action. So it should not be too much of a stretch to have a church help them turn intention into action when it comes to a parenting strategy.

Essentially, when you have an integrated family ministry strategy, you have an action plan. This is your doorway into a true partnership with parents at all age levels—from infant through to college.

But the question is, do parents see this? Do they know you have a plan? They may need help, but if they don't think of you as help, you may not ever truly connect. Mere attendance at church does not create a partnership—engagement in some way creates a partnership. And engagement in your strategy can help turn intention into action.

3. Challenge the status quo.

We want to say this carefully, but it would seem that there's an opportunity for church leaders to challenge common assumptions and practices among parents. This approach can work in tandem with the insight above, that parents need a partner to help turn intention into action.

Now please hear us: We need to do this with a great deal of humility. As the study indicates, it's not like the church has done an impeccable job of helping families in the past. And it's not as though all of us who are enthusiastic about our new strategies and plans are going to hit the mark well or hit it every time. We're going to make mistakes. (Ironically, admitting that and approaching parents with an attitude of humility and openness may help bridge some of the trust gap and indifference that's evident from the research.)

But with the right attitude in mind, consider this: Almost half of all parents say they have no plan in raising their kids; they simply do the best they can. And even among the parents who say they have a plan in mind to help their child become what they desire, you might wonder whether their plan is well thought out or cohesive.

This is a great opportunity for leaders to speak into the lives of parents. If we actually have a clear and compelling approach to helping families, this is a chance to help families realize more is possible. We can cast vision about beginning with the end in mind in raising their kids. We can speak clearly into parents lives about the value of a wider community building into their family. We are able to explain why we've refined the message to core truths that each child and student can receive at appropriate stages in their lives.

The more we are able to explain our strategy and approach clearly, the more it will become apparent to parents that their own approach might need rethinking. And (this is where humility is needed), we might ask parents to think through the effectiveness of their own plan. How much of it actually is an intention rather than a strategy or plan? How much of it is clear? And even if it's clear in their minds, is it producing what they hoped it would produce?

Despite ambivalent feelings toward the church, the vast majority of parents believe that a church would be a helpful resource to help them develop a parenting plan. This might be your opportunity to challenge assumptions as well as explain an alternative.

4. Parents still have misgivings about church.

As the report points out, suspicion and ambiguity about how helpful a church connection might be persists among some parents. All the marketing in the world probably won't overcome that. The question is, what might instill confidence and trust?

This might be an opportunity for churches to narrow the focus and find the best connection point with new families. One of the best ways to overcome latent suspicion or trust is to help people see that a given ministry has truly helped families and kids.

If you have one practice, strategy or environment in your church that has a great track record with parents, it might be with a pathway to help connect parents you haven't yet reached. In terms of overcoming suspicion or ambiguity, introducing them to a family experience, Sunday morning environment, or student service project that has a proven track record of helping families can erase doubt quickly and turn a desire into a reality. And most of us have one environment or

ministry that we would consider our best venue. Why not direct people there first?

Another way to help instill confidence and build trust is to help parents build relationships with other parents and church leaders. People appreciate meaningful community. What if you encouraged some of your families who love what's happening in their home to connect with new families? Church staff that are also excited about what's happening can also dialogue with new families and families that are not engaged. You might even host a reception that would put some of these people in the same room, encouraging them to share stories and approaches with each other.

This might not overcome all the suspicion that's out there, but it can instill confidence. And as people get to know other people, trust can develop at more meaningful levels.

5. Parents are more open to your influence at certain stages and in certain circumstances.

While parents generally might be more open to an intentional family ministry strategy than you think, notice that there are certain stages where interest is even higher.

Young parents, parents of younger children, unmarried parents, parents with a Roman Catholic background and other sub groups were more likely to desire help from an outside influence. There are also noteworthy regional trends and trends among lower income families, African-Americans and Hispanics that have implications for church leaders. Each of these will help you understand how to cooperate with parents in your situation.

This means it might be easier to create a meaningful partnership with some groups of parents than others—a bigger appetite for assistance can create greater participation among parents. People who want it more tend to use it more.

And that could bring momentum to your entire family ministry strategy. It's one thing to have church leaders championing a cause—another thing to have dozens or hundreds of parents enthusiastic about it because it's working in their home and in their Sunday experiences. If they became early adapters in your congregation—either of the strategy or the next phase of your strategy—it would be a way to get an idea to gain acceptance among families in your congregation not because it's a great

idea, but because it's actually working. If you started among those who have the greatest appetite, you might be able to better whet the appetite of other parents.

One final thought: While the study suggests young parents are the most open to your influence, it doesn't mean they're the only ones listening. It's important to realize that parents of pre-teens and teens also could use intentional engagement. Middle school and high school is a season of life when many students pull back from their parents, and many parents—unsure of what to do—pull back as well. You could help create greater engagement of teens and parents of teens in your community. That might produce fewer dropouts, and at a minimum, it's a great opportunity for you to help parents and teens engage each other and leaders at a meaningful level.

Developing Parenting Plans

Many parents lack an intentional, long-term view of how to best raise their children; half of all parents (46%) said that they do not have a plan in place for their children, instead trying to do their best with their children based upon immediate needs.

Most parents (72%) believe that a church or faith community would be a helpful resource to help them develop a parenting plan.

One of the consistent findings of Barna research on the subject of parenting has been that most American parents are not particularly intentional about the outcomes they are trying to achieve with their children. The Orange study supplements this insight, showing that many parents admit they do not have a plan of any kind in place, and admit that they simply try to do their best based upon the immediate needs of the children.

About half of parents (49%) said they have a plan or idea in mind of what they children will become as a person. Churchgoers were only slightly more likely than were unchurched parents (52% versus 44%) to have any semblance of a parenting plan in place.

A follow-up survey question was asked to determine whether parents believe that a church is a good place to help develop a parenting plan. Most parents believe that it would be; nearly three-quarters said it would be very helpful (39%) or somewhat helpful (33%) to them. Unchurched

parents were naturally less interested than were churchgoing parents in relying upon a church in developing a parenting plan; still, almost half of unchurched adults (46%) said they were open to such assistance. In terms of attitude, the difference between churchgoing and unchurched adults was minimal: churchgoing parents were only slightly more likely than were unchurched adults to place a premium on helping their children to cultivate meaningful non-family adult relationships. However, two-thirds of churchgoers (67%) said they had taken action to help their children connect with other adults, while only about half of unchurched parents (55%) had done this. Much of this gap is explained by churchgoers' willingness to rely on church involvement as a viable way to create intergenerational relationships for their offspring (24% of churchgoers do so, compared with just 2% of the unchurched).

The research confirms that churches have an opportunity to help parents become more proactive and to embrace a long-term view of their parenting. Still, as described in other elements of this research, church leaders often have difficulty getting on people's radar as a trusted resource or clearly communicating expectations. Also, getting parents to embrace intentionality will take overcoming many obstacles. The fact is that addressing immediate needs "works" for many families. Other significant barriers include the perceptions that planning is restrictive or that children should chart their own destiny.

Finding Guidance

During times of family crisis, parents are most likely to turn to their own parents or their spouse for help. Only about one-fifth of parents (22%) have turned to faith-related resources, like God, church or the Bible, during such times.

There is no single source that parents have to teach their children right and wrong; the most common were values from their family, the Bible, their own sense of standards, and lessons they have learned in the past—though none of these were particularly common responses. Only 34% of parents mentioned faith-related options as the basis for teaching right and wrong.

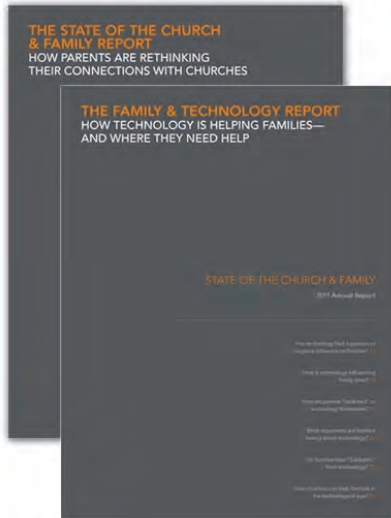
Parents are most likely to turn to faith-related alternatives in order to facilitate spiritual or character development for their children, with the most common resources being church (40%), grandparents (20%), and the Bible (10%).

When it comes to finding guidance during times of crisis, the largest share of parents admitted they returned to an unlikely resource during a recent family crisis—they asked their own parents for help (a resource mentioned by one-third of parents, 37%). Going to a parent was even more common than talking with a spouse (20%), asking God for help (14%), or turning to a friend (6%). Just 2% identified a spiritual leader as a recent resource and 5% mentioned a church. Only about one-third of churchgoing parents said they had turned to a church, pastor, or to God during a recent family crisis, which was higher than the 9% among unchurched adults.

Furthermore, parents pull from a variety of sources to find guidance for teaching their children right and wrong. The most frequent responses were the values that come from their family (35%), the Bible (29%), their own sense of what's right (19%), and lessons they have learned in the past (19%). Others said they turn to personal feelings (10%), God or Jesus (7%), the law (4%), what is acceptable or desirable to others (3%), or the Golden Rule (2%). In total, only one-third of parents (34%) mentioned some type of spiritual or Christian input on this matter. Churchgoing parents were significantly more likely to mention the Bible than were unchurched parents (49% versus 6%), representing one of the biggest gaps in the research.

Finding guidance for spiritual or character development was most likely to come from spiritual sources such as church (40%), the Bible (10%), a pastor (7%), or youth/children's ministries (2%). Another one-fifth of parents mentioned the grandparents (20%) as an important part of the equation.

Grandparents are often turned to for help when parents are dealing with problems, teaching children right from wrong, and developing the character of young people. Churches are much less likely to be seen as a resource during crises. Churches are slightly more valuable to parents when it comes to teaching right from wrong. Among the types of guidance parents are looking for, congregations are the most strongly positioned to help develop the character and spiritual lives of children.

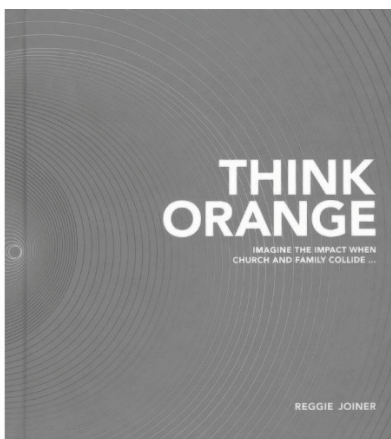


The State of the Church & Family Report 2010 The Family & Technology Report 2010

Barna Group & Orange (a division of reThink Group)
(www.barna.org)

Why aren't more families engaged in congregations? Find out more about the parenting environment and parents' expectations of churches. This report is designed for ministry planning and strategy to reach today's families, content for sermons, and evaluation of family and youth programs. It is a roadmap for retooling your efforts with today's families. Learn 19 different factors that are affecting the role of congregations in parents' lives: What kinds of churches do parents prefer? Does having children stimulate parental involvement in church? What do parents expect out of churches? Parenting peers: how do parents find support from others? Are parents intentional about their parenting goals? Where do parents turn in times of crisis? Do parents prioritize intergenerational relationships?

The Family & Technology Report from Barna Group and Orange gives you the tools to do that. The innovative study included interviews among parents, tweens and teens from the same households. The report addresses questions such as: How can churches assist families in the digital age? Has technology had a positive or negative influence on families? How is technology shaping family time? How many parents are "tech addicts?" What conflicts are families having about technology? Do families take "sabbaths" from technology? Do parents place limits on the family's use of technology? And much more!



Think Orange: Imagine the Impact When Church and Family Collide

Reggie Joiner (Colorado Springs: David C. Cooke, 2009)

Families and churches are each working hard to build faith in kids, but imagine the potential results when the two environments synchronize, maximizing their individual efforts. What can the church do to empower the family? How can the family emphasize the work of the church? They can Think Orange. Former family ministry director Reggie Joiner looks at what would happen if churches and families decided they could no longer do business as usual, but instead combined their efforts and began to work off the same page for the sake of the kids. *Think Orange* shows church leaders how to make radical changes so they can: 1) engage parents in an integrated strategy; 2) synchronize the home and church around a clear message; 3) provoke parents and kids to fight for their relationships with each other; 4) recruit mentors to become partners with the family; and 5) mobilize the next generation to be the church. With a transparent, authentic approach that gives every family and church hope for being more effective in their common mission, *Think Orange* rethinks the approach to children's, youth, and family ministry.



How to Pass Your Faith to Your Kids

Jim Burns

(From: Homeward.com)

With all of the great children and youth programs within churches today, many parents allow churches to “take the wheel” when it comes to their kids’ spiritual development while they take a more passive role. We can easily become convinced that it’s the church’s job to help our kids grow spiritually, not ours. Yet, guess what? God specifically places the responsibility for nurturing a child’s spiritual development on parents – not the church! In the Bible, in Deuteronomy 6:6-7, we read, “These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.” While our churches serve to partner with us in this great task of spiritually nurturing our kids, God has given us – parents – both the responsibility and the tremendous opportunity to pass our faith to our kids. It’s one way you can truly ‘get back to the basics’ as a parent. Still, I understand that many parents find it hard to talk to their kids about God and spiritual issues. So, here are some practical suggestions about how to get started.

1. **Be yourself.** You don’t need a seminary degree to talk to your kids about God. You don’t have to speak in King James language to send a message that you want to talk about spiritual issues. In fact, if you do, your kids will think you’re really weird! So, be yourself! Share your understanding of who God is and why God matters to you—in a way that reflects the real you.
2. **Don’t limit your conversations on spiritual matters to Sunday morning!** This is not to say that Sunday morning is off-limits for spiritual discussions, but don’t get caught in the trap of compartmentalizing faith issues to certain days or certain times. Let your kids know that spiritual issues are important in your life all of the time! This is exactly what the quote from Deuteronomy is talking about: talking about God when you sit at home, when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up! Spirituality is to be part of an ongoing discussion in our homes, with our families!

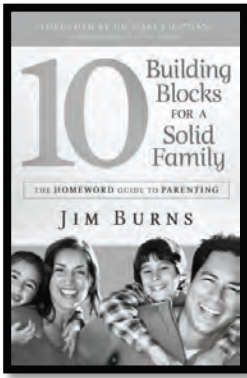
Jim Burns, PhD is President of HomeWord, senior director for the HomeWord Center for Youth and Family at Azusa Pacific University, and host of HomeWord’s radio broadcasts. Jim has written books for parents, youth, children, youth ministry and church leaders. This article is reprinted from www.Homeward.com.

3. **Let your kids catch you in the act of doing something spiritual.** Do you have a regular devotional time—where you read the Bible and pray—that you spend with God? Do your kids know it? How about letting your kids “see” you being involved in your own spiritual disciplines. Don’t forget that your actions will teach your kids a lot about your faith—probably even more than your words!
4. **Look for natural opportunities to raise spiritual issues.** This takes some intentional work by parents to be on the lookout for opportunities “along the road” of life, where issues almost beg to be discussed in light of our Christian commitment and faith. Many opportunities will arise as your kids watch you live life. How do you, for example, demonstrate your faith when some jerk cuts you off on the highway? Perhaps, depending on your reaction, this may be a time to discuss the issues of revenge or forgiveness!
5. **Take the posture of a “fellow-learner” as opposed to that of a “teacher and student.”** Being a “fellow-learner” takes the pressure off as far as trying to send the message that you “know it all” (and your kids will already know this isn’t true!). When discussing spiritual issues, you will most likely hear a question from your adolescent that you can’t answer. It’s fine to say, “I don’t know. Let’s work on finding the answer together.”
6. **Utilize media to launch discussions about God and the Christian life.** While much of today’s media is negative in its influence and portrayals of values, it can provide a launching pad for discussion of how Christian values compare to whatever is seen, heard or read.
7. **Have a plan for family devotional and prayer times.** First, find a devotional guide, sign-up for HomeWords’ “Daily Devotional” or download

HomeWord’s “52 Family Devotionals” tip sheet for family devotions (see www.HomeWord.com). Then devise a plan (daily, weekly, at certain mealtimes for example) and then stick to it. Build the habit so your kids learn, “this is what we do as a family.”

8. **Have fun with your kids!** Unfortunately, too many kids are taught through role modeling from their parents and other adults at church, that Christianity means being grumpy and bored. Perhaps one of the most spiritual things you can do for your kids’ spiritual growth is to model for them that the Christian life is filled with love, peace and joy! So plan intentionally fun times for your family. Let them know that the Christian life can be fun!
9. **Get involved in ministry together as a family.** The call to Christ is the call to serve. You can communicate a lot about your faith in Christ by your willingness to serve; by getting involved in ministry. For years, successful youth ministries have known that getting kids involved in ministry and service results in spiritual growth and in bonding together the youth group community. Do you know what? The same benefits will occur within families when they serve together!
10. **Disciple and equip your kids.** Actively participate in teaching your kids about God and what living the Christian life looks like. Why not do a weekly Bible study together with your son or daughter? Ask your children’s pastor, youth pastor or leaders for ideas for Bible study material. They’ll never be able to use all the materials that are available to them! How about reading a book together on a spiritual topic and then having a weekly discussion about what you’ve read? For ideas about Bible study or book resources you can use with your kids, visit www.HomeWord.com.



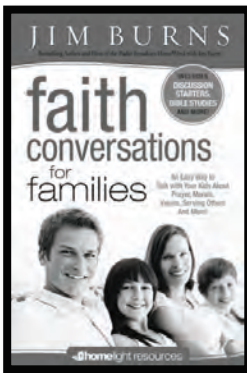


10 Building Blocks for a Solid Family

Jim Burns (Ventura: Regal, 2010)

(Also available 10 Building Blocks for a Solid Family DVD Curriculum Kit)

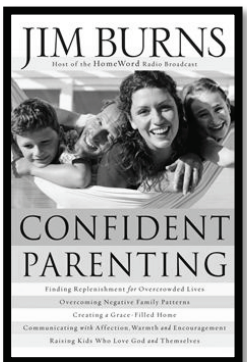
10 Building Blocks for a Solid Family contains a vision and essential ingredients for creating a healthy home filled with joy, peace and love for God and each other. It is also a handbook of tips and techniques for making that vision a reality. You will hear personal stories from parents and family experts that explore every aspect of parenting—from helping children deal with stress to disciplining with consistency, from learning to play together to handling the influence of media and youth culture. You will also find discussion questions and tools that can help you identify problem areas, and guidance for addressing difficulties in a way that builds up, rather than tears down, your child.



Faith Conversations for Families

Jim Burns (Ventura: Regal, 2011)

Faith Conversations for Families makes it easy for parents to invite God into their family's time together and talk with children and teens about life, faith, and following Jesus. The book includes 52 topics with more than 150 easy-to-follow dialog outlines that offer a practical, biblical basis for developing a family's spiritual life. Each outline is designed to help families grow together and strengthen each family member's relationships with God. There are also helpful tips for making regular family time meaningful for everyone.

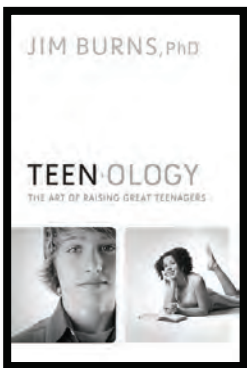


Confident Parent

Jim Burns (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2007)

(Also available: Confident Parenting DVD Curriculum Kit)

To counter the usual trial-and-error method of parenting, Jim Burns offers time-tested advice and strategies for today's busy families. Infused with his signature candidness and practicality, each chapter explores a different aspect of parenting—from breaking generational chains of dysfunction and creating a warm atmosphere at home to handling discipline issues and blessing your children with a legacy of faith. Helpful follow-up exercises and questions along the way reinforce the basics of good parenting and provide a foundation for developing your own family plan. You won't find any quick fixes here, but you will learn how to make a positive difference in your family.



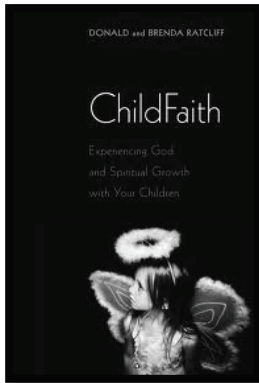
Teenology: The Art of Raising Great Teenagers

Jim Burns (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2010)

The questions and concerns never stop when it comes to parenting teens—especially these days, when culture is throwing more and more unhealthy things at our kids. Add teenage hormones, rebellion, and experimentation to the mix, and it's no wonder so many families are suffering. It doesn't have to be this way, though. Teen expert Jim Burns provides you with real-life answers and advice for navigating this ever-changing season in your child's life. Tackling even the most sensitive topics, he shows how you can give your teen the tools to make wise decisions about: dating and sexuality; the Internet and social media; music, TV, and movies; faith matters; and much more. Complete with a guide to common problems ranging from homework hassles to drug and alcohol use, this encouraging book can help you be the parent your teen needs.

Resources

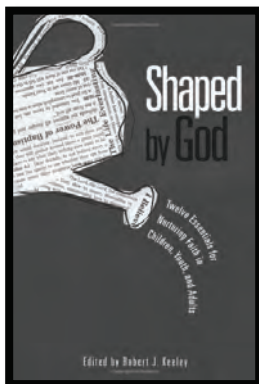
Parents & Faith Formation



ChildFaith: Experiencing God & Spiritual Growth with Your Children

Donald and Brenda Ratcliff (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2010)

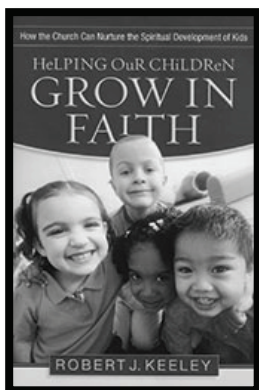
Parents can encourage the spiritual growth and experiences of their children through activities both inside and outside the home. *ChildFaith* provides the foundation for parental nurture of children's spirituality as well as for children's influencing their parents' spirituality. This book explores a wide variety of methods that can encourage mutual spiritual growth of parents and children, including reading Bible stories, celebrating rituals and biblical holidays, participating in church activities, and taking family field trips



Shaped by God: Twelve Essentials for Nurturing Faith in Children, Youth, and Adults

Robert J. Keeley, editor (Grand Rapids: Faith Alive, 2010)

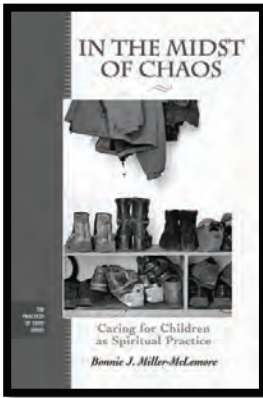
Faith formation doesn't just happen—it's a Spirit-led lifelong process of shaping and reshaping. In this accessible anthology, twelve experts share their perspectives on faith formation at home, in worship, in education, in intergenerational contexts, in people with developmental disabilities, and more. Chapters include: Biblical Foundations of Faith Formation, Faith Formation through Faith Practices, The Importance of Story in Faith Formation, Faith Formation at Home, Faith Formation through Worship, Sacraments and Education, Fostering Intergenerational Christian community, Faith Formation and People with Developmental Disabilities, Recent Research, and Faith Formation in the Postmodern Matrix.



Helping Our Children Grow in Faith

Robert J. Keeley (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008)

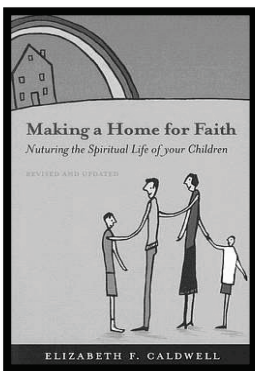
Educator and children's ministry director Robert Keeley provides guidance for helping children develop a three-dimensional faith—a faith that involves their heads, their hearts, and their spirits. The book presents six practical principles for fostering faith in children. It shows how to integrate children into congregational worship, how to teach them the Bible while appreciating the mystery of God, and how to distinguish the difference between faith development and moral development. Chapters include: The Church as Community, Jesus Values Children, Dwelling in the Mysteries, The Power of Story, Obedience and Faith, Worship, and Creating a Child-Friendly Culture.



In the Midst of Chaos: Caring for Children as Spiritual Practice

Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007)

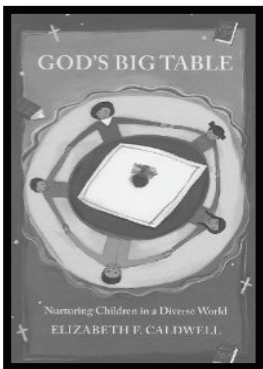
How can we find spiritual depth in the midst of the chaos of our lives with children? Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore shows us how to integrate and strengthen the practice of faith in the everyday experience of raising children. By rethinking parenting as an invitation to discover God in the middle of our busy and overstuffed lives, it relieves parents of the burden of being the all-knowing authority figures who impart spiritual knowledge to children. Finding spirituality in family activities such as reading bedtime stories, doing household chores, and playing games can empower parents to notice what they are already doing as potentially valuable and to practice it more consciously as part of their own faith journey.



Making a Home for Faith: Nurturing the Spiritual Life of Your Children

Elizabeth Caldwell (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2007)

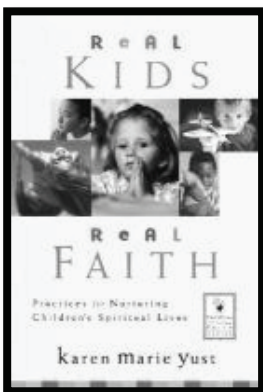
Churches often assume that parents know what to do with their children in regard to nurturing them in a life of faith after baptism or dedication. Elizabeth Caldwell addresses this need by offering parents and educators insights and ideas for nurturing the faith of children and creating a faithful ecology at home, at church, and in the world. Chapters include: Making a Home for Faith, Parenting for Faith Expression, Imprints of Faith, When Your Child Asks, and A Faithful Ecology.



God's Big Table: Nurturing Children in a Diverse World

Elizabeth Caldwell (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2011)

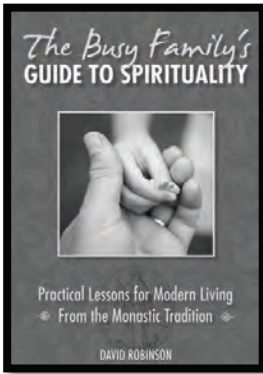
God's Big Table: Nurturing Children in a Diverse World uses the imagery of the table as a metaphor for the ways our churches engage differences and diversity through a biblical background of welcoming all God's children. In the 21st century, faithful Christians are being challenged with the topic of why living with diversity of faith and culture is important, the ways that it is impacting church communities, and why education for church members is essential. This is an encouraging guide for clergy and church families who want to be open to a diverse faith community.



Real Kids, Real Faith: Practices for Nurturing Children's Spiritual Lives

Karen Marie Yust (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004)

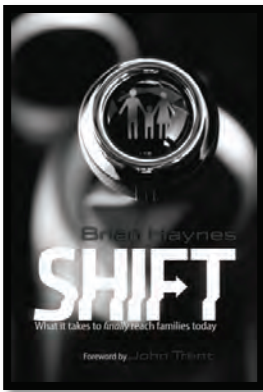
Karen Marie Yust provides insights and a variety of helpful tips for nurturing children's spiritual and religious formation. She challenges the prevailing notion that children are unable to grasp religious concepts and encourages parents and educators to recognize children as capable of genuine faith. Chapters include: Creating a Spiritual World for Children to Inhabit, Telling Stories that Draw Children into a Life of Faith, Helping Children Name God's Presence in their Lives, Praying with Children, Supporting Children as They Grow in Spiritual Awareness, and Acting Out Our Spirituality with Children.



The Busy Family's Guide to Spirituality: Practical Lessons for Modern Living from the Monastic Tradition

David Robinson (New York: Crossroad, 2009)

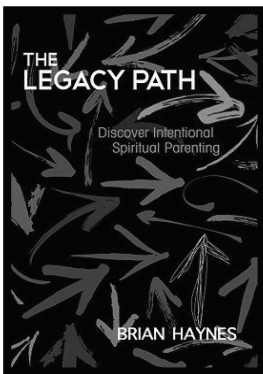
Drawing on timeless principles of monastic communal living, this spiritual guide for families offers effective tools to meet many challenges and counteract the divisive forces that can splinter a healthy home. Each chapter includes a practical lesson from the rule of St. Benedict and the Benedictine traditions which have been cornerstones of Western Christian monastic life for millennia. Spiritual practice, making time, discipline, sharing, hospitality, and changing family dynamics are some of the topics addressed in this wise and wide-ranging handbook, while exercises, checklists, and ideas for family activities are included at the end of every chapter. The gentle, reassuring tone offers encouragement to all families, and reinforces the importance of parenting as a spiritual calling.



Shift—What It Takes to Finally Reach Families Today

Brian Haynes (Loveland: Group, 2009)

Shift provides the tools for churches to make better use of seven rites of passage your church is most likely already celebrating—already marking as families move through their faith journey together: the birth of a baby, faith commitment, preparing for adolescence, commitment to purity, passage to adulthood, high school graduation, and life in Christ. As churches tap into the natural patterns of child development and family, leaders will be able to motivate parents when they're most open to shaping their children's faith. *Shift* puts family discipleship at church and at home on one simple, common path.



The Legacy Path: Discover Intentional Spiritual Parenting

Brian Haynes (Nashville: Randall House, 2011)

The Legacy Path provides a clear plan for parents as they seek to influence the faith of the next generation. Brian Haynes wants to take parents down the path of intentional spiritual parenting. The destination is a new generation of children emerging as adults who know how to love God and love people. This new generation will also know how to equip their own children to do the same. The Legacy Path gives parents great insight into biblical principles necessary for proper parenting. The seven Legacy Milestones created by Brian Haynes are explained with practical application.

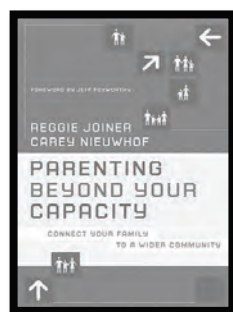
Resources Parenting



Parenting (Christian Explorations of Daily Living)

David H. Jensen (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011)

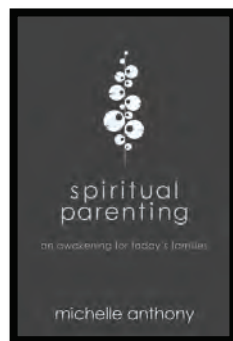
Parenting attempts to show how central Christian convictions inform the age-old practices of parenting and how the experience and practice of parenting shape Christian faith today. By paying special attention to some of the challenges and issues of parenting in a globalized world, the book offers a fresh theological vision of parenting that promotes justice, human flourishing, and recognition that all people are children of God.



Parenting Beyond Your Capacity

Reggie Joiner and Carey Nieuwhof (Colorado Springs, David C. Cooke, 2010)

As much as parents are tempted to think otherwise, no one has more influence on the life of a child than a parent. But what do they do with all that influence? This book introduces parents to a set of values that can help them steer things in the right direction. The book presents five Family Values in light of Deuteronomy 6:4-12: Imagine the End, Fight for the Heart, Make it Personal, Create a Rhythm, and Widen the Circle.



Spiritual Parenting: An Awakening for Today's Families

Michelle Anthony (Colorado Springs: David C. Cooke, 2010)

(Also available: Spiritual Parenting DVD Curriculum Kit)

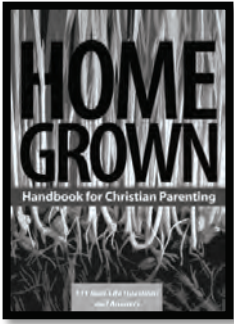
It's hard enough to train kids to behave, but good behavior isn't what Jesus calls for in the Bible. He wants hearts and souls that are shaped in vibrant faith and love toward God and others. In *Spiritual Parenting*, Michelle Anthony places the dependence upon God for our child and calls the reader to a heart posture of obedience and faithfulness. The end goal is a vibrant faith that is passed on from one generation to another. Parents are, by the power of God's Spirit, to obey and depend on God in order to create an environment God can use to beckon our kids to him.



Visionary Parenting

Rob Rienow (Nashville: Randall House, 2009)

Visionary Parenting offers a fresh, God-sized vision for families. No matter where parents are on the parenting journey, they will see God can transform their home. It begins with understanding God's purpose for the family and taking an honest look at the current state of the home. The author shares the foundational truth that God created the family to ensure that the next generation grows up to know, love, and serve God. Topics covered include: the God-filled normal life, impacting a thousand generations, creating a home of unity, the noble calling of fatherhood and motherhood, the blessing of family worship, and discipline that disciples.

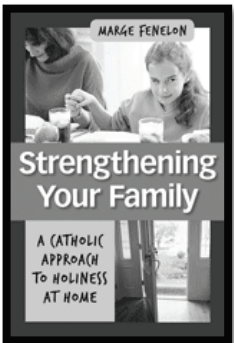


Home Grown: Handbook for Christian Parenting

(111 Real-Life Questions and Answers)

Karen DeBoer (Grand Rapids: Faith Alive, 2010)

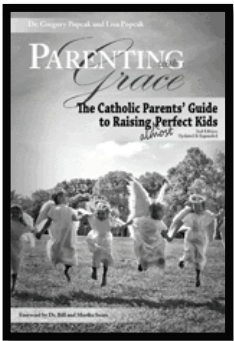
This handbook gives parents practical, real-world advice about how to help their kids know and love God. Karen DeBoer's practical approach to Christian parenting, combined with the insights of a panel of experts like Elizabeth Caldwell and Karen-Marie Yust, makes this book a valuable resource for how to build a home where the whole family can grow in faith together. Topics include: How can I help my kids trust God when they're worried or bad things happen? How do I explain tough things like death and divorce? Is it okay that we don't have family devotions? How can I make our home a place where my kids' faith will grow?



Strengthening Your Family: A Catholic Approach to Holiness

Marge Fenelon (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, 2011)

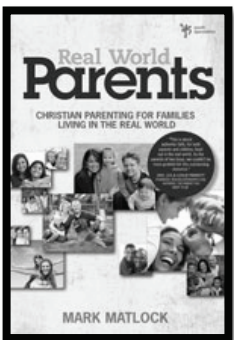
Marge Fenelon offers simple, practical ways to foster a holy atmosphere in the home—from which everything else can flow. Parents can discover how to set priorities, form ideals, and keep their family grounded with a workable spiritual schedule. They can learn to live “in the world, but not of the world” as they help their children develop the skills and attitudes that will serve them well, no matter what the challenge.



Parenting with Grace: The Catholic Parents' Guide to Raising Almost Perfect Kids (2nd Edition)

Gregory K. Popcak and Lisa Popcak (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, 2010)

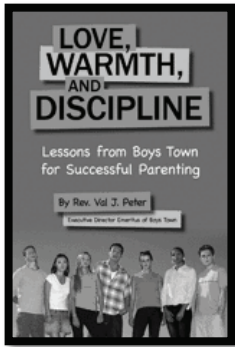
Gregory and Lisa Popcak guide parents through each stage of child development, from infancy through adolescence, offering additional age-specific advice on “parenting with grace.” *Parenting with Grace* presents seven factors that make Catholic parents unique; how to C.A.R.E. enough to parent your very best; and practical, faith-filled solutions to common problems of every childhood stage: sleep problems, tantrums, faith issues, childhood fears, dating, dealing with technology and media, and much, much more.



Real World Parents: Christian Parenting for Families Living in the Real World

Mark Matlock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010)

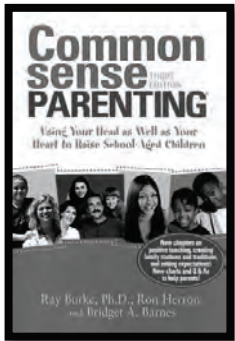
Christian families today often find themselves stuck between two stories—their own family's story and God's story. It's like they're living two lives: their Christian life and their “real world” life. The trick is figuring out how to get a family's story to line up with God's story, helping parents raise children who have the character, values, and mission that allows them to go out into the real world and live out a real faith. *Real World Parents* helps parents be proactive, rather than reactive, providing tools to help parents live out a faith that allows their children to see what it means to live as a Christian. Parents can learn how to lead their family towards an integrated life where the family's story and God's story come together to make a difference in the world.



Love, Warmth, and Discipline: Lessons from Boys Town for Successful Parenting

Val J. Peter (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, 2010)

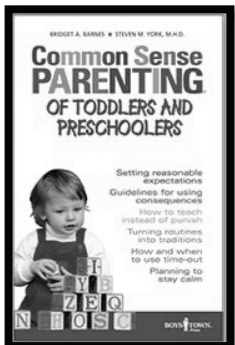
We've all been challenged by our children at one time or another—but what about every day, by dozens of kids of all ages and backgrounds? Now parents, teachers, counselors, and pastors can benefit from the collective wisdom of Boys Town, one of the most successful programs for troubled youth in the country. In the form of “dispatches from the front,” former director of Boys Town Father Val J. Peter shares these skills so that you, too, can help the young people in your life develop the virtues, self-esteem, resilience, and moral code that will sustain them throughout their lives.



Common Sense Parenting (Third Edition)

Ray Burke, Ron Herron, and Bridget Barnes (Boys Town: Boys Town Press, 2006)

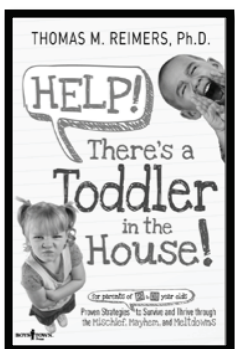
Common Sense Parenting® provides parents with a menu of proven techniques that will aid them in building good family relationships, preventing and correcting misbehavior, using consequences to improve behavior, teaching self-control, and staying calm. The book shows parents how to approach discipline as positive teaching rather than punishment of their children. Encouraging children by recognizing their good behavior and teaching before problems occur are as important as correcting children's negative behavior. Parents also learn how to help children solve problems, reach goals by using charts and contracts, and practice new social skills. As each new parenting technique is introduced, the authors explain each step, provide many clear examples, and give parents an action plan for implementing it in their home.



Common Sense Parenting of Toddlers and Preschoolers

Bridget Barnes and Steven York (Boys Town: Boys Town Press, 2006)

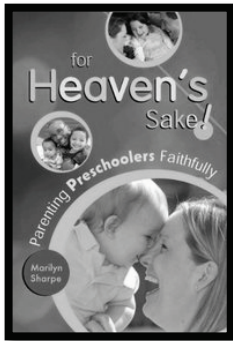
Common Sense Parenting® of *Toddlers and Preschoolers* shows parents how discipline can be more about teaching than punishment and more positive than negative for parent and child. Included is information on: setting reasonable expectations based on a child's age, development, and abilities; using a parent's version of “show and tell” to both prevent problems and correct misbehavior; using praise like a compass, helping a child stay on the right path; creating plans for staying calm for parents and child; using consistency, consequences, and practice to help a child learn what parents expect of him or her; celebrating special rituals and everyday routines as family traditions.



Help! There's a Toddler in the House!

Thomas Reimers (Boys Town: Boys Town Press, 2011)

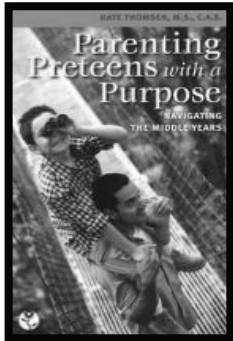
This book helps parents learn how to cope with and correct many of the most common behavioral problems that little ones demonstrate: hitting, kicking, pinching and biting; refusing to eat at mealtime; refusing to sleep at bedtime; throwing tantrums for attention; ignoring instructions; fighting with siblings; having meltdowns in public places. Each chapter examines a specific problem and describes practical strategies to rein in, correct and prevent it. Also included are special chapters on how to use time-out correctly, potty train a toddler, and how moms and dads can create a more rewarding and enriching family life.



For Heaven's Sake! Parenting Preschoolers Faithfully

Marilyn Sharpe (Minneapolis: Quill House, 2010) (www.forheavens-sake.com)

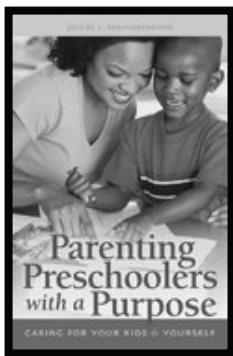
Parenting is a quintessentially spiritual journey. Based on thirty years of gathering incredible parents every week to share their stories, struggles, triumphs, and lived wisdom, this realistic, encouraging, and supportive book is a treasure for all who want to nurture faith in Jesus Christ in the home. Full of practical suggestions for daily life together, this book will be a parents' companion and guide as they navigate this formative time in a child's life, while using proven methods for raising great preschoolers.



Parenting Preteens with a Purpose

Kate Thompson (Minneapolis: Search Institute, 2008)

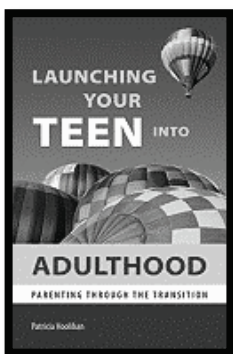
How can parents raise preteens to the best of their ability, encourage their responsible and caring actions, and maintain a strong sense of self? This nurturing, research-based guide offers tips, checklists, and solutions to common parenting topics, including preteen friendships, clothes and hair preferences, after-school hours, and finding a work/home balance. Sympathetic, respectful, and grounded in the Developmental Assets, this handbook provides abundant "on-the-job" support to parents.



Parenting Preschoolers with a Purpose

Jolene Roehlkepartain (Minneapolis: Search Institute, 2006)

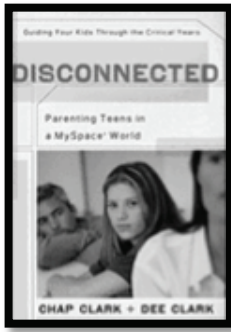
Parents will love the practical, creative ideas in *Parenting Preschoolers with a Purpose*. This resource promotes the physical, social, and emotional well-being of children 3 to 5 years old and their parents while enhancing the parent-child relationship. Included are innovative approaches that provide answers to 40 everyday issues such as bedwetting, discipline, sibling relationships, eating, bath time and rebellion. Also presented are simple and effective solutions to 15 common challenges that parents face—finances, isolation, job demands, guilt, sleep deprivation, and more.



Launching Your Teen into Adulthood: Parenting through Transition

Patricia Hoolihan (Minneapolis: Search Institute, 2008)

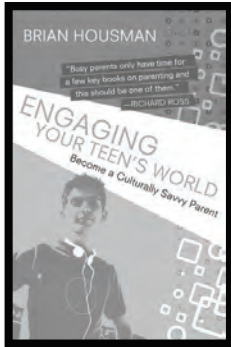
Using this thoughtful guide, parents can help older teens confidently navigate the issues and developmental transitions that will inevitably arise as they prepare to leave home. This road map for mentoring and advising young people to make good choices from a positive, strength-based perspective covers such topics as finding a good fit for school and work, dealing with money, living independently, setting goals, caring for personal needs, dealing with emotional challenges, handling new relationships, and developing a future-focused orientation. Each chapter also includes checklists, interviews, and resource sheets for parents and teens.



Disconnected: Parenting Teens in a MySpace World

Chap Clark and Dee Clark (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007)

Dee Clark, a licensed marriage and family therapist, and Chap Clark, a professor of youth and family ministry, have teamed to write *Disconnected—Parenting Teens in a MySpace World* that uses research and their own experience as parents to provide guidance in raising children and adolescents. They have written the book to inform, prepare, encourage, and motivate parents. Chapters include understanding today's adolescent journey, the five tasks of parenting, parenting through the seasons from childhood to late adolescence, and parenting as a partnership.



Engaging Your Teen's World: Becoming a Culturally Savvy Parent

Brian Housman (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009)

When it comes to relating to their teen, parents often feel tension and confusion. They get angry and blame the culture for the problems in their family. They make decisions for their teens out of fear, trying to protect them and shelter them from “the world.” *Engaging Your Teen's World* offers a more balanced, Christ-like approach to parenting teens. It brings parents face to face with unhealthy responses to the culture, such as developing an “us vs. them” mentality. It invites them to move toward their teen's world, becoming a redemptive influence. Parents learn to decipher which values motivate their teen and how those values play out in their behavior.



The Parent You Want to Be: What You Are Matters More Than What You Do

Les and Leslie Parrott (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007)

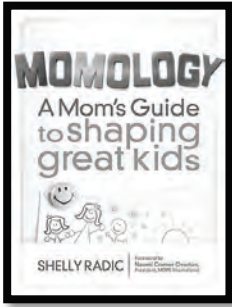
Les and Leslie Parrott have written a guide to parenting that helps parents learn: 1) a three-step approach to avoid become the parent you don't want to be; 2) how to make your child's perception of you as positive as possible; 3) the best way to give children the praise they crave; 4) how to hear what your child isn't saying to you—but wants to; 5) the immeasurable value of commemorating milestones; and 6) the key to building a lifelong bond of deep connection. The book includes exercises and brief self-tests let parents check their progress and provide instant feedback.



The Space Between: A Parent's Guide to Teenage Development

Walt Mueller (Grand Rapids: Youth Specialties/Zondervan, 2009)

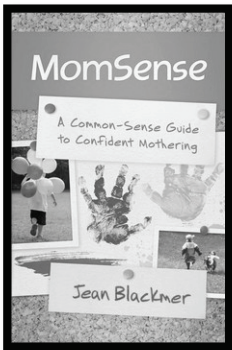
For many parents, raising children seems pretty manageable until the teenage years. The “normal” changes of adolescence seem to be nothing but abnormal to parents who begin to feel like helpless bystanders. Walt Mueller brings wisdom from research and his own experience to help parents through the tumultuous years of adolescence. With empathy and practical tools, parents will address important issues, including: How can I begin to facilitate a smoother adolescent period for my teen? How can I begin to break through the walls of confusion, fear, frustration, and misunderstanding? How can I be a positive and proactive bridge-builder in the life and world of my teenager?



Momology: A Mom's Guide to Shaping Great Kids

Shelly Radic (Grand Rapids: Revell, 2010)

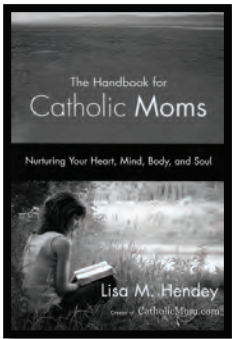
Mothering is part art, part science, and always a work in progress! Backed by more than thirty years of research-based ministry at MOPS International, *Momology* is designed to help moms be the unique mothers God created the to be—because better moms make a better world. The chapters are developed around four key concepts: knowing who we are; knowing what we're capable of; knowing who we can count on; and knowing who God is.



MomSense: A Common-Sense Guide to Confident Mothering

Jean Blackmer (Grand Rapids: Revell, 2011)

With personal stories from real moms and proven, practical advice, *MomSense* helps mothers honestly assess their skills, embrace their mothering instincts, and develop their own unique mothering style. Rather than pushing one “right” way to be a mom, this hope-filled book shows mothers that they can have contentment, joy, and confidence in their role as Mom. The chapters are organized into three sections: Discovering Your MomSense, Practicing Your MomSense, and Beyond Your MomSense.



The Handbook for Catholic Moms: Nurturing Your Heart, Mind, Body, and Soul

Lisa M. Hendey (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 2010)

Drawing from the deep tradition of the Catholic faith, Lisa Hendey, the creator of the popular CatholicMom.com website, coaches Catholic moms how to care for themselves—heart, mind, body, and soul—so that they can better love and care for their families, their neighbors, and their Church. With warmth and wisdom, Hendey creates an environment where Catholic moms can reflect peacefully upon often-competitive topics like parenting style, types of schooling, and working outside the home.

A Selection of Published Parenting Programs

- *10 Building Blocks of a Solid Family*: <http://www.homeward.com/building-blocks-solid-family-curriculum-with-p-90.html>
- *Active Parenting*: www.activeparenting.com
- *Common Sense Parenting* (Boys Town): www.parenting.org/common-sense-parenting
- *Confident Parenting* (Jim Burns): <http://www.homeward.com/confident-parenting-curriculum-with-p-8.html>
- *Parenting a New Generation* (Chap Clark): <http://secure.rethinkgroup.org/store/product.php?productid=1014&cat=97&page=1>
- *Parenting Wisely* (Donald Gordon): <http://www.familyworksinc.com/>
- *Sticky Faith Parent Curriculum* (Fuller Youth Institute): www.stickyfaith.org
- *STEP – Systematic Training for Effective Parenting*: www.steppublishers.com

Resources

Websites for Parents



Boys Town

www.Parenting.org

Parenting.org provides valuable resources, articles and tips offering parenting help in today's world. It includes free resources, articles and stories from the experts at Boys Town. Ask parenting questions online and search by age or topic.

Catholic Mom

www.catholicmom.com

CatholicMom.com celebrates all things faith, family, and fun from a Catholic perspective with columnists and contributors, a book club, music from an array of talented Catholic musicians, Sunday Gospel activities for children, and a weekly Catholic Moments Podcast with interviews of special people doing extraordinary things to live out our Catholic faith and share it with others.

Center for Parent-Youth Understanding

www.cpyu.org

The Center for Parent/Youth Understanding is a nonprofit organization committed to building strong families by serving to bridge the cultural-generational gap between parents and teenagers. CPYU helps parents, youth workers, educators, and others understand teenagers and their culture so that they will be better equipped to help children and teens navigate the challenging world of adolescence.

HomeWord by Jim Burns

www.HomeWord.com

HomeWord seeks to advance the work of God in the world by educating, equipping, and encouraging parents and churches to build God-honoring families from generation to generation.

Mothers of Preschoolers (MOPS)

www.mops.org

MOPS International exists to encourage, equip and develop every mother of preschoolers to realize her potential as a woman, mother and leader in the name of Jesus Christ. MOPS is about meeting the needs of every mom of a child from conception through kindergarten.

National Center for Infants, Toddlers, and Families

www.zerotothree.org

ZERO TO THREE is a national, nonprofit organization that informs, trains, and supports professionals, policymakers, and parents in their efforts to improve the lives of infants and toddlers. Our mission is to promote the health and development of infants and toddlers.

Orange Parents (Blog)

www.orangeparents.org

Orange Parents seeks to connect families to a wider community of parents and leaders, and expand parents' ideas, skills, and influence.

Parent Further (Search Institute)

www.ParentFurther.com

ParentFurther provides practical, everyday parenting tips and helpful advice for difficult situations. ParentFurther helps parents teach their kids positive values; set clear boundaries and enforce reasonable consequences; find the support and knowledge they need to help their kids grow up successfully; and focus on the things that matter most to their family.

PBS Parents

www.pbs.org/parents

PBS Parents is a trusted resource that's filled with information on child development and early learning. It also serves as a parent's window to the world of PBS KIDS, offering access to educational games and activities inspired by PBS KIDS programs. Created with input from experts in child psychology, early childhood education, media and other fields, PBS Parents provides the answers parents to be their child's first, best teacher.

Sticky Faith Parents (Fuller Youth Institute)

<http://stickyfaith.org/parents>

Sticky Faith Parents is designed for parents of kids of any age who are concerned about how

faith is shaping their children's life and what will happen to their faith when they leave home. Through research-based insights and stories from other parents, parents can use the ideas today and in the years to come to help build Sticky Faith in their kids.

Tumblon


<http://tumblon.com>

Tumblon helps parents understand, nurture, and remember their children's development. It does this by bringing together relevant and trustworthy content, secure blogging and photo sharing, and specific, interactive developmental information. Tumblon helps parents understand and nurture their children's growth, by informing and inspiring them to engage in the joys of parenting.

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