NCCL
National Community of Catechetical Leaders

Insights & Practices from Research & Theory

Practices for Forming Faith with Families & Parents

Leif Kehrwald and John Roberto

The **Insights & Practices from Research and Theory Series** *explores the latest research and thinking on forming faith with families and age groups, and suggests practical strategies for forming faith that reflect the current research and thinking.*

Part One. Insights from Research and Theory

We seek to respond to several key questions that surface when considering faith transmission for children and youth. When it comes to passing faith to the next generation, in our minds, the key questions are:

1. ***What do we mean by faith transmission?*** In short, the faith transmission process culminates when a young person or young adult makes a conscious choice to take their faith and religious practice and make it an integral part of their identity and life.
2. ***What does the research show are the most important contributors to effective faith transmission?*** The answer—parents and family—has been known for decades, yet most congregations cling to programming models that harness the influence of neither parents nor family. It's time to get serious about our partnership with the home and understand each other's roles.
3. ***What does the research show are the activities, tasks, and behaviors that bolster faith transmission?*** While certain *activities* such as family faith conversation, and *behaviors* such as "warm" interactions between parents and children, have real impact over time, what's more important is creating a *faith-building culture* that renders faith growth normative. "It's what we do, and it's who we are."
4. ***What are the implications for faith formation leaders, and the church as a whole?*** Broadly speaking, the research has voiced the same conclusions for decades: parents and family matter most. Yet, for decades, faith formation programming has clung to variations of a gathered, graded-level, schooling model that perhaps was never as effective as we would like to believe, and has certainly become obsolete in the post-pandemic, digitally-enabled world of today.

Tapping into the research reports from more than a dozen recent studies, we offer a concise, cogent, and hopefully helpful response to each of these four questions. Our goal is to empower you to develop new and innovative approaches and strategies that engage, encourage, and equip parents for family faith transmission and formation. From that work, we are confident, will emerge best practices for the future of faith formation in churches.

© 2023 NCCL (Permission is given to reprint for use by individuals and religious organizations.)

There is no more urgent task for churches today than strengthening parental and family faith and practice. Use this information to assess your current practice, redesign ministry and programming, and create new initiatives that engage, encourage, and equip parents and the whole family at home, church, and school.

1. What do we mean by faith transmission?

This is not a trick question. The answer is probably what you are thinking. Faith transmission is passing faith and religious practice to our children, the next generation. Yet we do not know if we have succeeded until our children have reached an age of independence and autonomous choice-making, typically the young adult years. At that time, as they sort through all the rules, roles, and responsibilities they've been raised with, deciding what to keep and what to leave behind, faith and religious practice are part of the mix. In short, faith transmission has succeeded if they choose to keep it integrate a religious faith into their identity and life.

We spend years of faith formation with children and adolescents in the hope that "faith will stick." This a great challenge to faith formation programming in churches, and a great challenge to the parental and family efforts in the home. Since it takes years to know if we have succeeded, how do we know we're on the right track?

Furthermore, for those who integrate faith into their identity, what they hold onto from their religious upbringing and how it is expressed in their independent lives may be quite different from what we, their parents and faith leaders, might hope and expect. This is to say that successful transmission is neither clean nor purely transactional — if we do x, y, and z, they will become Christians just like us. Rather, even when transmission is "successful" their expression of faith and religious practice cannot be entirely predicted. Even if they don't live their faith in the manner we would prefer, we are grateful there is evidence they have taken their faith with them into adulthood.

We should note that *faith* and *religious practice* are not one in the same, though they are mutually interdependent. If faith is putting my trust in God to a degree that it determines how I live, then religious practice is all the things I do, and all the contacts I make, to inform, bolster, and enrich my faith. Faith is personal. Religious practice is interpersonal, familial, and communal.

As we explore the role of parents and family in this complex dynamic of faith transmission, we note a troubling paradox. While the research is clear, and has been for decades, that parents and family are the most significant influence on the spiritual outcomes of young people, it's quite possible that most parents today do not consider it important to pass on their beliefs; that children should *make up their own minds* independent of their parents. Note, however, that highly religious parents who are regular church attenders feel much stronger about passing faith to their children that parents, in general (Mark).

Let's dig deeper.

2. What does the research tell us about what factors are needed for effective faith transmission?

In short, the answer lies in *who parents are* to and with their children, *what families do* together, and *how religious communities support* and enhance parents and families.

All the studies show that parents have the greatest influence on their children's faith development and their eventual faith transmission (or not). The studies have been reaching this same conclusion for

© 2023 NCCL (Permission is given to reprint for use by individuals and religious organizations.)

decades. Parents matter most. Parents are the primary educators in the faith. "Primary" meaning both first and most influential. Some studies also indicate that grandparents have an increasingly important role (Bengtson, and others).

It has more to do with who parents are than what they do with their children. Faith transmission is more likely to occur among children whose parents are *strong in their own faith* and religious practice versus lukewarm or marginally committed (Smith & Bartkus). These parents *cultivate a warm, compassionate, and open relationship* with their children in all matters, as opposed to a cold, hierarchical, "my way or the highway" style of relationship (Bengtson, and others). And these parents take the lead in creating a *family culture* that is supportive of faith and religious practice (Smith and Bartkus, Habenicht, Dollahite, others). From these identity factors, parents engage in a host of activities and interactions with their children and teens that are conducive to faith transmission. (See next section.)

It matters what families *do together* with intention, purpose, and discipline. What seems to surface from several studies (both current and in the past) is the value and importance of *family conversation* (Barna, and others). Families grow in faith when they talk about it; when they move beyond the surface level of day-to-day interaction and go deeper into matters of faith, spirituality, and meaning of life. And, over time, they develop a rapport with one another that makes such conversations rich and meaningful and sets the family up to engage in other intentional faith-building activities, tasks, and behaviors. (See next section.)

Another factor of interest that emerged from the Barna study is the correlation of family *hospitality* with faith. Families who welcome non-family members at least several times per month and engage in other intentional faith activities are considered spiritually vibrant households and more likely to succeed with faith transmission.

Finally, churches have a supportive role to both parents and families. No study indicated that faith formation programming should be eliminated altogether, yet those programs that ignore parents and families do so at their own peril (Bunge). In fact, at least one study showed an urgent need to strengthen child, youth, and family ministries (Bunge). And the "fun factor" is also important (Adamczyk). After several generations of cultivating a drop-off mentality of faith formation programming for children and youth, there is emerging a key task of beckoning parents and families into their lead role. They have been content to let the church take the lead. To reverse that dynamic requires a cultural shift for both the home and the church community.

To conclude, three factors are needed for effective faith transmission. First, parents who are intentional about who they are. Second, families who are intentional about what they do. And third, churches that are intentional about their support to parents and families. The next section will explore this further.

3. What does the research tell us about what activities, tasks, and behaviors of each of the key factors that bolster faith transmission?

Family/Home

The crucial location where faith transmission is largely decided is not in the church, but the home. The primary mechanisms by which religious identity becomes rooted in children's lives are not religious schooling or faith formation programs, but rather the day-to-day religious practices of the family and the ways parents model their faith and share it in conversation, collaboration, and exposure to outside religious opportunities (Smith & Bartkus).

© 2023 NCCL (Permission is given to reprint for use by individuals and religious organizations.)

The faith of the household is not perceived as belonging only to parents, but available to all family members (Smith & Bartkus). Families find themselves in conversation about faith, religion, morals, and meaning. From these discussions, religious practices emerge such as prayer, Bible reflection, sacred rituals, and works of mercy and justice (Smith, NSYR).

The full benefits of faith and religious practice are experienced by those who actively engage in home-centered religious practices, as well as attending religious services (Carroll). Among the most important practices are (Smith, Ritz, and Rotolo):

- ✦ Reading the Bible as a family and encouraging young people to read the Bible regularly.
- ✦ Praying together as a family and encouraging young people to pray personally.
- ✦ Serving people in need as a family and supporting service activities by young people.
- ✦ Eating together as a family.
- ✦ Having family conversations about faith.
- ✦ Talking about faith, religious issues, and questions and doubts.
- ✦ Ritualizing important family moments and milestone experiences.
- ✦ Celebrating holidays and church year seasons at home.
- ✦ Providing moral instruction.
- ✦ Being involved in a faith community and participating regularly in Sunday worship as a family.

When families engage in these activities regularly and over time, the *culture* of the family/home becomes conducive to a faith-based identity and worldview that is mentored to children, youth, and young adults, leaving a deep impression that empowers faith transmission (Smith & Bartkus).

The simple, though not always easy, activity of *family faith conversation* surfaces in multiple studies, both current and past. As mentioned above, faith conversation becomes part of the family's rapport. It's not relegated just to Sundays but becomes a normal part of everyday family life (Adamczyk). Once families have this rapport they turn to faith and religious practice when confronted with significant events, moments of meaning, times of trauma or joy, and they can go deeper with one another in those times. To do this, parents must be religious themselves. They can't fake it (Adamczyk).

To sum up, the research studies are all on the same page in confirming that:

- ✦ The foundations of faith are laid in childhood.
- ✦ The role and responsibility of the family is central in faith transmission.
- ✦ Enduring youth and adult believers are largely the product of caring, supportive, stable homes where faith is seen, discussed, and experienced.
- ✦ Modelling is crucial. Parents need to be and do what they want their children to become (Mark).

From that last line, let's turn our attention to parents.

Parents

The definitive causal agents in the religious and spiritual outcomes of American youth are neither clergy nor youth ministers, neither educators nor the voices of popular culture and media, but *parents* (Smith & Bartkus). All the studies echo Smith & Bartkus in one way or another. Putting all the studies side-by-side, several key activities surface for parents.

Parents are always transmitting. Some transmit authentic and genuine faith. Others transmit lukewarm faith, and many transmit no faith. Transmission is always happening. Several studies noted the

© 2023 NCCL (Permission is given to reprint for use by individuals and religious organizations.)

increasingly popular parental notion that children should be allowed to make their own choice when the time comes. Transmission rates plummet among these families. If children are not encouraged, formed, and coached to engage in faith and religious practice, they will very likely leave it all behind when they launch into independent young adulthood. By contrast, effective transmission of faith is completely possible for parents who genuinely intend this goal (Smith and Bartkus). As has been demonstrated in the past, mothers still have more influence than fathers or other family members (Guitierrez).

Parents talk with their children about religious matters. This is one of the most powerful mechanisms for the success or failure of religious transmission to children. When parents talk about their religion in personal terms, that sends a strong message to their kids that it's important to them (Smith, Ritz, and Rotolo). Also, religious "dosage" matters. One study found important differences in self-reported outcomes between those who engage in the highest levels of religious worship and those who are secular, nominally religious, or who attend religious services but do not engage in home worship practices. The findings suggest a host potential benefits to high religious dosage including home-centered religious practices (Carroll, et al).

***Parents must be people of genuine faith*.** They can't fake it. By the time our children are 8, 9, or 10 years old, they will know if faith and religious practice is truly genuine for their parents, or if it resides on the periphery. In their study, Smith and Adamcxyk noted one of the surprising findings [was that] a lot of parents just wanted to transmit moderate levels of religious belief. While many parents who were really into their religion were clearly more successful, they found a lot of parents that only wanted to pass on moderate levels . . . and the authors suspect they might be successful at that. The same authors found mixed motivations for parents wanting to transmit faith to their children. They reported that religion for many of these parents was a sort of tool that they wanted to pass on to their kids to add to the mix of things that would hopefully make their kids' lives better.

By contrast, children must see the faith as something which mattered intensely to mom or dad, which animated the love and care that went into their parenting, and therefore into a child's entire way of encountering the world (Smith and Bartkus).

Parents must be role models of faith and religious practice. Parents do this by engaging in a host activities and practices:

- ✦ They are involved in church life and Sunday worship.
- ✦ They participate in mission trips with their children and youth.
- ✦ They engage in acts of charity and service with their kids.
- ✦ They listen to and learn from their children.
- ✦ They ask for forgiveness when they mess up.
- ✦ They read, study, and reflect on the Bible.
- ✦ They sing with their children.
- ✦ They cultivate a reverence for creation.
- ✦ They introduce their children to good examples.
- ✦ And many more . . . you get the idea!

Parents by the power of their personality, practices, and way of being, model and generate the culture of the household both explicitly and implicitly. The single most powerful force in a child's religious formation is the spiritual personality of the parent (Smith and Bartkus).

Parents foster a "warm" relationship with their children. Transmission is more likely when parents maintain and enforce high standards and expectations for their children while simultaneously expressing

© 2023 NCCL (Permission is given to reprint for use by individuals and religious organizations.)

a lot of open warmth and connection to their children and confidently giving them enough space to work out their own views and values (Smith, Ritz, and Rotolo).

Parents cultivate relationships of warmth and love which makes everything else possible. While faith practices and attending religious services are important, the quality of the parent–child relationship is even more important (Dollahite, Marks, and Boyd).

Parents balance religious firmness with religious flexibility in their parenting. Parents who can avoid religious rigidity through balance are more likely to maintain more positive relationships with their children. They transmit their faith to their children while honoring their children's agency by teaching principles and values, providing expectations of religious participation and responsibility, not forcing faith, allowing exploration and mistakes, and showing respect for children's views (Dollahite, Marks, and Boyd).

To conclude this section on parents, let's return to Smith and Bartkus where their research led them to articulate three key roles for parents:

1. Sponsor of the faith. Parents are the point of access between the church and their children.
2. Gatekeeper of the faith. Parents are like a faucet, determining whether religious content will arrive in children's lives at an occasional drip or in a regular flow.
3. Interpreter of the faith. They do not just "represent" the faith; in many cases, they are the only meaningful embodiment of that faith in the lives of children. Parents render faith a matter of flesh and blood rather than just lifeless doctrines and teachings.

If children don't see faith in the face of their parents, they will likely never gain sufficient familiarity with it to commit to practicing the faith in the long run.

Church Community

Faith transmission is most definitely a family affair; however the environment surrounding the family can have a huge impact. In addition to contemporary culture, historical events, and the like, the family's relationship with the church community can either reinforce or detract from the intergenerational religious momentum of the family and the probability of the child following in the parents' religious footsteps (Bengtson).

The research studies are clear and consistent in their conclusions that parents and family are paramount in faith transmission, and church communities, their leaders and their programs, play a secondary supportive role. *But that role is not insignificant or unimportant*. Parents and families cannot go it alone. When churches understand and accept their role, seek to create authentic partnerships with parents and families, then they become integral in the process of faith transmission. In addition, any strong Christian vision of children, youth, and family ministry must be supported by a robust theological understanding of parents and adult-child relationships (Bunge).

The key is developing a working partnership, as opposed to conducting programs in an isolated parallel universe. While there is an urgent need to strengthen child, youth, and family ministries, too often religious education programs operate in isolation from the home (Bunge).

Over time, this separation has led a lot of parents holding only very modest expectations of their churches. They do not see them as places where their children go to learn about religion (Adamczyk). Yet parents today do say that churches can be helpful in a couple of important areas. They want their

© 2023 NCCL (Permission is given to reprint for use by individuals and religious organizations.)

children to do things that are fun. If churches can provide fun activities, that is valuable to the parents. Also, parents look to the church to provide factual information. Give parents talking points with their kids. How can churches encourage parents to use this religious education as a jumping-off point for having more religious discussions at home (Adamczyk)?

In short, the church community has the best grasp on the content of the faith, and, at least in the minds of parents, the ability to deliver that content in a manner that is fun and engaging for youngsters and that provides for ongoing discussion and exploration at home.

What are the implications for faith formation leaders and programming?

Imagine, for a moment, that the traditional age-segmented, child-focused, schooling model of faith formation had never existed, had never even been thought up. And imagine, that today's church leaders are presented with the research on faith transmission, and the centrality of parents and family in the process. What do you think they would dream up? Do you think they would put forward a graded-level, curriculum driven, classroom model of faith formation as the primary method to enhance faith transmission? Doubtful.

Perhaps the most immediate implication for church communities and faith formation leaders is to shed taken-for-granted practices that have become obsolete. Yet, those practices are so ingrained in church operations that both physical and leadership structures are built around them. A critical eye should be applied to all traditional faith formation practices and honestly assessed with these questions:

- ✦ Considering the research on faith transmission, do these practices deserve our continued time and energy?
- ✦ In a digitally-enabled, post-pandemic world, do these practices continue to serve us well or have they served their time?

Then, ask some forward-thinking questions. Considering the research on faith transmission and the centrality of parents and family:

- ✦ How can we encourage parents to grow in faith and become faith-formers for their children?
- ✦ How can we equip and empower parents to incorporate faith practices into the ordinary and extraordinary events of family life at home?
- ✦ How can we partner with parents and the whole family in education and formation programming that effectively enhances faith transmission?

In short, consider these three steps:

1. Assess your how well your current faith formation practices align with the research on faith transmission.
2. Identify ministries and programs that need to be redesigned or terminated.
3. Create new initiatives to engage, encourage, and equip parents and the whole family at home, church, and school.

There is no more urgent task for churches today than strengthening parental and family faith and practice.

© 2023 NCCL (Permission is given to reprint for use by individuals and religious organizations.)

The Studies Consulted for this Report

Adamczyk, Amy and Kristen Verhulst. "Amy Adamczyk on the Influence of Parents in the Religious Lives of Their Children" Podcast posted on May 17, 2022.

Barna Group, "Households of Faith: The rituals and relationships that turn a home into a sacred space."

Bengtson, Vern, et al. *Families and Faith: How Religion is Passed Down Across Generations*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Bunge, Marcia J. "Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Children, Parents, and 'Best Practices' for Faith Formation: Resources for Child, Youth, and Family Ministry Today." *Dialogue: A Journal of Theology*, Winter 2008.

Carroll, Jason S., and Spencer L. James. "A Not-So-Good Faith Estimate: Why Many Studies Underestimate the Full Benefits of Religion." Wheatley Institute, 2022.

Carroll, Jason S., Spencer L. James, and Hal Boyd. "Religion in the Home: Do Individuals and Couples Benefit from Home-Based Religious Practices?" The Wheatley Institution, 2020.

Diamant, Jeff and Elizabeth Podrebarac Sciupac. "10 key findings about the religious lives of U.S. teens and their parents." *FactTank*, September 10, 2020.

Dollahite. *How Family Religious Involvement Benefits*. Sutherland J. L. & Pub. Pol'y L28, 2005. http://www.sjlpp.org/documents/dollahite92605.pdf.

Dollahite, David C. and Loren D. Marks. "Positive Youth Religious and Spiritual Development: What We Have Learned from Religious Families." School of Family Life, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT, September 25, 2019.

Dollahite, David, Loren D. Marks, and Hal Boyd. "The Best Practices—and Benefits—of Religious Parenting." *Religion and the Public Square*, February 6, 2020.

Epstein, Robert. "What Makes a Good Parent?" *Scientific American Mind*, November/December 2010.

Guitierrez, Ian A., Katherine Kirkinis, Lucas J. Goodwin, Jacqueline S. Mathews. "Religious Socialization in African American Families: The Relative Influence of Parents, Grandparents, and Siblings." *Journal of Family Psychology*, 2014.

Habenicht, Donna. "The most important thing you need to know about parenting." *Ministry*, 2014.

Mark, Olwyn. "Passing on the Faith." Theos, Canterbury Christ Church University, 2016.

Roehlkepartain, Jolene. "Nurturing the Faith Young People through the Family." *Families at the Center of Faith Formation*. Lifelong Faith Associates, 2016.

Smith, Christian, et al. *National Study on Youth and Religion*. University of Notre Dame, https://youthandreligion.nd.edu/, 2015.

Smith, Christian, Bridget Ritz, and Michael Rotolo. *Religious Parenting: Transmitting Faith and Values in Contemporary America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020.

Smith, Christian and Amy Adamczyk. *Handing Down the Faith: How Parents Pass Their Religion on to the Next Generation*. Oxford University Press, 2021.

Smith, Christian and Justin Bartkus. "American Catholic Religious Parenting." University of Notre Dame, 2017.

Smith, Christian. "Keeping the Faith." John F. Scarpa Conference on Law, Politics and Culture, May 2021.

Smith, Christian. "If you want your kids to stay Catholic, here's what matters most." *Aleteia*, May 2021. https://aleteia.org/2021/05/21/if-you-want-your-kids-to-stay-catholic-heres-what-matters-most/

Zero to Three. "Tuning In: Parents of Young Children Speak Up About What They Think, Know and Need." National Parent Survey, 2016.

© 2023 NCCL (Permission is given to reprint for use by individuals and religious organizations.)

Part Two. Strategies for Parent and Family Faith Formation

Parents

1. **Focus on parents as the most significant influence on the religious and spiritual outcomes of young people** by:

   - ✦ Nurturing and encouraging parents' personal faith and practice
   - ✦ Developing skills and practices for building close and warm parent-child relationships
   - ✦ Encouraging and supporting parent involvement in church life and Sunday Mass
   - ✦ Strengthening their role in modeling and teaching a religious faith
   - ✦ Equipping parents (and grandparents) with faith forming skills and practices

2. **Address the diverse motivations of parents** for support, education, and formation by providing meaningful and relevant opportunities that speak to their motivations, for example:

   - ✦ *Transmission of values*: Many parents are motivated by the desire to pass on their religious values, beliefs, and traditions to their children. They see religious learning as a way to ensure that their children share their faith.
   - ✦ *Sense of identity*: Parents often view religious learning as a means of helping their children develop a strong sense of identity, belonging, and cultural heritage.
   - ✦ *Moral and ethical development*: Religious teachings often emphasize moral and ethical values. Parents are motivated by the belief that these teachings can help instill positive values and guide their children's behavior.
   - ✦ *Connection to community*: Parents are motivated to involve their children in religious learning to connect them with a supportive and like-minded community of faith.
   - ✦ *Future well-being*: Some parents are motivated by the belief that religious learning will contribute to their children's overall well-being and happiness in life.
   - ✦ *Respect for cultural heritage*: Parents who value their cultural heritage may be motivated to provide their children with a connection to their ancestral roots through religious learning.
   - ✦ *Character development*: Parents often see religious teachings as a way to help shape their children's character, fostering qualities like empathy, compassion, and humility.
   - ✦ *Guidance for challenges*: Some parents are motivated by the belief that religious teachings can provide guidance and comfort for their children as they face life's challenges.
   - ✦ *Community and Social Engagement*: Parents may see religious learning as a way for their children to become active participants in their religious community and engage in communal activities.
   - ✦ *Parent-child bond*: Engaging in religious learning together can create meaningful opportunities for parents to bond with their children and share experiences.

3. **Equip parents with the knowledge and skills for passing on religious faith and practice** so they can incorporate faith practices into the day-to-day religious practices of the family. Raising religious children is primarily a practice-centered process, not chiefly a didactic teaching program. Certain faith practices make a significant difference in nurturing the faith of children and adolescents at home, especially:

   - ✦ Reading the Bible as a family and encouraging young people to read the Bible regularly
   - ✦ Praying together as a family and encouraging young people to pray personally
   - ✦ Serving people in need as a family and supporting service activities by young people
   - ✦ Eating together as a family

© 2023 NCCL (Permission is given to reprint for use by individuals and religious organizations.)

- ✦ Having family conversations about faith
- ✦ Talking about faith, religious issues, and questions and doubts
- ✦ Ritualizing important family moments and milestone experiences
- ✦ Celebrating holidays and church year seasons at home
- ✦ Celebrating milestones and sacraments in the lives of individuals and the whole family
- ✦ Providing moral instruction
- ✦ Being involved in a faith community and participating regularly in Sunday Mass as a family

4. **Equip parents with the knowledge and skills for developing quality relationships** with their young people and applying styles of parenting that make a difference in faith transmission.

   - ✦ Cultivating relationships of warmth and love which makes everything else possible
   - ✦ Balancing religious firmness with religious flexibility in their parenting to maintain more positive relationships with their children
   - ✦ Transmitting their faith to their children while honoring their agency by teaching principles and values, providing expectations of religious participation and responsibility, not forcing faith, allowing exploration and mistakes, and showing respect for children's views
   - ✦ Talking about religious matters during the week – when parents talk about their religion in personal terms that sends a strong message to their kids that it's important to them
   - ✦ Practicing an "authoritative" parenting style (as opposed to authoritarian, permissive, or uninvolved style) by maintaining and enforcing high standards and expectations for their children while simultaneously expressing a lot of open warmth and connection to their children, and confidently giving them enough space to work out their own views and values
   - ✦ Listening more and preaching less. It is a more satisfying and successful religious and relational experience when the conversations are more child/youth-centered than parent-centered

5. **Equip parents with the most important knowledge and skills for effective parenting**, including:

   - ✦ Expressing care to young people by listening to them, being dependable, encouraging them, and make them feel known and valued
   - ✦ Challenging young people by expecting them to do their best and live up to their potential
   - ✦ Providing support for young people by encouraging their efforts and achievements and guiding them to learn and grow
   - ✦ Treating young people with respect, hearing their voices, and including them in decisions that affect them
   - ✦ Inspiring young people to see possibilities for their future, expose them to new experiences and places, and connect them to people who can help them grow
   - ✦ Demonstrating a warm and affirming parenting approach
   - ✦ Creating a warm, caring supportive family environment
   - ✦ Practicing effective communication skills
   - ✦ Managing screen time and social media use
   - ✦ Learning effective discipline practices
   - ✦ Creating a warm, caring supportive family

6. **Implement a parent plan with a life-stage progression** of workshops, webinars, classes, activities, support groups, and resources from infancy through the end of the adolescent years that provides parent faith formation, equips parents to be faith formers of their young people, and develops the knowledge and skills for effective parenting. With new digital tools and media, churches can reach today's parents and families anywhere and anytime with engaging and interactive content. Each new

© 2023 NCCL (Permission is given to reprint for use by individuals and religious organizations.)

stage of a parent plan could be introduced through a variety of educational opportunities and then sustained through support groups, continuing education, and online resources and activities.

Life Stage Plan

- ✦ Birth: parenting young children
- ✦ Start of school: parenting grade school children
- ✦ Middle school: parenting young adolescents
- ✦ High school: parenting older adolescents
- ✦ Graduation from high school: parenting emerging adults

7. **Provide parent mentors (or coaches)** who can offer guidance and support for parents and the whole family at each stage of life from birth/baptism through the end of adolescence. Mentors can accompany parents and families in their spiritual lives, guiding them in growing in their relationship with God and learning more about the faith. Mentoring can be life-cycle specific with mentors who focus on children or adolescents. Parents mentors can be drawn from the grandparent generation who are actively engaged in church and bring decades of parenting and family life experiences. Churches can provide training for mentors (mentoring skills, understanding today's family, learning how to access online resources and activities).

8. **Offer affinity groups for parents** (in online and in physical settings) to provide opportunities for parents with children in the same age group to talk about parenting, get information and encouragement, and discuss family life issues and challenges. Churches can offer groups for mothers, fathers, divorced parents, parents in blended families, parents of children with disabilities, and more.

Families

9. **Employ the process of the catechumenal model in sacramental preparation** for Baptism, First Eucharist, and Confirmation using a three movement process of preparation, celebration, and mystagogy. Using the catechumenal process, catechesis with parents and families can be *personalized* around their religious faith and practices today by catechesis designed for people: 1) who have a vibrant faith and relationship with God and are engaged in a faith community, 2) who participate occasionally in the faith community and whose faith is less central to their daily lives, 3) who are uninvolved in a faith community and who value and live their spirituality outside of organized religion, and 4) who are unaffiliated and have left involvement in organized religion, and have little need for God or religion in their lives .

   - ✦ Preparation
     - A first proclamation of the Gospel (kerygma) and introduction to the Christian life – especially for parents who have been minimally involved in their faith life and practice
     - Catechesis on the sacrament to be celebrated
     - Celebration of liturgies, rituals, and symbols for the sacrament
     - Engagement with a community of faith and support – other parents or families, the intergenerational faith community
     - Mentoring by members of the faith community
   - ✦ Celebration of the Sacrament
   - ✦ Continued Growth and Accompaniment (Mystagogy)
     - Parent formation and family catechesis
     - Continued mentoring

© 2023 NCCL (Permission is given to reprint for use by individuals and religious organizations.)

- Continued engagement with a community of faith and support

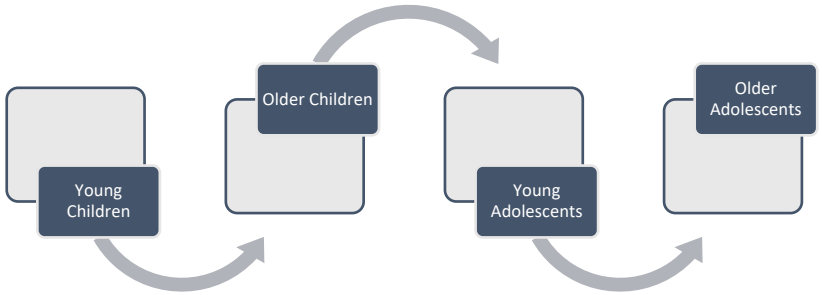
10. **Engage the whole family in faith formation experiences** (parents, young people, and even grandparents) as a primary model for catechesis (monthly or twice-a-month); as seasonal programming, such as Advent and Lent; as sacramental preparation for Reconciliation and First Eucharist, and more. Family catechesis models usually incorporate the following elements:

    1. A shared meal
    2. Shared prayer experience
    3. A whole family learning experience on the topic of the program with content and methods appropriate to an all-ages audience
    4. In-depth learning on the topic which can be conducted in three different ways: a) the whole family learning together with activities appropriate to all ages; b) parallel groups learning at the same time with content and learning activities for age groups and a parent group; and c) learning activity centers with whole family and age-specific learning activities at a variety of stations or centers
    5. A closing whole family activity to discover how to apply their learning to daily life using resources and activities provided in print or digital formats.

11. **Develop family life skills** by focusing on the types of skill-building that will strengthen family life, and parent-child/teen relationships, such as communicating effectively, discussing tough topics, making decisions and solving problems as a family, learning how to build strong relationships and express care for each other, supporting each other (encouraging and praising, giving feedback, standing up for each other), and treating each with respect and dignity.

12. **Implement an intentional, continuous plan for forming the faith of families** for young children, grade school children, young adolescents, and older adolescents with age-appropriate programs, activities, and resource.

    - ✦ *Family faith practices at home*: reading the Bible, praying, serving, working for justice, caring for creation, eating together, having family faith conversations, providing moral instruction, and more
    - ✦ *Celebrating milestones*: ritualizing important family moments and milestone experiences
    - ✦ *Celebrating church year seasons at home and church*—at church and home: Advent, Christmas, Lent, Holy Week, Easter, Pentecost, and more
    - ✦ *Parenting practices and skills* appropriate to the stage of life
    - ✦ *Parenting for faith* programs, videos, and activities
    - ✦ *Family-centered gatherings and programs at church*
    - ✦ *Intergenerational faith forming experiences*



© 2023 NCCL (Permission is given to reprint for use by individuals and religious organizations.)