

Teaching Approaches and Discipleship Formation

Purpose

During this two-hour workshop, participants will explore a variety of teaching approaches, their roles in discipleship formation, and strategies for using each approach. Each approach is modeled within the workshop presentation.

TIME FRAME: 2 hours with one 15-minute break

WORKSHOP OUTLINE

I. Introduction (*15 minutes*)

II. Teaching Approaches (*20 Minutes*)

III. Issues for Teaching Children (*20 minutes*)

Break (*15 minutes*)

IV. Practice (*40 minutes includes presentation time for groups*)

V. Closing (*10 minutes*)

PREPARATION AND MATERIALS

1. Read through the entire workshop.
2. Photocopy all handouts and the appendix.
3. Cut Handout 5 into strips and place in a box or hat for the drawing.
4. Prepare or secure volunteers to prepare drinks and snacks for break.
5. Gather the following materials:
 - paper and pens or pencils
 - nametags if participants do not know each other
 - handouts and appendix (using a different color for each is helpful)
 - CD player and CD of spiritual music for the Closing
 - newsprint or white board and marker

NOTES FOR LEADERS:

- › An optional PowerPoint presentation is provided, however, all the material that is in the PowerPoint is also in the workshop.
- › The teaching approaches are modeled in the workshop [noted in brackets] and will be reviewed during the Closing.

CONDUCTING THE WORKSHOP

I. Introduction (*15 minutes*)

A. Gathering and Welcome

As participants arrive, ask them to put on name tags, if they do not know each other. To save time, later on, have the participants pick up copies of the handouts before they sit down.

Welcome everyone and express your appreciation for their commitment to nurturing discipleship

Review the workshop outline (from page 1 or the PowerPoint) and note that there will be a break about halfway through. Model recognition that we are embodied learners with physical needs by pointing out where facilities and drinks are and telling them to feel free to take personal breaks as necessary.

B. Activities

1) Option for those who prefer to work alone [Personal Development]:

Provide paper and pen and invite the participant(s) to reflect on the following:

- a time when, as a learner, I felt a teaching approach really worked for me
- a time when, as a learner, I felt as though the approach didn't work
- What was the difference between the two?
- Does Christian education/discipleship teaching differ from other types of teaching? If so, how?

2) Group Activity [Personal Development]:

Ask the participants to complete the following sentence with a single word or a short phrase and record their responses on newsprint or white board:

A Christian education teacher is a . . .

Explain that these words or phrases are images or metaphors that reveal our assumptions about the role of a Christian education teacher. Select two metaphors to discuss with the following questions:

- 1) What assumptions underlie this image for teacher?
- 2) What does this image say about the role of the teacher?
- 3) What does it say about the role of the learner?
- 4) What does it say about the goals of teaching?
- 5) What teaching practices would be in keeping with this image?

Make the transition to the next activity by explaining:

There are a variety of teaching approaches and each has several strategies. Since learning involves the whole person and discipleship is a way of life rather than an intellectual activity, it is important to become familiar with a wide range of strategies for education in discipleship.

II. Teaching Approaches Summary [Information Processing] (20 minutes)

Note: If you are using the optional PowerPoint presentation, slides 3 through 8 provide the outline for the presentation.

Distribute Handout “Summary of Teaching Approaches” and introduce the five approaches you will be reviewing (slide 3):

- Information Processing
- Group Interaction
- Indirect Communication
- Personal Development
- Action/Reflection

Review the approaches, asking participants to follow along on their handouts.

A. Information Processing (slide 4)

- Focus is on cognition and understanding through the process of thinking.
- Rationale is that people need ways to structure knowledge, to interpret experience, and to frame life; and presenting information provides such a framework.
- Description: Believing and Thinking
- Role in Disciple–formation: *The* story becomes *my* story as the traditions of the church are acquired and processed.
- Role of Teacher is manager of information and of the learning process.
- Role of Learner is to acquire and respond to information.
- Strategies include lecture, inquiry into a problem, posing questions, activities for investigation, and learning stations.

B. Group Interaction (slide 5)

- Focus in on building knowledge and social responsibility through participation in groups.

- Rationale is that people learn from one another and together construct knowledge; content is both conceptual and relational.
- Description: Believing and Participating
- Role in Disciple–formation: Community is the context for Christian belief and the arena in which discipleship is formed and nurtured as people clarify, interpret, and test perceptions with one another.
- Role of Teacher is as a guide and resource person.
- Role of Learner is as one who shares control and responsibility for learning.
- Strategies include working in groups to plan, complete tasks, do problem solving, role play, discussion, simulations, research, and evaluation of both the information and the learning process.

C. Indirect Communication (slide 6)

- Focus is self–examination and encounter with the truth through a variety of media.
- Rationale is that truth is a subject that is known through relationship and affects the whole person at various levels; and that artistic expression has the capacity to express truth in ways that transform persons.
- Description: Believing and Encountering
- Role in Disciple–formation: Belief goes beyond the rational and moves persons into a relationship with and an embodiment of the truth.
- Role of Teacher is as artistic director.
- Role of Learner is as a risk–taker who is willing to encounter and be changed by truth as expressed in a variety of artistic ways.
- Strategies include stories, music, parables, drama, movies, poetry, silence, works of art, introspection, free reflection and response.

D. Personal Development (slide 7)

- Focus is on the development of the self through awareness and expression.
- Rationale is that in a context of acceptance, people become aware of their environment and themselves and can actualize their personal power to become.
- Description: Believing and Becoming Aware

- Role in Disciple–formation: When a person is aware of being unique and loved, he or she is able to think more clearly and come to deeper, more integrated ownership of belief.
- Role of Teacher is as advocate and guarantor of a safe place, facilitator of the learning process, resource person, and reflective counselor.
- Role of Learner is as a contemplative who meditates on the world and on the inner self.
- Strategies include providing a safe and accepting context, guided meditations, exploring personal metaphors, reflection, journaling, and artistic exploration.

E. Action/Reflection (slide 8)

- Focus is on *doing* the truth, evaluating actions in light of beliefs, and then reframing action in light of the evaluation.
- Rationale is that we come to know through a circle of acting on information, reflecting on action, and making changes.
- Description: Believing and Doing
- Role in Disciple–formation: Christian discipleship is a way of life and we can act our way into integrated, authentic believing.
- Role of Teacher is as companion and process guide.
- Role of Learner is as active agent and critical thinker who willingly reflects on actions in light of beliefs.
- Strategies—The action/reflection process goes as follows:
 - 1) Name an action.
 - 2) Reflect on that action.
 - 3) Recite the guiding story—the authoritative tradition or beliefs.
 - 4) Identify the dialectic—Is there a gap between our actions and our beliefs?
 - 5) Frame a response to the dialectic—How shall we change our actions in light of the gap?

Explain:

You will be given a chance to practice one of the approaches outlined above, but first, let's review some considerations for teaching children.

III. Issues for Teaching Children [Group Interaction and Action/Reflection] (20 minutes)

Distribute Handouts 2 and 3 and copies of the appendix and explain that these are resources that can help inform teaching practices with children and that some may want to refer to them during the practice activity.

Ask participants to divide up into small groups (3 or 4). If you have more than one church represented, make sure folks from the same church work together. Begin the activity by asking them to discuss the place and experience of children in their church(es). They need to get specific, so the following questions may be helpful. [Slide 9]

- What programs does your church have specifically for children?
- What are the goals of those programs?
- Are children expected to sit still and be quiet in the sanctuary?
- Are the pews in your sanctuary child-sized?
- Is worship fun for children?
- What contributions do children make to your church— Are their input and idea sought? Do they have jobs to do in church?
- How are children expected to behave at church gatherings?

Allow 10 minutes for discussion. Then distribute, Handout 4 “About Children” and give them a few minutes to review the content. Ask the groups to compare their church’s actions in relationship with children and consider what, if any, changes they might make to be in keeping with the principles on the handout.

Have the participants remain in groups for the next activity

IV. Practice: Create a Lesson Plan [Group Interaction] (40 minutes)

Distribute Handout 5 and review the elements of a lesson plan.

Have one member of each group draw out a teaching approach from the hat/box. Review the activity as follows: [slide 10]

- Select an age group.
- Plan a lesson around the topic “God as Creator.”
- Report out by either giving a summary or sharing a piece of your lesson.

Allow 15 minutes to prepare and then 5 minutes per group to report.

V. Closing [indirect communication]

Review the activities you have participated in so far and note which teaching approaches have been used. Explain:

The one approach that is missing is indirect communication and so we will close with an activity that uses music to speak to us about God. We will have a closing prayer together and then spend some time listening together and then sit in silence. We won't discuss or analyze the experience, but simply close our session with music and silence.

Thank the participants for their work. Encourage them to write up any evaluation, comments or suggestions and give them to you.

Offer a closing prayer, such as the following:

Creator God, to teach others as the whole persons you created us to be. Help us to use the things we have learned today so that others might draw closer to you. Amen.

Ask everyone to get comfortable and play one or two selections from your CD. Allow for several minutes of silence following the music and then stand to signal the end of the session.

	Information Processing	Group Interaction	Indirect Communication:	Personal Development	Action/Reflection
Focus	cognition/ understanding	building knowledge & social responsibility through groups	self-examination & encounter with the truth	development of the self through awareness & expression	<i>doing</i> the truth & evaluating action in light of Christian tradition
Rationale	People need ways to structure knowledge, to interpret experience, to frame life.	People learn from one another; knowledge is constructed in an interactive process and is conceptual & relational.	Truth is not an object to be acquired, but a subject that is known through relationship & affects us.	In a safe context, people can become aware of themselves & their environment in ways that actualize their personal power to become.	Knowing is most real when it is concrete. Experience coupled with reflection allows people to integrate concept/theory with practice.
Description	<i>Believing and Thinking</i> Recalling, grouping, naming, analyzing, interpreting, etc., are ways of acquiring & storing information.	<i>Believing & Participating</i> Groups tend to tasks or process; individuals clarify, interpret, and test ideas against others’ perceptions.	<i>Believing & Encountering</i> Participants engage & respond to multimedia, art, literature . . . on multiple levels: thinking, feeling, & volition	<i>Believing & Becoming Aware</i> Participants engage in activities that help them get in touch with themselves & to express their ideas in imaginative, evocative ways.	<i>Believing & Doing</i> Participants identify action and then reflecting on action in light of beliefs, revising assumptions & modifying actions as necessary.
Role in Disciple- formation	Sharing the content of Christianity develops a common memory & language— <i>The</i> story becomes <i>my</i> story.)	Community = context for Christian belief; where discipleship is nurtured; & shared support for relating faith to life.	Belief rests on relationship with the truth, transcends cognition toward a kind of knowing that is embodied in one’s life.	Awareness of being unique & loved, allows for clear thinking, honesty, and authentic ownership of belief.	Christian discipleship requires integration of thought, word & deed. Critical reflection aids in integrating belief & life.
Role of Teacher	Manager: of the content & its organization when presenting; of the process in activities designed to guide thinking	Guide and resource person: needs to be skilled in group process	Artistic director: imaginative use of art forms that are appropriate to the subject & learners; & a willingness to stay out of the way	Advocate & guarantor, facilitator, resource person, reflective counselor	Companion & process guide: outlines & guides group through a process in which he or she is a co-learner
Role of Learner	Acquirer & responder: to presented material & to concepts & insights emerging out of process	Sharer of control and responsibility—initiator of ideas & participant in cooperative investigation & decision-making	Risk-taker: openness & effort to discover & perceive truth; appropriate meaning & risk decisions & response	Contemplative who assumes responsibility for: exploring ideas & feelings; embracing personal freedom & growing; awareness of self, context & others	Agent & critical thinker: requires willingness to reflect honestly & consider change; this model takes seriously the agency of all persons in their own discipleship process
Strategies	lecture, inquiry into a problem, posing questions, activities for investigation, learning stations	planning, tasks, problem solving, role play, discussion, simulations, research, evaluation	stories, music, parables, drama, movies, poetry, silence, works of art introspection, free reflection & response	Create safe context; guided meditation, exploration of metaphors, reflecting on past experiences, journaling, artistic explorations	1) Name/Reflect on action 2) Recite the guiding story. 3) Identify the dialectic. 4) Frame a response to the dialectic.

General Learning Characteristics of Children

- Active
- Concrete
- Contextual
- Creative
- Curious
- Dependent
- Developing
- Different from one another
- Embodied
- Emotional
- Enthusiastic
- Experiential
- Naturally Spiritual/ Connected with Creation
- Physical
- Relational
- Require Structure and Consistency
- Symbolic
- THE FIRST YEARS
LAST FOREVER

Five Processes for Discipleship Formation

- Communicate belonging.
- Welcome participation.
- Model authenticity and integrity in faith.
- Provide formal, informal, and nonformal “instruction” that includes interpretation.
- Practice choice-making.

The Bible and Children

We can rob this story of its power by telling it badly, by sentimentalizing it or sensationalizing or distorting it, or by analyzing or reducing it to a theological formula, or a lesson to be learned to please the teacher. We cannot rob it of its power merely by telling it too often. It deserves to be told—over and over again, directly as gospel and liturgy, and also as it is mirrored in fairy tale, myth, and other works of art. And our children deserve the opportunity to respond to this story, with clay, paint, and crayons, with their bodies and their voices, with their imaginations and their hearts, in worship, in sacrament, in celebration, and in play.

[*Offering the Gospel to Children* by Gretchen Pritchard Wolff (Cowley Publications, 1992, 14).]

Children need to:

- *Tell the Story*
- *Explore the Story*
- *Play the Story*
- *Wonder about the Story*
- *Hear the Story*
- *Imagine the Story*
- *Interpret the Story*
- *Make connection with the Story*
- *Reflect on the Story*
- *Respond to the Story*
- *Experience the Story*
- *Celebrate the Story*
- *Know God through the Story*
- *Own the Story*

EFFECTIVE TEACHING FOR CHILDREN

Five Principles of How Children Learn

1. Children learn best if they are actively involved—through exploration and discovery—in real rather than abstract experiences. Effective teaching provides a setting in which children experience what we want them to learn.
2. Since children cannot stay seated for long periods of time, they need the freedom to move around and to use their large muscles. Effective teaching gives learners permission to move around, become involved, and come into contact with their environment; it does not expect learners to sit still and listen for extended periods of time.
3. Since children tire easily and can become over-stimulated, effective teaching includes the proper pacing of activities: lively tasks with quiet, reflective ones.
4. Since most children like responsibility and all children need to feel like contributors, effective teaching involves children in setting up, cleaning up, and presenting material as peer-leaders.
5. Children are eager to please and need to feel as though they have done a good job, so effective teaching includes varied experiences so that different learning styles are honored.

Five Marks of Effective Learning Activities for Children

- ⇒ The activities are appropriate for the age level.
- ⇒ Each activity involves as much of the total child—cognition, movement, listening, creativity, emotion, connectedness to their real life—as possible.
- ⇒ The activities provide for individual differences and needs and allow for choice.
- ⇒ Each activity helps to build community, rather than fostering competitiveness.
- ⇒ The activities are carefully planned while also being flexible enough to embrace unplanned “teaching moments” and allow for responding to children’s needs.

Six Things the Bible Says about Children

1) Children have natural spirituality and stand in relationship with God independent of adult mediation as reflected in:

- their participation in the covenant with God (Ezra 10)
- the presumption that they will ask questions and engage in discussion about God, rather than simply absorb what adults tell them (Ex. 12–13; Jos. 4:5–7)
- their designation as those who are ordained to praise God (Ps. 8:2, which Jesus quotes in Mt. 21:16)
- the identification of a child as the fulfillment of Israel's hope (Is. 11 and 65)

2) Children have personal agency, are God's instruments, and serve as models for adults, for example:

- The child Samuel was called to be a religious and political leader when adults failed to faithfully serve God (1 Sam. 3).
- A young slave girl is the instrument of healing for a military commander (2 Kings 22).
- Jesus presents children as models for entering the kingdom of God (Mt. 19:13–15; Mk. 10:13–16; and Lk. 18:15–17).
- Jesus calls children models of greatness (Mt. 18: 1–5; Mk. 9:33–37; and Luke 9:46–48).
- A child listened to Jesus, trusted Jesus, and provided the means for Jesus to reveal his divinity through the miracle of feeding the multitude when adults, including the disciples, failed to do so (Jn. 6:1–15).

3) Children are different from adults and have special status, being granted a special state of grace in relationship to God as attested to by:

- the fact that as human beings children are created in God's image (Gen. 1:27);
- the recognition that children belong first to God (Gen. 30:20 and Ps. 127:3);
- the call to teach children beginning with stories of God's love and grace, rather than with "expectations," suggesting that they have a different level of accountability related to their developmental process (Dt. 1:39; Is. 7:15–16 and 8:4; 1 Cor. 13:9–11; and Jn. 9:20–21)
- the fact that Jesus also went through a developmental process (Lk. 2:40, 52).

4) Children are innocent victims of the choices adults make, so God has special concern for them:

- as victims of adult idolatry that practices child sacrifice (Jer. 19:4–5)

- as victims of famine and war, which is the primary cause of children's suffering in Scripture (Lam. 2:11–12)

- as victims of adult ambitions (Mt. 2:6–18)

5) *God identifies with children and children both reveal and receive God's kingdom.*

- the incarnation (Lk. 1:16–56 and 2:1–12; Mt. 1:18–25) demonstrates the universality of being a child; all humans, all living creatures and God all experience childhood.

- Jesus said the Kingdom belongs to children (Mt. 19:13–15; Mk. 10:13–16; and Lk. 18:15–17)

- Jesus' first act after the transfiguration was to heal a child (Mt. 17:14–18; Mk. 9:15–29; and Lk. 9:37–43a)

- Jesus was recognized and proclaimed by children as the Son of David (Mt. 21:15–17)

6) *The ways we treat children are central to our faithfulness and have serious consequences.*

- Jesus proclaimed that to welcome (the word here means to treat as a special guest) a child is to welcome Jesus and God, who sent Jesus (Mt. 18:2–5; Mk. 9:33–37; and Lk. 9:46–48)

- Jesus warned his followers, “If you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea.” (Mt. 18:6; Mk. 9:42; and Lk. 17:1–3)

Three Things the Bible Does NOT Say about Children

The children are our future.

It's from the song “Greatest Love of All,” by Masser and Creed (1977).

Spare the rod and spoil the child.

It's from the burlesque poem, *Hudibras*, by Samuel Butler (1820–1905) about quelling “romantic” feelings and actions.

Children should be seen and not heard.

This is a 15th Century English proverb, which was first applied specifically to young women.

Basic Elements of a Lesson Plan

Element	Description/Illustration	
Who/What/Where/When	E.g. Young Adult Class, FBC, Oct 23, 2007	
Goal	Where you want to be. Goals reflect larger purpose, such as “develop enhanced awareness of impact of past experience on current beliefs.”	
Objectives	Specific, attainable steps toward the goal that defines what learners will do. E.g.. Participants will identify 3 nonverbal responses that communicate acceptance.	
Rationale	The rationale helps keep us honest by matching goals, objectives, and activities to beliefs; answers the question “Why?”	
Content	Content relates to the subject matter and can be as definable as the names of the books of the Bible or as broad as one’s life experiences.	
Process/procedures & materials	What will you do and how (step by step) will you do it? What materials will you need?	
Evaluation process	How will you know if you’ve accomplished your objectives and moved toward your goals?	
Other notes		

Information Processing

Group Interaction

Indirect Communication

Personal Development

Action/Reflection

ZERO TO TWOS

Building Block of Faith: Trust, which develops out of experiences of love, acceptance and safety.

Characteristics:

- › yearn for and actively seek relationship
- › experience God’s love through consistently positive relationships with adult caregivers
- › incorporate images and narratives into their worldview
- › developing notion of self apart from others (“No” and “Me do it!” are signs of healthy development!)
- › developing object constancy (objects and persons still exist when not seen)
- › testing trustworthiness of the world (touching and mouthing things is essential)
- › “oversee and overhear” faith

Special-needs Children:

- › Affirm their gifts and strengths to both the children and the parents.
- › Help others see beyond the labels of special needs.
- › Ask parents for specific supports needed.
- › Including their child in your program may be the only respite that families get.



Understanding of God:

- › Adults are experienced as concrete representations of God.
- › God is a source of comfort (like a “blankie”).
- › Later, God is imaged as a real person who lives in heaven or at church.

Ways to Nurture Discipleship:

- › Communicate belonging and joyous welcome to the family and church family.
- › Provide models of grace, authenticity and integrity in faith.
- › Provide loving care and consistently meet needs.
- › Sing hymns while holding or rocking the child.
- › Include religious symbols in their world.
- › Share Bible story books and picture books.
- › Provide a safe place for toddlers to explore.
- › Celebrate independence, even—or especially—if it is communicated with word “No!”



Building Block of Faith: Initiative

PRESCHOOLERS

Characteristics

- › growing relationships with self and others
- › increasing awareness of their own feelings
- › cannot yet imagine another's perspective
- › developing a sense of own abilities
- › increasing need for autonomy
- › active/relational learners
- › need to use large motor skills—running, dancing, clapping
- › limited attention span—limit sitting still
- › very curious, can be distractible
- › narrative/concrete Thinkers
- › have vivid imaginations: confuse fantasy with reality—they are not lying!



Understanding of God

- › God is powerful and mysterious and potentially frightening.
- › Images/stories portraying an angry, punishing God will have life-long negative effects.

Ways to Nurture Discipleship

- › teach values through relationships
- › play and exploration
- › participation, belonging and contribution within the family and within the church family
- › models of grace, authenticity and integrity
- › a safe place for curiosity, initiative, & choices
- › pairing concepts with concrete experience
- › inclusion in the rhythms, rituals, symbols, and gestures of faith
- › props & clothes for unstructured, imaginative play around Bible stories
- › creating own interpretations of the stories
- › stories that have the power to transfer fear to hope, E.g. rescue of Paul and Silas from prison
- › play with religious symbols and rituals

Special-needs Children:

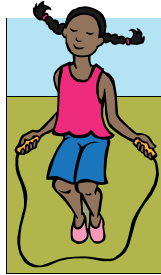
- › Let other children know it is ok to ask questions about their needs, so it is matter of fact and course.
- › Encourage peers to play with those who may need help playing.

YOUNGER ELEMENTARY

Building Block of Faith: Industry

Understanding of God:

- › God as a superhero
- › God imbued with human characteristics



Characteristics:

- › intuitive/literal thinkers
- › active/experiential Learners—know through observation and experience
- › eager to please
- › developing ability to understand abstractions, and space and time
- › keenly aware of justice and fairness—highly operative sense of morality
- › very sensitive to approval and disapproval
- › aware of others' feelings
- › increased importance of others
- › connectedness with creation and creatures
- › developing skill of setting personal boundaries
- › abundant energy—difficult to sit still for long periods of time
- › curious, fascinated by things they can feel, smell, touch
- › ask concrete questions: “Where is heaven?” “How is God with me?”
- › difficulty knowing and trusting a God whom they cannot see

Ways to Nurture Discipleship:

- › communicate belonging to church
- › practice deciding what is fair or right
- › group work
- › relationships with loving, kind, and trustworthy adults
- › role play, moving to, and acting out Bible stories and Christian concepts
- › making connections between Bible stories and acts of worship and service
- › contributing to the church family
- › models of grace, authenticity and integrity in faith
- › opportunities for service beyond the church to persons, animals, and creation
- › noncompetitive activities
- › learning meaning of Christian symbols, rhythms, and rituals

Special-needs Children:

- › As at any stage, ask families and the child's school teachers for inclusion ideas.
- › If issues come up about supporting a child, ask the other children for ideas of how to include or support someone.

OLDER ELEMENTARY/EARLY ADOLESCENCE [2 pp.]

Building Block of Faith: Industry and Competence



Understanding of God:

- › God is at work in systems that shape the world.
- › God is the creator and a friend who cares about me personally.
- › God's works are puzzles to investigate.

Characteristics:

- › spiritual inquirers—intuitive, reflective, and practical thinkers
- › active/observational/experiential learners
- › increasing attention span
- › self-identity tied to performance
- › enjoy language games
- › friends are vital; peer group supersedes family in identity
- › need for independence/increasingly self sufficient
- › growth spurts may make them tired, moody, or self-conscious
- › understand time and geography
- › beginning logic and symbolic thought
- › developing individual ideas, skills, interests, and talents
- › tend to adopt heroes and emulate adult role models

Ways to Nurture Discipleship:

- › participation and contribution within the family and church
- › models of grace, authenticity and integrity in faith
- › respite from increasing pressure and competition of school
- › introductions to Bible history, chronology, geography, and concept of literary genre in the Bible
- › identifying and interpreting biblical themes, such as forgiveness, grace and covenant
- › making connections between Bible stories and their real-life experiences.
- › taking the lead and freedom to investigate & explore faith
- › stories of heroes of the faith.
- › opportunities to practice choice-making

Special-needs Children:

- › Guide classmates to assist children with special needs so they do not feel left out or behind.
- › Help all of them see that people learn in different ways.

Early Adolescents: same as older elementary plus:

Characteristics:

- abstract, reflective, and practical thinkers
- often anxious, worried, and competitive
- physical growth spurts may make them tired, moody, or self-conscious



Ways to Nurture Discipleship:

- › intentional communication of belonging to the family and the church family.
- › more extensive treatment of Bible history, chronology, geography, and concept of literary genre in the Bible
- › nurturing and group inquisitiveness and independent investigation/research
- › expanding Bible study skills
- › opportunities to teach others

Special-needs Adolescents:

- › Peer pressures can break down former experience of inclusion.
- › Help them participate in rituals of Baptism and communion with their peers by teaching to their ability and hearing their statements of faith in their own ways.
- › Help all of them see that people learn in different ways.
- › Provide opportunities for them to tell other youth their own stories, what faith means to them, and how they feel God's call.

ADOLESCENTS

Building Block of Faith: Identity Formation

Understanding of God: as confidant, guide, and counselor, concerned with personal moral behavior and at work behind the scenes but not always clear where.



Characteristics:

- › seeking identity
- › grappling with big questions
- › capable of abstract conceptualization
- › logical-hypothetical thinkers who engage in deductive reasoning and critical thinking
- › experiential and experimental learners
- › preoccupation with self characterized by ego-centrism (“Everyone’s watching me.”) and extreme sense uniqueness (“No one understands me!”)
- › crossroads in which emotions, hormones, judgment, and body are in flux
- › sense of indestructibility/immortality
- › prefrontal cortex, the area of brain that provides judgment, is not yet developed
- › diminishing reliance on authority of community
- › need to commit to causes and groups
- › struggling to distinguish God’s work from human activity
- › aware of multiplicity of perspectives

Ways to Nurture Discipleship:

- › Develop reflection-action (shared praxis) experiences in which activities are reflected on according to beliefs and beliefs are unpacked in experiences.
 - › Provide guided practice in disciplines of discernment, such as stillness, meditation, critical reflection, and service.
 - › models of grace, authenticity and integrity in faith
 - › Teach basic skills of biblical interpretation and provide opportunities to explore the Bible through study tools, such as commentaries, Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias, and concordances.
 - › Allow space to ask difficult questions, challenge assumptions, and explore a variety of perspectives.
 - › Practice acceptance and trust—avoid communicating fears about “wrong” ideas or doubt.
 - › Provide opportunities to participate in rituals of belonging, such as Baptism and the Lord’s Supper *when they feel they can do so with integrity*.
- Allow them to take the lead in identifying areas of exploration so that discipleship efforts connect with their actual experiences of daily life.
- Create safe places for experimentation and exploration—this includes setting appropriate parameters for behavior and providing adult oversight.
 - Encourage reinterpreting traditions and expressing them in language and rituals that reflect their understandings.
 - Offer support groups and education to parents of adolescents that emphasize the need to allow youth to move outside the authority of the family in order to mature in faith and the need to provide enough structure to accommodate the not-yet-developed judgment center of their brains.



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