

January 2011

KID'S CONNECTION

Kid's Connection: 10:00-11:00

Transition Snacks: 11:00-11:30

The Source: 11:30-12:30



theParentLink

Children's Edition

How to Handle Doubt & Questions

"Doubts are the ants in the pants of faith," wrote Frederick Buechner. "They keep it awake and moving." This runs contrary to most people's assumptions about doubt—that questioning your faith proves you're a weak Christian. But when we have doubts about something, we're forced to examine its truthfulness and consider how much of ourselves we wish to invest in it. If we (and our children) are going to truly own our beliefs, we must critically evaluate them first.

Teaching your children that it's okay to express doubts and ask questions is crucial for their faith development. "When the doubts get ignored, it could eventually result in serious skepticism of one's worldview and personal faith," says professor Dean Hardy. Use these tips to help kids wonder and open up:

Don't feel threatened when children want to ask questions. These queries help kids verbalize their doubts. View tough questions not as a sign of rebellion but as opportunities to teach and learn.

Listen intently, and don't shame kids for asking questions. Reflect on what children say and affirm their feelings with phrases such as "You seem afraid" or "You look like you have a question."

Make your family a "safe zone." Foster attitudes that say it's okay to question and doubt. That will encourage children to feel free to think critically and explore honestly.



When Doubts Arise

In *Already Gone: Why Your Kids Will Quit Church and What You Can Do About It* (Master Books), Ken Ham and Britt Beemer explore the epidemic of young people leaving the traditional church in droves. They cite a George Barna study showing that 61% of young adults had been church-ed at one point during their teen years but are now spiritually disengaged. They also discovered that of young adults who no longer believe that all the Bible accounts are true:

- 40% first had doubts in middle school.
- 44% first had doubts in high school.
- 11% first had doubts in college.



PowerSource

Ask God:

1. To help your children know it's okay to have questions.
2. To help you be a good listener when kids share their doubts.
3. To reassure your whole family of God's presence and love.

Parenting Insights

These age-level insights from *Children's Ministry Magazine* track how young Christians' thoughts and questions change over time.

Ages 3 to 5

Older preschoolers begin to ask "why?" and "how?" Miracles, symbolism, and God's nonphysical nature are often confusing for kids this age. Answer their questions simply with words that mean exactly what they say.

Ages 6 to 8

Children this age begin to distinguish between fantasy and reality and begin to use logical thinking. Give them answers that allow them to use these skills; otherwise, they'll get frustrated.

Ages 9 to 12

Older children tend to question some basic beliefs they previously accepted. They want to explore an issue from many perspectives. Share your own doubts and help kids find a niche to put their faith into action.

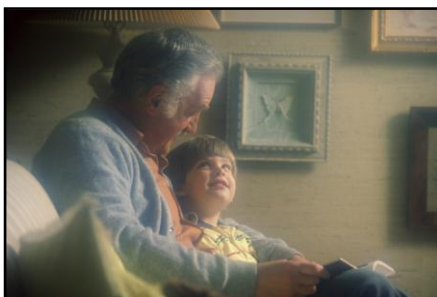
OpenTheBook

**"You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me."
John 20:29**

Jesus said these words to "Doubting Thomas," the disciple who wouldn't believe that Jesus rose unless he saw and touched him. When our faith is unsteady, we can find answers in God's Word.

Teachable Moments

- 1. Establish the Bible as the authority for truth.** Affirm that whatever God's Word says has either happened or will happen. Tell Bible accounts with enthusiasm so your children will believe them, too.



- 2. Let your children know that you also doubt sometimes.** Share the ways that your faith is a work in progress. Tell how God has worked in your life today. Be an example of how to grow through positive doubting.
- 3. Celebrate your children's faith journeys.** Recognize that kids' images of God expand as they struggle with life's complexities. Accept their immature perceptions and challenge them as their ability to think abstractly develops. Mark important milestones such as baptism, first Bible, Sunday school promotion, confirmation, etc.



"So commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these words of mine. Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders. Teach them to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are ON THE ROAD, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up." Deuteronomy 11:18-19, NLT

Support children's faith development by talking to them about their doubts and questions. Start by asking:

1. How much proof or evidence do you need before you believe something or someone?
2. What things about God and the Bible are hardest for you to believe, and why?
3. Why do you think God asks us to believe without visual "proof"?
4. How might doubts and questions actually make our faith stronger?

Family Experience: Faith Adventures

Many people in the Bible struggled with doubt. Use these experiences from Group's Hands-On Bible to explore faith.

- **What You Know**—Read aloud John 20:24-31 to meet a doubting disciple. Then say: "When you have doubts, it's helpful to separate what you *know* from what you *feel*. For example, you may doubt that God loves you because you didn't make the soccer team. You feel alone and unloved. But the Bible says that God loves you and that he'll take care of you. Because the Bible says it, you know it's true, even if it doesn't feel that way right now."

Together, divide a sheet of poster board into two columns. Label one "What I Feel" and the other "What I Know." List some feelings, and across from each feeling, write a Bible verse in response. For example, across from "loneliness" you can write "God is with me. Matthew 28:20." Use a Bible index to help you find relevant passages.

- **Childlike Faith**—Say: "When you were littler, you trusted your parents about everything. Jesus says everyone should have faith like little kids—even grown-ups! We *all* need Jesus, *all* the time." Read aloud Luke 18:15-17. Then make something to remind you that Jesus wants you to trust him the same way little kids trust their parents. Have each family member draw a heart on a piece of construction paper. Write "Jesus" inside it. To the left, tape a picture of when you were little. To the right, tape a recent picture of yourself. Decorate and hang the paper as a reminder of your faith.



