

AGE GROUP CHARACTERISTICS – CHILDREN’S EQUIPPING CENTER

Raising children from a young age to understand God’s relationship to us is important. A child’s constant questioning and learning can be quite challenging! How do you begin to explain God to a young child?

14...continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, 15and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. (2 Tim. 3:14–15; NIV)

From this scripture, we can see that Timothy was taught about God from the time he was a baby, and that he was raised to know God. A newborn baby does not have the same learning skills as a six-year-old, but a child is always growing, learning, and processing new information. A young child can understand many truths from the Bible, and although he may not be able to understand a truth completely, he will grow in understanding as he matures.

On the next few pages, you will find biblical concepts for each age group along with some brief tips to help you appreciate how most children in each group understand the foundational teachings of the Bible. Each child is an individual; therefore, each child will grasp different truths at different times in their development. It is critical in the development and presentation of a quality program that we familiarize ourselves with those biblical concepts that can be grasped by children at various developmental stages. That is why we establish teaching objectives in the Children’s Equipping Center. These objectives provide the framework for working with children at a given level. Objectives should be clearly understood and reviewed from time to time in order to ensure that we are teaching within the guidelines.

Basic Age Group Insights

Infants–Two-Year-Olds

2–12 months: A child of this age is in the process of establishing trust and has complete dependence on the caregiver.

1-year-olds: At this age, children are beginning to walk. Managing the child’s desire for autonomy is important. The child seeks a little independence while still being dependent on the caregiver.

2-year-olds: At this age, children are developing a sense of curiosity about the world and are still quite egocentric. They have a strong need to know they belong.

Concepts to teach this age group:

About God: Children should learn that God loves them and takes care of them and their families. God made the world and each one of us. He does good things for all of us. They can talk to God in prayer and can praise God in song and worship. They can tell God they are sorry for the bad things they do, and they should be learning to obey and please God.

About Jesus: Children should learn that Jesus loves us and is our friend, that He is God’s Son, that He was once a child like them, and that He lived on earth.

About the Bible: Children should learn that it is God’s special book, given to us to tell us about Him and how much He loves us.

About home and parents: Children should learn that God gave them parents and families, and that they should obey their parents.

About church: Children should learn that they can come to church to learn about God and Jesus, and that it is a place to see friends and enjoy others. They learn that the Church is God’s house, and that they can give money to God’s house to help buy things and give to others.

About others: Children should learn that God gives them grown-ups to care for them, and that people can be good friends. Children learn that though others may be unkind, God wants them to be kind to others and share with them.

About other biblical concepts: For example, children should learn that angels are messengers from God, that they were sent to tell people when Jesus was born, that they protect God’s children, and that they love and worship God.

Early Childhood (ages 3–5)

3-year-olds: Their language continues to develop. Peers play a larger role, especially in play. They cannot grasp abstract concepts yet. They learn primarily by doing.

4-year-olds: A greater sense of self is being developed. They are learning that they belong in the world. Peers are more important to them. Their vocabulary is growing. They enjoy different words and use them to exaggerate. Their ideas move beyond home and life.

5-year-olds: They enjoy dramatic play and pretending, including role-play. They are beginning to prefer companions and may now have a best friend. They like to feel independent and can be demanding at times.

Concepts to teach this age group:

About God: Children should learn that God loves them and others. God cares for and loves their families. He made all things, and He is everywhere. They can trust and depend on God. God sent His Son, Jesus, to die for their sins and they can talk to God any time. God wants them to talk to Him, worship Him, and be thankful for all He has done. God wants them to be obedient to their parent and to Him.

About Jesus: Children should learn that Jesus loves them and wants to be their best friend. Jesus came to earth to be their Lord and Savior and He died for their sins. He lives in heaven, but He will always be with them. Jesus wants them to love and obey Him and do the things that He taught us to do. Jesus will help us to obey and to do good to others.

About the Bible: Children should learn that it is God’s special book given to us to tell about Him and His love for us. They should know that the stories in the Bible are true.

About home and parents: Children should learn that God gave them parents to care for them and teach them. God cares for each member of his or her family. They should obey their parents. When they are disobedient, they sin.

About church: Children should learn that they come to church to learn about God and Jesus. It is a place to see friends and enjoy others. Church is God’s house. Church is a place where we can come to worship God and pray.

About others: Children should learn that God made all people to love Him. God wants them to tell others about Jesus. He wants them to pray for others, even those who may be unkind. God wants them to share with others, give to others, and be kind to others.

Early Elementary (Ages 6–8)

6-year-olds: They can be moody, bored, and restless when confined indoors. While they may take criticism poorly, they still crave affection and need their parents’ approval and affirmation. They have best friends and small groups of friends are forming.

7-year-olds: They may not demand companionship as much and they can spend more time by themselves. They are moving from concrete thinking to abstract thinking. They are establishing what they believe.

8-year-olds: They may spread themselves too thin, and things may wind up in a mess. Relationships with their parents may get complicated. They do well with other siblings. School is important because their friends are there.

Concepts to teach this age group:

About God: Children should learn that God is all-powerful and all-knowing. He is everywhere and is with them at all times. He loves them and wants to have a relationship with them. He wants them to know that each of them is special in His sight. God cares for and loves their families. God wants them to talk with Him in prayer every day. He always answers prayer with a “yes,” “no,” or “wait.” He provides all they need. He can be trusted for all things.

About Jesus: Children should learn that Jesus is the Son of God who came to earth to be our Savior and died for our sins. Jesus wants all people to come to Him as their Lord and Savior. Jesus is the only way to God and heaven. Jesus wants to take the sins from our lives. Jesus was perfect and never did anything wrong. He rose from the dead and now lives in heaven. He is preparing a place for us. He will return some day to take us home forever. He loves us and is our best friend. Jesus wants us to love and obey Him and do the things that He taught us to do.

About the Holy Spirit: Children should learn that when Jesus went to heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit as our Comforter and Teacher. The Holy Spirit will give us the power and desire to do the will of the Father. Through the Holy Spirit, we can participate in the things that Jesus did and told us to do. The Holy Spirit will speak to our hearts and show us where there is sin. He will help us worship the Lord and give us things to say to the

Lord. It is through the work of the Holy Spirit that we will see healing, miracles, and changed lives. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, others will come to know Jesus.

About the Bible: Children should learn that it is God’s Word to His children. The Bible tells them what God wants and how they are to live with Him. The Bible reveals His perfect love for them. It tells them about how He worked with others. It tells them about who they are and why they were created. The Bible has two major parts, the Old and New Testaments. There are sixty-six books in the Bible. They should read and memorize God’s Word so that they will be built up and strengthened.

About home and parents: Parents have rules for their children, and God also has rules for them to follow. God wants to be at home in their household and to be in authority there. He wants to restore their home when there is sin present. They can go to the Father in prayer to receive help and restoration for their home and their relationships. They can be ambassadors in their home to any non-believers.

About church: Children should learn that they come to church to learn about God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. It is a place to see friends and enjoy others. It is a place where they can feel loved, warm, and safe. It is a place where other people really show their love and care. Church is God’s house and is a place where we come to worship God and pray for one another. Church is more than a building; it is also the people that make up the church. They can give money to the church to help buy things and provide outreach to others.

About others: Children should learn that God loves all people, and He wants them to show love and compassion to others. He wants them to lead others to Jesus in love. He wants them to pray for others. He wants them to be able to turn the other cheek and do good to those who mistreat them. He wants them to forgive others. God wants them to share with and give to others.

About other biblical concepts: Children should learn that angels are messengers from God. Fallen angels are the demons that are at work for Satan. Satan will do anything within his power to cause us to sin and he will tempt us.

Upper Elementary (Ages 9–12)

9-year-olds: For the most part, they like school. They are apt to forget unless reminded. They are critical of things they think they could do better.

10-year-olds: They are fond of friends and like to tell people who they are. Simple companionship rather than competition motivates this group. Physical stamina is at a higher level.

11-year-olds: Peers continue to take up more of their time at this stage. They can often seem intense and can fly into a rage at short notice. Acceptance is very important to them.

12-year-olds: They are still concrete thinkers; they perceive things as good or bad, right or wrong. They are just beginning to imagine possibilities, recognize consequences of their actions, and anticipate what others are thinking. Moodiness is common as they struggle to search for an identity.

Concepts to teach this age group:

About God: Children should learn that God is all-powerful, all-knowing, is everywhere, and is with them at all times. He loves them and wants to have a relationship with them. He wants them to know that each of them is special in His sight. God cares for and loves their families. He wants them to talk with Him in prayer every day. He always answers prayer, either with a “yes,” “no,” or “wait.” He provides. He can be trusted for all things. God desires their worship. He wants them to trust Him in all their needs and problems and be thankful for all He has done. God wants them to obey their parents and those in authority, and to share His love with others. He wants them to go to His Word to learn about Him, hear His voice through the Word, and learn how to live for Him.

About Jesus: Children should learn that He wants to be their Lord and Savior. Through His death on the cross, He conquered sin and death once and for all. He can and desires to forgive them of their sin. Jesus will give salvation to all who ask. Jesus loves them even when they sin. He wants them to be His disciples, to follow Him and do the works He commanded. Jesus is the only way to God and heaven. He is their best friend. Jesus wants each one of them to love and obey Him with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength.

About the Holy Spirit: Children should learn that when Jesus went to heaven He sent the Holy Spirit as our Comforter and Teacher. The Holy Spirit will give us the power and desire to do the will of the Father. Through the Holy Spirit we can participate in the things that Jesus did and do what He told us to do. The Holy Spirit will speak to our hearts and show us our sin. He will help us worship the Lord and teach us how to pray. It is through the work of the Holy Spirit that we will see healing, miracles, and changed lives. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, others will come to know Jesus. Children can operate in the gifts of the Spirit. God wants us to live by the fruit of the Spirit.

About the Bible: Children should learn that the Bible is God’s Word to them, that it is true, and it will answer their questions. The Bible tells them what God wants them to know and how they are to live for Him. The Bible reveals His perfect love for them. It tells them how He worked with others and showed mankind that He desires to bring us back to Him. It tells them about who they are and why they were created. The Bible was written by men who were chosen by God and inspired by the Holy Spirit to write what God told them. The Bible has two major parts, the Old and New Testaments. There are sixty-six books in the Bible. The Gospels tell of the life and works of Jesus. Children should know the breakdown of the other major sections of the Bible. They should read and memorize Scripture so they will be strengthened by God’s Word.

About home and parents: Children should learn that God gave them parents to care for them and bring them up in the ways of the Lord. If their parents are non-believers, they should still honor and obey them. Their parents love them, and they should love their parents. God cares about each member in their family. Parents have rules to follow and children should obey them. God wants to be the authority in each household. Children should know they can ask God for help in restoring their family situation, and God cares very much about their family life.

About church: Children should learn that church is a place to worship God and learn about Him. It is a place for them to be equipped and trained as a part of the Christian body. Church should be a place where they feel secure and loved.

About others: Children should learn that God loves all people equally, whether they believe in Christ or not. God wants children to learn how to show love and compassion to people. They should know how to lead others to Christ and pray for friends and peers. Children should know that they can minister to others.

About other biblical concepts: Children should learn about Bible truths, including the nature of sin in us, the forgiveness of God through Christ, baptism, communion, death, and heaven. They should be taught about Satan, that he is the tempter and deceiver. They should know that God has power over all things, including the works of Satan. Children should also learn about Christ’s second coming and how it affects their lives.