

Answering Our Children's Questions

How do we respond to our kids when they come to us with questions?

By Mike Sciarra

Christian parents have been given the awesome privilege and reasonability to be the primary teachers and shepherds of their children. They are to bring them up in the "discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). As we are teaching them the Word of God and as they are learning about life, they will be filled with questions. Therefore, we need to be ready and available to field our children's questions, whatever they may be. If we don't attempt to answer our kid's questions people with far less altruistic motives will be more than happy to.

Will Rogers once said he believed in college because it took kids away from home just at the point when they started asking questions. Parents of younger children know better. They start asking questions as soon as they learn to talk! Recently, I provided a short questionnaire for parents at our church to check off the top 3 questions their kids ask most. The top 3 were: 1. Spiritual questions (about God, heaven, the Bible, etc.); 2. Questions about what other kids get (to do, see, have, etc.) that they do not get; 3. Questions regarding the choices of others. The ones that they most anticipated them asking were: 1. Questions pertaining to sex and body parts; and 2. Questions pertaining to death and dying.

What are some things to keep in mind as we seek to find appropriate ways to answer the tough questions?

Remember that questions are either answerable, hard to answer or unanswerable or they land in "grey" areas. Answerable ones may be simple, such as...Where did you grow up? Or they can be complex...such as...Who Created God? Answerable questions are objective. Cut and dry. Definite. Once on a cross-country driving trip our son Michael asked me several nights in a row "What is heaven like?" That question has a definite answer. Among other things I told him what the Bible says in the book of Revelation...no tears, no sadness, no death, no sin, etc. Every time I told him one he would pump his fist and say "Yes!" He also once asked me why God made ear wax.

Some questions are either very difficult to answer or they land in the "unanswerable" category. No easy answer is available for questions such as...Why is there suffering in the world? And some questions have no answer. Don't make one up. If you don't have an answer, it's ok to say so. You could research it together. If you get in the habit of making up answers it will only lead to confusion later on down the road.

And then there are the 'Grey' areas. Questions whose answers are by nature subjective, such as...Is it wrong for an adult to drink alcohol? It requires a judgment call. Some say yes, others say no, some aren't sure. With regards to "grey area" questions, let them know your standards and convictions and also that sincere and intelligent people, even some you are friends with, may have a different opinion. Avoid the temptation to answer these kinds of questions with a "My way or the highway" mentality. Many of these answers will depend upon your worldview.

When fielding questions, be mindful of timing, appropriateness and details as you seek to give appropriate answers to your kid's questions.

Timing has to do with *when to answer a question*. Does it need an immediate answer? Can it wait until later? Do you have an answer available or do you need to do some research? **Appropriateness** has to do with *how to answer a question*. Proverbs 25:11 says, "like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word spoken in right circumstances." The importance of well-chosen words is highlighted here by their comparison with objects of fine craftsmanship. Be choosy about what you choose to say. The setting is important. Is it at a Family gathering, in front of everyone, in carpool, in public, in private, at home, before bed? What do you perceive your child's heart attitude to be. Serious or joking? Inquisitive or flippant? Sometimes questions that seem silly are really serious, they just don't know how to ask it or they are embarrassed. **Details** have to do with *how much information to give* in your answer. Keep in mind their developmental level. Kids don't have to have all the details to give an honest, age-appropriate answer.

Learn from the wisdom gained by experience. What has been most helpful to me as a parent is to follow the example of Jesus. He dealt with questions and He gave appropriate answers. It is interesting to see what He did. Did He answer every question directly even though He knew the answer? No. He gave answers appropriate to the people involved and the setting. In Matthew 22:35 a lawyer asked him a question, testing Him. In Mark 10:2 some religious leaders called Pharisees came up and asked him a question about whether a man could legally divorce his wife. In Luke 11:53 He was questioned by some hostile people. Sometimes He gave a **definite** answer. Sometimes He gave a **cryptic** answer. Sometimes He answered a question with **a question**.

Also, it may be helpful get advice and help from people you trust. Ask your parents or grandparents. Older friends who've been through it. Talk with a pastor or elder. Use available resources. Some good ones are: 101 Questions Children Ask About God, Osborne, Veerman, Wilhoit, Galvin, Tyndale, 1992. Answers to Your Kid's Questions, Chuck Colson (This book is good for parents of teens), Tyndale, 2000. Creation or Evolution, Bliss, Master Books. What Happens When We Die?, Carolyn Nystrom, Moody, 1981. How and When to Tell Your Kids About Sex, Jones, NavPress, 1993. Talking With Your Kids About the Birds and the Bees, Talley, Regal, 1990.

In conclusion, God has promised to give wisdom to those who need it and ask for it (James 1:5). Be available to your kids. Impress truth upon their hearts. We are all on a serious quest for truth in life. It is important to know God's Word, especially to be able to teach our children and especially when fielding questions from them. It really is an awesome responsibility. The Word of God, the Bible, to be the only inspired, inerrant and infallible source of objective truth. It has been sufficient for me ever since I became a Christian as a college student in 1982.