



Childhood Conversion, Baptism, and Church Membership¹

A Position Paper Written by the Elders at Crawford Avenue Baptist Church

INTRODUCTION

If you've spent much time with us at Crawford Avenue, then you've probably noticed how richly God has blessed us with children! We believe that children are a gift from God, primarily to parents, but also to the church as a whole. Because of that, we are passionate about caring both for you as a parent, and for your children. We want to see all our children grow into a mature, rich, solid, saving faith in Jesus Christ, and we want to help them grow in their faith and discipleship as they grow up.

We're convinced that God works wonderfully in the lives of children. Many parents at Crawford Avenue have seen their children-sometimes very young ones-display a wonderful sensitivity to spiritual realities, a heartfelt love for Jesus, and even a desire to tell others about Jesus. In fact, we believe that God sometimes brings very young children to a saving faith in Jesus. You may be seeing some signs of conversion in your child's life. If so, then praise God!

Anytime parents see signs of conversion in a young child's life, the question will naturally and rightly arise: When should my child be baptized and added as a member of the church? What's a good question, and it's right for that question to press on a parent's heart. But even so, it's not an easy one to answer, and different Christians have come to thoughtful, principled, careful -and yet very different- conclusions on it. Among Baptists, there have been two very broad approaches:

Baptize quickly
or
Wait awhile

In other words, is it best for the church to act more-or-less immediately upon a child's profession of faith in Jesus, baptizing them and making them a member of the church even at a very young age? Or is it best to wait awhile, encouraging the child to continue growing in his or her understanding of the gospel and love for Jesus, until it's clearer that his or her profession of faith is considered, deep, and genuinely personal- that is, until his or her profession of faith becomes discernibly *credible* to the church.

¹ This paper is a composite of several position papers from other local churches, who share our convictions on childhood conversion, baptism, and church membership. We are thankful for and have relied heavily upon the work of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., North Point Church in Denton, Texas, Third Avenue Baptist Church in Louisville, KY, and Sojourn Community Church in Louisville, KY.

BIBLICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Some believers approach the issue of baptizing children as though Scripture gives a clear mandate. They contend that taking one position over another (*baptize quickly* or *wait awhile*) is really a matter of simple obedience to the Bible. We've concluded that this issue, as a whole is *not* a matter of simple obedience to biblical *prescriptions*, merely, but also requires a great degree of Christian discernment according to biblical *principles*.

Simply, the Bible gives no explicit command regarding an appropriate age for baptism. Moreover, the New Testament seems to account only for the baptisms of believing *adults* coming out of non-Christian contexts. We're *not* suggesting that children must become like adults to be saved. Opposite this, Jesus taught that adults must become childlike in their faith (Mark 10:14-15). We *are* suggesting that the Bible gives no clear record of a child (infant or otherwise) being baptized. Additionally, the Biblical record has nothing to say regarding third and fourth generation Christian parents attempting to discern whether they should baptize their believing children. Simply, we find ourselves in a cultural and historical situation alien to the apostles and the early church. This dissonance doesn't mean that the Bible is entirely silent. To the contrary, we are convinced that the Bible has much to say regarding this issue. Our pastoral responsibility is to lead our church in conforming its practices to both our Lord's *explicit commands* regarding baptism in addition to any *practical implications* reasonably drawn from patterns and practices handed down to the church by the apostles (e.g. 1 Cor. 11:2). With this in mind, we'll begin by answering the question, "What is baptism?"

Our church's confession of faith states, *We believe that baptism is the immersion in water of a believer, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in display of our faith in the crucified, buried, and risen Savior. It symbolizes our death to sin and resurrection to a new life, and is required for church membership.* As our confession states, the Bible teaches us that the proper subject of baptism is a believer. And, as our confession goes on to explain, a believer is one who has been given new life in the gospel and places their faith in the crucified, buried, and risen Savior.

Our responsibility as a church is not simply to determine when someone has made a profession of faith in Jesus. Our responsibility is rather to determine when someone has made a credible profession of faith - one which as been tested by the world, the flesh and the devil and, in the face of such testing, seems to be genuine, personal, real, deep, and accompanied by good evidence of repentance from sin and love for Jesus.

The Bible teaches that a person's individual profession of faith in Christ isn't to be marked by sincerity but genuine credibility. Jesus warned us about the dangers of mere sincerity: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven (see Matt. 7:21-23). Our Lord not only cautioned us against merely sincere professions but also spurious professions. Some will initially appear to believe in the gospel but time and worldly pressure will reveal that they weren't true believers (Matthew 13: 5-6, 20-21). According to Jesus, all true believers are those who evidence true life in Him and love for Him by obeying His Word (John 14:15-21, 15:1-10). The Apostle Paul, in agreement with Jesus' teaching in Matthew 18:17-19, insisted that congregations judge the lives of its own members in order to

determine credible professions of faith (1 Cor. 5:1-12). So too, the apostle John warned the church to be on the lookout for the spurious professions of those who “went out from us, but ...were not of us” (Jn. 2:19). From this small sample, we can observe New Testament adamantly insists that true Christians are known by their fruit (Mt. 7:16-20; Mk. 6:43-45; Jn. 15:2; cf Jas. 2:14-26).

What does this look like practically speaking? Conversion is God’s work in the believer. It is not simply a decision on the believer’s part. What evidences or signs of conversion should a parent look for in their child to discern whether or not they understand the gospel and have become a genuine follower of Jesus?

- *Conviction* is the work of the Holy Spirit, who uses God’s laws and commands to bring sin and the necessity of trusting Christ home to the child’s conscience (2 Kings 22; Romans 7:7-9). Does your child demonstrate sorrow and remorse about his or her sin? Does your child recognize that he has sinned against God and not just against others? Does your child confess her sins to God and ask for his mercy without your prompting? Does your child demonstrate commitment to Christ in the midst of strong temptation to disobey?
- *Revelation* is the work of the Holy Spirit by which he reveals the thoughts of God to people so that a person may obtain a true understanding of Christ and his word (John 10:26-27; 1 Corinthians 2:6-16). Does your child understand that she is a sinner and cannot save herself? Does your child understand that his sins deserve death and punishment in hell? Does your child understand that Jesus died as a substitute for his sins? Does your child understand that she is saved only by God’s grace and not because of any good within herself? Does your child demonstrate an understanding of the Scriptures when they are taught or is your child confused by the Scriptures?
- *Regeneration* is the work of the Holy Spirit, who gives life to a dead soul, and produces a credible profession of repentance and faith (John 3; Romans 6; 10:9-10) as well as a new valuing of the Scriptures (John 6:45). Does your child demonstrate a genuine interest in spiritual things? Does your child pray or read the Scriptures on their own initiative? What sins have your children repented of? Does your child desire to talk with you about the Scriptures? How does your child demonstrate that he trusts Jesus? Does your child demonstrate a genuine desire to tell others about Jesus?

HISTORICAL CONSIDERATIONS

That one should be baptized upon his profession of faith is generally uncontroversial among Baptists. However, determining when a child’s profession of faith is discernibly credible isn’t without disagreement. This hasn’t always been the case, however. Until recently, most Baptist seemed to believe that a credible profession of faith required a degree of maturity.

We would be mistaken to conclude, however, that Baptists never baptized young children. For example, Charles Spurgeon regularly called for young children to repent and be baptized. In a sermon titled “High Doctrine and Broad Doctrine,” Spurgeon preached,

Do not think that you have to wait till you are grown up before you may come to Jesus. We have baptized quite a number of boys and girls of 10, 11, and 12. I spoke the other day with a little boy nine years of age and I tell you that he knew more about Christ than many gray-headed men do - and he loved Jesus most heartily!²

Himself baptized at fifteen, Spurgeon was a good example of a pastor who eagerly preached the importance of leading children to conversion, even though he patiently waited to baptize his own two sons - who may have been believers for years - until they were eighteen years old.

Generally speaking, this practice of delaying baptism until a person reaches their late teens or early twenties was common for Baptists throughout history. In fact, the baptism of children and young adolescents was rarely practiced. The relative liberality of Spurgeon and the Metropolitan Tabernacle appears restrictive when compared to the practices of modern day Baptists. Historian John Hammett comments,

Over the years the average age for baptisms among Baptists in North America has steadily declined. Prior to 1966, Southern Baptists did not even keep statistics on the number of preschoolers baptized, but denominational statisticians apparently became aware by then that it was a growing trend. Over the next twenty-three years, they saw the number of preschool baptisms triple. It is hard to see how these preschool children could have convinced earlier Baptists that they were in fact regenerate or competent to take on the duties and responsibilities of membership.³

More recently, between 1977 and 1997, there was a 250 percent increase in the number of baptisms of children under age six in SBC churches. Tragically, an enormous number of these early baptism were later determined to have been illegitimate. A 1993 study found that 60 percent of adult baptisms by SBC churches were “re-baptisms” of which more than half acknowledged a lack of regeneracy when they were first baptized.

Interestingly, these trends are not only recent, but also seem to be distinctly American. English Baptists have noted that Baptists in America, particularly Southern Baptists, tend to approve of baptizing people at a much younger age than do Baptists in England. Similarly, in other parts of the world, reports have shown that while there is generally no written rule, few would think of asking for baptism prior to the age of fourteen.

Many reasons have been suggested as to why the age of baptisms in American Baptist Churches have dropped so precipitously during the last century. Whatever those reasons may be, Mark Dever offers the following warning:

² Charles Spurgeon, “High Doctrine and Broad Doctrine” [sermon 1762] as found at <http://www.spurgeongems.org/vols28-30/chs1762.pdf>.

³ John Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 111-112.

Christians today should be careful about participating in well-intended but ill-fated baptisms that seems to have tragically resulted in the confirmation of millions of people in conversions that have evidently proved to be false. So-called Christians are deceived, churches are diminished in their power, and the witness of the gospel is confused and weakened.⁴

Recent trends notwithstanding, Baptists have historically appreciated the high spiritual stakes associated with baptizing individuals and bringing them into the membership of the church.

Returning to the issue at hand, what should we conclude from this too-brief historical snapshot? Namely, that Baptists throughout history and around the world have tended to believe that discerning the credibility of a child's profession of faith requires time and a certain degree of maturity. In the interests of guarding the purity and witness of their churches, Baptists have historically trended away from baptizing young children. Instead, they patiently waited until those children mature well into adolescence, at which time they are more able to demonstrate the visible fruits of genuine conversion and participate in the privileges, responsibilities, and discipline belonging to church membership.

CONSIDERATIONS FROM CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

Over the years, careful observation of children as they mature through childhood and adolescence has helped clarify what parents have known for millennia: Children increase in self-awareness, abstract thinking, recognition of implications, ability to trace consequences, and independent decision making as they age. Indeed it seems that, generally speaking, a child's intellectual capacity to make a self-aware, independent decision about his or her relationship with Christ increases significantly through the early adolescent years and into mid-adolescence.

Even more importantly, though, our ability to see and identify that kind of decision increases as the child ages. The fact is, the younger a child is, the more their values, identity, and beliefs are—and are *supposed to be*—tightly woven together with their parents' values, identity, and beliefs. Therefore, a younger child will likely have a hard time distinguishing their love for and obedience to Jesus from their love for and obedience to their parents. That reality is actually very good and very right.

Think of a young child's heart as a flower bud, tightly closed. The child loves Jesus, and he loves his parents, too. In fact, it's probably true at that young age that the child loves Jesus *because* he loves his parents; and it's probably also true at some level that he loves and obeys his parents *because* he loves and wants to obey Jesus. Those two loves are as inseparable as the petals of a budded flower, and at this stage, it is good and right that they should be so.

⁴ Mark Dever, "Baptism in the Context of the Local Church," in *Believer's Baptism*, eds. Thomas Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright (Nashville: Baker Academic, 2006), 347.

But here's the problem: In order to discern whether a profession of faith is *credible*, a church needs to be able to see whether a person's love for Jesus is really *for Jesus*, or if it is because of something else. We have to ask, when push comes to shove, if a person will follow Jesus or family, Jesus or friends, Jesus or acceptability, Jesus or self, if and when those things diverge. To do that kind of questioning and prodding in the heart of a young child, though—to pry in and try to distinguish between the two in order to determine if one exists independently of the other—would seem too much like trying to force some distance between that child's love for his parents and his love for Jesus, a distinction that isn't *supposed* to be there at that age. It would seem like trying to force the bud to open before its time.

By the latter years of early adolescence, however, and into mid-adolescence, it seems that the bud has in most cases begun to open on its own. Children of that age have begun naturally to question their childhood beliefs and adopt their own values. They are becoming self-aware, capable of critically evaluating Christianity, of making a personal decision about whether they really do believe in Jesus, and also of deciding whether they believe themselves to be a sinner in need of a Savior. In short, the flower has opened, the petals have separated a bit, and therefore we can see much more clearly—without prying—whether that person believes in Jesus of their own volition, or whether their early belief in him has fallen away as they've become more independent from their parents.

PASTORAL APPLICATION

As elders, we rejoice to see God's kindness in growing our families. We love to see children learning about God and the gospel, increasing their understanding of the whole Bible, and growing in spiritual discernment. We delight in the ministry of our church's members as they assist and equip parents to fulfill their disciple-making responsibilities at home. We eagerly seek and pray for the salvation of every single child, both our own children and those belonging to our parent-members, and want to do everything possible to encourage them in their love for Jesus.

To that end,

1. The elders of Crawford Avenue Baptist Church strongly recommend that parents wait until early adolescence (12-14 years old) before encouraging their children to request baptism and church membership. We want to be clear that this is a recommendation, not mandate. Children will be interviewed, and their readiness for baptism considered on a case-by-case basis. However, since the goal of a membership interview is to determine, as best as possible, the credibility of a child's profession of faith, we simply don't expect those conversations to be nearly as clear or fruitful as they would be at a later age.
2. We encourage parents to actively instruct their children in the facts of the gospel while prayerfully, patiently, and vigilantly seeking to identify the fruit of the gospel in their children's lives - namely conviction of sin and repentance, understanding and faith, and evidence of new life in Christ.
3. When a child begins to profess faith in Christ and inquire about baptism and church membership, we will joyfully join with that child's parents in considering

God's work in their child's life. An elder will meet with the parents initially to discuss the matters outlined above, and we will also seek to stay in close contact in order to mentor, counsel, and advise parents as they seek to lead their children in spiritual things.

4. At the conclusion of this study, the child will meet for an interview (or even a series of interviews) with his or her parents and one or more elders of the church. The purpose of these meetings is to discern, as well as we can, if the child understands and has personally and genuinely embraced the gospel.
5. If the elders are convinced that a child has given evidence of a genuine conversion, the child will be baptized and accepted into the fellowship and discipline of the church, and into all the rights and privileges of church membership.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. *What if my child is expressing faith in Christ? How can I encourage this faith?*
 - Continue to teach your children God's law and commands, which the Holy Spirit uses to bring conviction of sin (Deuteronomy 6).
 - Teach your children God's promises and speak plainly about their need to repent from sin and trust Christ (Acts 2:38-39).
 - Model and teach honesty and openness with the Lord in prayer in the midst of all situations (Lamentations 2:19ff).
 - Encourage your children to exercise disciplines such as prayer, Bible reading, and Bible memorization (Psalm 119:9-11; 144:12).
 - Include your children in both family and corporate worship gatherings (Exodus 12:26; 13:9, 14-16). A person's presence and participation in a Christian worship service can be a catalyst for helping them grow to understand the gospel (Psalm 8:2; 102:18; 1 Corinthians 14:24-25).
2. *What if I have older children or teenagers, but they are not receptive to spiritual things? What do I do?*
 - Pray for your children's salvation. Salvation is God's work. Do not be afraid to ask God to give your children saving faith (Matthew 6:7-11). Pray that the Holy Spirit will use your teaching, correction, and love as parents to show your kids God's holiness as well as their own sin and guilt (2 Kings 22; Romans 7:7-9). Pray that he will make your child's conscience tender and ready to hear the gospel (Galatians 4:1-5). Pray these prayers in front of your kids.
 - Talk to your children.
 - Talk to them about the benefits of obeying God and living with wisdom (Proverbs 3:13-18; 8:12-21; Exodus 20:12; Proverbs 1:8-9; 6:20-23; 7:1-3; 24:13-14; Ephesians 6:1-3).
 - Lovingly warn your children that failing to trust and obey God results in death and hell (Proverbs 12:1-2; 13:1; 15:32-33; 19:20, 27-29; 23:12; Luke 12:4-5).
 - Assure your children that Jesus offers forgiveness of sins and joy to those who trust him (Romans 5:8).

- Correct your children when they disobey. Remember mercy when correcting your children. A truly just punishment destroys, but Christ already has taken the rebukes and beatings our sins deserve. Repent and ask your children for forgiveness when you fail to be merciful (Psalm 39:10-11; Proverbs 13:24; 29:15; 1 Timothy 3:16; Ephesians 6:4; Psalm 6:1-2; 38:1; 39:11; Isaiah 53:4-5; Romans 5:8).

- Don't rush your children to be baptized if you feel they are not ready. Do not feel you have failed as a parent because you do not see fruit. Trust that God will work according to his own timetable (Philippians 1:6).

- Ask for help. God has put us in community together so that we can help one another. Don't be afraid or embarrassed to ask one of our elders or another church member for help.

3. *What if my child was baptized at another church before our family came to Crawford?*

- By asking parents to wait until their children are twelve years old to present them for baptism, we are not saying that a genuine baptism cannot occur before age 12. If a child was baptized as a believer at another church before coming to Crawford, we will not ask that this child be baptized again.

- Children baptized at another church will usually be required to go through the church membership process outlined above before being identified as members at Crawford. These children should wait to participate in communion until this process is complete. One purpose of Crawford's process for childhood membership is to test a child's heart to ensure that they have the maturity and understanding necessary to take communion in a worthy way.

4. *What if my child has trusted Christ, but they have not been baptized? Can he or she take communion?*

The Church's Practice in History – Throughout the history of the church—for the past 2,000 years—people have traditionally waited for baptism to celebrate communion. Baptism has been considered an initiation rite, that is, baptism celebrated one's entrance into the believing community. The Lord's Table, on the other hand, was the community meal open to all who had declared their unity with the believing body through baptism. Thus, to the leaders of the early church, baptism should precede one's participation in the Lord's Table. It is interesting to note that a similar arrangement was seen with the Old Covenant rites of circumcision (initiation into the community) and the Passover (the community meal). For this reason parents should encourage their children to wait until they are baptized before partaking in the Lord's Table.

Paul's Warning – In 1 Corinthians 11: 27-29 Paul writes, "Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be

guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly.” We can see from these verses that Paul is concerned that people do not partake of the Lord’s Table in an unworthy manner. He instructs his readers to test the attitude of their own hearts and actions and their awareness of the significance of the supper. Each person should examine their genuineness of his faith and life so as to avoid taking upon himself the Lord’s judgement.

- In light of these two concerns, Crawford’s pastoral leadership advises parents not to allow their children to participate in the Lord’s Supper until after they have been baptized. If for the above reasons one is inclined to encourage his child to wait, take note of the following:
 - Make waiting positive. Instead of only focusing on why your child shouldn’t partake, focus on your eager anticipation that they will partake. If you can do so truthfully, let your child know how you have seen the Lord’s work in their lives, and how you look for them to grow. Encourage them to continue trusting Christ. Children in whom the Spirit is at work will be aware of their sins. Do not encourage children to be introspective and worried about their faults. Point them to Christ and assure them of your confidence that since he has begun a good work in them, he will finish it (Philippians 1:6).
 - While you wait, prepare. If your children are with you during the communion service, allow them to hold your hand as you hold the elements. Allow them to quietly observe you as you take each element. Share with them how much the Lord loved us to give His life for us. Pray with them thanking the Lord for His death and life.
 - Set an example of worthy partaking. If bitterness or anger or any sin troubles you, do not partake. This will show your child that you are serious about Paul’s admonition that we should not partake of the Table in an unworthy way.

5. What if my child has not been baptized, but has already been partaking of the Lord’s Supper?

As stated above, our counsel is that you not continue allowing your child to take communion until after he or she has finished the childhood baptism process. We recognize that this may be discouraging to a child that has already been taking the Lord’s Supper, and he or she may view this teaching as a punishment. Our counsel is that you lovingly explain the matters discussed in question 4 (above) to your child. Tell them of your desire to honor the Lord and Crawford’s leadership by submitting to this teaching. Then, encourage them to continue trusting Christ.

6. *What if I am convinced that my child is not ready for baptism and church membership, but he is feeling peer-pressure because he sees friends being baptized or taking communion?*

- Ask questions. Peer-pressure provides an excellent opportunity for parents to talk with their children about the gospel, baptism, and communion. Ask your children, “Why do you want to be baptized?” “Do you only want to be baptized because your friend was baptized?” “What do you understand baptism to signify?” Asking probing questions will help you, as the shepherds of your home, to understand your child’s heart.
- Be honest. If you are convinced that your child is not embracing the gospel, talk honestly with them about errors in their understanding or sin in the life. Encourage them to repent from sins or submit to the Bible’s teaching, and pray with them for God’s help.
- Make waiting positive. Instead of only focusing on why your child shouldn’t partake, focus on your eager anticipation that they will partake. If you can do so truthfully, let your child know how you have seen the Lord’s work in their lives, and how you look for them to grow. Encourage them to continue trusting Christ. Children in whom the Spirit is at work will be aware of their sins. Do not encourage children to be introspective and worried about their faults. Point them to Christ and assure them of your confidence that since he has begun a good work in them, he will finish it (Philippians 1:6).

7. *What do I say to other parents if they call into question our family’s decisions on these matters?*

- Be open. Don’t be embarrassed about sharing your convictions with others in our community. God intentionally created us to grow in community with others. Change occurs in community when we seek to life by faith together—loving one another, supporting one another, and holding one another accountable (Galatians 2:20; 2 Corinthians 7:3). This kind of gospel community is short changed if we are not talking with one another.
- Be forgiving. Remember that this is a matter in which the Scriptures are not perfectly clear. Families in our community will come to different conclusions about these things. Do not judge others because your approach is different (Romans 14:1-23).

8. *What if I don’t have kids, but I work with the children’s ministry at Crawford? How can I encourage a child who expresses faith in Christ without overstepping or pressuring the child?*

- Stress the facts of the gospel. Teach children God’s laws and commands, which the Holy Spirit uses to bring conviction of sin (Deuteronomy 6). Then, teach them God’s promises and plainly speak about their need to repent from sin and trust Christ (Acts 2:38-39).

- Encourage under-churched children to come to CrawforKids' regular gatherings. God saves sinners through exposure to His preached and taught word. Pray that the ministry of CrawforKids will influence every child that walks through our doors.
- Recognize that children are easily deceived and manipulated (Ephesians 4:14), and, just like adults, they may be tempted to find assurance in things they can manipulate—their own knowledge, emotional experiences, prayers, or good works. Discourage children from finding assurance in such things, and encourage them to trust Jesus alone.
- Do not offer false assurances or pressure children for commitments. Do not assure children that a prayer for mercy (a “sinner’s prayer”) guarantees their eternal destiny. It does not. Salvation is a work of God. We must teach children that assurance is found in Jesus Christ and his work alone.
- Do not be skeptical about a child’s sincerity. Although we want to be careful not to give a child a false sense of security, neither do we want to unwittingly discourage children from believing that God can grant them saving faith as a child.
- Trust God to work in the hearts of his children to bring them to himself through faith, in his time and in his ways. Your responsibility is to faithfully tell the gospel to them and leave the results to the Lord (Philippians 1:6). We can trust that the Holy Spirit will assure those who are truly changed (Rom 8:16).

9. *What if a child—on her own initiative—says she is trusting in Christ?*

- Express joy, but use discernment about validating that expression as one of saving faith. Offer encouragement to her to continue placing her trust in Christ throughout her life. If a child from a believing family speaks with you about the gospel, let her parents know the questions their child is asking. Parents are called to be the primary shepherds of their children, and they should be closely involved when their children are asking these questions. Encourage parents, with the support of Crawford’s leadership, to discern their child’s heart carefully.
- If a child from an under-churched family speaks with you about the gospel, let the CrawforKids leadership know so we can explain the gospel clearly to the child’s parents, let them know about the questions their child is asking, encourage them to continue bringing their child to CrawforKids, and build a relationship with them.