

UNDERSTANDING TODAY'S

Children

Developing Tomorrow's Leaders Today

Jerry Aldridge

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Introduction

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Have you ever just watched and listened to the boys and girls in your group as they enjoy their activities? As a parent, have you sat back and enjoyed watching and listening to your child or children? If so, you are well aware of how they differ from one another as well as how they are similar. If not, you are encouraged to do so during your next session, or stop now and go enjoy your children.

God has truly blessed you with the opportunity to teach and/or parent today's children. You have the timeless opportunity to influence the leaders of tomorrow as you guide your boys and girls during these important years. In fact, the children in your group or home today will take Jesus Christ to a world you will never know. God is using everything you are doing with them to guide your children to lay spiritual foundations that will last their lifetimes. Upon these spiritual foundations they will let God minister through them to their world.

Why should you take the time to watch and listen to your boys and girls? They are sending you messages and signals that help you understand the way God made them. God created each one of them in His image and to glorify Him. The more you understand them, the more you understand their Creator. In this sense, teaching and parenting children is an act of worship that is pleasing to God.

In addition, God is teaching you how to teach and parent your children. He has given you these children as gifts with the promise to guide you to be the best parent and/or teacher. That is what this book is about. It is designed to be a tool for both parents and teachers in understanding the common characteristics and needs that God gives all children. This book also provides insights and suggestions in accepting and helping children deal with various life situations in which they might find themselves. Through prayer, God will help you understand each unique child and his unique life situation.

When you understand your children individually the way God created them and their life situations, you are truly able to let God use you in their lives. For example, when you accept that children are sensitive, you will know to teach them in ways that allow them to stay in their comfort zones. God made them to be sensitive, so why would you get upset when a child gets upset over something trivial from your perspective? With this understanding, carefully plan learning opportunities that will avoid making a child feel uncomfortable.



Consequently, effective teaching and parenting are based on a positive understanding of the way God created boys and girls and their life situations.

Appreciation

The author of this resource is Dr. Jerry Aldridge. He is a member of Dawson Memorial Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, where he directs The Happy Singers choir for persons with disabilities. Jerry is a popular author and conference leader throughout the Southern Baptist Convention.

Professionally, Jerry is the coordinator of early childhood education in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. He has a B.S. degree from Livingston University, an M.A. in special education, an M.A. in early childhood education, an educational specialist degree (ED.S.), and an Ed.D from the University of Alabama. After completing his doctorate, Jerry completed further study at Clemson University, Bank Street College, Samford University, and the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Dr. Aldridge not only serves his church and university, but he is also an active member of several professional organizations. He is currently the president of the United States National Committee of the World Organization for Early Childhood Education. He serves on the publications committee of the Association for Childhood Education International. He is the State of Alabama early childhood education subject matter specialist where he reviews all early childhood education teacher education programs for the State Department of Education.

In 1997, Dr. Aldridge won the President's Award for Excellence in Classroom Teaching for the School of Education at UAB. He has also been included in Outstanding Young Men of American and was elected twice to the Birmingham Jaycee's Congress of Outstanding Young Citizens. He has been quoted in Parenting Magazine, The Chicago Sun Times, USA Today, and he has appeared on the Health News Network and CNN Headline News.

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Vickie Allen, LifeWay Christian Resources (Music)
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Suggestions for Ways to Use This Resource

As you read and study each article, consider your own children. You will not find pictures of children in this resource because we want to provide you with an inexpensive tool for developing your teaching skills. We also want you to think of your children. To enhance your experience with this book, take pictures of your boys and girls as a group then individually. Lay the pictures on the table nearby as you read the articles. As a parent, you probably have many pictures to use for this purpose.

As you read an article, apply the discussion to each child. How does the information relate to him or her? Use the discussion to prompt a desire to know more about each child. As you reflect on each discussion, you will find questions to guide your reflection.

In order to meet your needs as parents and teachers, you have choices as to how you will engage this resource. Some of you have access to the Internet and enjoy learning from electronic media. Others of you prefer print material that you can see, touch, and smell. In addition, as a church leader, you may want to consider using this resource in bits and pieces instead of giving your teachers the entire resource at one time. Whatever your approach, select one or more of the following options for using this resource:

1. Online: click on www.lifeway.com/kidtrek/understanding.asp for a free online copy of this resource.
2. Download: click on www.lifeway.com/kidtrek/understanding.asp to download the resource at no cost. You are welcome to make copies for others in your church or school. Or print out specific articles as you need them.
3. Text: A text is available for \$5.95 plus shipping. Call 1-800-458-2772 to order. Please allow three weeks for printing and shipping.

As you use this resource, resist the temptation to compare the boys and girls. Development in all areas has a wide range for what is considered “normal.” This wide range means children will develop skills at their own rates and in their own ways. The more you understand each child, the more effective you will be as a parent and teacher for each individual child.

Leadership Development Resource Series

This resource is part of a series of leadership resources designed to equip teachers and parents as they let God use them in the lives of children. The information you will explore in this resource answers the “who” and “why” questions. Who do we teach? Why do we teach the way we do? The “what” question will always be answered with the Bible. The Bible guides us in becoming Christlike in all that we do and say. It is our source of information that leads us to our living Lord.

The resources listed below that help teachers and parents learn “how” to teach children. They are the basic teaching books that provide information about the teaching methods that work well at home and at church. You will also

find below the resources that answer the “when” and “where” questions regarding teaching children. These are the administration resources for the various ministries that assist parents in guiding their children to God. In addition to this resource and the Bible, additional resources are listed below and are available by calling 1-800-458-2772:

Parents:

ParentLife magazine

Parenting by Grace: Discipline and Spiritual Growth

Children's Choir:

Teaching Children: Laying Foundations for Faith

Discipline, Who Needs It?

Plans and Pluses

Children in ActionSM:

Teaching Children: Laying Foundations for Faith

Five Steps to the Great Commission: A Study of the WMU Tasks

Discipleship Training:

Teaching Children: Laying Foundations for Faith

Transformational Discipleship: Your Church Helping People Be Like Jesus

Share Jesus Without Fear

Girls in Action[®]:

Teaching Children: Laying Foundations for Faith

Girls in Action Guide

Girls in Action Leader Plan Book

Mission KidsSM:

Mission Kids Volume I (Revised)

Royal Ambassadors:

Leading Royal Ambassadors: The Classic Method

Sunday School:

Teaching Children: Laying Foundations for Faith

Good News for Kids: The Power to Change Lives

Children's Sunday School for a New Century

Learning Approaches



Do all children learn the same way, or does each child have an individual learning style? This question has been debated since adults first attempted to teach those between the ages of 6 and 12.

What do you think?

Teachers who disagree on how children learn may still believe that all children learn the same way. For example, some adults believe that all children learn the same way—by being rewarded for memorizing or spitting back what the teacher tells them. Others disagree with this, saying that simply repeating or giving a correct answer is not learning. They call this pseudolearning or “false” learning because a child may not understand what she has memorized.

However, the same people who criticize pseudolearning often believe that all children learn in the same way. They believe all children construct their own knowledge inside their heads by interacting with others and materials. These teachers believe that all children make connections with what they already know, and, thus, all children learn the same way.

What do you think?

Other instructors and parents think differently. They believe that all children are unique and learn in different ways. Each and every child has his or her own unique learning style or preference. We can talk about learning styles or preferences in at least five ways. These include preferences for (1) the environment, (2) how they take in the information, (3) whether they want to work alone or with others, (4) the time of day they learn, and (5) movement.

The environment. A husband and wife team, Kenneth and Rita Dunn, have researched students' preferences for certain environments. They focused on four variables: bright versus soft lighting, formal versus informal seating, cool versus warm temperatures, and the need for some quiet versus sound.

Think about your own preferences. These preferences are individual. Some of us like bright lights and informal seating or warm temperature and some music in the background. Generally, younger children prefer less light, and boys like informal seating, but it is hard to generalize since each person has unique preferences. (For more information see Rita Dunn, Jeffrey S. Beaudry, and Angela Klavas, "Survey of Research on Learning Styles" *Educational Leadership*, March 1989.)

How they take in information. We all take in information through our senses, but children also have distinct preferences for receiving information. We learn through our eyes, ears, and through movement and touch. The fancy names for these terms are visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile. American children are strongly encouraged to focus on visual learning. This is quite noticeable in how we teach children and in the popular culture at large. For example, reading is highly encouraged and considered to be part of the three *Rs* which are the basics of education.

Children can hardly listen to anything today without some visual aide being provided. Hit songs now have accompanying videos, seen frequently on television. Even many worship services are enhanced with video clips or PowerPoint presentations.

This not only involves preferences, but children actually have strengths in one or more senses when learning. Consider the following true story. Jerry was musically talented and took piano lessons once a week. Soon after he



began taking piano, he could play almost any simple tune he had heard. His piano teacher did not like this at all. When the instructor thought Jerry was relying too much on his ear, she would scold him by saying, “You’re playing by ear again. Look at the notes!” Sometimes she would even slap his hands when she thought he was relying too much on what he had heard.

How would you handle this?

Jerry’s piano teacher should have looked at his playing by ear as a strength. This is not to say that he should not learn to play by looking at the notes. On the contrary, since this was his weakness, he did need to focus on the visual. However, the teacher could have encouraged him by saying something like this. “You know, Jerry, you have a really good ear and can play many things that you have heard. Lots of people wish they could do this too. However, you need to improve at reading the notes. I’ll make a deal with you. I’ll play this piece if you will promise to look at the notes carefully and focus on them. Then you will be better at using your eyes to play the piano.” This way, the teacher could use Jerry’s strengths (listening) to help with his weakness (reading music).

Younger children often learn best when movement is involved—when they are handling objects, manipulating materials, and moving around. If you want a child to learn about an apple, then you bring one to class. Give children the opportunity to taste it, touch it, eat it, or make applesauce.

So how do you help children who have different ways of taking in information? One way is to plan for all types of learning so that all children will be reached in some way. When you are teaching a lesson, make sure you

provide many visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile experiences. That way all children will benefit.

Working alone or with others. When children are asked to tell the teacher what they liked best and least about a particular lesson or activity, the instructor often gets some of the following comments. “I didn’t like working with my group.” And, “The best thing about this was working with my friends. “This is to be expected because some children prefer working alone and others like to work in pairs or groups.

How can an adult work with children who have different likes and dislikes about group work?

Some suggestions include (1) having options of working in a group or alone, and (2) including both individual and group work during a particular session. The first option may not be appropriate if children who want to work alone are criticized or thought to be unsociable.

How can you make the child who likes to work alone feel a part of group work—especially when other children might criticize the student for not wanting to work on a given project with others?

The time of day. Different cultures have different ideas about time. Americans work and live under the idea that first thing in the morning is the



most important part of the day. If children are going to learn something, they need to learn it early. This may be true for some children, but it is not true for all children. Each individual child has a daily clock in which a certain time of day is most optimal for learning. Some children are afternoon children—not morning children.

What can a church volunteer do about this when specific times are scheduled?

Fortunately, many church activities are not too early or too late, so this should not be a major problem.

Movement. Some children like to sit and work; and when they are interested, they can sit for hours at a time. Many children prefer active learning where there is a lot of movement. Young children, particularly those in grades one through three, prefer lots of movement and often need it for the best learning experiences.

While most children cannot sit all the time or move all the time, an important distinction needs to be made about movement. We cannot generalize about movement without looking at what is going on in the room. When children are asked to be in a large group, the double-the-age rule may apply. What is the double-the-age rule? Children should not sit in a large group or whole class formal activity (where they are expected to sit still) for more than double their age. For example, an 8-year-old should not be expected to sit for more than 15 or 20 minutes. However, the double-the-age rule does not apply when children are working individually or in small groups. In fact, if they are absorbed in what they are doing, they need large blocks of time in which to explore and learn.

How can you structure your sessions to balance the whole class with small group or individual projects?

For teaching ideas, use the following resource: *Teaching Children: Laying Foundations for Faith* by Chris Ward, David Morrow, Anne Tonks, and James Hargrave (available by calling 1-800-458-2772).

For curriculum resources, consider the following:

Sunday School (available by calling 1-800-458-2772)

- Children Bible Foundations
- Children Family Bible Study

Discipleship Training (available by calling 1-800-458-2772)

- TeamKid
- FUNdamentals

Girls in Action[®] (available by calling 1-800-968-7301)

- Aware

Children in ActionSM (available by calling 1-800-968-7301)

- Missions MATCHFILE

Children's Choir (available by calling 1-800-458-2772)

- Children's Choir PAK
- Music Makers PAK
- Young Musicians PAK

Royal Ambassadors (available by calling 1-800-448-8032)

- Lad Leader Edition
- Crusader Leader Edition

Day Camping (available by calling 1-800-458-2772)

- Day Camping Anytime: 10 Complete Weeks of All-Day Bible-Centered Curriculum

Multiple Intelligences



For most of the 20th century, teachers have believed in something called an “intelligence quotient” or IQ. IQ tests were originally designed to see who was qualified to enter the military. Later they were used to see which students in school did not fit in the normal category. They were used to determine which children were in need of special help—whether they were on the smart or slow end of the IQ scale.

Then in the 1980s, Howard Gardner of Harvard University really began to question IQ testing. The IQ tests given in schools measured only a few areas such as mathematical or verbal reasoning. If a child was good at math or language, he or she would do well on the IQ test. However, if the child had strengths in other areas but not so much in math or language, he or she might not do well on an IQ test. Howard said that we have been asking the wrong question about children for many years. We have been asking, “How smart is this child?” when we should have been asking, “How is this child smart?” Dr. Gardner originally identified seven different types of intelligence. Later, in the 1990s, he developed ideas on an eighth intelligence. The eight intelligences according to Gardner include: (1) mathematical logical, (2) linguistic, (3) musical, (4) visual/spatial, (5) bodily kinesthetic, (6) interpersonal, (7) intrapersonal, and (8) naturalist. (For more information see Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* [New York: Basic Books, 1983] and K. Checkley, “The First Seven . . . and the Eighth: A Conversation with Howard Gardner,” *Educational Leadership*, September 1997.)

This is a different view of intelligence from the IQ view. The IQ view assumes that children are born with a certain amount of intelligence. If we looked at a glass of water as a metaphor for the child’s intelligence, we could say that some children received almost a full glass while others might have a glass three-fourths full. With this in mind, it was thought that if a child was in a car accident and had a severe brain injury then that child might have only one-half glass and that all areas of intelligence would be influenced. This is simply not true. According to Gardner’s work with injured soldiers and stroke victims in a Boston hospital, different people had different problems depending upon the area of the brain that was affected.

Mathematical logical intelligence. Some children are good at math and reasoning. Math or science may be the favorite subject in school for children with this type of intelligence. They are good at computing, experimenting, searching for patterns, and are drawn to the rational.

Linguistic intelligence. Storytelling, reading, writing, and games like Scrabble® are often favorite activities of those who excel in linguistic intelligence. English and social studies are sometimes their favorite subjects.

Musical intelligence. Children who are great at singing or playing a musical instrument have this type of intelligence. They may also have the ability to compose music and take an interest in music during their spare time.

Visual/spatial intelligence. Jigsaw puzzles, drawing, geometry, and photography are examples of things that fascinate someone with visual/spatial intelligence. These children have potential for becoming great illustrators, architects, interior decorators, or computer graphics designers.

Bodily kinesthetic intelligence. The ability to move their bodies is a major characteristic of children with bodily kinesthetic intelligence. Great athletes, dancers, gymnasts, and acrobats are examples.

Interpersonal. Many children have great leadership potential. They are natural leaders and have the ability to capture others' attention. They are good at captivating an audience and are often popular.

Intrapersonal intelligence. Children who have intrapersonal intelligence know themselves. They know their own strengths and weaknesses and often make good counselors when they grow up because they help others develop this intelligence in themselves.

Naturalist. The latest type of intelligence identified by Gardner is the naturalist. These individuals are good at identifying plant and animal life and enjoy nature.

How can we address multiple intelligences in church settings? The first thing we can do is to change our attitudes about intelligence. God gave every child at least one type of intelligence, and we can help find it and cultivate it. Attitude makes the difference. Here is one example.

David is a second-grader who cannot read or write on a first-grade level.

Multiple Intelligences



However, he has visual/spatial intelligence and is an incredible artist. His teacher at school says things like, “Poor old David. He sure is dumb. He can’t read nor write, but he sure can draw.” His teacher looks at him with the “old IQ” eyes. But according to Gardner, David is not dumb at all. He has visual/spatial intelligence.

How can you encourage and use David’s intelligence in a church setting?

Another way we can address multiple intelligences in church settings is to look for ways to incorporate all of the intelligences into our teaching strategies.

How can you plan a lesson using multiple intelligences?

Brain Development

One of the most recent developments in our understanding of children has come from brain research. Much of the brain research has focused on the importance of early childhood education, but a lot of what we have learned from brain research is directly applicable to the elementary school years. Pat Wolfe and Ron Brandt, in the article "What Do We Know from Brain Research?" in *Educational Leadership* (November 1998), have synthesized the practical points educators and parents can glean. This article describes four specific findings: (1) the brain changes as a result of experience; (2) IQ is not fixed; (3) some abilities are acquired during sensitive periods of learning; and (4) emotions have a strong influence on learning.

The brain changes as a result of experience but not just any experience. Children's brains are innately curious, social, and collaborative. The brain does not progress by taking in meaningless data. It develops best in an enriched environment in which children have opportunities to understand and make sense out of what they are learning. For this reason, certain activities such as memorization and completing worksheets should be limited.

What types of activities can you do in church settings to tap into children's curiosity? What are ways you can encourage children to work together in collaboration on projects? How can you make this more meaningful?



Intelligence is not fixed. The more enriched the environment, the greater the chance a child will increase his or her IQ. But what is an enriched environment? By enriched we don't simply mean more is better. In fact, many people have been in elementary classrooms in which they felt overwhelmed by all the junk in the room, on the walls, and even hanging from the ceiling. Enrichment is more a qualitative difference than a quantitative one. For example, covering lots of topics on the surface is not enrichment. Going into more depth on fewer topics is enrichment.

In what ways can you enrich your environment to help children become all God created them to be? How can you plan for more in-depth study of the Bible rather than a quick tour? How can you focus more on what is truly important?

The brain is sensitive to particular periods for optimal learning.

However, this time frame may be over several years. For example, we know that children are more likely to learn a foreign language well if they begin learning it before the age of 10. After the age of 10, it becomes more and more difficult. The same is true for social skills such as making and keeping friends. Young children who have started making friends in elementary school are more likely to continue developing friendships (at a higher level) than if they did not start making friends during childhood.

How can you help children learn about God during this important and critical period for spiritual growth? How can you know when children are in a sensitive period for optimal learning?

Emotions have a strong influence on learning. Emotions play important roles in brain development and student learning. For example, the more passionate a child is about something, the more likely he or she is going to learn it. The more excited a child is about something, the more likely that child is to remember details about it. The brain knows that this is important to the child and will remember and organize it.

Emotions are also related to stress. Just how much stress is important or detrimental to learning? A mild level of stress is sometimes helpful to learning. This often has to do with fair and consistent discipline. Children who know the rules and also know they are expected to follow them are more likely to pay attention and learn if the learning activities are interesting. However, too much stress is detrimental. Too much stress interferes with brain activity. We see this in schools quite often with math phobia or reading difficulties. More recently we have seen an increase in school fears in general because of safety issues. Some children realistically fear for their health and safety in schools where children bring guns, knives, and other weapons. Such a place is not conducive for learning because too much stress influences the brain.



How can you help make children feel safe and secure in church while simultaneously challenging them with new or novel ideas that stimulate the brain?

One of the largest issues in brain development is parenting. Parents influence a child's brain development far more than we previously believed. For example, children who are abused are much more likely to develop a history of arrest, more likely to commit a violent crime. Even if there is not neurological or brain damage from physical abuse, neglect still has a long-term, damaging influence on children. However, there are many things parents can do to enhance brain development. These include reading to children every day. That's right—even through the elementary school years. Parents who talk, play, and even sing with their children are more likely to enhance their children's brain power and emotional growth. Parents can also work to provide a safe, healthy environment for their children. Parents who spend time with their children and encourage them are helping their children become what God created them to be. In what ways can you help parents in supporting their children's brain development?

How can you provide them with information that might help them with this?

The Importance of Parent-Child Bonding

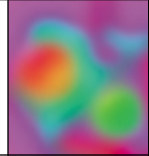
Parents have the greatest impact on their children's learning. While most people might agree with this statement for the preschool years, some might wonder how this can continue to be true during the elementary school years. Think about it. Parents determine most of their child's learning situations. They determine what language or dialect the child speaks, where the child lives, how the child will be educated, and what church or religious institution the child will attend, if any. For this reason, the importance of parent-child bonding is crucial for the child's learning and well-being.

We used to think of bonding as occurring shortly after birth. In the 1960s and 1970s, many hospital delivery facilities were reorganized to take bonding more seriously. It was believed that the child bonded by close contact with both mother and father during the early hours after birth. Today we know that bonding can occur later, even during the elementary school years. Parents today are adopting children of elementary school age from Russia, Romania, China, and other countries. These children still have many opportunities to bond with their new parents and learn to trust them. This is essential for a child if he or she is to adopt the family's lifestyle, values, and spiritual ideals.

However, parent-child bonding appears to be more difficult with each generation. A century ago the family was a cohesive unit in which all members worked together for a common goal. Many families lived and worked together on the farm. Then father went off to work, and the closeness of family contact, particularly between father and children, decreased. In the 21st century, close contact continues to diminish as divorce, single-parent homes, and longer working hours separate families from one another. More children each year join elementary after-school care, and children are spending less time at home. This does not necessarily paint a bleak picture. It does mean, though, that parents must work hard to spend more time with their children, teaching them their values and encouraging the children in their God-given uniqueness.

In an article that appeared in the *Denver Post* on September 26, 1999, David Campbell described how kids' biggest New Year's wish could not be granted by schools. Only parents could grant their wish. What was that wish? It was for parents to spend more time with their kids. According to Campbell,

The Importance of Parent-Child Bonding



most kids would rather read a book with their parents than watch TV. This is no joke. Kids need and want parents to spend much more time with them. Children see this as the solution to the recent episodes of school violence, and they also see it as the key to their learning and development.

How can you spend more time with your own children? How can you incorporate the parents into the children's program at church, inviting them to share and participate in their children's learning? How can you encourage parents to read the Bible and discuss the passage with their children?

Spiritual Growth in Children

The elementary school years are an important time of spiritual growth.

According to James Hargrave and David Morrow in *Sunday School for a New Century* (LifeWay, 1999), several important points can be made about children's spiritual growth. Some of the most important include: (1) Children develop values and attitudes through example. (2) Children are capable of responding to Bible stories in a variety of ways. (3) Children often ask important questions concerning God's Word. (4) The Holy Spirit directs children when God determines the time they are called to saving faith through Jesus.

Children develop values and attitudes through example. Children learn spiritual values through observation, imitation, and modeling. A good example is Bible reading. Parents and teachers at church often tell children to read their Bibles daily. Telling is not the same thing as teaching. Example is necessary to provide the best possible environment for children to grow as Jesus did as a child—in wisdom and in favor with God and man (Luke 2:52). Example is best accomplished through interaction between parents and children. Parents who read and discuss the Bible with their children are more likely to have children who read the Bible and develop spiritually.

What values and attitudes do you model for the children with whom you work? What spiritual values and attitudes do you wish to encourage by example?



Children are capable of responding to Bible stories. They can respond in a variety of ways. Some children are good at music or literature; others are good at math or drawing. This is important to remember when it comes to spiritual growth. Children can express their spiritual growth and understanding in numerous ways—especially in responding to Bible stories. Children need options in which to express their knowledge and understanding.

What are some ways you can help children respond to Bible stories? How can you help children use the gifts God gave them to represent Bible stories?

Children also ask important questions concerning God's Word.

Children in the elementary grades still want to know why. They often ask why God acted in a certain way or why a certain event happened. During these sacred moments we must listen carefully to children and not offer simple, superficial answers to their difficult questions. In many instances we can simply say we don't know why. As the Scriptures tell us, "The foolishness of God is wiser than the wisest man" (1 Cor. 1:25). On many other occasions we can guide children in seeing the bigger picture of God's plan through responding to their questions. For example, what would you say if a child asked: "Why did God allow Joseph's brothers to sell him into slavery? Why didn't God protect Joseph from this?"

Spiritual Growth in Children

Here is an opportunity to talk about how God has a plan for every life. When something bad happens, we may not see it as God sees it. Had Joseph not gone to Egypt, he would not have been able to share his gift with Pharaoh. We can discuss how God is present and working in our lives even when we don't like what has happened to us.

The Holy Spirit directs children when God determines the time in which a person is called to saving faith through Jesus. During childhood many children receive Christ. Teachers and parents can help by providing an example of what it means to be a Christian, by explaining the plan of salvation, by listening to children, and by watching for the time when the Holy Spirit moves. This is a critical time, leading to the most important event in a child's life. We want to help lead a child in God's direction and not be a stumbling block.

How can you assist children in accepting Christ when the time is right and when the Holy Spirit leads? How can you truly listen to children and discern when they are ready?

Mental Growth in Children



A Sunday School class of fifth-graders had just finished studying Moses. The teacher decided to review the class on important events related to Moses' life and prepared a question-and-answer game. One of the questions was "where is Moses buried?" It was Evan's turn to answer the question. Looking confused, he replied, "Is Moses dead?" Don, another member of the class jumped in and commented, "Course he's dead, dummy. Just because you didn't get an invitation to his funeral doesn't mean he hasn't died." The teacher felt like a failure. How could the class have missed this? The answer to this question can be found in children's mental growth.

Children think differently from adults. Although children between the ages of 6 and 12 have made great strides in their thinking since the preschool years, they still have trouble with certain concepts. One of these is found in the above illustration. Children in elementary school often have difficulty understanding historical time. Let's now look at other ways children think differently from adults and how this develops. Some of the major characteristics of mental growth for children from 6 to 12 include: (1) concrete operations, (2) learning by cooperating and sharing viewpoints, (3) changes in attention, (4) improvements in memory, (5) advances in classification abilities, (6) improvements in evaluation, and (7) major strides in literacy (reading and writing) development.

Concrete operations. Children of elementary age can solve problems, but those problems must be experienced in concrete ways. They are not yet able to solve many abstract questions. For example, the following problem would be difficult for most elementary children. "How many of you use salt and pepper when you eat? Now help me solve this problem. If pepper is white, what color is salt?" Most elementary children are thrown by this question and insist that pepper is black. Even if you say, "I know that pepper is black, but let's pretend it's white." Many children will respond by trying to convince you that pepper is black. They cannot hypothesize like adults. (For more information see Constance Kamii, *Young Children Reinvent Arithmetic* [New York: Teachers College Press, 2000].)

Learning by cooperating and sharing viewpoints. While most preschool children cannot take the viewpoint of another person, elementary children can.

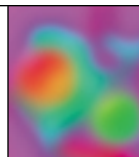
Mental Growth in Children

This is important to mental growth because children can now learn from one another by discussing issues and sharing viewpoints. Elementary children are much more likely to remember something if they have to explain their thinking and then consider someone else's ideas. This is especially true in math. Here is an example. If a teacher asks, "How much is $4 + 11 + 18$?" a few different answers may be given. If one child says "32" and another child says "33," it is most helpful to let them explain how they got their answers. By doing this, the child who came up with 32 is likely to see how he made his mistake and remember the next time. It is much less helpful if the teacher simply says, "The answer is 33."

While children can explain things, share ideas, and cooperate, such ability does not always come automatically. Teachers must remind children that we must respect one another. For example, when we have differences of opinion, we must listen to one another and show respect.

Elementary school children can benefit tremendously by working in cooperative and collaborative groups. If we want children to work with others, we have to provide opportunities for them to work together on lessons and projects.

How can you arrange your classroom so children will work on projects together? How can you help children develop respect for one another when they have disputes and differences of opinion?



Changes in attention. Younger children are not able to tune out irrelevant information. However, as children reach first and second grade, they are able to tune out unimportant information. You can explore this characteristic with your group. Tell your children that a boy and a girl will both be speaking some different words at the same time. Ask them to pay attention to and remember only what the girl said. Preschool children are much less likely to be able to remember what the girl says. They cannot discriminate as well as elementary children.

Selective attention also increases with age. As children go through school, they get better and better at paying attention to important information and using it in solving problems. They can discern what is important and what should receive their attention in order to achieve the goal at hand.

Since older children are better able to pay attention to more important things, how can you design your classroom to capitalize on this new thinking ability?

Improvements in memory. Memory is important to success in the primary and intermediate grades. Fortunately, children at this age are now capable of developing strategies to help them remember. These include clustering, associating, and chunking.

Clustering occurs when children group things into categories to help them remember information. For example, if elementary children are shown 20 pictures and asked to remember as many as they can, they will usually try to group them. They might try to remember the animals, the plants, the buildings, or any other items which can be clustered together.

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Associating has to do with relating information to what they already know. For example, if children are asked to spell the word separate, they may think, *I know how to spell rat and there's a rat in separate.*

Chunking occurs when someone groups things in a series to remember it better. An example is numbers. If a child is supposed to remember his grandparents' telephone number (including area code), he might chunk the numbers into groups of three or four such as 504-555-6721. Elementary children are better at chunking information than younger children. Younger children do not use chunking and therefore usually remember strings of numbers one by one or they simply forget it.

Since elementary children are better able to remember things, how can you make sure that what you are asking them to know and remember is truly important?

Advances in classification abilities. Children's classification abilities really increase from ages six to twelve. A preschooler can classify things in only one or two ways, but elementary children can classify things in multiple ways. As children get older, they are better able to classify things included in other things. Younger children simply do not have the thinking abilities to do this. Here are two examples. As children increase in age, they can better classify that they live in a particular state or province, a county, and a city. The state includes the county and city, and the county includes the city. A much more important example for Christian education is God the Father, God the Son, and

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God the Holy Spirit (although as we know, this is more complex than state, county, and city).

What should children be asked to think about and classify with regard to the Bible at this age? Why is this important?

Improvements in evaluation. Older children are less impulsive than younger ones in evaluating concepts. Younger children are more likely to blurt out any answer without thinking. Older children have much greater capacities at reflection in answering questions and solving problems. However, this has to be encouraged and developed.

In what ways are you asking children really to think and evaluate what they are learning? How can you better prepare your work so children can reflect and evaluate the topic at hand?

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Major strides in literacy (reading and writing). A major milestone during the primary and intermediate years is the increasing ability and achievements in reading and writing. Today we believe that reading and writing are closely connected, and so we combine these two terms to refer to literacy. In a later article in this resource, we consider the relationship of technology to literacy. As we have seen, technology has changed what children can do and are expected to do. Becoming literate involves several steps or stages. These include (1) functional literacy, (2) cultural literacy, and (3) critical literacy.

Functional literacy is “walking around literacy.” It is just enough literacy to keep one out of trouble or alive! Functional literacy includes labels, signs, billboards, coupons, and just enough reading recognition or writing skill to get by. With functional literacy, children rely on pictures, drawings, or shapes to help them recognize products, rest rooms, or other things they encounter on a daily basis.

Cultural literacy is the next step for children after they develop functional literacy. There are basically two types of cultural literacy. These are mainstream and marginalized. Mainstream literacy is what children learn in traditional schools and settings. For example, most children read in their social studies texts that Columbus discovered America in 1492. Children read traditional or standard stories about history, science, government, and economics. More recently marginalized stories have been included. They most often represent competing views of history and science. For example, these stories say Columbus did not discover America in 1492 if people were already here. Marginalized stories discuss viewpoints that paint a different picture from mainstream literacy.

Critical literacy follows. It is not enough for elementary children to learn to read. They need to be taught how to evaluate critically what they read. Critical literacy moves far beyond the memorization of either mainstream or marginalized cultural literacy to having students ponder, consider, and make critical judgments about what they are reading. Children are taught to be skeptical (not cynical) about everything they read. For example, many school systems teach things and provide textual content that children need to evaluate critically. Unfortunately, few children are taught critical literacy in school.



**Do you believe critical literacy is important? Why or why not?
How can you help children think about what they read? How
do you work with children whose interpretations are different
from what you expected or wanted?**

One more important topic needs to be mentioned about literacy. Children should never be asked to read aloud without a purpose in mind. Many of us remember how boring reading was in school when we did round-robin reading. Round-robin reading occurred when the teacher asked one student to read a page, the next student to read the next page, and so on. This is not an effective method of teaching. There are reasons children might read aloud. Some of these include choral or responsive reading, rehearsing a play, or reading (singing) songs. Always ask yourself why you are asking children to read. If there is not a positive reason, many other strategies mentioned in *Teaching Children: Laying Foundations for Faith* will be more appropriate for using time prayerfully and wisely.

Physical Growth in Children

See if you can answer the following questions about children's physical growth?

1. What percentage of North American children are obese (fat)?

Approximately one-third of American elementary school children are overweight.

2. What is the typical physical growth of children from ages 6 to 12?

Although most girls are almost an inch shorter than boys at age 6, they have caught up by age 11 and are slightly taller than most boys by age 12. At 6 years, girls are usually 1–3 pounds lighter than boys, and just like height, they do not catch up until about age 11. However, by age 12, they are 3 or more pounds heavier than boys. Even though there is a gradual decrease in fat and an increase in bone and muscle development, girls tend to retain more body fat than boys. Still, obesity is the number one health problem for American children.

3. How many inches does the typical elementary child grow a year?

For every year during elementary school, most children grow 2–3 inches.

4. What is the typical weight gain each year of an elementary school child? Most children ages 6–12 gain from 5 to 7 pounds per year.

5. What is the most common nutritional problem for this age group in the United States? As already mentioned, it's obesity.

6. How do infectious diseases in elementary school children compare to infectious diseases in preschool children? Children in elementary school do not get nearly as many respiratory infections as preschoolers do. In fact, this is the healthiest period in a person's life span. Why is that? In the preschool years, children are more vulnerable to childhood diseases or infections and are more likely to run in front of a car or have an accident because they haven't learned the dangers yet. When children reach adolescence, there are other dangers such as motorcycle or car accidents or injuries due to contact sports.

7. What happens with motor development for this age group? By the time children reach elementary school, motor development differences are often noticeable between boys and girls. Boys tend to increase in physical strength more than girls do. Boys can usually out jump girls after about age seven. Boys are generally better than girls at batting, throwing, kicking, catching, running, and broad jumping. However, girls tend to do better than boys at such things as rhythmic movement, hopscotch, gymnastics, jumping rope, flexibility, and balance.

Emotional Growth in Children



Emotional growth plays a strong role in children's overall development. Some aspects of emotional growth include: (1) temperament, (2) typology, (3) dispositions, and (4) resilience. *Temperament* is defined as the inborn part of the personality, while *typology* refers to the personality types children exhibit. *Dispositions* are behaviors the child chooses to exhibit, and *resilience* is a remarkable quality of strength against all odds, which can be enhanced by adults who love and care for children.

Temperament. Temperament, the inborn part of the personality, is present even before birth. Some children are easygoing; others are difficult, and others are slow to warm up. Basic temperaments children have at birth tend to follow them into adulthood.

Easygoing children tend to exhibit positive moods, regular habits, are quick to adapt to new situations, are not demonstrative in showing their emotions, and are not overly sensitive when they are agitated. These children make up about 40 percent of all children, and their temperament type is not a problem. In fact, because these children are not a problem, unintentionally overlooking them is easy. To work well with easygoing children we need to check with them from time to time, to pay attention to what they are doing, and to set aside some special time to spend with them.

What are some things you can do to make sure easy children are not neglected?

Difficult children, on the other hand, can be a real challenge. They make up about 10 percent of the population. Their behavior is often moody, active, erratic, and intense, and they are often highly distractible and sensitive. Some difficult children do not accept changes easily. The key to working with difficult children is to be flexible. If we decide to butt heads with difficult children,

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they will not back down. Since difficult children are active, it's important to provide high-energy activities as part of our strategy for teaching them. These children need to be prepared for change—what is coming next. Transitions from one activity to the next can become disruptive if they are not carefully planned. When conflicts arise with difficult children, it is best to redirect them and support them into the next activity. The key to working with difficult children is to be flexible.

How can you take a specific lesson and adapt it to make sure difficult children are accommodated?

Slow-to-warm-up children (about 10% of children) are also slow to adapt to new situations. While many children enjoy new, exciting, or novel activities, the slow-to-warm-up child will withdraw in such situations. When working with slow-to-warm-up children, it's best to go slowly and guide them into new situations. If possible, it's best to assign one adult to help them. Slow-to-warm-up children work best when they have one adult from whom to seek help or assistance. One designated adult can help these cautious children by being with them, taking them to the next activity slowly, stepping back, remaining available and then moving on to help others. This is somewhat difficult in church situations when there is often a limited time with children in the first place.

How can you work with slow-to-warm-up children when time is so limited in the first place?



Typology. Typology or personality types can be discussed in a variety of ways. One way considers children's personality types in light of resources related to (1) actions, (2) thought processes, and (3) relationships.

Actions place children on a continuum of reflecting to venturing. Some children are likely to reflect and consider options carefully before springing into action. Others are more likely to jump right in. They venture out often before they have spent hardly any time on reflection. If children always reflect over everything before action, sometimes they need to take a risk and be venturing. Children who are venturers most of the time may at times need to consider before they jump into action.

What are ways you can help reflectors take appropriate risks while encouraging venturers to sometimes consider before they leap?

Thought processes are on a continuum from practical thinking to possibility thinking. Some children are more practical in their thinking, while others are more possibility thinkers. Practical thinkers are drawn to getting things done in a realistic manner. When discussing a Bible story or drawing a map, they want to look at resources, get the facts right, and decide on the best way to get things done. Possibility thinkers are different. They often let their imagination

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take over and look at what could be or what might be. Children who are practical thinkers need to be occasionally challenged to look at possibilities, while possibility thinkers sometimes need to help follow through in practical ways.

How can you help practical thinkers use their imagination and consider possibilities? How can you help possibility thinkers follow through in practical ways?

Relationships are important resources for children. Some children are naturally more relational, preferring to do everything in a group. Others have a preference for working independently and doing things alone. Teachers need to look at ways to help children sometimes work in groups and sometimes to work alone.

How can you help a child who is more relational to enjoy working alone at times? How can you help a child who is more independent to enjoy group work?

Dispositions. Dispositions are not like temperament or typology. The difference between temperament and dispositions is that dispositions can be



encouraged or taught. For example, most children have the disposition to be curious, but not all children have the disposition to be good listeners. We generally think of teaching children both knowledge and skills. However, having knowledge or skills does not necessarily mean that children will use these. For example, a child may have the reading skills necessary to read the Bible and may also have some Bible knowledge through teaching and reading. This does not mean, though, that the child has the disposition to read and learn the Bible. Another example would be witnessing. Children may have the skills and knowledge to witness but not have the disposition to do it.

What dispositions do you want to encourage in church?

The way a skill is learned or knowledge is obtained may actually discourage the disposition. For example, if we push a three-year-old to learn to read, the child may actually develop reading skills, but in the process we may damage the child's interest in reading. Once a disposition is damaged it is difficult to regain it.

With elementary children we can strengthen certain desirable dispositions and weaken certain undesirable ones with the right teaching methods. Therefore, when selecting teaching methods, we should consider the dispositions we are teaching.

What dispositions in children do you want to strengthen?

What dispositions do you want to weaken?

Emotional Growth in Children

A salient point with regard to dispositions is feedback. Children need an optimal amount of feedback in order to develop or maintain a disposition. Beyond this, teachers may actually discourage the disposition. A good example is anything children naturally like to do. For instance, some children really enjoy drawing. If we praise children too much for what they like to do, then they will focus more on the praise than the doing.

How can you praise children without overdoing it? What have you noticed that certain children enjoy doing? How can you encourage them without overpraising them?

Perhaps the most important thing to be said about dispositions is that they are most often caught and not taught. Children pick up dispositions from adults who continually and constantly display these dispositions. If we want children to develop the disposition of kindness, we model kindness and encourage children to be kind. For example, Beverly is a fourth-grader with severe cerebral palsy. Her type of cerebral palsy makes it difficult for her to speak clearly or quickly. Her Sunday School teacher always includes Beverly in class discussions, listens carefully when Beverly contributes to the class, responds effectively to Beverly's comments or questions. The teacher makes clear that we will listen to everyone in the room. She does this by modeling and maintaining high expectations.



What dispositions do you want to model for the children with whom you work? Which ones can you do a better job at modeling?

Resilience. Finally related to emotional and personality growth there is resilience. What is resilience? Resilience is the ability to succeed and even thrive against all odds. In today's world many children suffer tragedies and traumas beyond anything we could possibly imagine. Child abuse and neglect, violence in schools, poverty or homelessness are just a few examples of the many which exist. Yet many children do well against all odds. What makes the difference in these children's lives? Several studies have been conducted on resilience to see what makes the difference. Children who are resilient tend to have three things going for them.

First, they are part of a classroom community in which all children are included and expected to participate. Whether the child is of a different ethnic group, color, or socioeconomic status does not matter. All children are included, and this is communicated over and over by the teacher.

In what ways are you making sure all children are included?

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A second factor that promotes resilience is high standards of conduct. All children are expected to achieve and respect others' attempts to learn. Teachers who believe that all children are gifts from God and that each and every child can learn promote resilience. A belief in all children seems to make a difference in the child who needs most to be believed in.

How do you show you believe in children—all children?

An adult or teacher who follows and encourages a child over time is the third promoter of resilience. Studies of resilient children who have been abused indicate that a teacher who not only believed in a child but also followed that child over several years made the difference.

In what ways do you take an interest in the lives of former children who have left your department? How are you encouraging children who needed it in your classroom and still need it when they leave?

Social Growth in Children



Social growth becomes increasingly important to children during the elementary school years. Friendships become more complex, the peer group more accepting or rejecting, and in the 21st century, the advent of younger gangs and violence in the schools all influence the social growth of children. Here we will consider (1) friendship, (2) the peer group, and (3) difficult social situations in the 21st century.

Friendship. Friends are extremely important to children. They promote social competence, provide security, and support and help children learn to solve conflicts or disputes. Friendships change significantly from ages 6 to 12. During the early elementary grades, friends are seen as someone with whom to play. Listed below are specific answers given by children from each age group when asked, “What is a friend?”

Six-year-old: “A friend is nice and plays with you.”

Seven-year-old: “A friend is always nice to you and shares their stuff.”

Eight-year-old: “A friend is someone you can trust and play with.”

Nine-year-old: “A friend cares about you, plays with you, and trusts you.”

Ten-year-old: “A friend is someone to trust, play with, and who likes you back.”

Eleven-year-old: “A friend is trustworthy, caring, and there for you.”

Twelve-year-old: “A friend is someone you trust or who shares a common interest.”

The peer group. A peer group is defined by equality. A peer is someone who has equal status with another, one who is operating at a similar level of behavior. Schools are designed around peer groups, and so peers frequently interact on a daily basis. Peers share specific norms that are social rules about how members should act. Peers can help develop a sense of belonging in children. However, there is almost always a pecking order in a peer group.

Specific types of peer groups include clubs, cliques, and gangs. A club is an organized group that is usually supervised by an adult, such as Brownies or Cub Scouts. A clique is a group of children who develop distinctive patterns of dress, talk, and ways of thinking and acting. A gang imposes strict codes of dress, talk, and ways of acting that are often antisocial or violent in nature. Every

Social Growth in Children

year elementary children are increasingly susceptible to gang involvement.

Peer acceptance or rejection is a bigger deal as children become older. In any class of 10 or more people, the following classifications usually emerge. Popular children are those who are liked by many and disliked by few. Rejected children are those who are disliked by many and liked by few. But that's not all. There are other types as well. There are controversial children who are liked by many and disliked by many as well. Then there are neglected children who are almost invisible. They appear to be neither liked nor disliked by the others. Finally, there are the average status children who are liked by a few and disliked by a few.

Do you have popular, rejected, controversial, neglected, and average status children in your program? How do you deal with each type of child?

Interestingly, there are several reasons we can identify many of the factors that influence peer acceptance or rejection. Some of these include parenting style, position in the family, intelligence, names, and physical characteristics. Parents who are overly strict are more likely to have children who are less popular. Also, firstborn children tend not to be as popular as are younger siblings. Children who are considered dumb are also often unpopular. A child's name will also influence popularity. Certain names are more popular than others, and this changes from generation to generation. Boys who have a name more commonly given to a girl are vulnerable to teasing. Also, children who are more muscular and represent what society considers as beautiful are more likely to be popular.



Despite these facts, there are ways adults can improve social skills. These include (1) modeling (teaching by example), (2) maintaining high expectations for all children, and (3) using social skills training. However, these work best with younger children. (It is important to remember that the older the children, the more influence the peer group will have and the less effect the adults will have.) Rejected children may improve their skills through help from caring adults, but they may still have many difficulties due to their past reputation.

Modeling or teaching by example is one way teachers can help rejected children. We often teach lessons about kindness, cooperation, and God's love; but if we want children really to care for one another, we must show them instead of tell them. Dorothy is a seven-year-old who comes to church every Sunday. The other children do not want to play with Dorothy for several reasons. Dorothy's family is poor, and she has only three dresses. The children complain that Dorothy smells. They say this in front of her and refuse to sit by her. The workers in the second-grade Sunday School class have told the children to stop saying such things and to sit down. This seems to have made matters worse. Some children absolutely refuse to sit by Dorothy and are angry with the teachers for insisting they do. Mrs. Adams has a different approach. She graciously and patiently includes Dorothy in all activities and makes a point to welcome Dorothy at every appropriate opportunity. However, Mrs. Adams does not overdo it. She simply makes it part of her nature to incorporate fair participation from everyone.

In what ways can you model kindness for children like Dorothy?

Social Growth in Children

Mrs. Adams also maintains high standards of conduct for everyone.

Children know what is expected and are appropriately reminded of expected modes of conduct. Mrs. Adams has three simple rules for her classroom. You cannot hurt yourself. You cannot hurt others. You cannot destroy property. When a situation becomes tense around Dorothy, Mrs. Adams reminds the children of the rules before the situation escalates or gets out of hand. She might say, "Now remember, we do not hurt others in this room. That means we do not say unkind things to or about anyone. How many of you understand and can do this?"

Sometimes children are rejected because they do not know how to play with or interact with other children. *A third option available to these children is social skills training.* Such training is most often attempted by a school counselor or psychologist. In social skills training rejected children are taught skills about how to interact with other children. A lot of role-playing and coaching occurs in these social skills training sessions. The school counselor or psychologist follows up in the school classroom to see how the rejected child is doing and to continue working with the child on ways to get along. Social skills training is not always successful. It appears to work much better with younger children. (For more information see Helen Bee, *The Developing Child* [Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2000].)

Difficult social situations in the 21st century. Parents and teachers were given an alarming wakeup call in April 1999 after the shootings at Columbine High School. School violence became a reality for all of us. In many ways school violence is much worse than we had ever expected. The crime rate involving children in terms of being both the perpetrators and the victims has increased dramatically since 1985. Weapon carrying, robbery, aggravated assault, sexual assault, and even murder have increased.

The types of crimes children commit are well documented. The following list of crimes kids commit is listed in order from most common to least common—from Beth Warner, "Risk Factors for School Violence" in *Urban Education*, March 1999. Children are more involved today in student-on-student violence, student-versus-teacher assaults, weapon carrying, racial and ethnic crimes, gang crimes, knifings and/or shootings, drive-by shootings,



and even rape. Researchers at the University of Maryland School of Medicine report that 135,000 American children carry guns to school each day. Only 63 percent of these are high school students. In fact, 24 percent of those who carry guns are in middle school, and 12 percent are in elementary school. Amazingly 1 percent of those who carry weapons to school are in preschool.

School violence can occur at any time during a school day, and most of it occurs in classrooms and hallways. It most often occurs during free time or when children are involved in independent work or even when the teacher is doing a presentation. In elementary and middle schools the areas of the school most vulnerable for violent activity are hallways, buses, bathrooms, outside events, and the gymnasium.

Most children who commit violence are males, and most children who are victims of violence are males. In fact, 93 percent of those who commit violence in schools are males, while 76 percent of the victims are also males. Interestingly, the grade levels with the highest percentage of violence are grades seven and eight. Further, violence is more likely to occur within the same ethnic group, and in most cases the perpetrators and victims know each other. However, children of minority groups are more often the victims of school crime.

Who are the children most likely to be victimized? Children who are rejected, unpopular, socially isolated, scared, special education students, and those who have just changed schools are more likely to be the victims of school crime. However, as we have seen recently in random shootings, all children are vulnerable. Today over half of children in middle school report that they feel unsafe at school. This interferes with their ability to think, and this tension can contribute to preventing them from becoming all that God wants them to be.

Who are the children most likely to commit violence? As we have already mentioned, the vast majority of violent acts are created by males. Many of these boys live in single-parent homes in which there is a lot of family conflict. Children who are either insufficiently monitored or overly punished are more likely to be violent. In other words, both extremes tend to produce more violent behavior—children whose parents don't know what they're doing and those who are severely punished. Most often these males are highly impul-

Social Growth in Children

sive and have not been taught ways to control these impulses. They also have limited coping skills and are often socially and academically unsuccessful in school.

As Christians we can be part of the solution. There are specific things we can know and do to make a difference. We can do our part by avoiding excessive competitiveness, and we can make our teaching both interesting and relevant. We can also become keenly aware of the characteristics of children who are perpetrators and victims of violent acts. We know that boys who have poor or overly strict parental supervision, who are frustrated and impulsive are at-risk for creating trouble. We also know that children who are socially rejected, in special education, scared, or even the new kids on the block are more susceptible to maltreatment.

What can you do to help children learn to deal with their anger? From what you have learned about victims and perpetrators of crimes, what can you do to help stop violence among children?

Discipline and Behavior Issues

Discipline is one of the most important, if not the most important, topics in which teachers want help. When teachers in both public and private schools are surveyed about areas of need, they most often choose discipline and classroom management.

One way to deal with discipline is concerned with children's outward behavior. It includes three concepts related to reinforcement: (1) positive reinforcement, (2) negative reinforcement, and (3) punishment.

Positive reinforcement is most similar to "rewards." A positive reinforcer is something that, when applied following a behavior, strengthens the chance the behavior will occur again. Positive reinforcement includes primary reinforcers and secondary reinforcers. Primary reinforcers are things which children naturally need or want. For example, food and water are primary reinforcers. Children naturally want these. If we give children some candy or something good to drink after they have done something we wanted them to do, then we are applying (or giving them) positive reinforcement. Secondary reinforcers are not rewarding at first, but they become rewarding. For example, chips or tokens which can be gathered (like money) to buy a toy or prize are secondary reinforcers. Money is a secondary reinforcer. No one was born wanting a dirty piece of green paper. However, it becomes rewarding because of what we can get with it.

Negative reinforcement is often more difficult to understand because we don't usually recognize its use. A negative reinforcer is something that, when removed, strengthens the chance a behavior will occur again. The seat-belt buzzer is a good example of a secondary reinforcer. When you put on your seat belt, the annoying noise goes away.

Punishment is not the same thing as reinforcement. While reinforcement (or what we usually call rewards) seeks to increase behaviors, punishment seeks to decrease certain behaviors. Punishment is something that, when applied, decreases the chance a behavior will occur again. Unfortunately, punishment does not have a direct connection with the behavior we are trying to discourage. For example, if we want a child to stop hitting other children and we take away his snack time, snack time has nothing to do with hitting other children.

Discipline and Behavior Issues

Extinction can also be used. Extinction is the removal of rewards that encourage or keep a behavior going. For example, if we laugh at the class clown when he does something for attention, that is usually rewarding or reinforcing; but if we ignore the class clown, we are using extinction. We are removing the rewards (laughing) that keep the clown going. (For more information see Michael J. Anthony, *Foundations of Ministry* [Wheaton, IL: BridgePoint Books, 1992].)

What do you like about giving rewards? What do you not like about giving rewards? What do children learn when you give them rewards? When should you give rewards? For what should rewards be given?

Another way of dealing with discipline is more concerned with children's thinking about their actions than their simply behaving in appropriate ways. The focus is to get children to think about their actions. Sanctions are used instead of rewards or punishment. Children have specific reasons for disliking rewards and punishment. Sanctions are designed to help children think about their actions so they will act in moral ways. Four recommended sanctions are: (1) temporary exclusion from the group; (2) calling the child's attention to the consequences of his actions; (3) depriving the child of whatever he has misused; and (4) perhaps the most important—restitution. Restitution means



a child must make good that which he has harmed.

Temporary exclusion from the group is not the same thing as time-out. If a child does something inappropriate during a class meeting, the child is sent to time-out for five minutes. The adult says, “Go to time-out, and don’t come back for five minutes.” Temporary exclusion from the group is different. A child is asked to leave the group until he can participate and follow the rules of the group. The child makes the decision when he is able and ready to come back and participate. Of course, this will not work with some children. For example, introverts may be pleased to leave the group and choose never to come back. However, children who really enjoy being a part of and participating in the group will be more influenced by temporary exclusion.

Calling a child’s attention to the consequences of his actions is another sanction. A child who is breaking crayons can be told, “When you break all the crayons, we will not have any more to use.” Of course, anyone who has worked with children will know that some children will defiantly say, “I don’t care.” In these cases the third sanction might be used.

Depriving the child of whatever he has abused or misused is a sanction a teacher might apply in this instance. When a child is breaking crayons, a natural consequence is that the child cannot use the crayons. As with all sanctions, the consequences are directly related to the child’s actions.

Restitution is perhaps the most important sanction we can use. Restitution means “making good that which you have harmed.” Whether a child intentionally commits a transgression or accidentally hurts someone or damages something, restitution can be a powerful tool to help children think about their actions and the consequences of such actions.

Here is a true story about how restitution can be effective. A sixth-grader once accidentally spilled blue ink on the white blouse of the girl sitting in front of him. The teacher decided to use restitution. How can the boy make good that which he has damaged? The girl couldn’t take off her blouse in class. The teacher thought about it and said to the boy, “I know you didn’t mean to spill ink on her blouse, but you must make it right. I’ve asked the girl to bring her blouse to school tomorrow. It is your job to try to get the ink out. Your mother

Discipline and Behavior Issues

or father can make suggestions, but it is your job to fix it. I'll call your mother and explain the situation.”

The next day the ink-stained white blouse was brought back to school. The boy took it home. His mother showed him how to use bleach and lemon juice, but she left him to make decisions about how to clean the garment. After three tries, the ink came out. The next day the boy brought the blouse back to school, after he had cleaned, dried, and pressed it. This was a powerful lesson.

Sometimes restitution is not possible. For example, if one child pushes another one and breaks his arm, how can the child make restitution? The child is not a physician. Even so, there are ways the child can make restitution. For example, the child can be responsible for carrying books for the child with the broken arm. She can run errands for the child with the broken limb, such as getting assignments from school. While exact restitution may not always be possible, the important thing to remember is that if we make a mistake we must do what we can to correct it.

Having children come up with their own solutions for restitution is often helpful. This is also helpful for disputes. When children have an argument, the most likely solution is to tattle. Adults can discourage this by telling children to work to solve their own disputes and then come back and tell you what they decided and how they solved the problem.

What do you believe about restitution? What does the Bible say about restitution? Can you think of specific stories in the Bible in which restitution was used? Can rewards and punishment be used as well as restitution? If so, how?



Problems with rewards. In the book *Punished by Rewards*, Alfie Kohn suggests five reasons rewards are harmful to children: (1) rewards punish; (2) rewards negatively influence relationships; (3) rewards do not consider reasons; (4) rewards discourage appropriate risk-taking; and (5) rewards may make children less interested in activities they naturally enjoy. (For more information see Alfie Kohn, *Punished by Rewards* [New York; Houghton Mifflin, 1993].)

Rewards punish. How can rewards possibly punish children—especially when they are designed to do the opposite? For example, in Bible study some teachers give children a star in their crown on a poster for every Bible verse they memorize. One child in the class has a learning disability, another has attention deficit disorder, and yet another is in special education at school for mental retardation. These students are punished because of their mental abilities. Further, rewards are like punishment in that both are used to manipulate people into doing what we want them to do.

Rewards negatively influence relationships. Rewards often foster competition and thus damage or destroy cooperative relationships. If only one person can win in a game, every other child is seen as someone to beat.

Is that the message you want to send children?

Rewards also do not consider reasons children do things. If a child is constantly fighting, parents and teachers might give rewards or administer punishment to change the child's behavior. The problem with this is that rewards and punishment do not consider why the child is constantly fighting. When we give rewards, we are not addressing the real issue—why children do the things they do.

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Rewards do not encourage appropriate risk-taking. The key word here is appropriate. What, exactly, is appropriate risk-taking? When a child is working for a reward, he may do only what is necessary to get the reward. He won't do any more. For example, let's go back to the example of a Bible study, in which children are given stars for memorizing Bible verses. If a child is interested in learning more about a particular Bible passage, he would probably not take the initiative to try to learn or read more because he would be focused on getting the stars. Children are naturally interested in learning, but if we give rewards, we may be discouraging them from digging deeper into the Scriptures for fear they might miss a reward. Rewards work, and they work fast; but in the long term, they may do more harm than good.

Rewards may make children less interested in activities they naturally enjoy. For those children who naturally like to draw or paint, rewards for drawing or painting are discouraging. In one study of children and rewards, children (who generally like to play with blocks) were shown two sets of identical blocks in their preschool classroom. The teacher told the children that if they played with one set of blocks they would receive a reward. However, they could play with the other set of blocks, but they would not receive any rewards. What do you think happened? Children immediately went to play with the blocks for which they would receive rewards. However, after a couple of weeks, the teacher said, "You can now play with either set of blocks, but you will not receive any rewards." Then what happened? The children rarely ever played with the blocks for which they had earlier received rewards. They most often went to play with the other set of blocks. When we reward children for things they naturally like to do, we are sending a message: "This is not fun. You must be rewarded for doing this."

Children with Special Needs



Every child is unique and special. All children deserve our prayers, attention, and guidance. However, some children provide more challenges than others. During the elementary years five particular groups of children often need special types of attention or help: (1) children with mental retardation; (2) children with learning disabilities; (3) children in emotional conflict; (4) children with AD(H)D; and (5) children with physical or health differences. A brief discussion of the first four follows. The importance of including all children in church settings will also be described. Because physical differences and needs are so varied and diverse, we will not discuss them here.

Children with mental retardation. Some children are classified with mental retardation in school. These children are unique in three important ways. (1) They do not usually learn as rapidly as other children their age. This is true for most school subjects such as reading, writing, arithmetic, language arts, science, and social studies. (2) They occasionally have trouble coping or become frustrated with what they are asked to do. (3) These children have some unique gift from God. It may not have been discovered. One of our jobs is to help them discover their gifts and use their gifts to honor God and help them become who God created them to be.

Most children who have mental retardation look just like other boys and girls. However, most of them receive some type of special services in school, especially if they are attending a public school. They may be sent to a special teacher for part of the day. Another way they are helped is for a special teacher or teacher's aide to come to a regular classroom and help special students there.

Jimmy is a child with mild mental retardation. He goes to a special class in school for two hours a day. During Sunday School he attends a class for third-graders. One Sunday the teacher asked him to read from the Bible. Jimmy has great difficulty reading aloud and does not enjoy doing so in front of other people. While Jimmy was struggling to read, he came across the word synagogue. He did not know how to pronounce it, and so he tried to sound out the word. His attempt sounded like "syna-goo-goo." The other children laughed, and one of them commented, "Don't you know anything? Everyone knows how to pronounce synagogue." The teacher was caring and tried to do damage control. However, Jimmy never came back to Sunday School.

Children with Special Needs

**How would you work to help Jimmy be a part of the class?
How could you help Jimmy be a part of the class without asking him to do things which might unnecessarily embarrass him? In what ways could you help the other children develop caring behaviors and accept Jimmy for his abilities and differences? In what ways could you help Jimmy find his God-given strengths?**

Children with learning disabilities. Another group of children who may need special guidance are those with learning disabilities. Children with learning disabilities are different from those with mental retardation. Children with learning disabilities have normal or sometimes gifted intelligence, but they have a specific type of learning problem in a particular area such as math, reading, or spelling. Just like children with mild mental retardation, they are not identified by the way they look.

Teaching a child with learning disabilities in Sunday School is not that much different from teaching a child with mental retardation. However, adults usually recognize a child with mental retardation who is slow in most subjects. They may know to make special modifications for children with mental retardation. Children with learning disabilities may present a surprise. Since these children are as good or better than most children at many things, it is sometimes hard for adults to perceive a specific learning problem.



For instance, Jennifer has a specific learning disability related to memory and following directions. Jennifer contributes much to the Sunday School class but is constantly forgetting things and sometimes can't remember where an object is supposed to be or what she is to do. Her teacher may be tempted to say, "Jennifer you are so smart. I know that as smart as you are you can remember where you put things, and you should certainly know how to follow directions." However, this is not true. Jennifer needs a teacher to help her keep up with things and to assist her in transition times when she moves from one task to another.

How can you help children like Jennifer through transition times? How can you assist children like her in keeping up with things like her Bible?

Children in emotional conflict. Some of the most challenging students are those with emotional conflicts. There are so many different types of emotional conflict in the 21st century that each child has to be considered individually. What sets one child off will not affect another. There are also as many causes of emotional conflict as there are children who experience it. One child might cry and completely withdraw for no apparent reason, while another might become violent and strike out at others. In church settings it may be necessary to enlist the help of a volunteer who helps all children but is especially available to attend to a child with emotional difficulties. The child may need to leave the room from time to time to cool down or regroup. This would not be possible without a designated helper to assist in these situations. Parents who have a child in emotional conflict may need to be consulted to make recommen-

Children with Special Needs

dations as to how to deal with specific situations that may arise.

Church leaders may want to incorporate and post the following three rules for all children. These rules can be used to help explain to children who are violent or self-destructive why we are taking certain actions when they deviate from them. The rules are: (1) You cannot hurt yourself. (2) You cannot hurt others. (3) You cannot destroy property. Most transgressions fall under one of these three areas.

Children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. The number of children identified with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder increases every year. AD(H)D is a general category for four specific types of differences. These are: (1) children who are inattentive; (2) children who are hyperactive or impulsive; (3) children who are both inattentive and hyperactive or impulsive; and (4) children who have attention or activity difficulties but do not fit in the first three categories. (For more information see Jerry Aldridge, Anne Eddowes, and Patricia Kuby, *No Easy Answers: Helping Children with Attention and Activity level Differences* [Olney, MD: Association for Childhood Education International, 1998].)

Teachers will probably need to know about the medical and educational treatments used with these boys and girls. Many children who have AD(H)D are placed on a stimulant drug such as Ritalin. For some reason, a stimulant drug helps some children who are inattentive or hyperactive do better in school. Interestingly though, the amount of a drug necessary to help with attention may not be enough to assist with hyperactivity. The amount of drug needed to help with hyperactivity may be too much for the attention deficit. Drugs are not magic. They only bring the child to a level in which the child can then learn to pay attention or deal with hyperactivity or impulsiveness. Drugs do not make the child pay attention or learn. Drugs do not keep the child from moving from place to place. We should not say to a child, "You must have forgotten to take your medicine." What we are saying is, "You are not responsible for controlling your behavior, the drug is." We want children to learn that they have responsibility in working with their behavior. Drugs can only assist.

We want children to enjoy reading the Bible and learning God's Word for



its own sake—not because of the stars, stickers, or candy they will get. Other ways to help them include:

1. Provide hands-on activities and movement.

What are some ways you can provide for more active learning?

2. Help find each child's God-given abilities or talents and encourage him or her to use their abilities.

What do you need to do to find out each child's talents or abilities?

3. Teach to children's learning styles.

**How is it possible to meet each child's learning style?
What are some ways you can incorporate visual learning, auditory helps, and movement strategies into each lesson?**

Children with Special Needs

4. Work to incorporate children's multiple intelligences into activities.

How can you go about finding each child's multiple intelligence(s)?

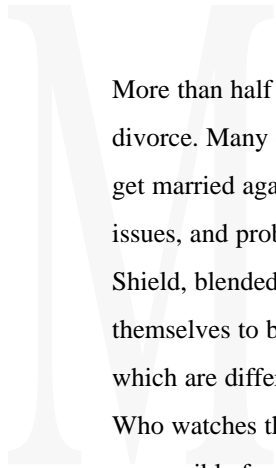
5. Provide structure while simultaneously using novel or interesting ways to teach.

How can you set guidelines, provide structure, make learning fun, and be flexible all at the same time?

6. Prepare AD(H)D children for change and guide them through transition times.

What times during church are most difficult? How can you prepare students for change and then follow through in helping them with difficult transition times?

Blended Families



More than half of 21st-century marriages in the United States will end in divorce. Many of these marriages will involve children, and the parents may get married again, creating blended families with new and unique challenges, issues, and problems. According to a Web site produced by Blue Cross Blue Shield, blended families may produce as many as eight people who consider themselves to be grandparents of one child. This is but one of many situations which are different for blended families. Who has authority over the children? Who watches the children when parents or stepparents are away? Who is responsible for disciplining the kids? These questions must often be negotiated and difficulties resolved.

Four basic tasks confront blended families: (1) parenting, (2) managing change, (3) separating the current marriage from the previous one, and (4) dealing with the parent who does not live in the same house. Depending on how blended families deal with these four issues, a new family structure is developed. This new family may be a new traditional one, a romantic family, or a matriarchal family. The new traditional family tries to operate with harmony, love, and traditional values; but they realize they must work hard at it, given the many added people with whom a blended family must communicate. A romantic family is similar to a new traditional family, with one main exception. The romantic family expects to have harmony and love established from the start. This is somewhat unrealistic, considering the amount of adjustments blended families must make. In some blended families the mother has the desire to take the dominant role and be the family leader. With these families, a matriarchal pattern may be established for the new stepfamily. (For more information see Mary Lou Fuller and Glenn Olsen, eds., *Home-School Relations: Working Successfully with Parents and Families* [Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1998].)

Church leaders must be sensitive to the complex nature of blended or step-families. There is much to consider when working with children from blended families. During the early days of the new family structure, some children will be angry and have difficulties adjusting. Others will not. Showing patience, caring for the child, and listening to the child can provide a tremendous amount of support during these days. Another thing to consider is the reli-



Blended Families

gious conflict that may occur within blended families. A child's biological parents or even the stepparents may have different views on religion, church attendance, and denominational differences. Children may even be asked to go to one church with one parent one Sunday and a different church with another parent the next Sunday.

How many children in your group come from blended families? Do these children have special needs?

Divorce

Divorce is one of the more complex issues of the 21st century. The influence divorce has on a particular child is based on at least six, possibly more, situations. These include, (1) the length of time since the divorce, (2) the child's level of vulnerability, (3) the socioeconomic level of the child after the divorce (and other economic stressors), (4) the family composition, (5) the parents' interaction and mental health, and finally (6) the family schedule.

Length of time since the divorce. The first 18 months after a divorce is usually a crisis time for the children of the family. Many of these children will go through what Kubler-Ross describes as denial, anger, depression, and acceptance. Not all children will go through these; but many, if not most, will. During this time guilt is a predominant emotion. A lot of children blame themselves for their parents' divorce. Teachers at church and parents need to provide tremendous encouragement and support during this time. It is vitally important for the parents to tell the children that the divorce was not the children's fault. After 18 months, children of divorce are more often more adjusted to their situation.

The child's level of vulnerability. Children have different temperaments and personalities. This influences their level of vulnerability. A child's age and sex during the time of divorce also contribute to that child's vulnerability level. Boys appear to be more affected by a divorce because they are more likely to act out their behavior. However, many girls have a tendency to internalize the divorce and withdraw inwardly.

The socioeconomic level. Mothers who gain custody of their children often live in an economic decline that adds to the difficulties of raising children alone. This contributes to the amount of stressors present during the adjustment period after the divorce.

The family composition. How many children are present; where the family lives (such as with grandparents); and the neighborhood, school, and church environment impact a child's adjustment after the divorce. Children who receive a lot of support, possibly from their church family, can make a better adjustment than those who are isolated or have limited family support systems.

The family schedule. Schedules change dramatically after a divorce. Custody issues influence these schedules. Today children may be involved in

joint custody in which their schedule changes from week to week. The single parent who is primarily responsible for the children may also have significant family scheduling issues that directly impact the children. Work schedules and after-school care are often major issues.

Suggestions for Helping Children Through a Divorce

Church workers and volunteers can assist in helping children through a divorce.

These actions include:

1. Provide encouragement and spiritual support to all children—especially those who are going through the initial stages of a divorce.
2. Be sensitive to issues of divorce related to religion. Specifically, children of divorce may have parents of different faith, not only within a Christian perspective but also between Christianity and other religions. (For example, a child may have a father who is Muslim and a mother who is Southern Baptist.) In some cases the child's attendance of church activities may be an issue with one of the parents.
3. Be a good listener and observer, but remember that most teachers are not trained psychologists or social workers. When issues arise related to divorce, it is sometimes necessary to seek help and guidance in working with children and families who express excessive anger or emotions during the divorce process.
4. Examine your own prejudices about divorce, and pray that God will help you accept all children, regardless of their family situation.
5. Finally, be sensitive on special occasions such as Mother's Day or Father's Day. Know each child's situation. Make sure you include all children on these days. Make sure no child feels ashamed or guilty because his or her family situation (such as a single-parent home) is different.

Multicultural Issues



The world is changing rapidly, and most people live in communities where other people from different cultures and religions coexist. Several misconceptions about other cultures are important to address for us to work effectively with children and families from other nations and cultures. Here are three of the most common misconceptions:

1. People from the same country who speak the same language share a common culture. This is not true. For example, while people from Argentina, Cuba, Mexico, and Puerto Rico share a common language, they do not share a common culture. Customs and traditions vary.

2. Families from the same culture share common values. This is another widespread misconception. The values held by people within a cultural group may differ. This is also true of varying generations living in the same household.

3. Many people identify with only one culture. This is also not true. For example, Maria is an active member of a Southern Baptist Church. She is originally from Ecuador but married Mohammed, a Muslim from Pakistan. They have two children who are going to school in New York where the family now lives. Patrick is of Chinese heritage but does not speak any Chinese. He was born in Jamaica but was raised in Canada. Today he lives in the United States. These individuals cannot be stereotyped as belonging to a particular culture. This is increasingly true throughout the world but especially in the United States.

Based on these three examples, what guidelines can you invent for working with children from other cultures?

While we cannot generalize about any culture, certain cultures historically have shared specific values. While the following list is not meant to stereotype and individuals may not share these, the following examples of

general culture are provided (from E. Lynch, & M. Hanson, eds., *Developing Cross-cultural Competence: A Guide for Working with Children and Their Families*, 1998).

Anglo-American

1. Believe in competition.
2. Have a future orientation.
3. Are more direct in dealing with others.
4. Are materialistic.
5. Believe in being on time.

Native American (American Indian)

1. Believe in harmony.
2. Focus on the group rather than the individual.
3. Accept things as they are (for example, a child with a disability).
4. Avoid criticism in public.
5. Make time and place negotiable.

African-American

1. Are more authoritarian with children.
2. Value family and extended family.
3. Focus on how something is communicated more than what is said.
4. Respect the elderly.
5. Focus on the situation rather than time.

Latino

1. Have a strong group orientation.
2. Include extended family members.
3. Are less uptight about child development (do not usually hurry children).
4. Are interdependent on one another.
5. Respect the father as the head of the household.



Asian

1. Have a family and society orientation.
2. Practice self-discipline and self-denial.
3. Are very contemplative (think before they speak).
4. Believe in harmony with nature.
5. Believe in tradition and patience.

Based on these characteristics, how would you adjust your interactions with children and parents from these broad examples?

Suggestions for working with children from other cultures.

1. Adjust your interactions with young children based on their culture. For example, some Latino parents teach their children to look down when their names are called. This indicates respect. In the U.S., most teachers expect a child to look at them when the child's name is called.
2. Try to include authentic information about the different cultures represented in the class. This shows respect for every child's heritage.
3. Maintain high standards of cultural diversity. Be inclusive of all children no matter what culture or background exists in the classroom.

Suggestions for working with parents from other cultures.

1. Find out as much as you can about the culture but do not generalize.
2. Be a good listener and look for appropriate ways to communicate with both the parents and the child.
3. Find out the nature of immigration. For example, a child of Chinese heritage could come from a traditional Chinese family or one which does not speak any Chinese language.

Technological Implications for Parents and Their Children

Technology has changed the face and pace of the 21st century. In many ways technology has enriched our lives. In other ways it has cluttered our lives with junk. Just a few years ago, if parents were taking a rare day off to spend time with their kids, they could not be reached. Today cell phones, voicemail, email, faxes, and any number of other means are available to reach people 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Children still have television, but it is only one medium among a host of others including the Internet, video games, and gadgets that fill their time and days.

In the last section we discussed the importance of parents' spending more time with their children. Technology provides one opportunity for spending this time. The following suggestions are made for parents regarding their children and technology: (1) Become familiar with the technology your children use. (2) Use technology with your children. (3) Monitor and limit the amount of time your children spend watching television, playing video games, and using the Internet. (4) Help and encourage your children to use technology for cooperative rather than competitive activities. (5) Discuss technology with your children often and communicate a sense of trust in them to use technology appropriately.

Become familiar with the technology your children use. A great resource to follow is the Web site provided by The Center for Children and Technology (CCT). Their address is <http://www2.edc.org/CCT/cctweb/index.html>. They have begun to identify the digital literacies children will be using in the 21st century. These include technological literacy, information literacy, communications literacy, and media literacy.

Technological literacy involves using machines for word processing, software applications, and even multimedia production tools. The CCT suggests that these should be taught or learned together in some meaningful context. In other words, technological literacy should be taught with a specific, practical purpose or project in mind.

Information literacy is necessary because the amount of information available at home, in the workplace, and at school has exploded. Children need to learn the process of evaluating, sorting, and judging the plethora of information currently available to them, which, by the way, is on the increase daily.

Technological Implications for Parents and Their Children



Children have to become their own librarians, sorting and classifying information which is important to their work and play, as well as that which is irrelevant, useless, or in some cases harmful.

Communications literacy is a must in the 21st century due to the increased use of email. Students can now email the professionals, asking important questions about what these professionals do. This is a new way of communicating. Children have to learn to compose an appropriate email, which includes “netiquette” (Internet etiquette), and to ask the right questions in the right ways to both invite and promote conversations.

Media literacy—the ability to use and produce communications in different forms—is also important. Children are most likely provided more opportunities to decode and analyze media than to produce it, although this is changing. Children can be taught that each form of media has a particular way of showing the world. There are biases, and children need to look at whose viewpoint is being expressed, what biases are present, and what important information may have been omitted. Children do not automatically learn these skills. Teaching children media literacy is an important role for parents and teachers. This is another way parents can spend time with their children.

Should you be concerned with these types of literacy at church? If so, how can you go about incorporating these into your lesson plans and activities?

Technological Implications for Parents and Their Children

Use technology with your children. Technology can be used to the family's and the children's advantage. It does not always need to be viewed as the enemy. Families can view quality television programs together and discuss them. There is now even a satellite dish available that incorporates multiple family-viewing channels. Carefully selecting quality religious or educational programming can be tremendous fun for some families. Appropriate videos can also be used for family gatherings. However, it is important to note that family discussions are vital if this is to be an interactive activity. The home provides an arena for families to discuss programs while they are watching as opposed to a theater where we are not supposed to talk.

Another way to use technology with your children is by building your own family Web site. Selecting pictures, constructing the family tree, deciding what is important to include and what is not offer opportunities for satisfying family discussions if both children and parents are interested and committed to the endeavor. Contact *LifeWayonline* for Web space services (call 1-888-454-5965).

Monitor and limit the amount of time your children spend watching television, playing video games, and using the Internet. Research is clear on this issue. Children who spend 10 hours and less per week watching television have higher IQ scores than those who watch more than 10 hours of television each week. We are not exactly sure why.

Does television dull the mind? Or do dull people just watch more television? What do you think?

Technological Implications for Parents and Their Children



Today, though, the amount of television viewing time seems less important than the quality of programs children are viewing. Back in the 1950s when *I Love Lucy* was first on television, the word pregnant was never used because it might be too vulgar or suggestive for children. That's hard to imagine in the 21st century. No one needs to be reminded that prime-time television has violence, sex, obscene language, and nudity. Professional wrestling in past decades used to be violent enough. Today it appears several times weekly during prime time, and vulgar, suggestive, malicious, and evil plots have been added.

Many video games are just as bad. Children have to kill the bad guy again and again to progress to the next level in many games. Then there's the World Wide Web with links to endless pornography, violence, and information children should not view under any circumstances. However, children's technological savvy is often greater than their parents or teachers, and they can easily surf inappropriate Web sites if adults do not tenaciously monitor their children's Internet habits. Parents may want to add a filter to their computer. One excellent resource is LifeWayonline (for information, call 1-888-454-5965).

Help and encourage your children to use technology for cooperative rather than competitive activities. This can begin with television. Most television game shows are competitive in nature. Children who watch these shows tend to be overactive and excited during and after the show. Other shows, even those designed for children, tend to move from frame to frame and topic to topic without ever landing on anything. While children may seem captivated, they are actually developing short attention spans because of the nature of these programs. A few programs, unfortunately not nearly enough, encourage cooperation. For preschoolers one example is *Mr. Rogers*. His show is designed to teach cooperation and helpfulness. Research shows that particularly boys exhibit more appropriate social behavior after watching *Mr. Rogers*. Television shows promoting social behaviors and targeting elementary-aged children are even more scarce. While *Mr. Rogers* has been around for 30 years, no other shows promoting kindness and cooperation for elementary children have lasted even half that long. Parents need to read carefully and often descriptions of religious or public television programs to find even a few of these. Still, if children

Technological Implications for Parents and Their Children

are to watch television, the shows they watch should promote cooperation.

Discuss technology with your children often, and communicate a sense of trust in them to use technology appropriately. No matter how much time parents spend with their children, there are still large blocks of time when parents and children are separated. These are the times when children may be most vulnerable to destructive uses of technology. This can even occur in school. Recently an elementary teacher told me that one of her students easily pulled up pictures of naked women on the Internet. When she found the boys giggling around one of the monitors, she quickly went over to discover the pornography. In another situation a third-grade girl went to an overnight party at a neighbor's house. The children watched R-rated videos until the early morning hours.

Since children are often much more skilled at technology than their parents or teachers, we have to teach our children values, prayerfully communicating Christian values to children often and lovingly. If we do this, we can move toward trusting our children to make the right decisions, even when they are difficult, about using technology in a Christlike manner.

Here are a few Web sites for children:

www.lifeway.com/kidtrek/kidhome.htm (sponsored by children's Sunday School)

www.kidzplace.org (sponsored by Mission Education at The North American Mission Board)

www.wmu.org/organizations/children (sponsored by Children in ActionSM at Woman's Missionary Union)

www.gapassport.com/gia (sponsored by Girls in Action[®] at Woman's Missionary Union)

Group Study Guide

Jan Marler



Purpose: To provide participants with the opportunity to reflect on what they read in this resource, talk with one another, and apply the information to the children in their homes and groups at church or school.

Objective: Through reflection and conversation, participants will develop an understanding of the children in their homes and their groups at church or school. With this understanding, they will be able to transform their methods to match the needs and characteristics of their learners.

Participants: This plan is for parents, teachers, leaders, coaches, and ministers who relate to children in grades one through six.

Sessions: This plan can be used in a variety of settings including retreats, planning meetings, and conferences. The suggestions are generally designed for one-hour sessions, but you are encouraged to adapt it to meet the needs of your group. For example, you can easily adjust the suggestions to fit a 15-minute training segment during a planning meeting. Some of the session outlines are designed for shorter sessions. Combine these with another outline for one session to meet your needs.

Feel free to use the sessions in any order. A conclusion exercise to the entire study is located at the end of the session titled “Technological Implications for Parents and Their Children.” Use this exercise at the end of your last session.

Approach: This plan is designed for discussions based on what participants have read in this resource. The convener serves as facilitator of the discussion. Group members participate by sharing their reflections or thoughts concerning what they have read. The exercises enable the participants to identify implications for applying the information to their group of children.

Room Arrangement: Tables and chairs arranged in a square is preferable so that participants can see one another. If tables are not available, arrange chairs in a circle.

Session: Introduction

Preparation

- Gather paper and pencils or copies of class or group rolls for the participants.
- Order copies of the book *Understanding Today's Children: Developing Tomorrow's Leaders Today* (allow three weeks for delivery) or download the contents page and make copies.
- Provide name tags if the participants do not know one another.

Reflect and Practice

1. As participants arrive, distribute copies of the class/group rolls or ask them to write down the names of the children in their class, group, or team. Guide them to keep this list with them during the group discussions so they can consider how the information is true of the individuals in their groups.
2. Distribute copies of this resource or the contents page to the participants.
3. Ask participants to share what they would like to learn about the children in their homes and groups at church. Refer them to the contents page. As a group, determine the order of sessions the group will discuss. Also identify sessions your group wants to combine for discussion.
4. Encourage the members of your group to read before each session the article(s) to be discussed during the session. The group experience will be enhanced by individuals' reading the article(s) to prepare themselves for the discussion. Conduct a time of prayer to give each person an opportunity to make a commitment to understand the children in his or her group.
5. Depending on which session your group decided to discuss first, ask them to share what they know about the subject and what they want to learn during the next session. For example, if your group decided to reflect on the article "Children with Special Needs," ask them to share an experience they have had with a child with special needs. Ask, "What do you want to learn about these special needs as we read this week and reflect next time?"
6. Close the session with prayer concerning personal needs and concerns of participants. Remind your participants to read the article(s) for the next session.



Session: Learning Approaches and Multiple Intelligences

Preparation

- Tape a large sheet of paper to the focal wall in your meeting room. You will need a marker.
- Collect pictures of the children you parent or teach. Display the photographs on a table or on the floor in the meeting room.
- Cut out of a magazine a picture of a child who is in grades one through six.
- Collect five boxes that will nest inside of one another and colorful wrapping paper. The smallest box needs to be large enough for the magazine picture to fit inside.
- Make one photocopy of this page. Cut out each of the following paragraphs:
 - A. My Mom says: “Turn that music off. You can’t do your homework with that noise distracting you.” Now my room is quiet. All I can think about now is what TV program I hear coming from the living room. What is my brother doing in his room? I wonder what Mom is making for dinner? It sounds like she is cooking something on the stove. Maybe it is tacos. That’s my favorite! Mom yells from the kitchen, “No dinner until your homework is finished.” Oh yea, I’m supposed to be doing my homework.
 - B. My teacher asked me to stand straight and still in front of the class to repeat the memory verse. I could not do it. I knew the verse. I had practiced it many times. The kids laughed. My teacher said I should have been paying attention. I was! As I walked back to my chair, the words came into my mind. It was too late. I sat down in my spot and wanted to cry.
 - C. Another worksheet! I hate worksheets. I’m always the last one to finish. I hate being last. Why doesn’t Mrs. Clark just ask me to tell the Bible story to my friends? I like telling stories, especially when we get together in a group and act out the Bible story. “What did you say, Mrs. Clark? Finish my worksheet? Yes, Ma’am.” I hate worksheets!

4. My teacher said to draw a picture of the Bible story. I love to draw.

I drew a picture of the garden of Eden. It had trees and flowers and animals. I asked the teacher if I could use the paint I saw in the cabinet. She told me, "No, we don't have time." She said we were only keeping busy until our parents come for us. I wish we could paint every week.

- Place the magazine picture in the smallest box and wrap it. Place this box in the next sized box with paragraph D on top. Wrap it, then place it in the next size box with paragraph C. Proceed with this process until you have one large wrapped box. Be sure to place the paragraphs on top of the enclosed boxes where the participants can easily find them.

Reflect and Practice

1. Begin the session with a time of fellowship and prayer.
2. Invite participants to choose a picture from the display. Say, "The child you choose will become your friend and prayer concern for the duration of the study."
3. As a group, list common characteristics of the children in the pictures. Write the characteristics on the large sheet of paper with a marker. Say, "Though children have many common characteristics, God has designed each child in unique and special ways." Suggest that teachers and parents observe boys and girls for clues that help them understand the way God created them so that God can guide them to the best ways to teach children.
4. Pick up the wrapped box. Say, "Inside each box we will discover a clue to help us understand how children learn." Ask one of the participants to unwrap the large box and read the enclosed paragraph. Ask, "What kind of learning environment do you believe this child prefers?" (This child likes to have music in the background to help him concentrate.) Facilitate a group discussion about learning environments based on page 10.
5. Give the next wrapped box to another participant to unwrap it and read the enclosed paragraph. Ask, "How do you think this child prefers to take in information?" (This child likes to wiggle while she learns. She is a kines-



- thetic learner.) Let the group discuss ways children take in information in their groups. Use pages 10-11 as a guide.
6. Ask another participant to open the next box and read the enclosed paragraph. Ask, “Does this child prefer working alone or with others?” Facilitate a discussion about ways they can teach children who have different likes and dislikes regarding group work. Use page 12 as a guide.
 7. Ask for a volunteer to open the fourth box and read the paragraph. Ask, “How is this child smart?” (This child has visual/spatial intelligence.) Discuss with your participants the implications of the article on multiple intelligences, pages 15-17.
 8. Give the last box to a volunteer to open it to discover the picture. Say, “As we have unwrapped the boxes and discussed learning and multiple intelligences, we have more clues than we had before about our children. Take the picture you selected when you arrived and find a partner. Together, share your observations about this child that help you understand how God uniquely created her or him.
 9. Close the session with a time of prayer for the children in your groups. Remind your participants to read the article(s) for the next session.

Session: Brain Development

Preparation

- Write each of the following thoughts on a different large sheet of paper or poster board:
 1. The brain changes as a result of experience.
 2. IQ is not fixed.
 3. Some abilities are acquired during sensitive periods of learning.
 4. Emotions have a strong influence on learning.
- Place the sheets of paper in the corners of the room with markers.
- Ask teachers to bring their current teacher’s guides to this session.

Reflect and Practice

1. Begin the session with fellowship and prayer.
2. Ask participants to select one of the statements in the corners of the room and move to their selected corners. Ask each group to prepare a creative presentation on their principle for the whole group. Refer them to pages 18-21.
3. Give each group time to make their presentation and facilitate a brief time of reflection on each principle. Ask, "How does this principle impact your teaching practices?"
4. As a total group or in pairs, guide participants to study their teaching guides. Ask them to find examples of ways teachers can enhance brain development during the next session with their children.
5. Close the session with a time of prayer for the personal concerns of your participants. Remind your participants to read the article(s) for the next session.

Session: The Importance of Parent-Child Bonding

Preparation

- Before the session ask one or two of your participants to be prepared to share a personal experience they have had with parent-child bonding.
- Draw a line down the middle of a marker board in your meeting room. On the left side, write "Involving Parents at Church." On the right side, write "Encouraging Parents at Home."

Reflect and Practice

1. Open the session with fellowship and prayer.
2. Ask participant(s) you enlisted to share their experience with the group.
3. Invite others to share their experiences.
4. Ask, "How did you respond to the second question on page 23: 'How can you incorporate the parents into the children's program at church, inviting



- them to share and participate in their children's learning?" List the ideas on a marker board under the heading "Involving Parents at Church." Develop a strategy or plan of action to follow in making this happen in your church.
5. Say, "Now let's consider ways we can encourage parents to read the Bible with their children." List the ideas on the marker board under the heading "Encouraging Parents at Home." Develop an action plan for such encouragement.
 6. Close the session with a time of prayer for the parents of the children in your groups. Remind your participants to read the article(s) for the next session.

Session: Spiritual Growth in Children

Preparation

- Write each of the following points on sentence strips:
 1. Children develop values and attitudes through example.
 2. Children are capable of responding to Bible stories in a variety of ways.
 3. Children often ask important questions concerning God's Word.
 4. The Holy Spirit directs children when God determines the time they are called to a saving faith through Jesus Christ.
- Ask teachers to bring their teaching guides to this session.
- Write each of the following scenarios on an index card:

Teacher 1. That's your last chance. You are not allowed to sit by your friends ever again.

Teacher 2. Only those children who have perfect attendance are invited to the class party.

Teacher 3. I see that you are angry. Why don't you go to the rest room, wash your face, and calm down? You may join the group when you are ready.

Reflect and Practice

1. As participants arrive, ask for three volunteers to read the scenarios later in the session. Open the session with fellowship and prayer.

2. Attach the first sentence strip (Children develop values and attitudes through examples.) to the wall where everyone can see it.
3. Ask Teacher 1 to read his or her scenario. Ask the group, "Does this statement teach children about God's grace? What statement would better teach the concept of grace to children?"
4. Ask Teacher 2 to read his or her scenario. Ask, "Does this statement model the concept of acceptance for children? How would you change the statement to teach the value of acceptance?" Let participants reflect on experiences they had as children in the area of acceptance.
5. Ask Teacher 3 to read his or her scenario. Ask, "How does this statement express understanding?"
6. Divide participants into three groups. Give each group one of the three remaining sentence strips. Ask them to reflect on the statement on the sentence strip; then search their teaching guides for ways to implement that point during the next session with their boys and girls.
7. Allow the groups to work; then bring the whole group together for each group to share what they discovered concerning their point on the sentence strip.
8. Close the session with a time of prayer for their own spiritual growth and that of their children. Remind your participants to read the article(s) for the next session.

Session: Mental Growth in Children

Preparation

- Write each of the major characteristics on an index card:
 1. Concrete operations
 2. Learning by cooperating and sharing viewpoints
 3. Changes in attention
 4. Improvements in memory
 5. Advances in classification abilities



6. Improvements in evaluation

7. Major strides in literacy.

- Write the word “Milestones” on the marker board.

Reflect and Practice

1. Begin the session with fellowship and prayer.
2. Read the story about the fifth grader who asked if Moses was dead (p. 27).
Say, “During this session, we are going to discover how children think differently from adults.”
3. Divide the participants into seven small groups. Give each group one of the index cards. Ask each group to reflect on what Jerry Aldridge wrote about the characteristic on the card (pp. 27-33). Prepare a creative way to engage the total group in conversation about the characteristic. Identify easy-to-use ways of using the characteristic in learning activities.
4. Let each small group make a presentation and facilitate the discussion. Give each group a time limit as appropriate.
5. Close the session with a time of prayer for personal concerns. Remind your participants to read the article(s) for the next session.

Session: Physical Growth in Children

Preparation

- Gather paper and pencils for your participants to use during the session.

Reflect and Practice

1. Open the session with fellowship and prayer.
2. Distribute paper and pencils to the participants.
3. With their books open to page 34 or a copy of the article, ask participants to answer silently each question with their specific children in mind. For example, “What percentage of the children in your group are obese?” “What is the typical physical growth of the children in your group?”

4. As a group, look through the questions to see if your children differ from the general statements made on page 34. Are any boys and girls experiencing physical problems? If so, are the parents aware of the problems? If not, how can you minister to these parents?
5. Close the session with a time of prayer for these specific children as well as the physical growth of all of your children. Remind your participants to read the article(s) for the next session.

Session: Emotional Growth in Children

Preparation

- Make one photocopy of this following page. Cut out the following small group assignments.
 - A. Review the paragraphs on temperament on pages 35-36. Select one temperament type. Write a case study describing how a child with this temperament might act.
 - B. Review the paragraphs on typology on pages 37-38. Choose one of the personality resources—actions, thought processes, or relationships. Write a case study describing one way a teacher could encourage a child to gain confidence or stretch beyond his personality type.
 - C. Review the paragraphs on disposition on pages 38-40. Identify a skill you could use to teach children at church or home that might discourage their disposition. Write a case study describing the incident. Be ready to lead the group to develop a better approach to teaching that encourages children to use their skills and knowledge.
 - D. Review the paragraphs on resilience on pages 41-42. What are ways a teacher helped you be resilient during your childhood? Be ready to share one or two of your stories with the total group.
- Gather paper and pencils for your participants.



Reflect and Practice

1. Begin the session with fellowship and prayer.
2. Organize your participants in to four small groups. Give each group an assignment sheet and a piece of paper and pencil for the recorder. Ask them to complete their assignment for the total group.
3. At the appropriate time, call the group together and ask Group A to share their case study without identifying their selected temperament. Ask the rest of the participants to guess which temperament they have just described in the case study. Facilitate a brief discussion about the implications regarding the various temperaments on teaching children in your church or home.
4. Ask Group B to share their case study without identifying the resource. After the participants identify the resource, discuss ways to use the awareness of these resources at church and at home.
5. Ask Group C to read their case study to the participants and lead a discussion in developing a better way of teaching children. Let the participants reflect on the implications of the dispositions of the children they teach at church and at home.
6. Ask Group D to share one or two stories about resiliency. Identify ways the teachers can work together to support resiliency in the children in your church and homes.
7. Conclude this session by asking participants to look at the picture of the child they selected during the first session. Ask, “Based on what we have discussed during this session and your experience, how can you help that child in the picture grow emotionally?”
8. Close with a time of prayer for the emotional needs of your participants.
Remind your participants to read the article(s) for the next session.

Session: Social Growth in Children

Preparation

- Display a large sheet of paper on the wall or use a marker board. With a marker, write the heading “Difficult Situations” at the top.

Reflect and Practice

1. Open the session with fellowship and prayer.
2. Facilitate a discussion about the friendships among the children in your groups. Would your children agree with the answers on page 43 to the question, “What is a friend?” If not, why?
3. Continue the discussion by asking your participants to identify any peer groups—clubs, cliques, or gangs among your children. If so, are these healthy or destructive?
4. Ask, “How can parents and teachers guide healthy social development among our children?” Encourage the group to identify practical ways they can start using immediately.
5. Refer your teachers to page 46. Ask, “Do any of our children face difficult situations?” List these on the large paper or marker board. Ask, “How can we help our children to deal with anger, disappointments, and frustrations?” Discuss specific ways your group can minister to these children.
6. Close the session with a time of prayer for the social development of your children and the difficult situations some of them face at school, church, and home. Remind your participants to read the article(s) for the next session.



Session: Discipline and Behavior Issues

Preparation

- On a large sheet of paper or poster board, write each one of the following statements:

1. Positive Reinforcement
2. Negative Reinforcement
3. Punishment.

Attach each sheet to the focal wall.

- Make one photocopy of this page. Cut out the following three case studies.

As participants arrive, ask three volunteers to read the case studies.

- A. Candace loves to talk. Almost every week Mrs. Barnes reminds Candace that it is not her turn to talk. Candace distracts other children with her constant conversations. She does not listen to instructions. Teachers must take time to repeat instructions for Candace.
- B. Edward says: "I'm bored. Why do I have to do this?" He tips back in his chair and breaks pencils. He refuses to participate in activities and many times will not even sit with the group. Edward spends every other weekend with his dad. He attends church on the weekends he is with his mother. The weeks that Edward is absent the session seems to run smoothly. When Edward is there, he encourages the other boys to make fun of planned activities. None of the boys want to participate in activities when Edward comes to church.
- C. Trae is easily distracted. He just does not seem to focus his attention. If he sits next to a girl, he is constantly poking her or pulling her hair. He asks questions that have nothing to do with what the group is discussing. It appears he is just not paying attention. He acts silly and likes to be the center of attention. It takes one teacher just to deal with Trae's constant interruptions and inappropriate behaviors.

Reflect and Practice

1. Open the session with fellowship and prayer.
2. Ask a volunteer to read Case Study A. Ask, "What is an example of how a teacher might use positive reinforcement to manage Candace's behavior?" Write ideas on the sheet of paper titled "Positive Reinforcement." Do the same for negative reinforcement and punishment.
3. Ask the second volunteer to read Case Study B. Ask, "What is an example of how a teacher might use positive reinforcement to manage Edward?" List ideas on the sheet of paper titled "Positive Reinforcement." Do the same for negative reinforcement and punishment.
4. Ask the third volunteer to read Case Study C. Follow the same pattern as above.
5. Consider how to use restitution with the situations in these three case studies. Refer to pages 50-54.
6. Conclude the session by asking the participants to apply these ideas to specific behavior problems they are encountering with their groups of children.
7. Close the session with a time of prayer for behavior problems in their groups. Remind participants to read the article(s) for the next session.

Session: Children with Special Needs

Preparation

- Gather paper and pencils.
- Cut four slips of paper. Write the name of each one of the following groups of children on a slip:
 1. Children with mental retardation
 2. Children with learning disabilities
 3. Children in emotional conflict
 4. Children with AD(H)D

Reflect and Practice

1. Open the session with fellowship and prayer.
2. Organize participants into four groups. If your group is small, do this exercise as one group. Offer each group the opportunity to pick one of the four slips of paper. Ask each group to create a game for the total group to play to help participants learn about the group of children on their slip of paper. Refer them to pages 55-60. Offer paper and pencils.
3. When the games are ready, bring the total group together. Play the games in any order. Follow each game with an opportunity to discuss specific children in their groups.
4. Close the session with a time of prayer for these children. Remind your participants to read the article(s) for the next session.

Session: Blended Families and Divorce

Preparation

- If your church family has a blended family with parents who would be comfortable sharing with your group, invite them to meet with your group. In addition, if your church has a ministry or support group for divorced persons, ask one of the facilitators of that group to meet with your group during this session.

Reflect and Practice

1. Begin the session with fellowship and prayer.
2. Introduce your special guests. Begin the interview by inviting each guest to share a brief testimony about his or her journey. Ask them to share how they think your church family is ministering and could minister to children in blended families and those in divorced homes.
3. Open the discussion up for your participants to ask questions, but ask them to be sensitive to personal needs of the guests. If someone asks an inappropriate question, move the discussion in another direction. Refer them to suggestions on pages 61-64.

4. With the guests and your participants, develop a strategy or set of actions that your participants could take to help your church effectively meet the needs of these children.
5. Close the session by thanking your special guests. Pray for the blended families and divorced families in your church and community.

Session: Multicultural Issues

Preparation

- Ask your church office for the multicultural part or ethnic makeup report from the Scan US report for your church. If they do not have this report, ask your pastor or someone on staff assist you in contacting the state convention office for a copy of your church's Scan US report. Ask specifically for a report of the culture groups within a five-mile radius of your church building. This report is free in most states.
- Set up the marker board or poster board with markers.

Reflect and Practice

1. Open the session with fellowship and prayer.
2. On the marker board or poster board, list the cultures represented among the children in your church.
3. Share the Scan US report that will inform your group about the various cultures represented in the community surrounding your church. List these groups on the marker board or poster board.
4. As a group, reflect on the information on pages 65-67 which will help you minister to these cultures. List actions beside each culture group that will help you reach these groups.
5. Close the session with a time of prayer for these unreached culture groups near your church building. Remind participants to read the article(s) for the next session.



Session: Technological Implications for Parents and Their Children

Preparation

- Arrange to meet in a room or home that has a computer with Internet access.
- Provide a pencil and paper for each participant.
- Attach a large sheet of paper or poster board to the wall.

Reflect and Practice

1. Open the session with fellowship and prayer.
2. Distribute paper and pencils. Ask participants to write a description of each of the following literacies: technological, information, communication, and media. Refer them to pages 68-69.
3. As a group, reflect on their use of these forms of literacy. Ask, “What do we need to do to increase our levels of literacy in these areas?” Develop a leadership development strategy to guide you in increasing your levels of literacy.
4. Take your group on a tour of the following Web sites:
 - www.lifeway.com/kidtrek (Sunday School)
 - www.kidzplace.org (Mission Education)
 - www.wmu.org/organizations/children (Children in ActionSM)
 - www.gapassport.com/gia (Girls in Action[®])
5. Discuss how your groups can use these sites with the children and their parents.
6. If this is your last session, spend a few moments reflecting on the experiences your participants have had with this study. Ask, “What difference has this experience had on the way you teach and minister? What actions can we take to encourage our church family to be more intentional in ministering to children and their parents?”
7. Close with a concert of prayer where teachers and leaders verbalize the names of children in their groups at the same time. Open the prayer time for specific requests and concerns about understanding children in your church and community.

CHRISTIAN GROWTH STUDY PLAN

In the **Christian Growth Study Plan (formerly Church Study Course)**, this book *Understanding Today's Children: Developing Tomorrow's Leaders Today* is a resource for course credit in seven Leadership and Skill Development diploma plans. To receive credit, read the book, complete the learning activities, show your work to your pastor, a staff member or church leader, then complete the following information. This page may be duplicated. Send the completed page to:

Christian Growth Study Plan
127 Ninth Avenue, North, MSN 117
Nashville, TN 37234-0117
FAX: (615)251-5067

For information about the Christian Growth Study Plan, refer to the current Christian Growth Study Plan Catalog. Your church office may have a copy. If not, request a free copy from the Christian Growth Study Plan office (615/251-2525).

COURSE CREDIT INFORMATION

Please check the appropriate box indicating the diploma you want to apply this credit. You may check more than one.

- Leadership Skill Development (LS-0002)
- Children's Leadership Sunday School (LS-0022)
- Children's Leadership Discipleship Training (LS-0022)
- Children's Leadership Girls In Action (LS-0022)
- Adult Leadership Children In Action (LS-0022)
- Children's Leadership Royal Ambassadors (LS-0022)
- Children's Leadership Mission Kids (LS-0022)

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Rev. 6-99

Social Security Number (USA Only)			Personal CGSP Number*			Date of Birth (Mo., Day, Yr.)									
		-			-		-								
Name (First, MI, Last)						Home Phone									
										-					
Address (Street, Route, or P.O. Box)						City, State, or Province			Zip/Postal Code						

CHURCH INFORMATION

Church Name						
Address (Street, Route, or P.O. Box)		City, State, or Province				
		Zip/Postal Code				

CHANGE REQUEST ONLY

<input type="checkbox"/> Former Name						
<input type="checkbox"/> Former Address		City, State, or Province				
		Zip/Postal Code				
<input type="checkbox"/> Former Church		City, State, or Province				
		Zip/Postal Code				
Signature of Pastor, Conference Leader, or Other Church Leader						Date

*New participants are requested but not required to give SS# and date of birth. Existing participants, please give CGSP# when using SS# for the first time. Thereafter, only one ID# is required. *Mail To:* Christian Growth Study Plan, 127 Ninth Ave., North, MSN 117, Nashville, TN 37234-0117. Fax: (615)251-5067