



For
now

– *being the church
in unusual times*

For now – encouraging families with younger children

Just now: It takes a village

Being a parent can be hard work sometimes. Add to that a global pandemic and there are so many more challenges that get thrown into the mix of family life. One is that many of the usual church programmes that supplement the role of parents as primary disciplers of their children, have fallen foul of restrictions on church life. That shouldn't mean that the crucial role of the church in supporting and encouraging families with younger children can be set aside. Rather, it just needs to look different for now. Just as the African proverb says 'it takes a village to raise a child', it also takes a family of faith supporting parents to raise children to follow Jesus - and never more so than at this time.

Watch a short introduction to this session by [clicking here](#).

Read: Deuteronomy 6:4-9. [Click here](#) for the passage

Talk about: *Being the village*

These verses are a go-to passage in thinking about what discipleship in the family looks and feels like. They give an outline that helps us to consider both God's method and key moments in sharing faith with our kids. It is less programme and more personal. Less rules and roadmap, more regular relationship.

1. These verses are addressed to Israel as a community of all ages seeking to follow God together (v4). Children are a part of that to be both included and considered in the life of God's people as a whole (v7). As our congregation struggles to come to terms with restrictions on gathering arising from the Covid-19 pandemic, how does our response display an attempt to facilitate families with young children in how we worship and seek to support one another?
2. A primary aspect of effectively passing on faith in these verses is the importance of strong parental faith and devotion, built on basic practices which enable a growing love for the Lord with heart, soul and strength, and a desire to live in his ways (vv5-6). In this time when everyday life is more stressful and family life more demanding, in what practical ways could our church encourage parents to ensure they take time to develop their own walk with God?
3. The passage goes on to give a simple framework for sharing faith in the everyday rhythms and routines of home and family life – talking about faith when sitting or walking together, at bedtime and first thing in the morning (v7). This has become even more important with the onset of Covid-19 as so much congregational children's ministry has stopped. What might this everyday

faith sharing look like for the ordinary family? In what ways can our church encourage parents in this task of sharing faith in everyday conversation?

4. Verses 8 and 9 go on to suggest that it is not enough to just talk about faith with our children, but that there is a visual element to teaching and illustrating it. In Old Testament Israel that involved tying symbols to hands and foreheads, writing on doorposts and gates. In what ways can our congregation equip parents with simple tools that encourage talking about faith in the family and showing it to be a real part of the present experience of children living through the upheavals of the pandemic period?

Consider: *Things we can do as a congregation to encourage families with younger children*

- **Understand** – seek to understand the particular challenges experienced by families with young children arising from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- **Include** – as you make decisions and plan your congregation's response to Covid-19 restrictions, make arrangements for worship in-person or digitally, and prioritise other possible activities, include children and the needs of their parents in your thinking.
- **Devotional** – encourage parents in their spiritual walk by signposting resources like the Tides daily devotional www.presbyterianireland.org/tides
- **Equip** – create simple resource packs to be dropped off with families containing books and resources which encourage family discipleship.
- **Pray** – make sure families with young children and their particular needs are included in prayer in church services, prayer times and sharing of prayer requests.
- **Connect** – have the minister, district elder or children's ministry leader organise a time to call a family in their district on Zoom and take time to chat to everyone in the family together, then pray with them.

Try: *Creating conversation with and in families*

- **Coffee** – set up a Zoom coffee time after church where members can catch up with families and children who normally see each other in organisations can connect and chat. Breakout rooms could also be used to connect families together or to have members pray for individual families.
- **Walk** – walking is an outdoor activity that, with appropriate social distancing, is both possible and popular. Encourage families to be aware of God's world around them and to ponder questions about him as they are out and about.
- **Questions** – encourage families to share the meal table together and to use that time to ask each other questions like, "what was good about your day?", "what was challenging?", "where did you see God in your day?"
- **Morning** – encourage time in the morning, while brushing teeth, tying shoe laces or getting in the car, to simply pray, handing the day and all it holds over to God.
- **Bedtime** – encourage taking time at the end of the day to read the Bible and thank God for our day as a simple and important routine.

Pray: About what God is leading your congregations to do for now to encourage families with younger children.

Follow up?

To find out more about faith in the family and to signpost parents for more ideas visit the [PCI Family ministry Facebook page](#) and the Kitchen Table Project [website](#)

