

FOCUS ON THE FAMILY

Helping Families Thrive
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CHILD MAY NOT
FEEL LOVED

4 CHALLENGES
TO YOUR
CHILD'S FAITH

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Love Notes

My family makes homemade valentines for the widows and widowers in our church. We pray over the cards and for the people they are going to. On the Sunday before Valentine's Day, we hand them out. It's a small way for my children to begin caring for those who may be sad or lonely on Valentine's Day.

—Robin Meade

Community Cards

Beginning when my daughter was 2, we found a way to encourage others around Valentine's Day. We made craft hearts out of paper. I wrote, "Thank you for the love you show your community" on one side and "We appreciate you" on the other. We carried these hearts with us during February, and my daughter gave them to different workers we encountered—cashiers, librarians, custodians and others. It made her more aware of the people in our community.

—Emily Yang

Double Dates

My husband and I came up with a new Valentine's Day tradition: double-dating our children. He became our daughter's date, and I became our son's. Our hope was that our children would learn how to act on a date from our examples and would eventually look for spouses who treated them like we did on these dates.

The first Valentine's Day double date consisted of dinner and a movie. My husband held the door for our daughter, which taught our son to do the same for me. The evening continued in this way, as we gave our "dates" special attention. Everyone enjoyed this Valentine's Day event so much that we've continued the tradition over the last four years.

—Heather Lynn

FREE VALENTINES

Choose from three different sets of Valentine's Day cards—Adventures in Odyssey, Average Boy and Friends Out Back. You'll also find short, simple notes that you can give to your children to let them know how much you love them. Download this free Valentine's Day packet at FocusOnTheFamily.com/valentines.



Conversation Cues

Whenever I heard my daughter speak to her friends, her response had little to do with what they were talking about. So when she and I were alone, I pointed out that being a good friend meant being a good listener. I reminded her to:

- Make eye contact with the person talking. This forced her to give the speaker her undivided attention.
- Give a short response whenever someone finished speaking—even if it was just to say “cool” or “bummer”—to let the person know she was listening to him or her.

By practicing these two habits, my daughter slowly became a more engaged listener and a better friend.

—Heather Pike

No-Gossip Guidelines

I tell my kids that before they offer an opinion, especially about their friends, they should ask themselves three questions:

1. Is it true?
2. Is it kind?
3. How would I feel if it was said to or about me?

If their answers are negative to any of those questions, they need to keep their opinion to themselves. By doing that, they have become more trustworthy friends.

—Sandra Samoska

A FRIENDSHIP ATTITUDE

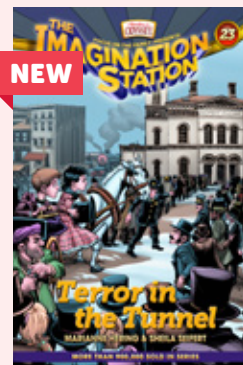
Ten-year-old Abby got in the car, tossed her bag in back and slumped in her seat.

“A new girl’s trying to steal Sarah away,” my daughter complained. “She wants to be Sarah’s best friend.”

I knew a teachable moment when I saw one. So I told Abby, “Sometimes the best way to love a friend is to share her with others. Sarah has blessed your life. Let her bless other girls’ lives, too.”

My daughter is learning to adjust her attitude. When she feels insecure, we talk. I’ve challenged her to say and think kind thoughts about this other girl and to occasionally even compliment her so that every action isn’t seen through a negative light. This has helped Abby learn to put herself in another’s shoes. Slowly, all three girls have become friends.

—Rebecca Lynn Dikeman



FROM FOCUS ON THE FAMILY TERROR IN THE TUNNEL

Join cousins Patrick and Beth on their latest Imagination Station adventure!
FocusOnTheFamily.com/Terror



WHY YOUR CHILD MAY NOT FEEL LOVED

... and what you can do about it

BY DR. GARY CHAPMAN

ONE OF MY CLIENTS was only 13 when he ran away from home. “My parents don’t love me,” he told me. “They love my brother, but they don’t love me.” I knew this boy’s parents, and I knew they loved him, but obviously he felt disconnected.

Most parents love their children. However, many children don’t *feel* loved. One possible reason is that parents aren’t “speaking” their child’s primary love language. Love can be expressed and received in five distinct ways or “languages,” which include words of affirmation, quality time, acts of service, gifts or physical touch. If parents don’t speak the right language, a child likely won’t feel loved, even though the parents may speak the other love languages.

While a child’s love language doesn’t change, by the teen years the “dialect” of that love language may change. Here is how to figure out your child’s love language or dialect at each stage of his or her development.

the first six years

Most parents are fully dedicated to meeting the physical needs of their young children. However, they may not think as much about the child's emotional needs. One of the needs that is essential to the child's well-being is the need to feel loved. The first six years are extremely important in meeting this emotional need.

In the early stages, parents should speak all five love languages.

Physical touch is the most natural language for parents. It is almost instinctive to hold and cuddle young children. All research indicates that children who receive tender touch at this stage of life will be much healthier emotionally than children who receive little touch.

Acts of service is a love language that you must speak in order for your child to survive. When your child is an infant, you feed, clean and change her. As she grows, you serve her by exposing her to things she can see, touch, taste, smell and hear. You do things for her that she cannot do for herself.

Quality time becomes important as a child ages. This is when reading stories, as he sits on your lap, becomes meaningful. Playing age-appropriate games communicates that you love him. The child has your undivided attention, and nothing is more important to him.

Gift giving is a concept that most

kids begin to understand by age 4. When you wrap a present, it is even more exciting for your little one. This provides an opportunity to teach your child to express gratitude after receiving a gift.

Words of affirmation can encourage and inspire a young child. Praising her efforts at learning to walk gives her motivation to get up and try again. As your child begins her very first attempts at reading, your encouragement gives her the confidence to keep learning.

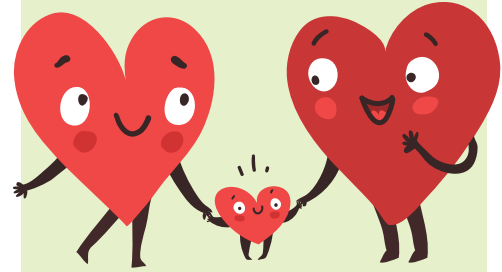
Studying your child

As you speak all five love languages to your child, observe how he relates to you. From his reaction, you can begin to notice his primary love language around the age of 4.

When my son was that age, he would run to the door and begin climbing up my leg the moment I came home. If I sat down, he was in my lap. His love language was physical touch. My daughter never did that. She would say, "Come into my room, Daddy. I want to show you something." Quality time was her primary love language.

The goal is to give your child heavy doses of his or her primary love language while continuing to include the other four. This teaches the child how to receive and give love in all five languages. >>>

WHAT ARE THE FIVE LOVE LANGUAGES?



PHYSICAL TOUCH

Some children need to be physically shown love through hugging, holding their hand or even squeezing their arm gently to show you care.

ACTS OF SERVICE

This form of showing children that they are loved comes from doing small things for them. Perhaps doing their chores or helping with a difficult task speaks their love language.

QUALITY TIME

Some children feel loved when they are given a parent's undivided attention. They want to talk and be heard in one-on-one time, whether on a walk, sitting on the couch or going somewhere.

GIFTS

All children love gifts, but some feel especially loved when they are given gifts that show how someone thought about them. The value of the gift increases with the amount of thought that went into it.

WORDS OF AFFIRMATION

Some children feel loved when a parent affirms them or builds them up with words.



the school- age and preteen years

How parents bond with their children in the preadolescent years will greatly impact their emotional health and behavior during their teen years. When parents learn to speak a child's primary love language throughout grade school and middle school, they prepare their child for a smoother transition into adolescence.

Sometimes loving parents wonder why their child is not motivated to study more, or play sports, or sing or pursue a number of other activities. Their child may be spending too much time playing video games or reading comics, but the parent can't seem to pull the child into more meaningful activities.

When children feel deeply loved by parents, they are much more open to parental guidance. As parents discover the simple principle of speaking

a child's love language, they see dramatic changes in their child's attitude and behavior. One mom told me, "We cannot believe the changes we are seeing in our 10-year-old son since we started speaking his primary love language."

Studying your child

Here are three ways to better discover a child's primary love language during the school-age and preteen years:

- **Notice how your child relates to you.** Typically, kids show love in the way they'd like to receive it. Does your child give you affirming words, for instance, or a number of gifts? How he treats you is evidence of his primary love language.

• **Listen to what your child complains about the most.** Her complaints can reveal her love language. “We don’t ever spend any time together” reveals the love language of quality time. “I can’t ever please you” indicates that she wants words of affirmation. If your child complains that she doesn’t have something, her language might be gift giving, but consider how your child wants to use the item. Its use might reveal her love language. For example, if she complains that she wants a new outfit because she wants to shop with you, the language might be quality time and not gift giving; but if she wants it because she wants to look good in front of others, her language may be words of affirmation.

• **Categorize the types of things your child requests the most.** “Can

we take a walk?” is a request for quality time. “How does this look?” or “how am I doing?” reveals his desire for words of affirmation.

If you think you know your child’s love language, you can test your theory. Focus on one of the love languages each week for five weeks. On the week that you are speaking your child’s primary love language, you will see a difference in his attitude and behavior.

Once you are confident in knowing your child’s primary love language, speak it daily and watch his “love tank” begin to fill up. Meeting your child’s emotional needs will reap huge dividends in your family. One mother told me, “It was amazing how our relationship improved when we started walking with our son and giving him individual attention.” >>>



FOCUS ON THE FAMILY PRESENTS

7 Traits of Effective Parenting

ASSESSMENT

Focus on the Family's *7 Traits of Effective Parenting Assessment* gives parents with kids of all ages an honest look at their unique strengths, plus some areas that could use a little help.

You can help raise the next generation of healthy, mature and responsible children—and this assessment will help get you started.

TAKE THE ASSESSMENT

FocusOnTheFamily.com/7Traits



the teen years

A mother told me, “I know my daughter’s love language is quality time. As a child, she loved to play games with me, and we’d go shopping together. Now that she’s a teen, she has no interest in doing those things with me. Did her love language change?”

Parents often ask that question about their teens. The answer is no. But *how* you communicate your children’s love language might need to be tweaked. You may need to learn new “dialects” of your teen’s love language.

Teens go through tremendous physical, emotional and intellectual changes. Even if you spoke her love language when she was younger, she may draw back from it when she becomes a teen, believing the ways you formerly expressed love seem childish now. Her primary language is likely the same as it has always been, but she may not “hear” or “speak” that language in the same ways that she used to. The dialect has changed.

Mom can hug her 10-year-old after his game, and he feels loved. But three or four years later, a hug may no longer feel comfortable for him. He still needs physical

touch—but not necessarily in front of his teammates.

A teen’s emotions fluctuate in response to what happens in life. A child who loves physical touch may receive a hug from Mom in the morning but may reject one in the afternoon. Why? Something happened at school that impacted him emotionally. A good rule of thumb with hugs is: If your teen stands close to you, he will likely receive your hug. If he stands across the room, probably not. Try to read his mood, and you will understand why your expressions of love may be accepted or rejected.

Studying your teen

If you don’t know your teen’s love language, ask: “On a scale of one to 10, how much love do you feel coming from me?” Then ask, “What could I do to bring up my score?” Or, if you are really brave, ask this question: “Would you give me one idea for how I can be a better parent?” The answer can give you a clue to your teen’s love language.

Remember, teen brains are in the process of being rewired. He is

developing a more logical thought process and will begin to question your ideas and opinions more often. He is more argumentative, which might frustrate and anger you, and when you’re angry, you may be less inclined to express love. You may even be tempted to respond with negative or condemning words. But you must be careful not to allow your emotions to dictate your behavior. Instead, offer empathetic listening.

“I’m glad to see you thinking about this,” you might say. “Please let me hear your thoughts.” Empathetic listening fosters the teen’s developing intellect. Learning to listen, instead of arguing, is the road to keeping your teen’s love tank full.

You may find it difficult to speak your teen’s changing love dialect. It’s OK to start with baby steps. For instance, in the area of physical touch, begin with a light touch on the shoulder as you walk by, or offer a fist bump after a positive event. Then try a pat on the back. Small steps eventually can lead to big hugs. ●

Dr. Gary Chapman is the best-selling author of *The Five Love Languages of Teenagers* and *The Five Love Languages of Children*.

4 challenges to your child's faith

... and how you can counter them

BY NATASHA CRAIN

"THERE'S NOT A SHRED of evidence that Jesus ever existed."

It wasn't the first comment I'd received from someone questioning Christianity. Over the years, my website has attracted hundreds of skeptics wanting to challenge my posts. Although I've been a Christian since childhood and I wanted to respond, I felt unprepared to knowledgeably discuss such claims as:

"Science has disproved God."

"The Bible is filled with contradictions."

"Christianity is a copycat of pagan religions."

But the day someone commented that there was no evidence Jesus even *existed*, I knew I had to be better informed. I discovered apologetics, the discipline of studying how to make a case for the truths of Christianity. Apologetics helped me better understand the historical evidence for Christ's ministry and resurrection and gave me good responses to claims against Jesus' existence.

As I studied, I learned that many young people today are walking away from Christianity because they don't understand the evidence that refutes the same challenges I've encountered. Sadly, many Christian parents are unaware of how to include this information in the discipleship of their kids.

If you are one of these parents, you can begin educating yourself by learning how to respond to the following four challenges to our faith:

“Faith doesn’t work together with reason.”

1

NOT LONG AGO, I was talking with some parents about how to best disciple children. One mom had a view of faith very different from my own. “I tell my daughter that belief in God is just a matter of faith,” she said. “It’s like with Santa Claus. Some people believe; some don’t.”

Sadly, this mom seemed to have accepted the misconception that faith is the opposite of reason, no different from a child’s belief in Santa. Unfortunately, many parents agree with this false dichotomy between faith and reason. “We just need to have faith,” they tell their kids when someone criticizes them for holding “unreasonable” beliefs.

Help your kids recognize that they need not choose between faith and reason. Faith, by itself, is a commitment to a belief. It can be based on good or bad reasons. A well-placed faith is supported by good reason, and a poorly placed faith isn’t supported by reason.

Christians are instructed to have a reasonable faith in response to the evidence God has provided, such as the intelligently designed world we live in or the fact that humans are uniquely wired to understand a moral code. We must understand the evidence and be prepared to share when asked (1 Peter 3:15).

APPLICATION

Help your kids see that Christians should welcome conversations based on reason and logic. Explain that there is a clear distinction between a well-placed and poorly placed faith. Look for examples of both, talking about how these compare to our faith in God.

For example, I recently noticed that my son was in the kitchen examining spoons in the silverware drawer. “They’re not always clean,” he said.

“So you have reason to believe the dishwasher isn’t effective,” I said. “To trust it would be poorly placed faith!”

We laughed, but that little moment led to a good discussion about how faith in God is based on good reason.

“Science has disproved God.”

2

IF FAITH IS GROUNDED IN REASON, it follows that our kids need to understand what those good reasons are and how to look deeper into the ways God has revealed himself to us.

The Bible is our main source of knowledge about God, but Christians often overlook the natural world as a source of God’s revelation to us. What, if anything, do you think you would be able to know about God from looking at the world around you?

Our physical world declares God’s glory, proclaiming the work of His hands (Psalm 19:1). Christians must recognize that true science—an honest observation of the created world—is not incompatible with our faith.

A good place to begin is . . . well, with *beginnings*. It’s an accepted scientific fact that the universe had a beginning. We also know that anything that starts to exist must have a cause. We don’t see things popping into existence without a cause. So our vast universe necessarily had a *cause*. And in order to *create* things like space, time and matter, that cause would be *outside* of space, time and matter. This description is entirely consistent with the Bible’s picture of Creation and of who God is.



Tune in to our broadcast as Natasha Crain explains how to build your child's faith with everyday situations.
FocusOnTheFamily.com/Crain

Astrophysicist Hugh Ross and his colleagues have observed over 140 properties of the universe, such as the strength of gravity, that appear to be precisely adjusted to support the existence of life. It's extraordinarily improbable that these factors would all, by chance, line up just right for life to flourish. This strongly suggests that our universe is the product of a purposeful intelligence beyond nature.

APPLICATION

Ask your child to imagine learning about God without the benefit of the Bible: "What could you learn about God from looking at the world around you?" Read Romans 1:18-20 and discuss what the Bible says we can learn from nature. Use this as a steppingstone to future conversations about what our world reveals about the Creator.

"Where is your God now?"

3

AS TERRORIST ATTACKS and other man-made tragedies fill headlines, comments like this demonstrate how the problem of evil enters everyday conversations. It's an age-old dilemma: If God really is good, He *would* eliminate evil, and if He is all-powerful, He *could* eliminate it. But since evil exists, does God exist?

I've been contacted by many parents whose kids have decided that the existence of evil and a good God can't be reconciled; they've concluded that God must not exist.

We must anticipate this challenge. Answering it starts with helping our children remember that God created humans with the gift of free will. I ask my kids to imagine what life would be like without the possibility of ever choosing evil. What if we were *only* able to do good and love God? It doesn't take long to understand: We'd be like robots blindly obeying commands.

True goodness can't be forced; we must choose it. But that freedom allows us to make evil choices, too. God made evil possible by giving us the power to choose, but humans are responsible for bringing evil into the world.

It's equally important for young people to understand that atheists have their own problem with evil. If God doesn't exist, there would be no objective standard for calling *anything* evil. Without a moral authority over humankind, what we call "good" and "evil" can only be a matter of opinion. Yet our deepest intuition tells us that certain behaviors are objectively evil. And since these objective moral "laws" truly exist, the best explanation is that a moral *law-giver* exists, as well (Romans 2:14-16).

APPLICATION

News stories unfortunately provide ample opportunities to bring this subject to the forefront of discussion. Use a news story to ask your child, "How do you think this kind of evil can happen if God is good?" Discuss the nature of free will. Then explain that only in a world where God exists can we objectively label the wrongdoing as evil. >>>

AGENTS OF TRUTH

Can your kids respond to the secular challenges to Christianity? Download our free adventure kit, *Agents of Truth*. Kids will be tasked with 12 missions to help them understand what it means to have a ready defense for their faith (1 Peter 3:15). Download this free resource today.

FocusOnTheFamily.com/AgentsOfTruth



“Do you really believe dead people can live again?”

4

IMAGINE YOUR KIDS running in from outside, shouting, “We just saw three pigs fly over!” You likely wouldn’t believe them. Pigs can’t fly!

For many people, this is the same logic by which they determine that the claims of Christianity, such as the Resurrection, are not true. An atheist once told me, “I know there was no Resurrection because I know from science that dead people stay dead.” Other skeptics agree: The claims of Christianity don’t fit the workings of the natural world.

It’s important for our kids to understand the inherent flaw here. Christians and nonbelievers all agree that dead people don’t come back to life *naturally*. But miracles like the Resurrection are not events that Christians believe happen according to the laws of nature. Miracles, by definition, happen *supernaturally*—by God’s direct action in our world.

It follows, then, that if God exists, miracles are possible. If God doesn’t exist, miracles are not possible. Nature is all there is. This is a key distinction for kids to understand. Miracles like the Resurrection are events with a cause from outside of nature. They aren’t limited by natural laws!

APPLICATION

Ask your child, “Why do you think Christians believe Jesus came back to life when we know that all other people who die remain dead?” Clarify that the Resurrection is a *miracle* claim and that miracles are events with a cause from outside of nature, so they don’t necessarily follow natural laws. Emphasize that if God, the Creator of our universe exists, then miracles are absolutely possible and even expected.

These conversations are only a starting point, but they provide a framework for responding to the main intellectual challenges Christians face today, and they will lead to discussions that equip kids with a more confident faith. ●

Natasha Crain is an author and apologetics teacher. Her most recent book is *Talking With Your Kids About God*.