

Practical tools for nurturing faith in children

Active Disciplining in Families



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Family Active Discipling

Why is family important to faith formation?

Children need to be nurtured in a safe family household built on love. This is God's original pattern.

At every stage of a child's development, the household family has the most influence. Nurturing and training a child in all areas of their life, including spiritual, is called **disciple-making or discipling**.

In the Gospels, we see how Jesus disciplined His close followers. He was loving, personal, intentional and active as He helped them grow.

Discipling is clearly a priority in the Scriptures. As we see in Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and Jesus' *Great Commission* in Matthew 28:19, it is God's great priority for us to pass on faith to the next generation.

God has designed the family to be the primary place where children can be disciplined and has made the family the means of raising the next generation in His ways.

The Old Testament uses two words for 'family'. One (*mishpachah*) represents the wider family or 'clan' and the other (*bayith*) represents the household. Both are important in the discipling of our children.

As children grow and change, our approach to discipling needs to reflect this. This guide will help you to adapt your discipling strategies to the various stages of a child's life.

May your
family flourish
for God's glory!



Research shows just how influential the first 1000 days of a child's life are. Influence from conception to 2 years old shapes the path of a child's life.

thousanddays.org

A child is born with a brain of 100 billion neurons (same as the number of stars in the Milky Way). They are designed to connect as a baby learns.

parentingforbrain.com

A person will spend less than 20% of their life as a child. We are not so much 'raising children' as 'raising adults.'

As a child grows up, the time that a parent has to influence them drops from 12 + hours per day as a baby, to less than 2 hours per day as a teen.

justaphase.com

Children learn as much from what they observe of you as they do from what you tell them. Telling them to do anything important without your living example will be almost worthless. We must 'walk the talk'.

Passing on faith

Foundational thinking on passing on faith to the next generation.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 (NIV) says:

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts.

Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

This part of scripture immediately follows the Ten Commandments. What is Israel's first priority in obeying God? It is to pass the Commandments faithfully to the next generation. How do we pass on faith? We **impress**.

Many principles can be drawn from this passage about how to impress. There are three verbs used: **talk, tie and write**.

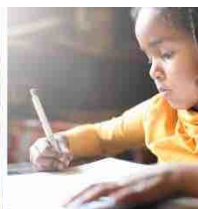
Talk, tie and write

Three actions that help make an impression.

Talk so children can hear and respond. Talk about God and life at all times and in all circumstances.

Create symbols so children can form important connections (**tie**) between God and life. Make things as reminders of God's message: objects, paintings, posters; write poems, journals and family stories. Display these items in the house.

Write about God's word in ordinary life. Use every day experiences to memorize scripture and to model to children how to respond personally to God's Word. Be active together in living out the faith.



Find creative and age appropriate ways for children to have faith active in their lives – through hearing, doing and seeing. Disciple making in the family needs to be constant and intentional.

Teachable moments

Powerful daily opportunities to learn together.

In life, there are many moments when we are ready and receptive to learn. These are called *teachable moments*. In fact, the best way to deal with failure, conflict and disappointment is to draw life lessons from them. Deuteronomy reminds us that these moments are around us every day, for ourselves and our children. We must be alert to these opportunities and learn how best to use them.

Think about how your children learn.

- When are they most receptive?
- Do they learn better by seeing, hearing or doing?



Constant messages

Identity, love and purpose.

God spoke three things at Jesus' baptism: "You are my son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."
(Mark 1:11)

When God says these things right at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, it gives us an insight into God as a father. God speaks to Jesus in three major areas of His life; His identity (you are my son); His value (He is loved); and in His God-pleasing purpose.

We can use these three principles to help us shape the constant messages we give our own children.

Identity	Love	Purpose
We want our children to know they are God's precious children.	We want them to know they are loved, forgiven and restored.	We want them to know that they will flourish in life as they serve God and others.

How can you find ways every day to reinforce and deepen these three essential messages to your child?



Milestone guide

As children grow and change, our approach to discipling them will also adapt to their new intellectual, physical, emotional, and social needs. This guide will help you think about these milestones and make specific plans to make the most of these stages.

0-2 years	the <u>foundational</u> years
3-6 years	the <u>curious</u> years
7-11 years	the <u>active</u> years
12-18 years	the <u>restructuring</u> years

NOTE: All children develop at their own pace, so use this advice on the following pages as a general guide only.

0-2 years

The foundational years - the most formative time of life in every aspect.

Physical development

I am asking, "Can you please meet my needs?" I am growing faster than I will ever grow. So ...

Hold me when you pray for me and when we worship God together, so I can hear and feel your voice. Remind me that God made me and loves me.

Intellectual development

I am asking for stimulation, attention and loving care. My attention span is 1-4 minutes. I learn to move and communicate by playing. So ...

Tell me that God made everything. Tell me that God loves me and cares for me. Talk about my world as God's world; share the wonder with me.

Social/emotional development

I am asking, "Am I safe? Can I trust you?" I will cry to communicate strong feelings, tiredness or physical need. So ...

Tell me and show me that God loves me and God loves everyone. When I cry, show me that God loves me by checking me, comforting me and praying for me.

Key things to do as parents

1. Pray for them and with them every day.
2. Read, talk and sing with them on your lap.
3. Play with them at their level and give them your focused attention, especially eye contact.
4. Remember, baby tears are not sinful, they show a baby is emotionally overwhelmed, over-tired or has another need.



3-6 years

The curious years.

Physical development

I am asking, “What can my body do?” My rate of growth is slower and consistent. So ...

Pray with me in many different places and times, like walking, working, and travelling. Act out Bible stories with me to help me understand ideas better. Build models and make things with me to help me understand the Bible better.

Intellectual development

I am asking “why” questions to learn about the world. My attention span is 5-9 minutes. I like to explore and discover things for myself. I am learning to read. So ...

Read the Bible with me as a story book. Keep teachable moments very short. Take me seriously if I decide I want to follow Jesus. Use all my senses to make ideas appealing.

Social/emotional development

I am asking, “Do I have your attention?” I love being with my family and friends, but struggle to play with more than one at a time. I can identify major emotions in myself and others. I can understand when I do something wrong (sin). So ...

Encourage me to talk to my friends about Jesus and the Bible. Encourage me to recognise and understand the consequences of my sin, ask for forgiveness and seek to restore the relationship.

Key things to do as parents

1. Give them your full attention when talking with them about their questions.
2. Have fun together and play imaginary games.
3. Play rough and tumble games with them on the floor or ground.



7-11 years

The active years.

Physical development

I am asking: “What can I do well with my body?” I am mastering hand-eye coordination through play and training. I am still growing (some girls experience early puberty). My adult teeth are emerging. So ...

Connect faith to everyday actions (worship, serving, chores). Help me understand that I am responsible for my choices. Encourage me as I train myself.

Intellectual development

I am asking, “What I am good at?” I think about words and ideas literally. I am asking complex questions. My attention span is 9-13 minutes. I can understand another point of view. So ...

Use faith to explore complex questions with me. Help me see the historical truth and validity of the Bible and Jesus’ work. Help me explore what God wants of me, and of people everywhere.

Social/emotional development

I am asking, “Who are my friends?” I am ready to be responsible; to lead, to care, to be an activist. I depend on adults to help me cope with threats, injustice, anxiety and grief. So ...

Engage faith around my interests and friendships. Teach me to pray and to know that I can ask God to change me. Model for me how to lean on God for guidance and comfort. Empower me to tell others about Jesus.

Key things to do as parents

1. Be active with them and open their world to new experiences and safe people.
2. Speak about faith, personal experiences and topics that influence their world.
3. Give them training and increasing responsibility with chores and self-management.



12 + years

The restructuring years.

Physical development

I am asking, “What is normal? Am I normal?” I can be unsettled or embarrassed by changes to my body. I am tired and need more sleep. I need help to assess physical risk as I try out my strength. I may stop growing at 12 or grow until I am 20. So ...

Remind me of what I will become and don't lose patience with who I am now. Give me opportunities to try my strength and build physical skills so I can use them to serve God and others.

Intellectual development

I am questioning ... everything! I have a 15-minute attention span — only if you are interesting. My brain is restructuring as a normal part of growth. I have increased abstract thinking, imaginative and reasoning skills. I learn by connecting ideas and personalising them. So ...

I need to know that God can answer my difficult questions. I need evidence that the Bible is truthful, reliable and relevant. I need people to discuss the Bible with me and listen to my point of view.

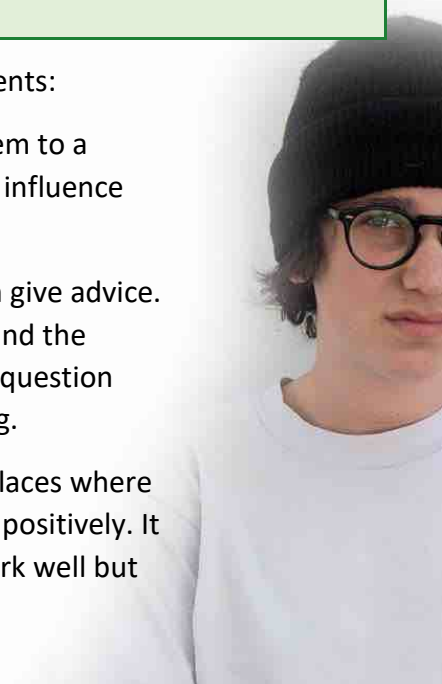
Social/emotional development

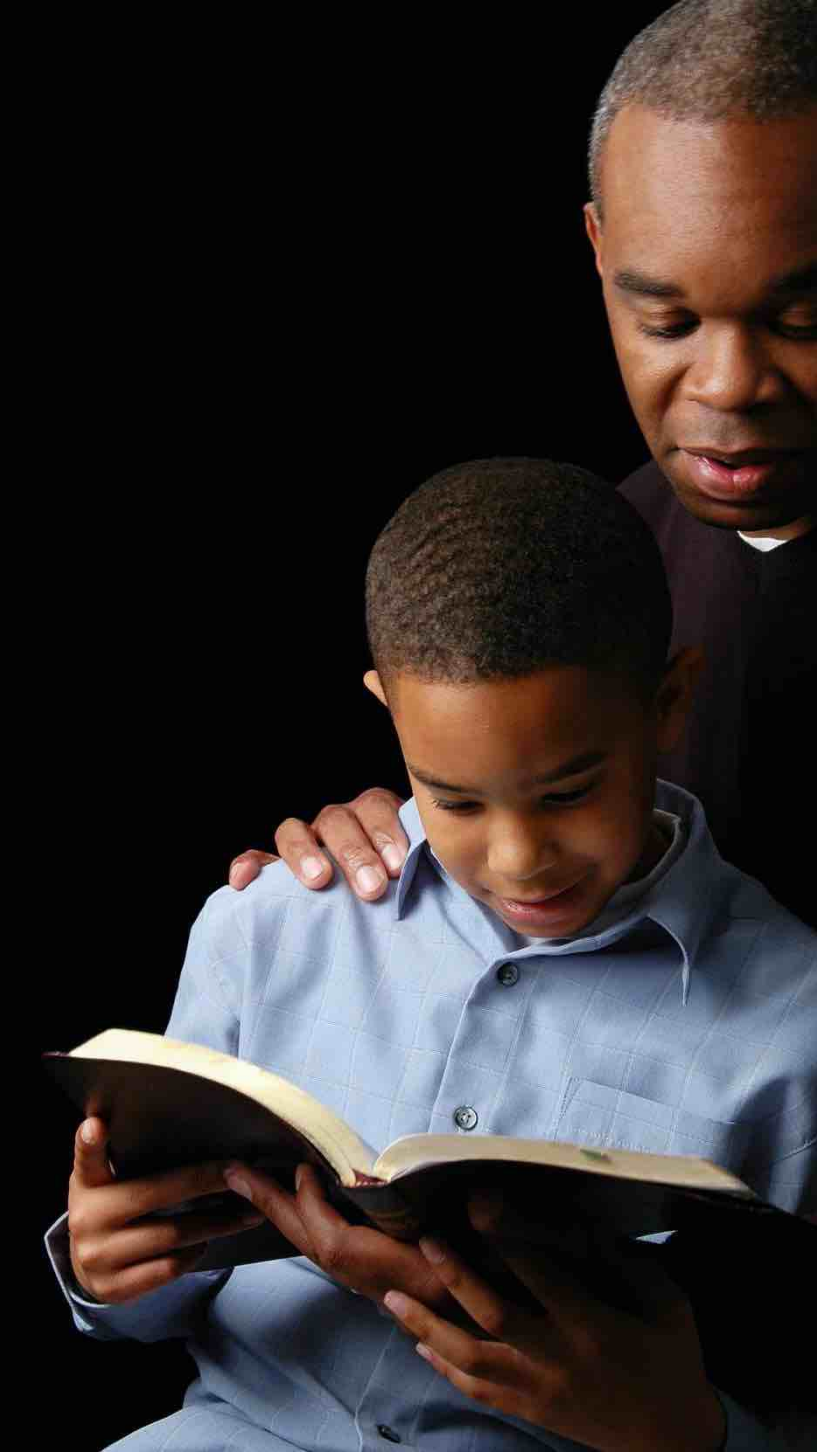
I am asking, “Who am I? Where do I belong?” I still need to belong to my family, but I won’t always tell them. I am able to self-reflect and evaluate, but my strong emotions are often driven by hormonal changes. I am very oriented toward my peer group but I will rework friendships and friendship groups. So ...

Help me connect with other Christians in my peer group. Give me good models and mentors to follow. Remind me of my identity in Christ. Show me how to use God’s word to self-reflect and evaluate.

Key things to do as parents:

1. Help connect them to a mentor who can influence them for good.
2. Listen more than give advice. Seek to understand the motivation for a question before answering.
3. Find times and places where you can connect positively. It won’t always work well but keep persisting.





Active lasting faith

How to help faith 'stick' in our children.

2 principles

1	Be intentional about discipling children daily in the household family
2	Connect with other generations authentically

8 practical areas to consider

3	Encounters with Jesus
4	Connect with the 'big story' of the Bible (not only disconnected individual stories)
5	Celebrate transitions from one life-stage to another
6	Mentors
7	Mountain top experiences
8	Positive peer community
9	Compassionate responses
10	Serve in mission

Encounters with Jesus

Help children to see how your life and decisions are connected to your relationship with Jesus.

Read the Gospels often to see and know the real Jesus. See His value in everyday life.



Pray WITH your children for all sorts of things *e.g. the news, their teachers, their faith, healing of sick people.*

Talk with them about how God answers prayer and sometimes seems not to. Try praying when you have them as a captive audience *e.g. in the car or at bedtime.*

Pray FOR your children and their encounters with Jesus; try setting a phone alarm at a certain time of day to remind you *e.g. their birthday time (12:07 for 7th December).*

Act towards your kids in a way that demonstrates Jesus' love and grace. Ask for their forgiveness when you speak in anger.

Connect with the *big story* of the Bible

Share with children your own journey of faith and how it connects to the big narrative of the Bible.

Tell them about how you chose to follow Jesus. Ask others to share too.

Choose books and Bible devotions that help you explain how all the stories of the Bible fit together.

Make a flow-chart or timeline to show how different parts of the Bible fit together.

Use many hearing, seeing and doing activities to explore the Bible together. Remember, everyone learns slightly differently.



Celebrate transitions

Celebrate milestones which mark significant transitions or achievements in a child's life. These include birthdays, new stages and graduations.

Take your child (of the same gender) on a retreat or adventure to mark the beginning of the teenage season.



Invite mentors to write letters of encouragement to your child at the end of key seasons of schooling.

Give a timeless symbolic gift to mark a new season in their life *e.g. watch, bike, book.*

Say important and life giving messages at birthdays rather than silly embarrassing stories *e.g. "I am so glad you were born. You remind us of God's goodness every day."*

Mentors

Older believers can play a key role in listening and being available for life's big and small questions.

Encourage your children to meet youth group leaders and also believers from older generations who may be available for them in a particular season of life.

Start a 'KidsHub' with your families and others around sport, gardening, drama, computers, art, photography, cooking (see KidsHubs.com). This is a way for adults, teens and kids to learn and be disciplined together around everyday life activities.

Have a family worship time (a small group of families) where everyone plays a role: sharing the Bible message, leading worship, Bible reading, creative reflection. Everyone can experience "church" together inter-generationally.



Mountain top experiences

A mountain top experience is a special catalytic event that helps to inspire everyday discipleship.

Have a camp with other families or children. These complement regular activities in faith communities and can significantly inspire and encourage children. Try a residential camp with a special evening speaker or a concert.

Plan a mission or service trip as a family for a day or a week.

Run a local outreach in your own community.



Positive peer community

Friends and friendship groups can have significant influence on our children.

Pray for positive friendships and consider ways of creating positive peer environments.

Invite a friend of your child to join a family event.

Get to know your children's friends at parties, sports events, and 'play dates.'

Offer to help with the youth group by preparing food, cleaning, leading activities or transportation. You will get to know and enjoy the child's peer group, and they will also get to know and respect you.



Respond with compassion

Model the compassion of Jesus with your kids.

Allow them to plan or prepare a meal for someone.

Help them to come up with an idea for demonstrating compassion in their neighbourhood. Try working with them to shape it and see it happen.

Discuss ways to use their own resources to help others in need.



Serve in mission

Show that faith is active and more than words.

Join an intergenerational team to serve in a practical way. On a work team, in a neighbourhood outreach, short-term mission, or festival.

Take kids when you participate in outreach events, volunteer at church or visit people in need.

Develop a family mission statement about the role God has given you as a family.



What next?

Make a faith development strategy for each of your children.

Here's how.

Take some time to pray and think about each of your children. You might spend 30-60 minutes on each one. As you do this, write some notes around these questions.

1. What things are they concerned about now?
2. What parts of their character or life are you struggling with?
3. What ways/situations do you naturally connect with them and have your best times together?
4. What ideas do you have to help them flourish in their lives?

Then sit with each child and ask them how you can help them grow in faith and in your relationship. Take some notes. Then pray for them together.

Do this again every 6-12 months to guide your efforts in discipling.

More reading

1. **Sticky faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in your Kids** - book by Kara E Powell & Chap Clark
2. **Global Family Alliance** website - <http://familyalliance.org>
3. **Here2Stay** website - <http://here2stay.org.au>
4. **It's Just a Phase – So Don't Miss It** – book by Reggie Joiner & Kristen Ivy - justaphase.com

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Creative Active Learning Supplement



Jesus' creative learning techniques

Jesus was a very creative teacher. He was focused on both the message and how to communicate it.

Try this simple activity. Allow 1 or 2 minutes.

1. List or draw as many of the **objects** Jesus used in His teaching to help His disciples or the crowds to learn a lesson as you can.
2. List or draw as many of the **places** where Jesus did his teaching as you can.

What does this tell you about Jesus' teaching methods?

If Jesus used very active discipling methods, are there ways we can apply this to how we disciple our children?

- Where and when do you find teachable moments with your children? Take notice.
- What types of activities do they respond most to?
- What 'a-ha' moments have you had together?

Using 5 senses

Jesus used all five senses when helping people to learn about the Kingdom of God. He understood the power of our brains in encoding multisensory experiences.

Jesus used:

Hearing – Telling parables and stories. Explaining ideas. Preaching and teaching. Rebuking.

Seeing – Looking at objects and situations together. Imagining objects and places. Being outdoors.

Tasting – Eating together to include those people on the ‘outside’. Using meals symbolically to remember important things.

Touching – Using touch when healing and to include people on the fringes. Washing feet.

Smelling – Using places to teach that had rich smells: fishing, fields of flowers and Lazarus’ tomb.

Are there ways you can engage your child more holistically as you learn together?

Using 8 intelligences

Current educational techniques involve 'multiple intelligences'. We see Jesus using all of these 2000 years ago in His discipling.

All children and adults are gifted in their thinking in different ways. Everyone is unique. Pay attention to the ways your children particularly like to wrestle with new ideas. They will likely be really strong in 3 of these intelligences.

Using Words

Discipling with:

Jesus' example:

Use of words

Preached sermons

Listening

Read the Scriptures in the synagogue

Reading and writing

Told stories

Speaking

Listened; asked questions

Memorizing

Matthew 5,6 and 7,13,18

With your children:

- Tell and read stories.
- Encourage writing: journals, poems, thoughts, letters to other children and/or older believers.
- Engage your children in discussion.

Using Music & Rhythm

Discipling with:

Music
Rhythm and Pitch
Sensitivity to emotional power of music

Jesus' example:

Mark 14:26 - Last Supper
Jesus quoted from Psalms -
Matt 21:16 (Psalm 8:2),
Matt 27:46 (Psalm 22:1)

- Sing and play songs containing truth. Play instruments.
- Encourage song writing.
- Mix worship music into everyday life.

Using Mathematics and Logic

Discipling with:

Numbers
Abstract thinking
Logical reasoning
Organization
Problem solving

Jesus' example:

Asked probing, thinking questions
Reasoned with the Pharisees
Matthew 19:16-30
Mark 2:23 – 3:6

- Ask probing, thinking questions about the Bible.
- Encourage them to use gifts of organisation to serve at church.
- Involve your children in problem solving about age-appropriate Biblical issues that affect them.

Using Space and Vision

Discipling with:	Jesus' example:
Art	Drew in the dirt
Drawing	Used metaphors e.g. pearl, mustard seed
Imagination	Used objects to teach e.g. fish, sheep, a boy's lunch
Use of metaphors	John 6:1-15

- Use pictures, posters, Scriptures and maps around the house.
- Let your children draw or mind map their understandings.
- Use arts and crafts activities to explore their understanding.
- Ask them about the things they imagine. Imagine with them about the changes that following Jesus can bring to our lives and our world.

Using Body and Physical Activities

Discipling with:	Jesus' example:
Athletics	Put mud on eyes of blind man
Dance	Healed the deaf mute
Hand skills	Washed disciples' feet
Acting	Walked everywhere
	John 13:1-17

- Act out stories together, role-play situations.
- Play games, dance, run and play sport together.
- Encourage them to build models and work with their hands.

Using People and Relationships

Discipling with:	Jesus' example:
Working with others	Had 12 close disciples
Negotiation	Talked with everyone, healed and helped people of any age, culture or gender
Awareness of others' needs	Mark 3:7-19

- Chat together as a family.
- Do service projects together.

- Mix with other families and children, spend time with believers and non-believers.

Using Self Reflection

Discipling with:

Jesus' example:

Understanding self

Self-motivation

Meditation

Made time for quiet reflection and prayer

Mark 1:35-39

- Create opportunities (and a physical space) for quiet reflection and alone-time; keep a journal, pray, do Bible devotions.
- Talk together one-on-one with your children.

Using Nature and Outdoors

Discipling with:

Jesus' example:

Open spaces

Things of nature

Jesus often preached outdoors

Used things of nature in His stories.

Mark 4:26-41

- Spend time outdoors; plan family activities that connect with nature.
- Learn how to take care of animals and/or gardens together. Share about God creating us and caring for us.

