

ABC's of Worshiping with Children

Arrive in time to allow children to choose a good place to sit. Encourage children to sit up front where they can see the pastor, musicians, choir etc.

Bring your child's Bible into worship with you. Also don't forget your child's worship bag from the back of the sanctuary. Each child has their own bag with paper, crayons or colored pencils, and a worship guide. Also get a children's bulletin from the ushers when you enter the sanctuary. The worship bags for older children have a notebook: to write down unfamiliar words, draw a picture about something they hear in the sermon, take notes during the sermon..

Clue your child into what will happen next in worship. Children who like to read will want to read the words in the Bible, on the screen or in the hymnal. They like to be ready. Keep a bookmark in their bag/notebook so they can find the Scripture text for the day.

Discuss worship when you are at home. Take time to answer questions about worship experiences. Consider starting a family worship time at home.

Express your gladness with having children in worship. After the service, be sure to welcome the children sitting near you. Encourage your children to greet other members of the congregation. When you make introductions, always introduce your children and introduce yourself to other people's children. Include them in your conversations to let them know they belong.

Firm, loving, and consistent. Apply the same discipline you use for other important matters. Make the boundaries as wide as you can make them (say yes as much as you can), but keep the boundaries FIRM. Remember that teaching worship behavior will be much easier during childhood than waiting until adolescence.

Guide young readers to read the hymnal, Bible, words on the screen, and bulletin:

- . Look together for familiar words.
- . Follow the lines/sentences with a bookmark or bulletin on it its side.

Holy Hugs. Use a gentle touch - an arm around your child's shoulder or holding hands gives children reassurance and appropriate attention.

In and out. Children come *in and out* of participation- The children's bulletin or traditional bulletin helps them find their place and join in. When they can't keep their focus on the service, they can engage in a related activity. Check out the children's area at the back of the sanctuary for alternative activities. It is also a great idea to let your child keep something special to do or read from home in their worship bag. If they only use the toy or book during worship, it will become more special.

Joyful worship for all members of the congregation is our goal. Children are an important part of the family of God and the family is not complete when the children are absent. We want all members of the church to look forward to worship.

Keep the *Children's Bulletin Activities* for the sermon time. This is a good part of the service to focus on being as still and quiet as is age appropriate. Remember that children behave differently than adults when bored and plan in advance.

Let your children print their own name in the Attendance Pad.

Make it a rule not to sit alone with friends. Children sitting without adult supervision will have a less than worshipful experience.....and so will their neighbors!

Notice when your children minister to someone else or are touched by God. Praise them when they're listening well. "Catch your child doing something good!"

Offering. When we give a tithe (10%) to God it shows that we know God is the giver of all good things. You may want to allow your child to put some of his or her own money in the offering plate so that he or she can fully participate in worshipping God.

Participate. Children learn to be passionate about worship by watching you worship in spirit and truth. Let your child see you preparing for worship, participating in the service and talking about it afterwards.

Questions. Whisper questions to your child during the sermon/Scripture readings:

- . "How do you think Jesus looked and sounded when he said that?"
- . "What does this say about how you felt yesterday?"
- . Wondering questions - wondering questions keep the Scriptures open by dealing with a child's experience and understanding of the story. Wondering brings us to the knowledge of God, ourselves and others in a deep and convincing way.
- . "I wonder why Jesus enjoyed being in the temple so much?"
- . "I wonder what Bartimaeus is seeing Jesus do now?"

Relax! God put the "wiggle" in children.

Stand "short people" on the pew to "read the hymnal/screen with a "tall person".

- . Let them hum or "la la" along before they are able to read the words.
- . Help them sing repeated words or choruses.
- . During special music have a young child squeeze your hand every time they hear the word Jesus, Glory etc

. During music without words, children can be asked to listen closely and picture what is going on in the music. Have them think of a Bible story that seems to go along with the music.

Talk about the sermon afterwards and encourage children to share what they learned in the service. Ask them questions and let them ask you questions about what you learned. “Wondering” questions are especially useful at this time.

Understand their need to move around. Children may wish to get new materials from the back of the sanctuary during the service. Older children can be reminded to walk slowly. Younger children may need to be quietly escorted. Understand how much God loves children and do your part to care for them in the worship setting. Be appreciative for their presence and always be ready to cuddle.

Visit the sanctuary when a service is not going on. Let your child go up front and explore and ask questions. Explain to the children that this is a special space for being with God. In this place, we walk more slowly and talk more quietly because this is a special place for being with God.

Whisper instructions.

"Now is the time we tell God about how sorry we are. Remember our talk this morning about the importance of sharing?" Tell God you're sorry you took two doughnuts. Ask him to help you share the last doughnut next time."

"Listen to this story. It's a good one."

Exit when necessary. In certain cases, exit is desirable: a teething baby, a hurt/distressed child, loud & rambunctious behavior, a toileting emergency, or if a child has set up a distracting pattern of play with another child. Exit relieves tension. Children are not born knowing worship behavior and need to be taught in a loving manner. When the child's needs have been addressed, you are welcome to return. For older children, **exiting without reentry is counterproductive**. The nursery is also open if a parent prefers for infants and toddlers.

You are your child's best worship teacher. Call her or his attention to the minister, choir, worship leaders, flowers, banners, worship furniture, and seasonal colors etc.

Zzzzz no sleeping in God's presence, for older elementary and youth. Babies and small children are welcome to encounter the holy presence of God in their sleep whenever and however the Spirit moves.

-adapted from “*Parenting in the Pew*”