

# Parent Pages



RESOURCES FOR CHRISTIAN PARENTS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

## UPON THIS ROCK: Asking the Right Questions

Once children hit elementary age, getting them to talk about school is like picking popcorn out of shag carpeting. Yet, encouraging your children to talk about their experiences and learning is important for the development of good social skills, self-evaluation and abstract thinking. It also offers an opportunity to integrate faith into everyday life.

When children first start school, a simple "How was school today?" is all it takes to get a flood of stories and comments. Young children relate recent memories as a way to process them. They simply tell it the way they remember it and are often unable to make judgements about the event. They are concrete thinkers, and their storytelling reflects this.

As children grow older, they are able to think about what happened during the day and assess the situation. Thinking abstractly, they are able to contemplate what could have happened differently, how another student might have felt about a situation, or what might have improved the outcome of a particular event. They can apply this same thinking to the academic skills they have learned. This process is called metacognition, or thinking about learning, and it is a skill that makes for stronger learning and smarter students.

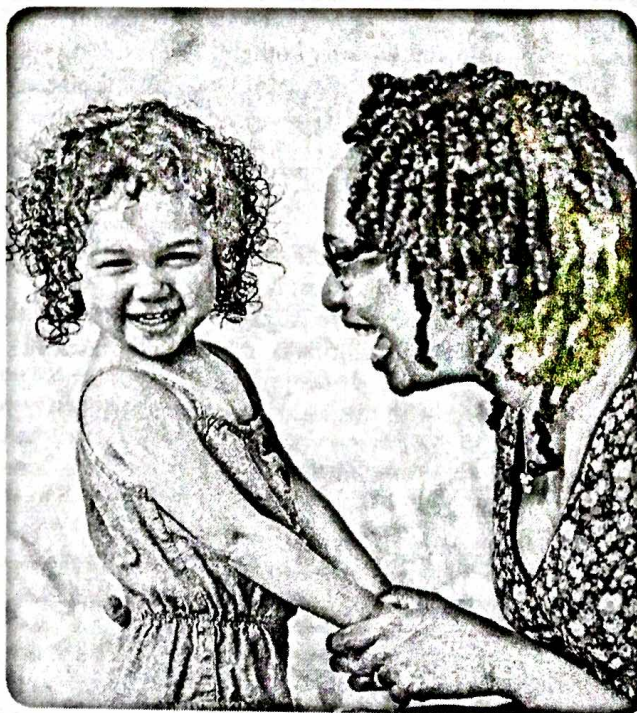
The questions we ask children can also build a healthy perspective. For example, we can encourage taking personal responsibility rather than blaming. A healthy perspective influences not only future learning, but also decision making. If a student is able to see that a lack of time spent studying is the reason for a poor test grade, then he is more likely to study for the next test. Whereas, the child who insists the teacher just doesn't like him is not going to see any advantage in putting effort into

studying. Parents can influence a healthy perspective by asking the right kinds of questions.

Here are some questions to try:

- What did you do today that made you think hard?
- What problem did you work on today?

These questions encourage students to value effort and work. When we focus only on performance, we run the risk of encouraging children to think, "I must not be smart if I have to work hard." We want children to realize that hard work often means more learning.





“ When we dwell in the shelter of God, we live in a place of safety. Research indicates that people who attend church regularly are 2 ”

- What mistake did you make that taught you something?
- How did you think about your work and improve it today?

These two questions also focus on the process of learning rather than the finished product. The advantage to these is that they encourage students to self-evaluate. Elementary-age children are just at the beginning of being able to do this, and middle-school children need a reminder to connect the correction of mistakes to improvement, rather than a lack of competence.

- Did you apologize to or forgive someone today?
- How did God help you change your behavior today?

These questions encourage accountability. They are good ways to let your child know that because we are sinners living in a sinful world, we will have to contend with our own sin and the sin of others. The resulting discussions are a gentle reminder of God's forgiveness and mercy.

- Did you congratulate or comfort someone today?
- Did you find someone who needed kindness today?

These questions encourage empathy, or the ability to recognize the feelings of others. It is not natural for children to think about the feelings or perspectives of other people. This is a skill that is learned and practiced over the process of brain development. The skill of empathy improves with this kind of gentle nudging.

The discussion that results from these questions encourages your child to think in new ways and with a

different perspective. You also reinforce strong values about learning, expressing your faith and caring for others. When we integrate the faith value of compassion, we encourage not only kind behavior, but brain growth as well. God's world is most certainly a beautiful and intricate creation!

Martin Luther used a particular question in his Small Catechism that encouraged further thinking: "What does this mean?" It is a simple question that leads the learner to seek a deeper answer. Jesus was the best practitioner of this educational technique. Consider some of His many questions:

- "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have?" (MATT. 5:46).
- "And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?" (MATT. 6:27).
- "Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" (LUKE 10:36).
- "Do you understand what I have done to you?" (JOHN 13:12).

Jesus' questions encourage us to evaluate and empathize. His questions are designed to help our faith grow. Use them to create unique family devotions that encourage deeper thinking.

### For Further Study

Make it a family activity to write and use your own "What does this mean?" questions.

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Vol. 16 • No. 7 • March 2017

*Parent Pages* is an LCMS School Ministry newsletter published by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod  
1333 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122-7295  
314-965-9000 • [lcms.org](http://lcms.org)  
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