7 Essential Faith Experiences

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST
FAITH SHAPER
SHAPING LIFELONG FAITH

For Home, Church and School

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But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 3:18, NIV)

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Current statistics tells us that the present generation of young people are walking away from church and or their faith in early adolescent years. "50,000 young people a year are leaving the Christian faith and deciding that they have 'no religion." (Philip Hughes, Christian Research Australia.)

David Goodwin in his thesis Lost In Transition states "There is no doubt that pre and early adolescence is a time when many children drop out of church. What makes the situation worse is that many children, who do stay in church during their high school years . . . are possibly only there because parents insist they attend church, or their social life is linked with the church youth group." P.7

Making disciples of children and youth is a key priority of our church. We believe that it is time to have the important discussions on what formational experience they need. In partnership with the Interdenominational National conversation www.here3stay.org, South Pacific Division and Australian Conferences Children's Ministries have put together 7 Essential Experiences that will shape a lifelong faith. We want this faith to be deep, and it needs to be strong and active.

This is not a program. It doesn't sit with one department. It doesn't sit with one age group. 'Faith Shaper' is a set of experiences from birth to eighteen years that should determine how all Departments do ministry. We are asking that everyone – church, home and school, study the experiences and put in place strategies that ensure they happen well. In his Valugenesis research, Dr Barry Gane found that "There is an increasing probability that young people will develop high Christian commitment , and high loyalty to the Church if they have the benefits of effective homes, effective churches and effective Adventist Schools."

It is time to work together for the faith of our present and future generations of children and young people. We have a problem and we have a solution

For more information and Faith Shaper resources go to children.adventist.org.au/faith-shaper

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For Home, Church and School

S Service and Mission

H Homes Empowered

A Authentic Relationships

P Participation

I Intergenerational Connections

N Noteworthy Memory Events

G God Encounters

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The Research

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST FAITH SHAPER SHAPING LIFELONG FAITH

For Home, Church and School

Despite all our incredible children's youth and young adult programs, we have not been able to stop we have not been able to stop the mass exodus from our churches. We have not just lost one generation, we are losing several. (David Sawler, Goodbye Generation, Canada)

Students didn't begin doubting in college, they simply departed by collage. If you look around in your church today, two thirds of those who are sitting among us have already left in their hearts. (Ken Ham, Brit Beamer, Already Gone Australian and United States)

We are losing more young people between childhood and adolescence than between adolescence and young adult years. More young males are leaving the church than young females. (Penner et al, Hemorrhaging Faith, Canada)

If church is hemorrhaging young people, we have to ask ourselves if it's because we address the issues of discipleship too late? Is that spiritual education we provide for our young people neither consistent enough or rigorous enough to provide them with the means to hance a strong and stable faith in a time when there are many challenges to the authenticity and relevance of our beliefs? (Jason Gardner, Mend the Gap, UK)

"Faith trajectories are often set in early adolescence. Sadly most youth ministries are long on fun and fluff and short on listening and thoughtful engagement. The former produced a million paper boats; the latter produce a handful of seaworthy ships." (Kara Powell and Chap Clark, Sticky Faith, USA)

"Contrary to popular misguided cultural stereotypes and frequent parenteral misperceptions, we believe that the evidence clearly shows that the single most important social influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents is their parents." (Vern Bengston, Families and Faith, 2013)

"Twenty years ago, the phrase was, if you don't reach a young person by 18, you probably won't reach them. Now, atheists and agnostics have the same access to your kids as you do, it's just one click away. The internet has levelled the playing field and now if you don't reach a child by their 12th birthday, you won't reach them." (Josh McDowell, 2013)

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S Service and Mission

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"As families serve together, they grip a deeper understanding of one another and God. They find their faith more resilient and meaningful. Their children develop a faith that helps them stick to the church and to their beliefs into young adulthood." (Diana Garland, Inside Out Families, 2011)

- Encourage children and families to build friendships with people living near them.
- Provide opportunities and resources for families to serve others together — home; neighbourhood; church; world.
- Provide opportunities for children to respond with compassion and generosity.
- Provide resources and opportunities for children to share their faith story.
- Provide outreach opportunities with and for children.

Each one of you should use whatever gifts you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace." (1 Peter 4:10)

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H Homes Empowered

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"The single most important social influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents is their parents." (Vern L Bengtson, Religion and Faith, 2013)

- Synergise church, home and school strategies so that all have the same vision and purpose.
- Partner with and support families — help them build strong marriages and quality family relationships by not overscheduling too many church programs.
- Equip and resource them for every Milestone or life stage of their children.
- Demonstrate family faith practices and traditions and provide at home resources.
- Resource and equip parents to become authentic disciples of Jesus.

"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." (Deuteronomy 6: 6-9)

7 Essential Faith Experiences

A Authentic Relationships

Role models and mentors; positive peer communities

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"Recognizing the powerful influence of other adults in their kids' Sticky Faith Web, many parents include mentoring in their 5:1 plan (5 significant adults to 1 child). Through these empowering relationships, your kids are able to spend time with adults who are further along in their spiritual journey. (Sticky Faith, Kara Powell and Chap Clarke, 2011)

- Provide positive role models and mentors from all generations.
- Equip parents as role models and mentors.
- Ensure leaders of programs build quality relationships and model God's grace.
- Provide pro-social places for positive peer connections.
- Ensure safe environments and implement child protection policies.

"Encourage one another and build each other up." (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

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P Participation

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"To participate in the life of the faith community, children need to be a part of this community. And to be a part of the community they need to be present for its central practices. They need to rub shoulders with all sorts of folks who make up this community.... They need to be seen as active and valued members of their faith community." (Ivy Beckwith and David Csinos, Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus, 2013)

- Be intentional about allowing children to be a part of the church community.
- Welcome children into intergenerational worship.
- Ensure that they participate, use their gifts and feel that they belong.
- Give children equal opportunity to contribute and have a voice.
- Guide and mentor them to participate in meaningful ways.

When the religious leaders saw the outrageous things he was doing, and heard all the children running and shouting through the Temple, "Hosanna to David's Son!" they were up in arms and took him to task. "Do you hear what these children are saying?" Jesus said, "Yes, I hear them. And haven't you read in God's Word, 'From the mouths of children and babies I'll furnish a place of praise'?" (Matthew 21:15-16, The Message)

7 Essential Faith Experiences

Intergenerational Connections

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Children are spiritually formed when they observe their parents and other members of the faith community, practicing the worship of God. (Ivy Beckwith, 2010)

- Plan for and engage children in shared experiences with all generations and their families.
- Create opportunities for children to build relationships with all generations.
- Plan for and allow all generations to worship together.
- Provide opportunities for generations to celebrate faith milestones and spiritual anchors together.
- Provide opportunities for children to learn and serve alongside their family and other generations.

"All of you are standing today in the presence of the Lord your God – your leaders and chief men, your elders and officials, and all the other men of Israel together with your children and your wives . . . You are standing here in order to enter into a covenant with the Lord your God. (Deuteronomy 29:10-12)

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N Noteworthy Memory Events

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"A Memory event is activity big enough to dominate a adolescent's horizon, so that he or she becomes so fully immersed in the event they will never forget it or its message." (Creating Memories for Teens, Wayne French, 2005)

- Resource and equip homes to create special daily, weekly and yearly rituals and traditions.
- Be intentional about creating memory events for children and families at church such as Milestone celebrations, kids rallies, concerts and family camps.
- Support children as they participate in Conference wide memory events such as Camps.
- Provide events that allow children to respond to God's call on their lives.
- Provide events that allow children to be inspired by people with a vibrant faith.

Joshua erected a monument at The Gilgal, using the twelve stones that they had taken from the Jordan. And then he told the People of Israel, "In the days to come, when your children ask their fathers, 'What are these stones doing here?' tell your children this: 'Israel crossed over this Jordan on dry ground.' (Joshua 4:19-22 The Message)

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G God Encounters

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"When children realize that they are part of this story, that God's story is also their story, that God's story connects with their own expanding self- narratives, they become responsible for ensuring that the episodes in which they make appearances are faithful to the overall script." (David Csinos and Ivy Beckwith, Children's Ministry in the way of Jesus, 2013)

- Provide an environment and experiences that allow children to encounter Jesus intimately, personally and regularly through prayer and reflection.
- Use learning activities that are experiential, multisensory, engaging and varied in learning styles.
- Tell awesome Bible stories and stories of faith that reach the heart and the mind.
- Provide opportunities for children to experience and imagine how their personal story is intertwined with the big picture of the Bible.
- Help children to enter into the wonder and mystery of the Bible through discussion and questioning and to respond using their individual gifts such as art, music, construction or drama.

"Your word is a lamp to my feet, a light on my path." (Psalms 119:105) "The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the seep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. The sheep follow him because they know his voice. (John 10:3-5)

7 Essential Faith Experiences Model

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