



# GUIDING CHILDREN DISCUSSION GUIDE

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It's a great responsibility to raise children to be strong in their faith. When a new study comes out, like the *Guiding Children* report we did with Barna, you may wonder, "What exactly do I need to know?" We created a simple guide that distills the findings of our research and what it means for you as a spiritual mother or father to the next generation.

We all need wise guides at every age and stage. We've identified the four most influential guides in the faith formation of children ages 6-12 and added questions, conversation starters, prayer prompts, and tips from the latest research to help you raise the next generation.

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# SCRIPTURE

A recent study by Lifeway entitled *Nothing Less: Engaging Kids in a Lifetime of Faith* surveyed 2,000 parents whose children are now young adults to find the spiritual health indicators that seemed to matter most. Among the 40 factors that could affect a child's moral and spiritual development, the number one thing that was by far the most likely predictor of spiritual health was that the child regularly read the Bible growing up.

**The families who report their kids are in the Word at least weekly are seeing an entire host of other benefits in their spiritual lives.**

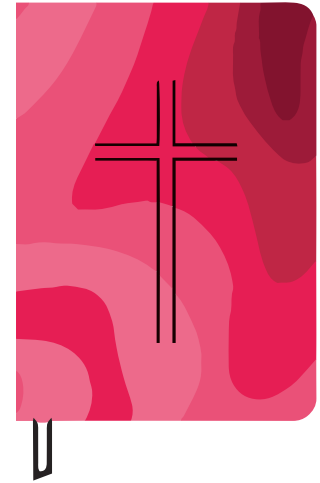
Nearly 6 in 10 of these children engage in non-service church activities (58% vs. 27%). They are also more likely to participate in Bible studies (37% vs. 9%) and youth group programs (52% vs. 31%).

**From the Barna research, we saw encouraging statistics for children ages 6-9.**

88% of engaged Christian parents with children ages 6-9 report their child is in the Bible at least weekly, 66% a few times weekly.

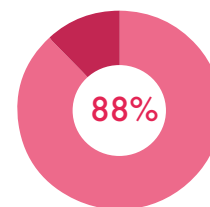
**However, parents begin to let their child manage their own Scripture engagement around age 9 (a 29% drop).**

Parents also provide less offline Bible resources around age 9 (16% drop).



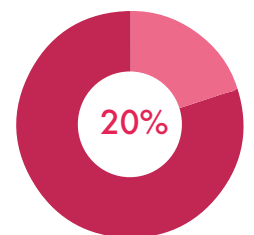
**Scripture is the most valuable gift we can give our children.**

**Nearly 6 in 10 children who spend time in the Word engage in non-service church activities weekly.**



**88% of engaged Christian parents with children ages 6-9 report their child is in the Bible at least weekly.**

**Only 20% of engaged Christian parents with 10 to 12-year-olds use offline resources to help their child engage with the Bible.**



# SCRIPTURE

This newly introduced self management for 9 year olds has led to a pretty interesting shift in 10-12 year olds.

There is a noticeable dip in Bible engagement among children ages 10-12. 73% are in the Bible weekly, and 53% a few times weekly.

Once kids hit fourth and fifth grade, we're seeing them grapple with what used to be difficult subjects for seventh and eighth graders. They're asking tough questions, especially about who they are. We need to pay special attention to 10-12 year olds.

"The 11-year-old is entering puberty. It's the best time to teach a child what they need to know, because a lot of formative memories happen at age 11 and into the preteen years. It's also when our brains get rid of what we don't need or use, a process called 'cognitive pruning.'"

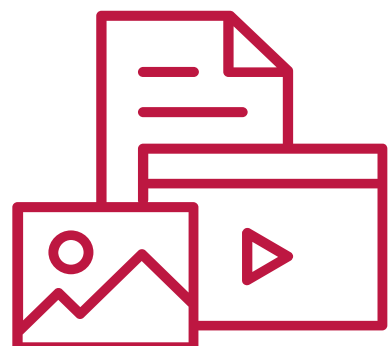
- Dan Scott, Author of Caught In Between: Engage Your Preteens Before They Check Out

**Tweens Pull Back** - As kids get older and can actually take in more Scripture, we're giving them less. In families with only tweens (10 to 12) and only younger children (6 to 9),\* analysts find evidence that older kids pull back from regular Bible engagement. Yet this tween phase is catalytic for faith that lasts.

Once children leave elementary school, the next step is the BIG Bible, and it feels daunting. We're still overwhelmingly using print versions of the Bible.

**When we take the media away, we miss a big opportunity to make the Bible come alive for a 10-12 year old.**

**Opportunity:** Increase Bible engagement through media: video versions, audio versions, and Bible apps.



# SCRIPTURE

## Think About:

How are you getting your kids in the Word? What is distracting them (or you) from spending time in the Word? How can you help encourage each other to spend more time in Scripture?

## Conversation Kickstarter:

Ask a young person what they think are the five most important things they can spend their time doing right now. Then ask them if they're satisfied with how much time they are spending on each of those *important* things, or if they'd like your support to help them make some changes.

## Tip:

They're watching you! Make your time in the Word, in prayer, worship, and listening to uplifting things as public as possible for a week. It might feel like grandstanding, but there's real truth behind the saying, "actions speak louder than words."

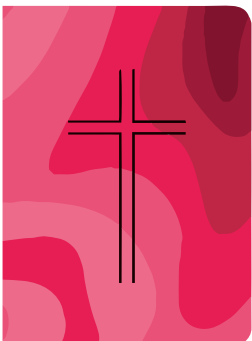
## Prayer Prompt:

Help me to:

- Love your Word.
- Help others love it, too.
- Live it out.

## Ask Your Church:

Reach out to leaders in your church and get on the same page about expectations for how kids engage with the Bible at church and at home. What are the biggest challenges they see to getting kids engaged in God's Word? Ask how they see digital resources helping boost Scripture engagement. Share the biggest changes and challenges in how kids engage with and are influenced by technology then brainstorm how to leverage it for good.



"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."

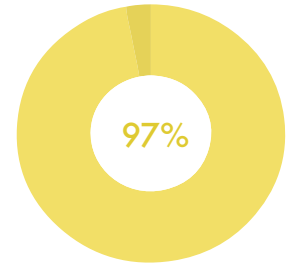
Deuteronomy 6:6-7 (NIV)

# FAMILY

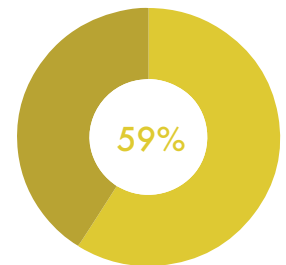
Our study with Barna revealed that 97% of parents are satisfied with their child's spiritual development. Yet, additional Barna research shows that 59% of young Christians disconnect either for an extended period of time or permanently from church life after age 15. Maybe it's time not to be so quickly satisfied with a child's spiritual journey. Maybe it's time to play a more active, long-term role.

Pre-teens still need guidance—though it shouldn't necessarily be heavy handed. But they benefit from our pointing things out and asking, "What do you think about that? What do you understand about that? What does that mean to you? Is that something you should avoid?" These kinds of questions can help children not only acquire knowledge, but also refine it. The guidance and rich activity is important.

- **We need to steward their faith well. As kids of this age are asking tough questions and testing faith for themselves, we need to be careful to ensure we are providing a solid foundation from Scripture and not just saying things that are nice to hear but don't stand up to the rigors of life's testing and trials.**



**97% of parents are satisfied with their child's spiritual development.**



**Yet, 59% of young Christians disconnect either for an extended period of time or permanently from church life after age 15.**



**"There are break off points that can occur at certain ages and phases. Teaching the right foundation and the right truths about Jesus will help them avoid those break off points in their faith."**

**- Hettie Britz, Developer of the Evergreen Parenting Course**

# FAMILY

- 10-11 is one of those break off points where kids are internalizing values, and they want to see that it works. They are trying things out for themselves to see if it has power—and if it doesn't, they cast it aside. Does it make a difference if I do it the biblical way or not? They want to see, and they also want to see this modeled for them.
- We also know this is a critical time in their childhood development. They are moving from the concrete, literal thinkers of their younger years to being more nuanced in their language and thought development. They are exercising increased abstract thinking, and internalizing critiquing beliefs they may have formerly taken at face value. They are under greater influence from their peer group and are highly comparative.



“11 is a magical age of taking on new thinking and leaving behind old thinking. Kids are actually losing their mind at 11 because they are working on abstract thinking.”

- Dan Scott, Director for 252 Kids and 252 Preteen curriculum

# FAMILY

## Think About:

What are some differences between the way you engaged with God's Word while you were growing up and how your kids connect with it now? What has changed, and what remains the same?

## Conversation Kickstarter:

Ask a child what is their preferred method of learning information. Then brainstorm ways to experience Scripture using each method. Now give them each a try!

(Hint: If you haven't yet, download the *Bible App for Kids* for this activity).



Prefer sound  
and music



Prefer words  
(both in speech  
and writing)



Prefer pictures  
and images



Prefer using  
your body and  
sense of touch

## Prayer Prompt:

Help me to:

- Prioritize my time in the Word.
- Value my family by encouraging their time in God's Word.
- Model the love of Christ.

## Tip:

No matter their age, don't stop giving a child access to a variety of Scripture-rich resources in diverse mediums. One family has an 8pm bedtime for their children from toddlers to teens. They are encouraged to go to sleep but allowed to stay up as late as they want and read the Bible.

## Ask Your Church:

Reach out to leaders in your church to thank and encourage them for their investment in your family. (A cup of coffee or a meal is always encouraging.) Open up a conversation that helps move the needle on how church and family can better help support each other by creating more overlap in spiritual disciplines that happen at church and at home. Share resources you are using or have heard of others incorporating—best practices are always a win.

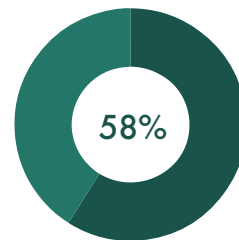
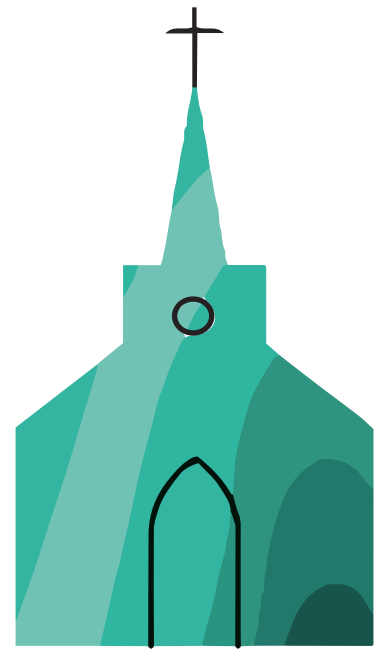
"And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea."

Matthew 18:5-6 (NIV)



# CHURCH

- 58% of parents choose a church based on its children's program.
- As kids get older, their interest in attending church declines.
- Parents of all ages are looking to the Church for parenting advice on matters of faith; 69% of parents ages 24-34, 68% of those 35-39 and 60% of those ages 40-49. (Other choices included friends, your parents, your own upbringing, online resources, books etc.)
- Nearly 9 out of 10 parents (88%) want the Church to cover sensitive topics with their children to some degree.
- Regular church attendance in childhood plays an important role in young people's long-range faith picture.
- Families aren't skipping church because they don't care or are too busy, which are common perceptions. Our research showed that they skip primarily because of sickness in the family.
- Also, interest in church dips among tweens. It's not a dive, just a dip. What we found in the research was that children who regularly missed church more than once a month were much less likely to want to attend in their teen years. This is an interesting observation. A lot has been reported about teenagers who step away from church during college and young adulthood, but this is the first research indicating this drift may actually start in childhood. Attending church regularly from a young age may be more important than parents realize.



58% of parents choose a church based on its children's program.

Parents of all ages are looking to the church for parenting advice on matters of faith.

69% of parents ages 24-34



68% of parents ages 35-39

60% of parents ages 40-49



56% of parents ages 50+

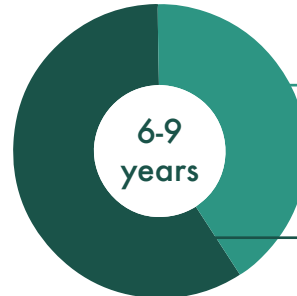
# CHURCH

- Resourcing is also a larger gap for 10-12 year olds than 6-9 year olds. Almost half (46%) of parents use church-created resources to engage their children with the Bible, and more than half (54%) create their own resources to do this. But for 10-12 year olds, only 31% of parents are using church resources, and a mere 1 in 4 are creating their own.



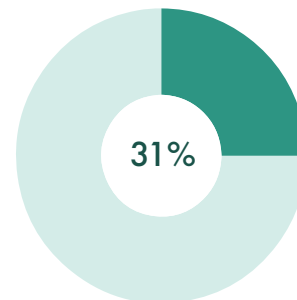
3 in 4 parents of 10-12 year olds do not use any digital resources to help their children engage with the Bible.

## Bible Engagement Resources:

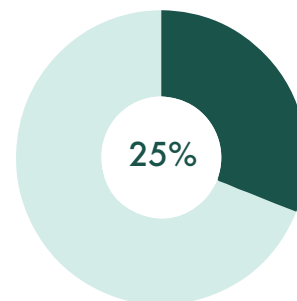


**For 6-9 year olds,** 46% of parents are using church-created resources.

54% create their own resources.



**But for 10-12 year olds,** only 31% of parents are using church resources to engage their children with the Bible.



**Only 25% are** creating their own to engage their children with the Bible.

- Digital resourcing is also noticeably absent. 3 in 4 parents of 10-12 year olds do not use any digital resources to help their children engage with the Bible. Why is this? We don't know, but it needs to become a conversation. The Bible is complicated, and we know kids of this age are visual and interactive learners. How can we bring the Bible to life for them?

# CHURCH

## Think About:

How are you partnering with the church for the spiritual formation of your child(ren)? Don't give all the responsibility away but also don't hold onto it all. You're not alone in this journey!

## Conversation Kickstarter:

Ask a young person what is a church. What they get from it and what they give to it. Have some honest conversations about what you like most and what you learn from the parts of church that are a bit challenging.

## Tip:

Reach out to the people who are guiding the youth in your church and see how you can partner with them.

## Prayer Prompt:

Help me to:

- Commit to attending church regularly.
- Love my church and serve using my gifting.
- Instill a love for and commitment to our local body with those I influence.

## Ask Your Church:

Reach out to leaders in your church and ask about the levels of engagement they are seeing among the children and youth in these age ranges. What are the biggest challenges they face and how can parents stand in the gap. Brainstorm ways to partner and make home and church more synonymous and connected.

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**"Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction."**

**2 Timothy 4:2 (NIV)**

# SCREENS

It may be valuable to reflect more on how kids spend their screen time than on how much time they spend whether active or passive, social or isolated, creating or merely consuming.

“There will be technology no matter what, so the question is if parents are there to guide the context of how children interpret what they are experiencing.”

-Yu-Kai Chou, author of Actionable Gamification: Beyond Points, Badges, and Leaderboards

The world of digital resources is powerful and ubiquitous, but it is missing from our children’s spiritual formation experiences. 3 out of 4 parents don’t use any digital resources for their children’s Bible engagement, including videos, apps, games, and websites. None.

Christian parents report their children consume nearly 81% less entertainment media than the national average: average 8 vs. 42 hours/week. Yet 34% of Christian parents are media-stressed. Stressing them out even more than time spent on screens is the peer influence happening online outside of parental control

Kids are absorbing high quality media experiences everywhere they go.

**“If what we present to children about God is a black and white photocopy page: 2-D, flat, non-dimensional and boring, we are very far behind. We are not audible and visible to kids.”**

**- Hettie Britz, Developer of the Evergreen Parenting Course**



**1 in 3 (34%) Christian parents are media-stressed.**



**Stressing them out even more than time spent on screens is the peer influence happening online outside of parental control.**

# SCREENS

- The conversation around technology and faith may be too simplistic. There's a lot of dialogue around screen time; how much time is a child using a screen? Who's limiting their screen time or their internet access? There are a lot of articles about screen time and yet we know we increasingly use our screens to work, learn, and stay in touch across distances and lots of other good and useful purposes.
- We should be thinking more about what kids are doing on those screens. How are they engaging? What neural pathways are being built? How is it feeding into their curiosities and creativity? Who's going with them on that journey? Digital can be incredibly creative; it can build empathy and form communities but it can also be terribly destructive.

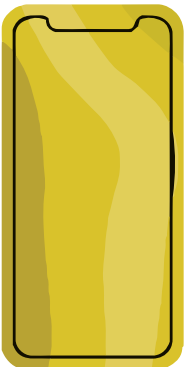
"Technology is still advancing and is not going away, so we have to prepare kids for this and build strength in them today."

- Michelle Zimmerman,  
Educator at Renton  
Prep School

"If your concern is the child will go off the right path, I would say wouldn't you rather be right there on that journey and have a chance to speak in, versus the child not being exposed at all, and later they are surprised by this and you are not around to support and guide them?"

- Michelle Zimmerman,  
Educator at Renton  
Prep School

- Have we led parents to believe that when it comes to technology the best thing we can do for faith is to turn it off?
- As parents, we have to wrestle with how we model technology use for our children. They are always watching us and when they see you glued to your iPhone, it makes them want the screen. Most often, kids resort to occupying themselves with devices because of a lack of emotional connectedness.



"It's the unavailability and busyness that make them default to the device."

- Hettie Britz, Developer of the  
Evergreen Parenting Course

# SCREENS

## Think About:

How open are your eyes to the realities you may want to ignore? Your children are being exposed whether you want to think so or not.

## Conversation Kickstarter:

Discuss whether it would be worse to have no money or no tech the rest of your life.

(Hint: you should end up talking about how both money and tech are tools we can use, as long as we don't let them take over and don't let them take over and hold us captive.

## Prayer Prompt:

Help me to:

- Take a good look at the reality to which we live.
- Stay focused on what matters.
- Set a good example.

You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

Jeremiah 29:13 (NIV)

## Tip:

Try to set aside at least an hour every day to connect with people. Be sure to do activities that connect like playing a game, taking a walk outside, or creating a space to talk, listen to music, or pray together.

(Hint: it doesn't have to be tech-free time; you can use a device to enhance your time together as long as it's helping you connect.)

## Ask Your Church:

Reach out to leaders in your church and start the conversation about the reality young people face today. Ask what trends they are seeing, how kids are using tech vs. how adults use it, and clarify how the Church is helping young people face the increasingly complex issues a digital world poses from a biblical viewpoint. Ask what help or support they need from home as well as figure out ways to leverage the digital space to better serve the digital natives you want to serve. Brainstorm ways to leverage technology to help increase Scripture engagement as well as church and home integration. Start working together to figure out how to best and biblically handle sensitive topics.