

SHARING THE PLAN OF SALVATION WITH CHILDREN

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Do you remember when you became a Christian? How old were you? Where were you? Was there a significant event such as VBS that was the environment for your decision? Were you a child raised in the church who just knew one day that it was time to admit your sin and need for a savior? Was there a significant adult who walked with you through the process? Have you had the privilege of being the significant person who presented the plan of salvation to someone else?

George Barna, founder of The Barna Group, a market research firm specializing in studying the religious beliefs and behavior of Americans and the intersection of faith and culture, says:

The current Barna study indicates that nearly half of all Americans who accept Jesus Christ as their savior do so before reaching the age of 13 (43%), and that two out of three born again Christians (64%) made that commitment to Christ before their 18th birthday. One out of eight born again people (13%) made their profession of faith while 18 to 21 years old. Less than one out of every four born again Christians (23%) embraced Christ after their twenty-first birthday. Barna noted that these figures are consistent with similar studies it has conducted during the past twenty years.

Perhaps the most significant outcome of the research, in Barna's eyes, is the prevalence of decisions made during childhood. "Families, churches and para-church ministries must recognize that primary window of opportunity for effectively reaching people with the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection is during the pre-teen years. It is during those years that people develop their frames of reference for the remainder of their life - especially theologically and morally. Consistently explaining and modeling truth principles for young people is the most critical factor in their spiritual development."

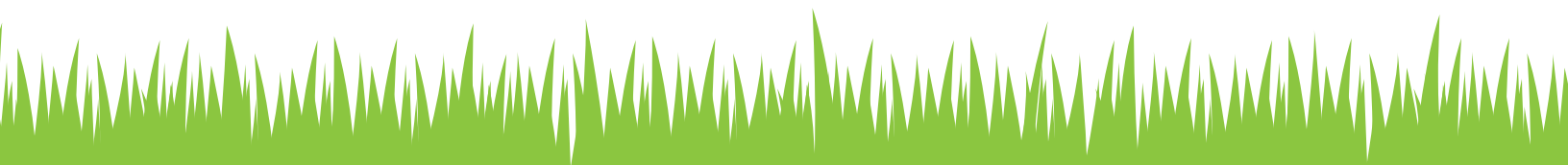
www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/196-evangelism-is-most-effective-among-kids

Here are some important things you need to know about children in preparation for the privilege of talking with them about becoming a Christ-follower:

- Children are literal minded; they see what you say. Close your eyes and imagine a literal picture of the following:
 - Being washed in the blood or washing our sins away (When we are forgiven of our sin, Jesus both forgives and forgets our sin.)
 - Asking Jesus into your heart (Asking Jesus to be in charge of our lives.)
 - New creation in Christ (Our lives will change when we decide to follow Jesus.)
 - Jesus is knocking on the door of your heart (Jesus wants you to become a Christian.)

These are some of the symbolic terms we use in our "church speak." We need to learn to express symbolic concepts in everyday language. Some suggested ideas for everyday translations are in parenthesis in the list above.

- Children often have short attention spans. Practice a simple presentation outline before you have a real-life opportunity to share with a child. Time your explanations so that a child will not lose focus before you complete your thoughts. Mark your Bible with key verses that you can show or have a child read with you. Think one minute per year of age +1 for the length of your presentation. Check out Outlines 1 and 2 at the end of this article for suggested outlines you can use, or combine ideas to create a plan with which you are comfortable.



- Children can be easily talked into “praying the prayer” without experiencing the work of the Holy Spirit. Being sensitive to a child’s readiness to accept Christ is crucial. Sometimes, your initial conversations with a child will be the beginning of an ongoing, multi-part conversation. Allow time for responses, and do not act disappointed or upset if a child is not ready to make a decision during your initial time together.
- Children need to have a presentation of the gospel, not just platitudes about being good. The gospel is the message we are to share. We may need to adapt our vocabulary but not the message of personal responsibility for sin and our need of a Savior.
- Children need to have a clear understanding of sin and repentance. Sin is more than just “being bad.” It is understanding that we sin when we choose to disobey God’s teachings in the Bible. Repentance is more than just saying, “I’m sorry.” It is a sorrow over sin and a decision to follow God’s way over our own ways.
- Children need to acknowledge their understanding that they sin and are sorry to God for their sin.
- Children need to understand that God and Jesus are real. They are not part of the childhood trinity of the Easter bunny, Santa and the tooth fairy.
- Children need to understand that baptism is not the same as becoming a Christian. There is nothing magical about the baptismal waters. Baptism is our way of witnessing to our church our commitment to follow Christ (become a Christian) and demonstrating our obedience to Christ by following His command to be baptized.
- Sometimes when a child asks about becoming a Christian or being baptized, it is the beginning of exploring what it means to become a Christian. It is important to not rush to a commitment that a child is not ready to make. Art Murphy, childhood ministry seminar leader, describes this as the beginning of labor pains before the birth of a new Christian.

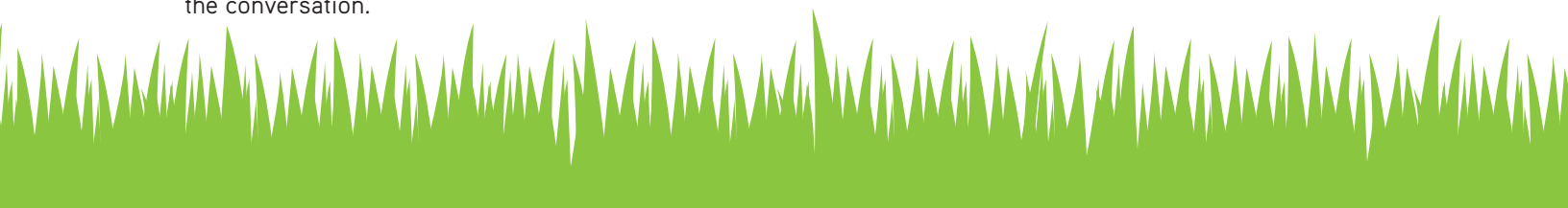
www.realtimeladers.e-quip.net/presentations/show/2068

- Consider using open-ended questions to initiate or carry on a conversation with a child about becoming a Christian. Use what, where, when, why and how questions rather than questions with yes or no answers. Ask questions that allow children to express what they are feeling or what they understand. This opens the door for correction of misunderstandings so that a child can make a commitment based on truth.
- NEVER use fear tactics, peer pressure, adult pressure, prizes or tangible rewards to provoke a response from a child. The work of the Holy Spirit in anyone’s life is the only reason to make a decision to become a Christian.

Here are some suggested outlines for presenting the plan of salvation:

Try to find a quiet place so that your conversation will not be disturbed. If you are a leader and not the child’s parent, remember that in today’s culture it is required that adequate safety and security procedures be followed. Be sure that you are not alone in a building with a child without the knowledge of other significant adults. Try to find a room with a window so that anyone passing by has a clear view of both you and the child.

It is wonderful to have the parent(s) present as you talk with their child. If a parent is not available or chooses to leave the room, ask them to return before concluding your time with the child and to join the prayer of commitment or closing thoughts. Half of all children who become Christians do so with their parents leading the conversation.



Scriptures that are helpful to use and enhance the flow of conversation include:

1 John 4:10 God sent Jesus to show His great love for us even though we have sinned.

Romans 3:23 Everyone sins, and no one is perfect like God.

Romans 6:23 Just as we earn a punishment when we do wrong things at home or school, God must punish our disobedience to Him, our sin. The Bible says this punishment is death, which means being separated from God forever. This breaks God's heart because He loves us so much, and this was not part of His original plan for people. God sent Jesus to take our punishment so that we can be forgiven of our disobedience and sin and enjoy life with Him forever.

John 3:16 Jesus' death on the cross takes away our punishment for sin if we believe He is God's son who came to die in our place and rose again from the dead.

1 John 1:9 We must ask God to forgive us of our sin and commit to be His follower all of our life if we want to have everlasting life. God promises to forgive us and make us pure in His sight. With our sins forgiven, we have the promise of living with God forever in heaven.

You may want to mark these verses in your Bible. Write the page number of the next verse to be located at the bottom of the page to help make easier transitions from verse to verse. (Outline 1 follows this plan and may be printed and placed in your Bible for easy reference).

Article: Model Discussion (With a Child) by Dr. Thomas Sanders

The following plan is simple. It utilizes five simple statements and Scriptures that will help you as you discuss Christianity with young children. Before you begin remember to **(A) Determine the true intent.** The first part of any conversation with a child should begin with open-ended questions that allow the child (not the parent) to express his desire. **(B) Determine the context.** In some cases, children begin to think about becoming a Christian because of a situation or event. Such as a friend getting baptized or wanting to participate in the Lord's Supper. Knowing this information can help you know how to guide the discussion. Begin with simple questions: "How long have you been thinking about becoming a Christian?" "When did you first start thinking about becoming a Christian?"

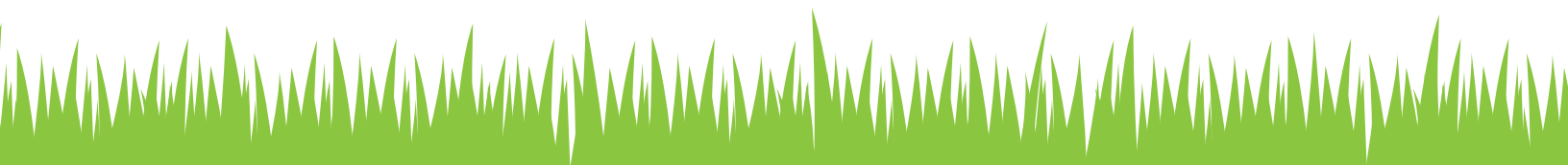
God loves you and has a great plan for you. (Psalm 139:13-16)

Hopefully, a child has been hearing this truth since the first day of life, but people all around us are unaware of this most basic truth. Begin speaking in warm terms about God. Emphasize these truths: God made the world, God made people, God made you, God wants to have a relationship with people, and God wants to have a relationship with you. Say, "Tell me one thing that is special about the way God made you."

To transition to the second point you may wish to say, "We know that God loves us and has a great plan for us, but why does a person need to become a Christian?" This question should lead into a discussion of sin.

We have all sinned. (Romans 3:23)

The child must understand his "separateness from God." Sin is best understood as choosing to do things our way instead of God's way. Avoid talking about sin in a way that invades the child's privacy or causes unnecessary guilt. Consider these questions: "What is sin?" "Have you ever sinned?" "What does God think about sin?" "How does sin affect our relationship with God?" Reinforce the child's understanding by pointing out that all people sin (Romans 3:23).



Even though we choose to sin, God still loves us and offers to forgive us. (Romans 5:8)

Ask, "How do you think it makes God feel when we sin?" Continue focusing on the fact that God loves us even though we sin. Say, "God promised that one day a Savior would come to the world. That Savior would not sin and would die for all people. Do you know who that Savior is?"

Jesus died for us. (John 3:16)

Ask, "Tell me what you know about Jesus?" Talk about John 3:16. Explain, "Because our sins separate us from God, we needed a Savior – someone who would not sin, but do all that God wanted Him to do." Ask, "Do you know why Jesus died?" Say, "God sent His only Son Jesus. Jesus died willingly for our sins so we could be with God forever. That is how much He loved us." Ask, "What happened to Jesus after He died?" Explain that Jesus rose from the dead so we could have eternal life. We live for Him here on earth, and one day will live with Him in heaven.

You become a Christian by confessing Jesus as your Savior and Lord. (Romans 10:9)

Ask, "Do you know how to become a Christian?" Say, "The word 'confess' means to say something. You confess that Jesus is your Savior and Lord. First, admit you are a sinner. Then you must also 'repent' or turn from sin and say to God that you are sorry for your sins. When you become a Christian, you are saying to God you will go His direction instead of your own. That is what it means when you say Jesus is your Lord."

Review and Follow-up. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Encourage the child to tell you in his own words what he understands. If the parents are present they may wish to talk with the child because God has given parents the ultimate responsibility for their children.

Ask the child, "Do you want to become a Christian? Do you want Jesus to be your Lord and Savior?" If the answer is yes, review what the child must pray: Admitting he has sinned and is sorry for his sin. Believing that Jesus is God's Son, and Confessing that Jesus is his Savior and Lord. Encourage the child to pray in his own words.

After the child prays, read Romans 10:13 and remind him this verse is a promise. It means that he has become a Christian. Suggest some special way to remember the occasion such as writing the date in his Bible, beginning a journal, taking a family photo, etc. Encourage the family to have a daily devotional. Also, discuss with him how the church handles the next step for baptism.

Becoming a Christian is the beginning of an exciting journey that doesn't end until we are reunited with Jesus in heaven.

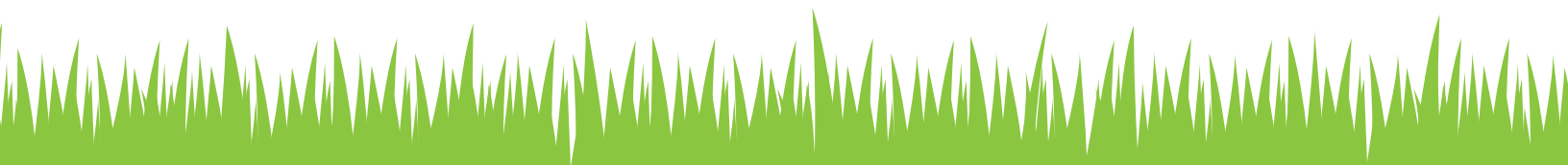
This information is taken from *When Can I?*, by Dr. Thomas Sanders, B&H Publishing. Article used by permission.

The ABC method used in LifeWay childhood curriculum:

Admitt that you are a sinner. Explain what being a sinner means.

Believe that Jesus is God's son who came to earth to make a way for us to be forgiven of our sin.

Confess that you want to receive this forgiveness and commit your life to becoming a follower of Jesus.



Additional resources to use in a conversation with a child:

The Gospel, God's Plan for Me, LifeWay Kids. pamphlet. (Item #005567178)

God's Special Plan, NAMB, pamphlet.

Steps of Jesus, L. J. Sattgast, Waterbrook Press, 1999.

I Believe in Jesus, Leading Your Child to Christ, John MacArthur. Tommy Nelson, 1999.

When Can I?, Thomas Sanders, B&H Publishing, 2002.

Additional training resources for leaders of children:

<http://ministry-to-children.com/20-non-negotiable-principles-for-evangelizing-kids/>

<http://mrmarksclassroom.com/2013/05/12/children-and-salvation-2/>

<http://www.lifeway.com/Article/communicating-Christian-conversion-to-children>

http://centrikid.com/2012/12/21/5-articles-kids-and-salvation/#.VOldr_nF-So

vimeo.com/album/2269929/video/65067780

God's Plan for Becoming a Christian

God loves you.

This is how God showed his love to us: He sent his one and only Son into the world so that we could have life through him. This is what real love is: It is not our love for God; it is God's love for us. He sent his Son to die in our place to take away our sins. (New Century Version, 1 John 4:9-10)

Sin separates us from God.

The payment for sin is death. But God gives us the free gift of life forever in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)

Everyone sins.

Everyone has sinned and fallen short of God's glorious standard... (Romans 6:23)

We must be sorry for our sins.

But if we confess our sins, he will forgive our sins, because we can trust God to do what is right. He will cleanse us from all the wrongs we have done. (1 John 1:9)

We must believe in Jesus and what He did for us.

"God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son so that whoever believes in him may not be lost, but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

We are to follow Jesus' way about how we should live our life.

You are my friends if you do what I command you. (John 15:14)

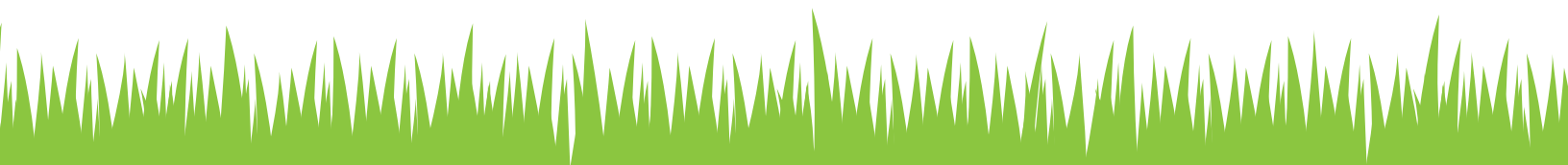
We should tell others about our faith in Jesus.

"All those who stand before others and say they believe in me, I will say before my Father in heaven that they belong to me." (Matthew 10:32)

Outline 1

God's Plan of Salvation

(based on the article by Dr. Thomas Sanders)



God loves you and has a great plan for you.

You made my whole being; you formed me in my mother's body. I praise you because you made me in an amazing and wonderful way. What you have done is wonderful. I know this very well. You saw my bones being formed as I took shape in my mother's body. When I was put together there, you saw my body as it was formed. All the days planned for me were written in your book before I was one day old. (New Century Version, Psalm 139:13-16)

We all sin.

Everyone has sinned and fallen short of God's glorious standard. (Romans 3:23)

Even though we choose to sin, God still loves us and offers to forgive us.

But God shows his great love for us in this way: Christ died for us while we were still sinners. (Romans 5:8)

Jesus died for us.

"God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son so that whoever believes in him may not be lost, but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

You become a Christian by confessing Jesus as your Savior and Lord.

If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and if you believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9)

Follow up conversation after becoming a Christian

If anyone belongs to Christ, there is a new creation. The old things have gone; everything is made new! (2 Corinthians 5:17)

God's promise to save us.

As the Scripture says, "Anyone who calls on the Lord will be saved." (Romans 10:13)

Outline 2

