

Teaching Children to Pray

When adults attempt to teach children to pray, they should encourage the children to keep doing what they do naturally: retain a simple, conversational approach to prayer. Here are some guidelines to remember:

- **Help children understand that prayer is a process of developing a deep love relationship with God.**
Encourage children to use prayer as a way to experience the love of their kind and forgiving Father.
- **As you work with young children, relate to God in an unaffected way.**
Learn to use normal vocabulary and tones of voice during prayer, instead of using artificial language and formal, pietistic expressions. Encourage brief one-sentence prayers.
- **Help them learn to listen to God, to wait in silence for God to speak to them.**
Help your children become comfortable with silence in prayer. Teach them to listen to the still small voice of God.
- **Teach children the value of praying together, and help them find their voices.**
Work to foster an atmosphere of trust and acceptance in group prayer. As children experience acceptance from God and from each other, they will learn honest sharing with God and each other.
- **Encourage children to talk to God about everything on their hearts.**
Help them to know that prayer is not just a way to ask for things that they need. Prayer can help them face the darkness in their lives as well as the light; their woundedness as well as their healing.
- **Remember that children learn by doing, by involvement.**
Children do learn from our words, but they learn far more from our actions and attitudes. Children learn primarily by doing—by seeing, touching, tasting, feeling, hearing. It is important to give them the experience of prayer.
- **Children also learn by observing.**
Adult models are very important. Children should hear adults praying for them. They will catch an adult's enthusiasm for prayer and will be keen observers of the priority that grownups really give to prayer.
- **Adults can help children develop good prayer habits.**
Some good prayer habits are simple basics—closing eyes, folding hands, kneeling, lifting hands in praise—and are useful in teaching the meaning of prayer. Other good prayer habits are internal. The most important, perhaps, is learning to give our undivided attention to the person who is praying aloud.