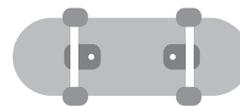


To enhance the conversation, here are a few activities your family can try:

- **Few things grow a person's maturity or faith** better than serving others. If your middle schooler has a cause or passion that they've expressed interest in, research ways your entire family can get involved. Or, empower your middle schooler to figure out how they can get connected to a cause themselves. You may have to provide consistent encouragement, but let them take the first step to engaging with a charity, ministry, or organization.
- **Get your middle schooler connected** in a student ministry or youth group they can attend regularly. But don't just drop them off and pick them up, engage in what they're learning as much as you can. Connect with their small group leader right away and often, but only as a means to offer support and help. What your student discusses with their small group leader should remain private unless the leader initiates a conversation with you. Read the ministry's emails, newsletters, or website. Volunteer on the Host Team or Food Team so you're familiar with the environment and its leaders, but still give your student space to create their own spiritual community.
- **Help your middle schooler discover** the way they're uniquely wired to connect with God. For example, is it when they see something beautiful, when they listen to worship music, read their Bible, or when they are serving others? Encourage them to pursue worship and connect with Him in a way that feels meaningful and comfortable for them—even if it's a different style than your own.

This guide is based on research from The Phase Project, a collaborative, ongoing effort, assembling classic and innovative research with practical application. To discover more ways to help your preschooler develop healthy habits, check out <http://PhaseGuides.com>.



Middle School

FAITH

PARENT CONVERSATION GUIDE

Faith. Middle School is a new and exciting time for kids, accompanied by lots of change. And with all that change comes the opportunity for a lot of growth in key areas, including faith. As kids make their way through the middle school years, they are transitioning from a time where their faith has primarily been a by-product of their parent's faith and mostly reactive, rather than proactive. But these are the years when they take initiative and create a faith of their own. The best thing you can do is be a coach, not a teacher. Encourage and affirm them in their personal faith journey. In this phase your role is to . . .

Provoke
DISCOVERY



So they will . . .
**OWN THEIR OWN FAITH AND
VALUE A FAITH COMMUNITY.**

This guide is designed to help you connect with your middle school student in the phase they are in, giving you some words to say as you navigate the critical issue of faith. As the conversation progresses through the phases, always keep this end goal in mind:

AUTHENTIC FAITH

Trusting Jesus in a way that transforms how I love God, myself, and the rest of the world.

TO SIXTH GRADERS, SAY THINGS LIKE:

"God will never stop loving you."

"I am fearfully and wonderfully made."
Psalm 139:14 *(Repeat simple Bible verses.)*

"Have you read anything in the Bible that means a lot to you right now?"

"Can we pray about this together?"

TO SEVENTH GRADERS, SAY THINGS LIKE:

"When you do you feel closest to God?"

"I have questions, too. What other things do you wonder about?"

**"I don't know why . . . but I do know
God is good. But that doesn't mean
we'll understand everything."**

"How can I pray for you today/this week?"

"What would be a fun way we could serve others together?"

TO EIGHTH GRADERS, SAY THINGS LIKE:

"God made you, He knows you, and He loves you."

"That's a great question. I don't know the answer, but we can find out."

"The way you live can show others who Jesus is."

"When do you feel closest to God?"

"What's something new that you're learning about God?"

JUST REMEMBER

Every phase is a timeframe in a kid's life when you can leverage distinctive opportunities to influence their future. In this phase, your middle schooler may be asking some hard questions. Don't be shocked (at least not visibly). Doubt isn't toxic to your middle schooler's faith; it's part of the process of personalizing what they believe. Make your home a safe place for them to ask questions, and show interest in what they are learning.

To enhance the conversation, here are a few activities your family can try:

- **Normalize conversations about God and faith.** Share what you read in your devotional or ask how you can pray for them during the week. Don't be afraid to text the occasional quote or Scripture reference and ask your teenager what they think about it. Make it so faith isn't something reserved for Sunday mornings, but a part of your everyday rhythm.
- **Share your faith story with your high schooler.** And not just the highlight reel, either! If you haven't already, it's important your student hear the struggles, obstacles, and doubts you've dealt with on your faith journey. Be transparent about past mistakes. Share appropriately but transparently. Make this conversation intentional by taking them on a hike or to a quiet coffee house to share how God has shown up in your life.
- **Your high schooler is a skeptic. That's normal.** But that means if you're not practicing what you're preaching, they probably won't take you very seriously. You don't have to make a huge production out of it, but consistently modeling healthy spiritual disciplines is one of the most important things you can do to encourage your high schooler to build a faith of their own.

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High School

FAITH

PARENT CONVERSATION GUIDE

Faith. Your teen is in a phase when the complexities of the world, and their life in particular, are becoming more obvious than ever before. The answers that seemed simple in their childlike faith aren't cutting it, and the black and white certainties that once seemed rock solid feel a little crumbly and gray. And that's okay. As their way of viewing the world matures and grows, the way they understand faith should grow, too. Allowing them to ask questions and evaluate their faith will help them make it their own. In the high school phase, your role is to . . .

Fuel
PASSION



So they will . . .
**KEEP PURSUING AUTHENTIC FAITH
AND DISCOVER A PERSONAL MISSION.**

This guide is designed to help you connect with your high school, giving you some words to say as you navigate the critical issue of faith. You're becoming more of a coach now than an active advisor, but your teenager still needs you to guide them along the way. Some of these conversation starters will overlap or need to be repeated at different ages. But as the conversation progresses, always keep the end goal in mind:

AUTHENTIC FAITH

Trusting Jesus in a way that transforms how I love God, myself, and the rest of the world.

TO HIGH SCHOOLERS, SAY THINGS LIKE . . .

"How can I pray for you today/this week?"

"When do you feel closest to God?"

"I don't know." *(Be honest if your child asks a question you don't have the answer to.)*

"Are there ways you would want to serve in our church or community?"

"What do you like about church/youth group?" *(Talk about the value of a faith community.)*

"That's a good question. I'm not sure I will ever know the full answer, but I believe . . ." *(Let them know it's okay to talk about hard questions.)*

"What's something you feel like God is teaching you right now?"

"Lately, I'm finding I connect best with God when I'm . . ."

"There's nothing you will ever do that could make God stop loving you."

"When you told me about . . . it made me think of a verse in Proverbs." *(Share Bible verses that relate to their present circumstances.)*

JUST REMEMBER

Every phase is a timeframe in a kid's life when you can leverage distinctive opportunities to influence their future. Look for ways to prioritize church connection, and stay engaged in their faith journey by having conversations at home. Also, a faith community can help them find significance by giving them opportunities to give, serve, and love others. Your high schooler will never get over seeing how God can work through them in meaningful ways.