

Ministering to Children from Non-Christian Homes

by Jill Nelson

Having children in your classroom from unbelieving homes provides both unique opportunities and challenges. For example, your words, demeanor, and actions can serve as a beautiful demonstration of the Gospel. At the same time, you may need to deal with issues that arise from children who are not being spiritually nurtured in the home, requiring a greater investment of your time and attention. Below are some suggestions for ways to maximize the potential for spiritual impact on these children:

- Understand that children from both Christian and non-Christian homes have the same basic spiritual need: They are sinners in need of a Savior. Do not assume that a child from a difficult home situation has a heart that is any more desperate than a pastor's child who has not yet come to saving faith. Both children need to hear and respond to the same biblical truths. Furthermore, ultimately, their salvation is not dependent on their parents' belief or unbelief, but on the sovereign mercy of God.
- Whenever possible, introduce yourself to the parents in person or via phone, letter, or e-mail. Try to connect with the parents on a regular basis, even if it is by simply writing a short note on the child's weekly Growing in Faith Together: Parent and Child Resource Page.
- As a leadership team, commit yourselves to weekly prayer for this child and his parents.
- Provide the child with any necessary resources that he may need, especially his own Bible. The ESV Children's Bible (Crossway Books) is very child-friendly in its design and provides helpful study tips and additional resources at the end that explain the message of the Bible.
- A younger child may be greatly helped by your providing him with a good storybook Bible to make him familiar with the main biblical themes, people, and events.
- If possible, seek out a mentor family from your church to provide the child with spiritual nurturing beyond the classroom. Make sure that this is done with sensitivity and with permission from the child's own parents.
- Create a welcoming atmosphere in your classroom and small groups. Be careful not to make the child feel odd or excluded because his parents are not Christians. For example, try to avoid statements that assume parental belief such as, "Your parents read the Bible to you and pray with you and bring you to church. Your parents want you to know and follow Jesus." Rather, try to use language that takes into account that, although the above comments are God's desire for all parents, this is not necessarily the experience of every child.
- If you encounter any problems in communicating with the parents or in interacting with a child, seek counsel from your children's ministry leadership and/or a pastor or elder.