

# SPIRITUAL CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILDREN

On the next few pages you'll find general descriptions of the spiritual characteristics of children at various stages, along with notes about how they might experience communion. Following that, you'll find a list of suggestions for enhancing the participation of children in the Lord's Supper. While each child's developmental path is unique, these general descriptions are designed to support congregational leaders, parents, and caregivers as together you seek to enfold and include children of all ages in the celebration of the Lord's Supper.



# PRESCHOOLERS

<b>1</b>	Have a <b>growing sense</b> that God is very special and real.	<b>2</b>	Tend to have a <b>literal concept</b> of God, perhaps as a grandfather figure who lives “up there.”
<b>3</b>	<b>Readily accept</b> what you say about God.	<b>4</b>	<b>Sense</b> that God loves them and cares for them.
<b>5</b>	<b>Enjoy</b> Bible stories, especially about Jesus; want stories repeated . . . and repeated!	<b>6</b>	Can <b>develop attitudes of trust</b> and love toward Jesus and God.
<b>7</b>	Do not yet have a <b>built-in control</b> (conscience) that nudges them toward right behavior for its own sake; they generally do the “right thing” out of fear of punishment or to win approval.	<b>8</b>	<b>Sense</b> that church is a good place to be.
<b>9</b>	Can <b>recite simple prayers</b> ; may add their own ideas to form personal prayers.	Experience communion <i>as part of their worship experience, mimicking their parent’s faith—just as they do when they fold their hands in prayer, raise their hands in praise, or turn the pages of a Bible storybook.</i>	

## 5 AND 6 YEAR OLDS

**1**

Have a **very real spiritual nature**, a strong sense of who God is, and often relate to Jesus as their friend.

**2**

Are **aware of right and wrong** but are still likely to define "wrong" in terms of its immediate consequences ("Taking cookies is wrong if Mom catches me!"). They begin to experience guilt and understand the joy that comes with forgiveness.

**3**

**Understand** God's love and our response within the context of everyday experiences and, to some extent, within the context of God's family, the church. By and large they are still concrete thinkers.

**4**

Can be **delighted and awed** by Bible stories. They can use their imagination to ask questions about the Bible and God.

**5**

Can **express their love** for Jesus in their own words and actions.

**Understand** *that the bread and the wine or juice remind us of Jesus' body and blood and the celebration of communion reminds us that Jesus died on a cross and forgives our sins.*

## 7 AND 8 YEAR OLDS

1

Are **capable of understanding** basic salvation concepts and making a commitment to Jesus, but they may do so simply out of a desire to please their teachers or parents.

2

Often **express opinions and feelings** about God and church. They enjoy asking a great many "why" and "how" questions.

3

Often **include prayer** in their daily routines. Their prayers are frequently self-centered but are sincere and offered in faith.

4

Often still **see issues in black and white**.

**Experience** *communion as a reminder of Jesus' death and resurrection and understand that the celebration of communion is something that God's family does together as a way of remembering Jesus' gift of forgiveness.*

## 9 AND 10 YEAR OLDS

1

Are **developing a conscience: a personal sense** of right and wrong that often expresses itself in judgments of what's "unfair" or unjust. They may be critical of adults who appear to be insincere in their faith.

2

May be **able to deal, in a limited way**, with moral questions in terms of motives and consequences. They are beginning to think about questions of ethics and morality in the context of love, loyalty, promises, and so on.

3

May **show an increasing concern** for people who are hungry, homeless, or poor.

4

Are **often open to learning** about other cultures and can be more accepting of differences in others, especially if they have personal experiences with people who are different from them.

5

**Understand why we pray** and are often able to make up spontaneous prayers.

6

Are **more inclined to look inward** than younger children and may ask questions and wonder about making a commitment to Christ.

*Continue to deepen their understanding that the bread and the wine or juice are reminders of Jesus' body and blood given through his death on the cross. They're beginning to understand metaphors and symbols and can be more thoughtful in their experience of the sacrament.*



# YOUNG TEENS

**1** Are **moving from** doing good simply to avoid punishment or to return a favor to a more "conventional" level of faith and morality where the key is conforming to what the group or culture defines as "normal" and acceptable. They are developing their own beliefs and values in the context of peers, school, media, and church. Belonging to groups like the church and participating in its rituals and ministry become increasingly important.

**2** Are **able to commit themselves** to Christ and to understand what it means to live a life of Christian gratitude and service. Public profession of faith is a very real possibility as some have arrived at the place of making commitments in their own right, apart from peers and parents.

**3** Are **able to deal with moral questions** in terms of motives and consequences. They can think about questions of ethics and morality in the context of love, loyalty, promises, and so on.

**4** Are **idealists, quick to point out faults and failures** at home and in the world, quick to spot injustice, and eager to become involved in worthy causes. They can be blind to how this idealism applies to their behavior.

**5** **Need to know** they're important to God and to the church right now, not just when they get older.

**6** **Often admire and seek to imitate** adult faith models as a way of establishing their own identity.

**7** May be **struggling** with doubts and questions about their faith, feelings that often intensify with older adolescents. Their faith still likely reflects the faith of their parents, but they have begun to make it more personal and individual. Some may reject the faith of their parents and teachers out of rebellion or a desire to demonstrate that they think for themselves, but this is more likely with older adolescents.

**8** **Resonate with** thinking about a God who knows and cares for them as individuals. As they are working on developing their identity, knowing that God knows and loves them personally is very important.

**Able to use metaphors and understand symbolism.** *Cognitively, many young teens have most of the same tools adults do to understand the richness of the sacrament. Most do not have the life experiences that adults do to help put this sacrament in the context of their lives or of the bigger salvation story.*