



Welcome to My World

TRAINING MANUAL

Engaging with Today's Children



Welcome to My World

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Focus

By understanding what life is like for today's children, children's ministry leaders can effectively help them walk a faith journey that honors God.

"Parents and religious educators can help children inhabit the two worlds of [North] American culture and religious culture simultaneously, much as immigrant families have learned to do in order preserve their ethnic culture in a new land."

Karen Marie Yust, *Real Kids, Real Faith* (Jossey-Bass, 2004)

Our goal in the faith community called church is to make the faith culture so real, so vibrant and important, that our children will feel at home in it as much as they feel at home in secular Western culture, and will make it their home base of operation for the rest of their lives.

In this workshop, children's ministry leaders will receive a clearer understanding of the world children live in, encouragement to consider how important their ministry is, and practical ideas to use as they work with kids.

Room Setup

Arrange the room so that participants can work in small groups for the Grow step.

You'll want to provide tables for each small group of 4-5 participants. To help create a welcoming space, you may want to decorate the room or create a bulletin board display with pictures of families cut from magazines.

Preparation

- Photocopy a set of numbered handouts (see back of this guide; handout 2 is optional) for each participant.
- Set up PowerPoint presentation or create overheads from PP slides 1-7 (available for download at www.WalkWithMeOnline.org). As participants enter the room, project PP 1: "Welcome to My World," on your screen.
- Read through materials list for each step (Hello, Know, Grow, Show) and assemble the materials ahead of time, along with pens or pencils for each participant.

Session Planner

Hello Find out how much you know about the culture today's kids live in.

■ GAG test 10-15 minutes

Know Learn the realities of what life is like for today's kids.

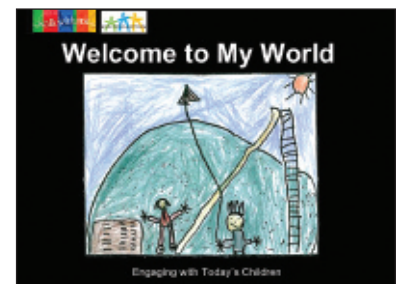
■ Welcome to My World puzzle 25 minutes

Grow Compile a list of ways you can minimize the effects of "stumbling stones" and encourage the faith development of children in today's world.

■ Stumbling Stones 30 minutes

Show Commit to practicing one concrete idea you have learned in this workshop.

■ My Commitment 10 minutes



1

HELLO-What's Up?

GAG Test

Time

10-15 minutes

Goal

Find out how much you know about the culture today's kids live in.

Materials

- PP slide 1 or transparency made from page 24
- Nametags
- Pens or pencils
- Handout 1: GAG Test (pp. 9-10)
- Handout 2: GAG test answers (optional) (pp. 11-13)
- Small rewards, such as a dish of jellybeans for each table.

As people arrive, welcome them warmly and ask them to fill out and wear a nametag. Invite them to begin working on the quiz you've set out on the tables. When they are finished, participants may compare their results with others sitting at their table and see if they can arrive at a consensus.

When all have arrived, give a few moments to make sure everyone has had time to answer the questions before beginning the workshop.

Begin by thanking all those who are attending the workshop today. Congratulate them for wanting to become better teachers. Say, **An important principle in teaching is to build on knowledge that is already there. We will be more effective teachers if we understand the realities of a child's world. So let's check out how much you know about that world.**

Go through the answers to the quiz, using information noted on the answer sheet for additional insights into a child's world. However, don't go into too much detail; many of these facts will come up again in the next step.

Hand out the rewards, calling everyone heroes for taking time out of their busy schedules to learn more about a child's world. Remind them that by doing this, they are helping to fulfill God's plan for his children.

Spend a few moments in devotions. Read Psalm 78:2-7 aloud. Then pray together, thanking God for the faith communities that nurtured each participant's faith in the past. Pray for the worlds your children and their parents live in today, asking for God's wisdom to help you learn and grow as effective teachers.



If you are short of time, hand out copies of the answer sheet (Handout 2) so participants can read the additional information later.

2

KNOW-Guess What?

Welcome to My World Puzzle

Time

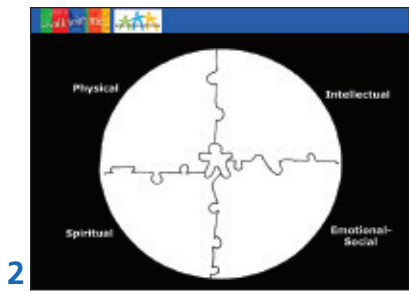
25 minutes

Goal

Learn the realities of what life is like for today's kids.

Materials

- PP slides 2-6 or transparencies
- Case studies (pp. 7-8)
- Handout 3: Puzzle (p.15)
- Handout 4: Fact Sheet and Bibliography (pp. 17-20)
- Pens or pencils

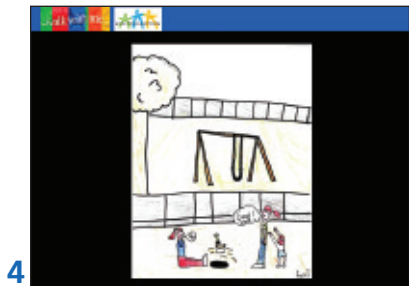


Project PP 2, the Welcome to My World puzzle, on your screen or overhead projector. Point out the words written around the outside of the “world,” and mention that most psychologists agree that children have basic human needs that must be met for a child to grow and thrive: physical, emotional/social, intellectual, and spiritual needs. Briefly define what you mean by each of these terms:

- *physical*: the need for food and water, clothing, shelter, safety, a clean environment
- *emotional/social*: the need for love, acceptance, affirmation; the need to belong to a caring community of friends, family, and neighbors
- *intellectual*: the need to learn and grow, the need for stimulation, information, coping skills to thrive in the world
- *spiritual*: the need to experience God’s love and live for a higher purpose



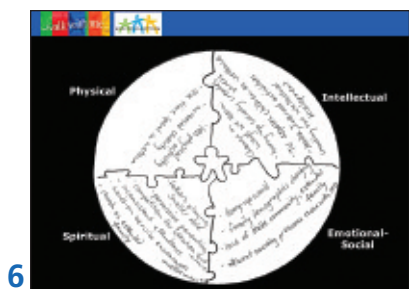
Hand out copies of the puzzle (Handout 3). Then invite participants to listen to three case studies of typical families. As you read case study 1, project PP 3 on your screen or overhead projector. Then debrief, inviting participants to name realities they heard in the story that will impact a child’s basic needs in the four areas you’ve described.



Encourage them to jot notes on the pieces of their puzzles. Repeat with case studies 2 and 3, displaying the accompanying PP slides (PP 4 and 5) for each.



Note: The case study stories are based on statistics from various sources that have been compiled on the fact sheet (pp. 17-20). Participants may wish to take these home to read later.



Process this experience by having participants share with the larger group what they’ve written on their puzzles. Hand out the fact sheet and bibliography (Handout 4), emphasizing the concepts that are important for your particular situation. For example, if you are presenting this workshop at a middle-class urban congregation, you’ll emphasize different statistics than if you are presenting it to an inner-city outreach congregation.

Next project PP 6, which shows the Welcome to My World puzzle with some characteristics of today’s world included in each of the four areas of development. You may wish to use some of the following statistics to reinforce the conclusions participants have drawn from the case studies:

tip In your discussion, be careful not to paint a “gloom and doom” scenario. Make sure participants know it’s not all bad news! Many disturbing trends seem to be reversing themselves or have held stable for the last ten years after a sharp downturn previously. (For example, statistics on teen violence, teen pregnancy, and divorce are remaining stable or decreasing.) Parents in general know a lot more about child development, and are very intentional about participating in their children’s lives. Young people in the postmodern world have a deep hunger for meaningful relationships and are open to spiritual seeking. Millennial kids (those born before 2000) are inquisitive, have a positive view of life, ask good questions, and are looking for good role models.

Emotional/Social Development

- hurry-up world; less time for everything: free time for children has decreased by 12 hours per week since the 80s; 1 in 4 workers works more than 50 hours a week, up from one in 10 in 1991.
- family demographics changing: 68 percent of families include two parents (may be blended family); 23 percent are headed by single moms; 5 percent are headed by single dads; 4 percent of children live with others

- lack of stable community, extended family: each year, 1 in 6 families move to a different home
- affluent society pressures those with less: single moms make up the poorest part of society

Intellectual Development

- media, Internet crowding out intellectual development: kids who use the Internet can find information quickly
- change in ways we learn: children are visual, hands-on learners with shorter attention spans
- hurry-up society creates stress: kids come to school/church without breakfast; lack sleep
- TV exposes children to violence, war in real time on our screens
- increasing multicultural influences: 19 percent of children in North America speak a second language

Physical Development

- less physical activity: 4 in 10 kids have TV in their rooms; 1 in 3 have video games
- increased obesity: from 6 percent of children in 1980 to 15 percent in 2000
- increased respiratory illnesses and hyperactivity: asthma from 2.5 percent in 1978 to 11.8 percent in 1995; 6.7 percent of children ages 5-17 diagnosed with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).
- less time spent in nature: “nature-deficit disorder” is a newly minted term to describe physical, mental and spiritual loss

Spiritual Development

- fathers playing smaller role: more women than men attend church, teach Sunday school
- greater diversity of expressions: church forms, meeting times may need to change to reach children
- inconsistent attendance: children spend every other weekend with other parent
- permissive parenting: postmodern mindset doesn't value authority; parents don't insist on attendance
- competition for attention and time: Barna (*Transforming Children*) says that most parents agree they have the primary responsibility for faith nurture, but spend minimal or no time in an average week talking to their kids about it; it's harder to get teachers and workers for children's ministry programs

Conclude this step by reading the following quote from George Barna's book *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions*:

“Although the world is becoming more complex, kids maintain the same basic needs as they have for decades: to be trusted, to be loved, to feel safe, and to identify a significant purpose in life.”



It's true that statistics can be used to say just about anything you want. But these facts point out trends and developments in society that, taken as a whole, show us how we are changing. Change is a constant.

3

GROW-So What?

Stumbling Stones

Time

30 minutes

Goal

Compile a list of ways you can minimize the effects of “stumbling stones” and encourage the faith development of children in today’s real world.

Materials

- Basket of assorted sizes of stones for each table (either find these outside or purchase some at a dollar or craft store)
- Fine-point markers
- Placemat or large paper plates, one for each small group
- Newsprint, several sheets for each small group, plus markers

Remind leaders that God gave the primary responsibility for nurturing children’s faith to the family. It’s the job of parents to pass on the message of God’s love and salvation to their children. The church is also part of the faith culture. Its job is to support, encourage, equip, and reinforce the role of the parent in nurturing faith in their children, and to be the body of Christ, which includes children. We are called to be the family of God, models of Christ, and important agents of passing on God’s good news.

As church ministry workers, we realize that passing on spiritual knowledge and values is only part of what we do. We are working with a whole child, not just his or her soul. We can minister to all four of a child’s basic needs: physical, emotional/social, intellectual, and spiritual.

Give each small group of 4-5 people a basket of various sizes of stones, a placemat or paper plate, and newsprint and markers. Have the group choose one person to record and report the group’s discussions.

Invite them to enter into a child’s world, using the rocks to pinpoint stumbling blocks to faith nurture. They should take turns picking out a rock and naming a stumbling stone, choosing the size of rock to reflect the relative effect this problem could have on a child. They should write the name of the problem on the rock and place it on the placemat or paper plate in the center of the table. For example, someone may choose a large stone to represent family breakdown, which may lead to emotional insecurity or turmoil in a child’s life.

After spending about ten minutes naming stumbling stones, participants should begin reversing the process by taking stones back out of the pile and naming actions and strategies they could implement in the classroom to help alleviate the effect of these stones. They might wish to begin with the bigger rocks, since there will likely not be enough time to find solutions to all the stumbling stones. Remind the group that by brainstorming together you can come up with more ideas than any one person alone could do; the more people contribute their ideas and insights, the more worthwhile this activity will be.

For example, the large stone labeled “family breakdown” may prompt strategies like these:

- teacher should be aware of family situation; use adequate registration procedures to collect this information
- when preparing lessons, do not assume that all children come from a traditional family; gear preparation to the child who is hurting
- involve a helper in the classroom whose job it is to reassure and comfort little ones
- phone the family when their child is absent for two weeks or more
- create a letter box where children are encouraged to post notes to the teacher; answer the notes you get!



Remind participants that as teachers we cannot assume that all families are actually aware of their responsibility. Some of the children in your groups come from non-Christian homes; their parents may be seekers or they may be using the church as a babysitter. In any case, they are passing on spiritual values, albeit values that may not support faith.

Explain that the “secretary” for each small group should record the discussions that occur in the small group by creating two columns on the newsprint headed “Stumbling Stone” and “Positive Actions” and listing the group’s ideas and strategies. This part of the activity should take about ten minutes.

Debrief, having each group talk about their suggestions as they present them to the whole group.



Teachers may wish to do a modified form of this activity with children in their classroom. The stones might represent “worries” or “problems” that can be prayed for.

4 SHOW-Do What? My Commitment

Time	10 minutes
Goal	Commit to practicing one concrete idea you have learned in this workshop.
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> PP slide 7 or transparency <input type="checkbox"/> Handout 5: My Commitment (p. 21) <input type="checkbox"/> Handout 6: What It Means to Walk With Me (p. 23)



7

Pile the stones together in one place where people can see them. Remind participants that we have a rock-moving God for whom nothing is impossible. But God uses people like us to help accomplish God’s purposes.

Project PP slide 7 or a transparency on your screen or overhead. Challenge participants to commit to practicing at least one thing they have learned in today’s session. Hand out copies of “My Commitment” (Handout 7). Have them fill in their commitment, and suggest that they place the sheet in their ministry manuals or post it in a place where they will see it often.

Remind participants that for a commitment to be effective, it should include the following elements:

- A concrete statement of what you intend to do: “I will pray for the children in my class”
- Specific time and limits: “I will include prayer for the children in my morning devotions five times a week.”
- How you will accomplish this commitment: “I will note a different child’s name in my prayer diary each day, and pray for that child.”
- Accountability: “I will verbally share this commitment with my Sunday school coordinator, asking if he or she will call me in a month to see how I am doing.”

Conclude the workshop by reading aloud Handout 6: “What It Means to Walk With Me.”

Close with prayer, including the following:

- the specific needs of children participants have discovered in this workshop
- the children who are growing up in today’s world
- the church as it ministers to children’s needs
- strength and self-discipline for participants to stick to their commitments

Invite participants to take a few stones home as a reminder of this session, and thank them for their contributions to your time together.

CASE STUDY 1

Tim and Jason

This is Tim and his son Jason. Tim and Shelly got married right out of high school. A year later their son Jason was born. When Jason was 2, the relationship fell apart. Shelly had primary custody of Jason; Tim took Jason every other weekend and most Wednesday evenings.

On the weekends when Tim had Jason, he took him to church, then spent the rest of the day with his parents, whom loved Jason dearly.

When he was 4, Jason came to live with his dad after Shelly couldn't handle the stress of single parenting any longer. Now Shelly sees Jason every other Sunday and most Wednesday evenings. Tim's parents live nearby, and Tim's mom takes care of Jason when Tim is working. They've reassured him that if anything happens to Tim, they will raise Jason as their son.

Tim is thankful for his church's support: they've started a program for single parents and there's also prayer support. Jason likes to go to Sunday school on the weekends that he is home with his dad.

Tim would love to take Jason out on hikes and expose him to nature, but time is always at a premium. So is money, and so are relationships with people his own age, which he longs for. All in all, though, Tim considers himself quite blessed.

CASE STUDY 2

Sandy and Ken, Kate and Paul

This is Sandy and her two children Kate, 12, and Paul, 6. Sandy's husband Ken works sixty hours a week and he travels at least one weekend a month. Sandy has to juggle her part-time job, do most of the household chores, and drive the kids to school, play dates, soccer practice, and music lessons. All the grandparents live on the East coast, half a country away, and have busy lives of their own.

Sandy wishes Ken would at least take Sundays off and come to church with them, but that doesn't look like it's going to happen any time soon. So Sandy goes to church alone with the kids. She tries to have family devotions at suppertime if they're not eating supper on the run in the car. It's a good thing the church is teaching them the basics about God, she thinks; it will fill in the holes. There are midweek clubs too, but the children aren't really interested. Sandy is actually glad about that—transporting them back and forth would just be one more headache.

Ken's hefty income means the children have everything they want. They have their own computers and TVs in their rooms. Kate uses her computer incessantly for instant messaging and surfing the Internet. Last week Sandy bought both kids cell phones so she can keep up with them.

But she's worried about Kate, who seems to be packing on the pounds. Kate's beginning to obsess about her weight and wants to join the gym. Sandy figures it's better not let her go on her own—the world is not a safe place. So Sandy brings the car around, and off they go again.

CASE STUDY 3

Andrew and Maria, John and Anya

Meet Andrew and Maria and their two children, John, 9, and Anya, 5. Andrew met Maria in Nicaragua when he was working for the Peace Corps after college. They've been married for twelve years and live back in the United States. Maria wants to make sure that her children understand the language of her culture, so when they are at home, Andrew and Maria speak Spanish. The children are growing up bilingual.

Andrew and Maria both work full-time for nonprofit agencies. That means long hours and low pay doing work that they love. It's not an easy road, though. John and Anya don't wear the name-brand clothes that many of the other kids at their school wear, and John, especially, is beginning to notice that he's different. The midweek kids' program at church sponsored a field trip to the local water park that would cost "only" twenty dollars. That's twenty dollars Andrew and Maria don't have. Andrew has taken on a second job to pay Christian school tuition.

Still, there are lots of good things to celebrate. John's Sunday school class is collecting used eyeglasses and sending them to countries where poverty prevents many people from getting the prescription lenses they need. So far, the group has collected 83 pairs in just three weeks! Word has spread and the whole church is getting involved now.

The children also have a special friend at church, a single woman they call Aunt Nancy who babysits when Andrew and Maria's work schedules take them away from home. She's become an important part of the family. Nancy tells funny stories about her own childhood, growing up in a poor family as one of ten children. And their church has started an Alpha ministry that is attracting lots of people from different ethnic and social groups, bringing new life into the congregation.

GAG Test*

(General Assessment of Grownups)

1. What is Phat Farm?

- a band
- a place to go to lose weight
- a brand of shoes
- a popular night club in New York

2. In IM, what does P911 mean?

- Porsche 911
- phone emergency!
- I need a bathroom break
- parent alert

Bonus: What does IM mean?

3. Who is Dora's sidekick?

- Boots
- Pedro
- Slider
- Lionheart

4. RPGs, MMOGs and First-Person Shooters refer to

- science fiction heroes
- alcoholic drinks
- video games
- gang members

5. What percentage of American children live apart from their biological father?

- 21 percent
- 27 percent
- 36 percent
- 40 percent

6. The average child watches how many hours of television in a year?

- over 1,000
- 840
- 700
- 532

7. The human brain is fully grown at what age?

- 6
- 10
- 14
- 18

8. Kids born before 2001 are known as

- the Sad Generation
- iGeneration
- Generation Y
- Millennials
- all of the above

9. How much did child abuse rise between 1980 and 1993?

- 30 percent
- 40 percent
- 70 percent
- over 70 percent

10. If a child attends Sunday school regularly, how many hours of church education will she receive between the ages of 4-18?

Some of these questions were taken from a quiz developed by middle school and high school kids to see how aware grownups are of their culture (hence the name GAG: General Assessment of Grownups). Find all 50 questions of that quiz at www.healthinschools.org. Other resources used in this quiz: www.familyfirst.net; Wikipedia; and lecture notes from conferences on children's spirituality.

GAG Test Answers

1. What is Phat Farm?

- a brand of shoes

Advertising aimed at children is heavy on “branding,” pushing the importance of “in” labels, and relying on the developmental need of preteens and teens to have the approval of their peers. For an eye-opening experience, view the online video *Merchants of Cool* on the Frontline page of PBS.org.

2. In IM, what does P911 mean?

- parent alert

IM stands for instant messaging, a popular communication strategy on the Internet and over cell phones. P911 warns the message recipient to watch what they’re saying since a parent is watching the screen. Today’s kids are digital natives: they have never lived in a world without personal computers.

3. Who is Dora’s sidekick?

- Boots

Dora the Explorer is a character created by Nickelodeon who goes on great problem-solving adventures with Boots, her dog. The show is interactive, inviting preschool children to participate by answering questions asked by Dora.

4. RPGs, MMOGs and First-Person Shooters refer to

- video games

Video games often replace outdoor unscripted playing time, leading to less contact with nature, and perhaps contributing to a rising rate of childhood obesity. Video games come in several types, such as Role-Playing Games, Massively Multiplayer Online Games, and First-Person Shooter (the player operates the weapon).

5. What percentage of American children live apart from their biological father?

- 36 percent

A correlating statistic: elementary children who do not have an actively involved father at home are 11 times more likely to engage in violent behavior.

6. The average child watches how many hours of television in a year?

- over 1,000

The average is 2-4 hours a day; in many homes, TV is left on during waking hours. As a result, American children might witness 8,000 acts of murder on TV before they are 10 years old. Pediatricians urge parents not to allow children under the age of 2 to watch TV at all; preschoolers should be limited to 1-2 hours of quality programming.

7. The human brain is fully grown at this age

- 14

Studies show that the brain has reached its adult size between the ages of 12-14, but new pathways within the brain keep forming until about age 20-30. Most basic attitudes—for instance, the building blocks for faith development—are laid down before the age of 6. Most Christians make a faith commitment before they reach their teen years.

8. Kids born before 2001 are known as

- all of these

The Sad Generation: these kids are more medicated than any other generation (Ritalin, antidepressants); iGeneration or Net Gen: they are growing up in a digital, Internet-driven world; Gen Y: to differentiate them from Gen X; Millennials: a name this generation came up with themselves. These kids are generally positive, forward-thinking, tolerant, multicultural, and technologically savvy. They ask good questions, want reasons for doing things, and are looking for role models and relationships to help them sort out what's real and what's not.

9. According to the American Department of Health Services, how much did child abuse rise between 1980 and 1993?

- 30 percent
- 40 percent
- 70 percent
- over 70 percent

According to the U.S. Department of Health, child abuse in America rose 134% between 1980 and 1993. The U.S. national rate of child victimization is 12.4 per 1,000 children, according to the National Association of Counsel for Children's 2006 Child Maltreatment Report.

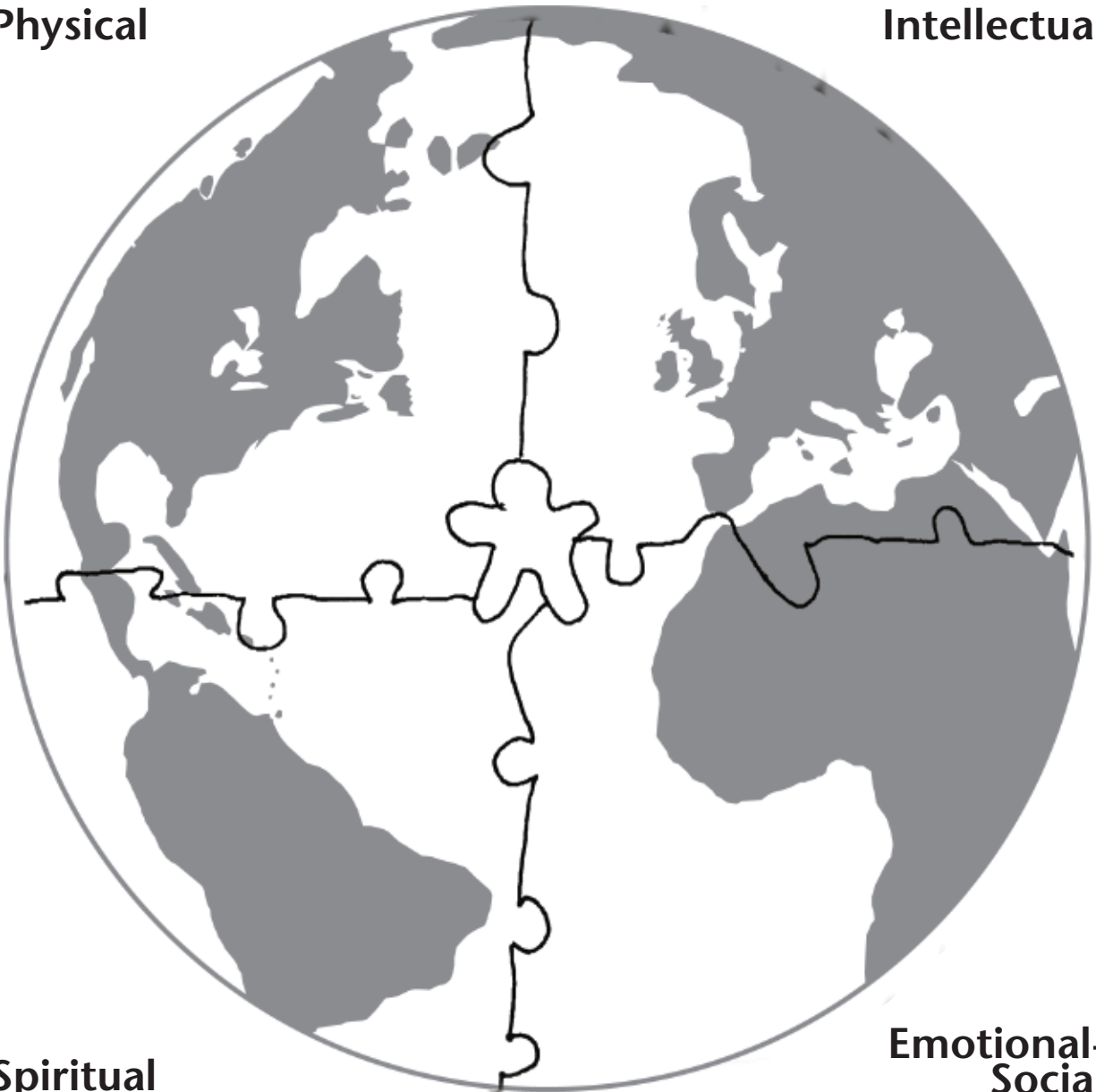
10. If a child attends Sunday school regularly, how many hours of church education will she receive between the ages of 4-18?

If a child attends Sunday school 50 weeks a year for one hour a week between the ages of 4-18, she will receive 750 hours of formal instruction. In comparison, the average child watches more than 15,000 hours of TV—twenty times more—during the same time frame. Studies have shown that after family involvement, the church is the second-most important factor in a child's spiritual formation.

Welcome to My World Puzzle

Physical

Intellectual



Spiritual

**Emotional-
Social**

Children's Basic Needs Fact Sheet and Bibliography

1. Physical: the need for health, food and water, clothing, shelter, safety, a clean environment

- increase in asthma: 2.5 percent of children in 1978; 11.8 percent of children in 1995
- increase in obesity: 6 percent overweight in 1980; 15 percent in 2000
- increase in treatment for hyperactivity
- homelessness: 39 percent of homeless people are children
- 1 in 8 children have no health insurance
- decrease in exposure to smoking and lead hazards in the home
- bullying: 1 in 7 children is bullied or is a bully
- violent crime: perpetrated by youth as well as youth victims; numbers are up by 1/3 from several years ago, but down sharply from early 90s. Still, youths aged 12-17 are more than twice as likely to be victims of violent crimes as adults.
- statistics on sexual abuse in Christian families varies little from society at large

2. Emotional/social: the need for love, acceptance, affirmation; the need to belong to a caring community of friends, family, and neighbors

- in 2004, 68 percent of children ages 0-17 lived with two married parents, down from 77 percent in 1980; nearly 1/4 (23 percent) of children lived with only their mothers, 5 percent lived with their fathers, and 4 percent lived with neither of their parents (grandparents or foster parents)
- increase in gay couples, common-law relationships
- decrease in birth rate for unmarried teens since 1994 (22 births per 1,000 females, the lowest rate ever recorded)
- 1 in 6 households will move in a typical year
- grandparents often separated by distance, leaving the nuclear family to stand alone
- society slots people into aged groupings (gated communities, 45+ complexes, age-segregated clubs, classes, Sunday schools); less exposure to a larger cross section of age and experience
- 3 in 5 preschoolers have both parents in the labor force
- 1 in 4 adults works 50 hours or more per week (1 in 10 in 1991)
- families with dependent care responsibilities devote approximately 110 hours per week to work and nonwork activities
- postmodern mindset is anti-authoritarian, leaving parents confused about child-rearing practices

3. Intellectual: the need to learn and grow; the need for stimulation, information, coping skills to thrive in the world

- kids have ready access to TV, movies, video games, cell phones, IM, chat rooms, downloadable music files, Internet, digital cameras
- most teens would rather give up TV than be deprived of cell phones (63 percent of teens have cell phones)
- 1/3 of preschoolers live in homes where TV is on almost all the time
- advertising is aimed at children
- children are exposed to violence in TV shows and in song lyrics
- increasingly diverse society: 19 percent of kids speak a second language at home; Hispanic population increasing the fastest

4. Spiritual: the need to experience God's love and live for a higher purpose

- work, sports, entertainment, community programs place increasing stress on family time, leaving less time for spiritual awareness and growth
- increasing programs at church, combined with family time crunch, make it difficult to recruit committed and capable leaders and teachers
- entertainment figures are becoming the new heroes; obsessive preoccupation by society with celebrities
- nature-deprived: some sociologists wonder if some of our children are overweight and depressed because they do not have exposure to nature
- postmodern thinking: all ways lead to God; absolute norms do not exist
- consumer/materialist society: consumers are turning to material things to fill spiritual needs
- people are most likely to accept Jesus as Savior when they are young

Bibliography: Helpful Materials Used in Welcome to My World

Books

Barna, George. *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions*. Ventura Cal.: Regal Books, 2003. ISBN 0-8307-3293-4

Barna, a well-known researcher, compiles information helpful to Christian ministries. Biweekly research reports are also published online at www.barna.org. After conducting research on children and families, Barna is convinced that children should be the church's #1 priority.

Caldwell, Elizabeth F. *Making a Home for Faith*. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2000. ISBN 0-8298-1370-5

Caldwell is a professor of educational ministry at McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago. The book offers guidance and insight to parents and caregivers who want to take an active role in the spiritual life of their children.

Caldwell emphasizes that people who work with children in a faith context have a vocation: a sacred calling.

Freudenburg, Ben (with Rick Lawrence). *The Family Friendly Church*. Loveland, Col.: Group Publishing, 1998. ISBN 0-7644-2048-8

Freudenburg, a youth minister in a Lutheran church, makes a strong case for considering the family as the primary institution for faith nurture. The church, he believes, must change its emphasis from church-based, home-supported ministry to home-based, church-supported ministry. Lots of good things to chew on in this book.

Halverson, Delia. *Teaching Prayer in the Classroom*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989, rev. 2003. ISBN: 0-687-06425-2

This is a great book: a very helpful, informative, and practical guide for children's ministry leaders about getting your children involved with, learning about, and growing in prayer. Bonus: photocopiable pages to send home with kids so families can reinforce your classroom prayer experiences.

Yust, Karen Marie. *Real Kids, Real Faith*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004. ISBN 0-7879-6407-7

Written by a children's pastor and mother, this book is aimed at parents, but gives lots of insights to educators as well. Yust's dream is that children will discover a safe community that challenges them to discern their purpose and vocation in life as children of God; that they will learn to resist those aspects of contemporary culture that make empty promises, and that adults and children will work together toward understanding how they are to live lives pleasing to God. Includes stories and practical ideas as well as a strong theological framework for faith nurture.

Denominational Information

Together All God's People: Integrating Children and Youth into the Life of Your Church. A report compiled by Karen Wilk for the Children and Youth Ministry Council of the Christian Reformed Church. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2005. The report is based on conferences by the same name held across the United States and Canada in 2003 and 2004. It makes a case for the inclusion of children and youth in all aspects of congregational life, as well as giving very concrete suggestions for how to do it. One chapter deals specifically with faith nurture.

Report of the Synodical Committee to Study Church Education: available in the *Acts of Synod*, 2005. Published by the Christian Reformed Church in North America, or available online at www.crcna.org/pages/synodical.cfm

Websites

www.americanvalues.org

"The Institute for American Values, founded in 1987, is a private, nonpartisan organization devoted to contributing intellectually to the renewal of marriage and family life and the sources of competence, character, and citizenship."

Active in strengthening marriage through the Marriage Movement; produced an excellent report called *Hardwired to Connect* about the evidence for children's need to have "authoritative communities" in their lives: "groups of people who are committed to one another over time and who exhibit and are able to pass on what it means to be a good person."

www.cdfactioncouncil.org

The Children's Defense Fund Action Council's mission is to leave no child behind and to ensure every child a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start, and a Moral Start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities. Site features up-to-date statistics on children and families, as well as reports and action plans for helping children at risk. A special section challenges religious communities to get involved.

www.childstats.gov

This site offers easy access to statistics and reports on children and families, including population and family characteristics, economic security, health, behavior and social environment, and education. The forum fosters coordination, collaboration, and integration of federal efforts to collect and report data on conditions and trends for children and families.

www.search-institute.org

Search Institute is an independent nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide leadership, knowledge; and resources to promote healthy children, youth, and communities. To accomplish this mission, the Institute generates and communicates new knowledge and brings together community, state, and national leaders. At the heart of the Institute's work is the framework of 40 Developmental Assets: positive experiences and personal qualities that young people need to grow up healthy, caring, and responsible. The Institute is currently conducting a huge study on spiritual development (see website for preliminary findings and books already produced on the subject.)

My Commitment

“I’m gonna live so God can use me, anywhere, Lord, anytime!”

—traditional African-American Spiritual

A Pledge

Knowing and trusting that God has called me to minister to children,
I commit to using my gifts for God.

I commit, with God’s help, to do the following concrete ministry action
to better minister to the children:

This is when I intend, with God’s help, to keep my commitment:

This is how I hope, with God’s help, to accomplish my commitment:

I will ask this person to hold me accountable:

Signed:

Date:

What It Means to Walk With Me

Dear Teacher,

So, my parents tell me I'm going to Sunday school again this year. That's OK, that's cool. Let's have fun together this year.

Are you ready to walk with me on my faith journey? Here's what I hope will happen:

1. I hope you'll love me like nobody's business. You don't have to be the greatest singer or storyteller or craft expert, but you do have to love me lots. I hear that's what Jesus did, even when his disciples disappointed him.
2. I hope you show me that Jesus is living in your heart and he's changed your life, and you want to tell me about it. If it's real for you, I'm going to want to try it too. If it's not real for you, don't come . . . please!
3. I hope you know how to laugh. I hear laughter is the shortest distance between two people. What are you going to do if the bottle of glue tips over in your purse or the juice spills everywhere? When we laugh together, I feel good about life, and good about being in Sunday school.
4. I hope you can go with the flow. Once my friend came to Sunday school so sad because his granny had just died. We didn't have a lesson that day. Instead, we made paper flowers to put on her grave, and we talked about heaven. We all felt better afterwards.
5. I hope you don't think my faith is not as good as your faith. I know I have lots to learn because I'm just starting out on this walk. But Jesus said adults should have the faith of a kid, and that must mean something. Can you show me that there's a kid inside you too?
6. I hope you'll expect the best from me. Sure, I'll crab and whine when you raise the bar, but secretly, I'll be pleased that you think I can grow to be the best I can possibly be.
7. I hope you understand where I'm coming from. Kids haven't got all the thinking and physical skills grown-ups have. Try to look at the world from my point of view before you figure out what I need to learn.
8. I hope we get to move around and do things, instead of always listening and being quiet. Doing, moving, talking, looking . . . those are important ways of learning that come naturally to me.

There's more, but I'm sure you get the idea. And thanks for offering to walk with me . . . I hope you learn as much as I do on this journey.

Love,
Your kid

Excerpted from *Trail Mix: Good Stuff for Walk With Me Teachers* (Faith Alive Resources, 2004)

