

How to help your teen when they are doubting their faith.

This is one of our key focuses in He's Alive Students. We actually believe that doubt is an important phase in an adolescent's faith to help them mature from having a simple faith that they've inherited unquestioningly from others to building a strong personalized faith of their own. Doubt is not as debilitating to faith as silence is. When teens don't question their faith (or feel like they're not allowed to) it is difficult for them to develop a solid faith base that will help them weather the challenges of adulthood. The best things families can do to nurture a vibrant faith in their children and teens is to regularly pray together, study scripture together, and open up conversations that includes room for questioning some of the tough areas of the faith together.

We also provide several resources to help students and families through this important phase:

1. Can I Ask That Class. Every few years, we provide a class called *Can I Ask That?* in which we intentionally go into and have conversations about some of the tough questions and issues of the Christian faith. During this 9-week class we discuss the questions: Can I trust the Bible? Does the Bible contradict itself? Can I be a Christian and believe in evolution? Is Jesus really the only way to God? What does the Bible say about being gay? How can I follow a God who would let people do bad things? Is hell real and how could God send someone there? Why do bad things happen to good people? And is sex outside marriage wrong? If you see registration open up, get your 9th-12th grader involved!

2. Recommended Reading

Article: [The Biggest Hindrance to Your Kids' Faith Isn't Doubt. It's Silence](#) by Kara Powell and Steven Argue from ChristianityToday.com

Article: [How Do You Best Respond When Kids Question Their Faith?](#) by Sean and Josh McDowell from SeanMcdowell.com

Book: [Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids](#) by Kara Powell and Chap Clark

Book: [Can I Ask That: 8 Hard Questions about God and Faith](#) by Jim Candy, Brad Griffin, and Kara Powell

Help! My Teen Is Questioning the Faith

(by Melissa Kruger, from the [gospelcoalition.org](#))

Most days, young children bombard their parents with a series of rapid-fire questions. From the situational (“Why do I have to go to bed at 7:30?”), to the theoretical (“Do you think I could fly off the roof if I made a set of wings?”), to the theological (“Why didn’t God protect me from falling off my bike?”), most parents spend their days offering up answers, advice, and wisdom to satisfy the natural curiosity of their kids.

Once the teen years hit, however, young adults start searching for new sources of information. Parents are no longer seen as the fount of all wisdom. In fact, for many teens, parents are the last place they want to take their questions—especially when it comes to matters of faith. They often internalize or verbalize the words of Will Smith: “Take it from me; parents just don’t understand.” (Although most of them are too young to remember his singing days.)

As our teens search for answers, how can we foster home environments where they can bring their questions, doubts, and insecurities to us? How can we proactively create spaces for discussions and respond to their doubts and questions with a listening ear and prayerful heart?

Here are a few ways we can build homes that allow our children to wrestle with questions of faith.

Proactively: Create an Environment for Spiritual Discussion

If your children are still young, one of the best ways to prepare for spiritual discussions in the teen years is to build a regularly scheduled time of Bible reading in your home. Talk often about God as you go throughout your day. Memorize Bible verses together and discuss what they mean. Let the names of Abraham, Sarah, Moses, and Ruth be as familiar to them as their

friends in preschool. Pray before meals, for people you love, and for comfort when they fear the monsters under the bed. Beginning spiritual conversations in the early years builds a foundation for conversations to continue in the teen years.

If your children are older, it's not too late. You can start reading the Bible and learning from it together. If you feel unsure about how to study or what questions to ask, tell your teen your fears. Your honesty and humility may disarm their natural resistance. Search together for a Bible study. Ask friends or ministry leaders what studies they've used. It's never too late to start spiritual discussions in your home. Be willing [to search the Bible with them](#) to seek answers to their spiritual questions. Let the Bible be the authority—allow it to speak within the walls of your home.

Reactively: Argue Less, Question More

When teens begin to pose their theological questions, it's tempting to jump in with all the right answers—which can lead to [arguing and debating](#) all sorts of topics that might not be the real issue. Doubting teens (and adults) usually have deeper struggles behind their stated concerns or theological nitpicking.

Asking questions can help you *understand* your teen rather than just *answer* your teen. If your child is doubting the inerrancy of the Bible, questions like “When did you first start having doubts about the Bible?” and “Is there something the Bible teaches that is bothering you and making you unsure about God's goodness?” can provide needed insight.

If they're doubting God exists, probe into their concerns: “If God doesn't exist, what do you think is the purpose of life?” Seek to know and understand your child in the midst of doubts. Asking questions communicates your willingness to listen, as well as [respect for them as an individual](#). It helps keep the conversation going and promotes further discussion.

Proactively: Help Them Question Before They Question

During family devotions, [my husband and I](#) regularly ask our kids the questions we know they'll probably hear one day: "How would you answer someone who reads this passage and says there's no way Jesus could have walked on water; it was probably just a sandbar?" or "What would you say to someone who says it's not fair for God to judge someone who's never heard about Jesus?"

Questions help teens read the Bible with increased thoughtfulness. While studying the book of John, I asked our kids, "If you want people to believe a lie, would you give a lot of specific details or just tell a general story of what happened?" After concluding that the best way to lie is to give as few details as possible (trust me, there was a point to this exercise!), I told them to be on the lookout for the multitude of specific details John offered his readers. He mentions names of people and where they lived. He tells the specific places that miracles happened. If John was telling a big lie about Jesus, why would he include so many specific details? Well, John was either a really bad liar or perhaps he was telling the truth—as unbelievable as it may have been.

Asking teens questions is one of the best ways to engage their minds and encourage learning. Questioning them before they question you can proactively answer some of their doubts, as well as let them know your home is an inviting place for questions.

Reactively: Don't Fear (or Freak Out!) When They Question

If our children start questioning biblical teaching, we often jump to offer quick answers—because we are fearful. We mistakenly view our teen's acceptance of Christianity as evidence of our parenting. If our children have faith, then we've parented them correctly. If our children don't believe, then we've failed. We also may fear because we assume their questions are the first step toward inevitable apostasy.

To answer these fears, we must continually remind ourselves that everyone is saved by grace and by grace alone. Period. No caveats. If our children come to faith, it's because God chose them before the creation of the world ([Eph. 1:4](#)) and rescued them from the dominion of darkness ([Col. 1:13](#)). God adopts our children through the work of Christ, not the work of

our parenting. And they persevere in the faith not because we keep them, but because he does.

Yes, Christian parents are often a means by which God works, but it's always his plan, his power, and his grace alone that saves our children.

So when your teens start to wrestle with their faith, don't freak out. Don't get angry. Don't be insecure. Don't fret. Don't be condescending. Take your concerns to God and entrust your fears to him. Be patient and prayerful, loving and kind. Help your teen find answers to their questions, but know that only the Spirit can give discernment ([1 Cor. 2:14](#)). Let them know that just because they have questions they can't answer (or perhaps you can't answer) doesn't mean there aren't answers. Involve the community of the church—seek advice from pastors or ministry leaders. Find relevant books to help them in their thinking and processing.

Building an inviting home for questions of faith takes time, energy, availability, and prayer. Our children need our presence just as much in the teen years as they do the little years. In the rush of sporting events, dance recitals, and homework, it takes effort to create an environment for discussing questions.

My greatest desire is that my children will always seek the Lord. I hope they walk with God, obey his commands, and find abundant life in Jesus. However, I also want them to know I'll listen to their doubts, care about their concerns, and love them all their days.