

How to Prepare Your Child for Worship

Worship is one of the most important things a congregation does. It is through worship that God comes to us in the word and sacrament, and we respond by listening and receiving, praising and thinking, and dedicating our lives to God's service. Worship motivates us and empowers us to serve.

John Westerhoff, a leading Christian educator, teaches that faith for children is "caught" more than "taught." Children are a part of our church family and we share responsibility for nurturing their spiritual needs. We embraced this role at their baptism. By welcoming them at our church's most sacred moments, children learn that nothing can separate them from the love of God. By worshipping together with our children, we pass on our traditions for praising God through the sacraments, music, proclaiming and hearing the good news, and offering our gifts and prayers.

This is a process. Each child is unique and we all need to remember to be patient and realistic with our expectations.

Children learn to worship by worshipping. Below are helpful tips to begin this journey.

1. **Take baby steps.** Be realistic with expectations. Remember every child is unique and every day is different. This is a process of helping your child develop the skills and discipline of attentive listening as well as a growing awareness of interacting with God's presence through ritual.
2. **Arrive early and get settled before service begins.** Use this time to invite your child's questions before worship begins, point out interesting elements of the space ("Look, the altar is set for communion today," or "Wow. The banner colors are different from last week." You can point out people your child knows singing in the choir or preparing to acolyte. This is a good time to review the morning worship bulletin with your child.
3. **Be a role model for your child.** Start your morning with a positive attitude, a cheerful tone, a spirit of anticipation and enthusiasm, and a heart for worship. Sing the hymns, read the scriptures and say the prayers.
4. **Fall in love with worship.** "Children can feel the difference between duty and delight. Therefore, the first and most important job of a parent is to fall in love with the worship of God. You can't impart what you don't possess." — Noel Piper in *Treasuring God in our Traditions*.
5. **Help your child participate.** Let him find the scripture or hymn. Give him a dollar, or have him bring money from home to put in the offering plate.

Encourage your child to sit and to stand at the appropriate times. Show him the words in the hymn book, moving your finger along as the hymn is sung.

6. **Answer questions.** You can whisper close to his ear to model quiet talking. Explain the offering to your children. Emphasize that it is a way we show love to God.
7. **Use the worship bags or bring something from home.** Children often multitask, listening while they are occupied with an unrelated activity. The church provides bags with colors, pipe cleaners and a children's bulletin that changes weekly and relates to the scripture that day.
8. **Encourage your child to participate in the Time with Young Disciples.** This is a great chance for your child to get up, move around and be close to the minister, altar, and others in the congregation.
9. **Help your child become an active listener.** Help your child to focus on the sermon by quietly whispering instructions to him like "Listen to this story," or "Can you draw a picture of...". This is not a time of long instruction, but just very short statements to focus their attention. As your child gets older and learns to write, model for him how to take simple notes. Your child can keep a spiral notebook that is specifically for Sunday morning.
10. **Plan ahead and be flexible.** Not every service will go smoothly for you and your child. Praise your child as he progresses in reaching the goals that you set.