

10 Things Toddlers Wish They Could Tell You

Here are some tips for helping your young child or grandchild grow spiritually, socially and emotionally.

By Colleen L. Reece

Reprinted with permission from the June, 2000 issue of The Lutheran Witness

1 “Be sure to tell me about Jesus.”

Small children are wide open to learning about Jesus in their preschool years. The Lord recognized this, as shown in Luke 10:15: “I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter in.”

Teach your toddler children (and grandchildren) that Jesus is their friend; He loves them dearly and forgives them when they do wrong.

Children and parents can grow together spiritually as toddlers learn to worship by watching. They will worship, sing and pray enthusiastically.

Encourage them to pray in their own words.

2 “My attention span is limited.”

It’s fun to meet and greet neighbors in supermarket aisles, but your toddlers aren’t interested in catching up on all the latest news. They’d rather wander, explore, touch. Instead of spending 15 minutes chatting next to the Oreos and Ding-Dongs, tell your friend you’ll call when you get home.

3 “I’m afraid of strangers.”

Few children appreciate being passed from lap to lap. Most prefer getting to know new people a little at a time—and on their terms. Be wary of forcing your toddler to accept strangers and new baby-sitters too quickly.

4 “I’m not a pet or a trained seal.”

“Come on, honey, say ‘Aunt Kathie.’”

“Show Mrs. Dennis how you play pat-a-cake, Josh.”

“Sing that little song you learned at church for Grandma.”

These requests-to-perform place your toddler in a tough spot. Some small children delight in showing off. Others shrink away. If your child falls in the latter group, don’t push him or her.

5 “Don’t be embarrassed if I don’t respond the way you hope I will.”

There is no need to apologize for your small children if they cry when someone new picks them up, hide behind you during introductions or refuse to sit on Grandpa's lap when he hasn't visited in a long time.

They aren't terrible kids. They're shy, frightened and unsure of themselves in new situations. Too many parents feel an unresponsive toddler reflects unfavorably on them, and they react accordingly.

6 "Handle me with care."

Toddlers may look sturdy, but they are still fragile. Overdone roughhousing, tossing babies in the air and jerking little arms and legs can damage young, growing bodies. Toddlers also need careful emotional handling. They can't always tell you if they're sick, cold, lonely or overly tired as easily as they can express hunger. Fussing is usually a symptom of something needing attention.

7 "Don't compare me with others."

Each child is a unique person, created by God with his or her own timetable. Some learn to walk and say a few words in their first year. Others take longer. So what? Toddler development isn't a race—although, to hear some parents, it appears to be.

8 "I can't like everything you think I should."

Children need variety in their food, toys and other things. Provide several choices and give your toddlers an opportunity to learn decision-making.

9 "Let me be my own age."

Some toddlers behave so well that, on occasion, parents forget they aren't little women and little men. Remember, toddlers are just past babyhood, and they must not be expected to respond like miniature adults. Lead—don't push—your toddlers into each new stage of childhood. Enjoy them fully at ages 2, 3 and 4. Soon you'll wave your kindergartners off in the mornings and only the memories of their toddler days will remain.

10 "Walk in my small shoes."

Remember the children's game "Mother, May I"? One child played Mother; the rest started the game behind a line drawn on sidewalk or in the dirt. "Mother" stood in the distance, a second line in front of her. The first child to cross that second line won. The children took turns asking questions such as, "Mother, may I take three giant steps?" "Mother" might answer, "No, but you may take 10 baby steps."

Even small children recognized babies and toddlers must take many steps with their short legs to keep up with the "giant steps" of big people.

A sad sight at shopping centers and grocery stores is a hurried mother carrying a baby and half-dragging a toddler whose chubby little legs must run to keep up. Slow down while shopping with toddlers in tow. Or take a stroller for when their little legs tire.

While all 10 of these are things parents need to keep in mind, let's repeat the first—the most important: “Be sure to tell me about Jesus.”

God's blessings to you as you help your toddler learn and grow spiritually, intellectually, physically, emotionally and socially. Nurture them in the love of the Lord.

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