



part 1 of 2—

# The Pastor as a “Big Person” in the Life of a Child

by Donald A. Lichi, Ph.D.

Vice President and Director of Education for EMERGE Ministries, Akron, Ohio

**P**astors often consult with and counsel parents struggling with the inevitable challenges of parenthood. Research confirms that parenting issues and family problems are among the most frequent concerns that pastors encounter in their role as counselor. Moreover, the pastor is a significant “big person” in the life of every child in his church.

The importance of children to Jesus is reflected in His statement, “Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:14). Without a doubt Jesus loves little children, and as the big people in their lives, we must love them too. Bringing children to Christ provides a powerful motivation for our work in counseling and parenting children in a godly manner.

One fundamental truth to keep in mind when working with children is that the “you” messages of childhood become the “I” messages of adulthood. Someone has wisely said, “The child is the parent of the adult.” Simply speaking, a child’s God-concept and self-concept are formed quite early in life. Much of the

child’s God-concept is formed by the interaction he or she has with the big people in his or her life. The pastor is a significant player in this process. So how do we communicate a healthy sense of worth to a child?

Realizing that children respond to the words and



actions of the big people in their lives, it is important to let them know they are lovable, valuable, forgivable, and changeable. After all, isn’t this the way God sees us? A child who develops a healthy self-image will find it much easier to develop a healthy image of God. Here are some practical how-to’s to help the children in your church develop a godly self-image:

**1** Communicate personal worth to the children in your church by verbally expressing their worth to you and to God. Statements like, “You are very special” are internalized as, “I am very special.”

**2** Honor the name of the child. God loves to show the importance of names. He even gave names to the starry host (Isaiah 40:26). Avoid negative nicknames and use loving nicknames in the proper context.

**3** Speak the child’s name frequently with a happy inclination and in association with kind and helpful tasks. Catch him being good.

**4** Make eye contact and get at a child’s level whenever possible. If you do a children’s sermon, have the children gather around you while you sit in their midst.

**5** Speak words that focus on the child’s character qualities rather than on his or her physical abilities or appearance. Take notice and reinforce qualities such as cooperation, kindness, and helpfulness.

**6** Avoid using generalizations that cause confusion: Instead of “Johnny, you are a kind boy”; rather say, “Johnny, I noticed that you shared your candy with Sue.”

**7** Anticipate what the child can become rather than

expecting perfection today. All too often the motivation for a child to get good grades or excel in sports is parental pride.

**8** Be willing to help a child who asks for help rather than acting disinterested, too busy, or annoyed. If it is not possible to assist the child at that

moment, simply say, “I can’t help you right now; but if you can wait just a few minutes, I’ll be right with you.”

**9** Respect children as persons. Share your thoughts with them, but on their level. Avoid interrupting them. Say “please” or “thank you.”

---

### Questions for Further Study—

1. As pastors engage in counseling, what are among the most frequent concerns they encounter?
2. According to this article, what is one fundamental truth to keep in mind when working with children?
3. How is a child’s God-concept formed?

This article is reprinted from the *Enrichment Journal*, published quarterly by The General Council of the Assemblies of God. For subscription information, contact GPH at 1-800-641-4310.



part 2 of 2—

## The Pastor as a “Big Person” in the Life of a Child

by Donald A. Lichi, Ph.D.

Vice President and Director of Education for EMERGE Ministries, Akron, Ohio

**10** Acknowledge accomplishments with thanks and praise. Pay attention to the effort and attitude put forth in accomplishing tasks.

**11** Show affection by use of age-appropriate physical contact. Jesus held little children. As a pastor it means a lot to a child for you to shake his or her hand.

**12** Teach children to be polite and to use proper vocabulary regarding bodily functions.

**13** Avert criticism of one child to another by countering with kind words. Children can be cruel to one another, especially siblings.

**14** Teach children the importance of completing a job on time. Make time limits specific, and encourage parents to inspect what they expect.

**15** Encourage parents to create a quiet home atmosphere by speaking directly to the child rather than shouting from a distance.

**16** Encourage parents to prepare children for experiences rather than expect-

ing them to make quick adjustments. For example, “In fifteen minutes it will be bedtime.” “When we go to the store, we are only going to buy such and such.”



**17** Encourage parents to use responsibilities as effective learning tools. According to their age, children can be assigned daily tasks. Living in a family requires certain responsibilities, such as straight-

ening a bedroom, doing dishes, and assisting in meal preparation and yard work.

**18** Encourage parents to spend quality time alone with each child each day. “These thirty minutes are just for you and me. What would you like to talk about or do?”

**19** Encourage parents to enjoy their children daily. Help parents to venture into their child's world even if it is to do something they are not particularly interested in.

**20** Regarding discipline, as much as possible allow the child to anticipate consequences (both positive and negative) ahead of time. “If you do such and such, this will happen; but if you do so and so, this will happen.” God called this type of parenting the proclamation of the “blessings and curses.” The most effective type of parent is high in love and high in discipline.

Help your parents learn the three Fs of effective parenting: be FIRM, be FAIR, be FRIENDLY. The word “train” in Proverbs 22:6 means to tame something wild and to develop a

taste for things good and nourishing. As a big person in the life of a child, lead the parents in your church by counsel and by example to relate to the children of your church.

<sup>1</sup>Donald A. Lichi, "The Many Roles and Demands of the Assemblies of God Pastor," *Enrichment* 1, no. 2 (1996): 88–92.

---

### Questions for Further Study—

1. What are some steps you could take to communicate a healthy sense of worth to the children in your church?
2. What are the three Fs of effective parenting?
3. In Proverbs 22:6, what does it mean to "train"?

This article is reprinted from the *Enrichment Journal*, published quarterly by The General Council of the Assemblies of God. For subscription information, contact GPH at 1-800-641-4310.