

Challenge Task Supplement



What Affects A Child's Faith?

You will notice in your *HELPS* manual and on the award work cards that in order to earn these awards the Junior Soldiers must 'be a certain age' and that it is 'suitable for' Junior Soldiers of a particular age. This is because the challenges in each award have been worked out according to the age of the Junior Soldiers. It is not meant to be a system of levels where every Junior Soldier starts at Bronze and works his/her way to Crest.

Junior Soldiers are developing physically, socially and emotionally and for this reason as they get older, the award work contains challenges that are more suited to Junior Soldiers at that stage in their development.

Junior Soldiers are between 7 and 11 years of age. Child psychologists and researchers into child development tell us that children in this age:

- Avoid blame and guilt.
- See fairness as vital.
- Add, subtract and read.
- Think that fantasy is less important.
- Enjoy being part of an organised group.
- Have finer coordination skills than 3 – 6 year olds.
- Are active and energetic.
- Imitate adult faith.
- May experience a vivid relationship with God.
- Love adventure.
- See friendships as important.
- Hero worship.
- Like to belong to a group or gang.
- Love to explore and collect things.

John Westerhoff's theory of faith development in children which has been tried and tested by many writers in children's ministry, puts faith into four categories – Experienced, Affiliative, Searching and Owned Faith. He says a person at any stage in their life may move forward and backward through these stages of faith. We need to remember that no child or adult for that matter, will strictly conform to the stages of development and the same can be said for their faith development. Individuals will progress at different rates according to physical, environmental and social factors.

Experienced Faith

This stage tends to be more observable in young children. Faith is observed and experienced in those people around them. The way 'others' treat children will either encourage or discourage faith in the children themselves at this stage.

Affiliative Faith

Later on in childhood, children accept the beliefs of another person or group at home, at school or at church, and are carried along by their enthusiasm. Again, this stage may be seen in older or younger children.

Searching Faith

Children search for a faith which they can accept as their own. Westerhoff says that this does not usually happen until later in adolescence.

Owned Faith

Children gain a personal faith that is expressed both in word and action.

With all of this in mind, as a Junior Soldier Sergeant or leader/helper we...

- invite them to admire Jesus who is brave and did great things, or other Bible heroes.
- encourage a 'club' feeling to grow by doing things together.
- let them have an outlet for their energy through lots of activities.
- are sensitive about the uneasiness of feelings between boys and girls.
- don't ask them to sit through boring, irrelevant teaching programs. Our stories are exciting with plenty of action, mystery and adventure.
- don't speak to them in babyish language.
- don't assume they will understand abstract theological terms.
- don't manipulate their loyalty to their friends by encouraging copycat responses to the Gospel.
- don't ask them to take actions which run completely against their parents' wishes.
- teach them the truths of the Gospel in ways that are strong and straightforward.
- realise that many of them will be struggling with family problems beyond their control.
- offer them support and understanding.
- encourage them to explore the Bible in the same way they explore anything that is interesting.

Further Reading

Bridger, Francis. *'Children finding faith'*, 2000. England: Scripture Union.

Frank, Penny. *'Every child a chance to choose'*, 2002. England: CPAS.

