

UNDERSTANDING CHILDREN'S FAITH FORMATION

Age Group	Wonderings...	Faith Development
Preschool Aged Child <i>Ages two to five</i>	“Who made the trees?”	<p>The preschool child is the center of their own thinking. They learn about religion and faith through everyday life experiences and rituals.</p> <p>Receptive to spirituality, they are not afraid of “big questions” and are full of wonder.</p> <p>Early childhood faith is a sense of being held in care and love. He or she may ask “who made the trees?” and is receptive to both concrete (“they came from seeds”) and less tangible answers (“God made them”).</p>
Early School Age Child <i>Ages five through seven</i>	“What happens when we die?”	<p>They are still at home in both the worlds of fantasy and reality. Routines and rituals are the building blocks of faith. “We light a candle and say kind words about a sick relative or friend”.</p> <p>A child of this age wants to belong to his or her family, community and world.</p> <p>They “do” religion to know religion.</p>
School Aged Child <i>Seven through twelve</i>	“Julie’s mom says we go to heaven when we die. Do WE believe that?”	<p>The school aged child is very literal in her understanding. She or he is able to understand that there are different answers to big questions such as what happens when we die.</p> <p>Belonging to a faith community anchors this stage of faith development.</p> <p>Searching beyond one set of answers creates a foundation for a lifelong spiritual search.</p> <p>Now able to understand multiple perspectives, they find new meaning in religious community.</p> <p>“Belonging” is a critical element of their life.</p>
Early Adolescence <i>Ages twelve to fifteen</i>	“I’m not sure if I believe in god or not. But Julie does.”	<p>He or she now has the cognitive ability to understand the moral underpinnings of a faith community.</p> <p>They express interest in religion that embodies their own values.</p> <p>The youth is able to conceptualize religion as an outside authority that can be questioned.</p>
Middle Adolescence <i>Ages fifteen to eighteen</i>	“I was thinking about what Nina said about what Mustafa did...and I’m really not sure what to think...”	<p>She or he questions faith, leading to deeper ownership or disenfranchisement.</p> <p>The Unitarian Universalist tradition capitalizes on the youth’s interest in and commitment to a broader understanding of moral and social ideals.</p>