

FAITH IN THE NEXUS



Exploring Faith in the Nexus

Resource to use with the parent's animation

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What is the research behind the animation?

The Faith in the Nexus research project.

In the Faith in the Nexus research, the term nexus refers to the connections between home, church school and the local church community. Our project investigated the ways church primary schools, working in collaboration with churches and interested key groups, facilitated opportunities for children's exploration of faith and spiritual life in the home. It involved 20 church primary schools, a cross-section of Church of England and Catholic primary schools. Focus group interviews were held with 187 pupils and 267 adults (parents, staff, local clergy, and other interested key groups) and an online survey was completed by 1002 people; 730 pupils and 272 adults.

What did we find?

Faith-Talk

- Children value opportunities to ask open-ended questions; they ask questions about things they do not know, or do not understand.
- Some parents struggled with responding; others avoided or closed such conversations down, often due to lack of confidence.
- Adults often look to give a definitive answer or solution, children may be just seeking to explore these issues.
- The role of grandparents or the older generation in these conversations and supporting parents cannot be underestimated.

Reflection

- Children actively seek out spaces and times to be alone to reflect, think and pray.
- Reflection or prayer space and time is essential for young people's spiritual wellbeing.

The Nexus: home, school and church

- Parents' confidence in talking about faith or spiritual matters increased when they were offered opportunities to encounter faith beliefs and practices in school and church.
- Relationships are crucial to sustaining opportunities to explore faith or spirituality.

What challenges did parents say they faced?

In our research, parents drew attention to the number of questions children ask. The main challenges they found in responding were:

- Not being able to provide adequate answers.
- Not having the correct spiritual or religious language.
- Having a general lack of knowledge about some of the big questions they raised.
- Not sharing the same Christian beliefs as the school their child attends and therefore not wishing to confuse them with different responses they would hear from their teachers.

How does the animation offer support?

- The animation recognises that all children have a spiritual life that drives them to seek meaning and purpose in life.
- Often in this search, children turn to their parents with big questions about things such as the origin of life, the existence of God, and life after death.
- We acknowledge that being confronted with such questions can be daunting for parents and can leave them feeling inadequate to offer a response.
- Our main message is to reassure and encourage.
- Parents are in a unique position to stand alongside their child and explore with them.
- To just “be” with your child, to share the journey of discovery and curiosity with them is powerful.
- An experience that will encourage your child to be spiritually curious setting the foundations for them to grow stronger in their spiritual life.



Watch

View our Parent's animation explainer at nicer.org.uk

Conversation Starters.

How do you answer the questions children ask?

If I was a mighty God and people were starving when they were a baby, I would do something about it. I wouldn't watch them die.

It makes me wonder if God is actually real or if someone just made the whole thing up.

I do know that Jesus was actually a real person, but no one actually knows if he was God's son. He was just a very wise man.

Are Gran and Grandad going to come to ours soon, or are they going to die because they're quite old?

What have parents said?

He comes home and asks what was there before God. How do you answer that, you know what I mean?

If they've had RE that day it will always be discussed at home.

How do you answer the question when they say why does everybody have to die?

My husband is a firm non-believer, and my children have said to him, "Daddy, why don't you believe in God?" and he's said to them, "Because I am very much science based."

When they pose you a question, and you think, I don't know how I feel about that. I'm not sure if I've thought about it quite that way before.

Children's questions encourages the parents and adults to think about what it is they're saying...You want to give them the right answer if you can. So it makes you consider it.



EXPLORING FAITH IN THE NEXUS



Every child has a spiritual life, an inner world.

Children search for meaning, and try to make sense of the world around them.

WHAT DOES OUR RESEARCH SAY?

Children actively seek out spaces and times to be alone to reflect, think and pray.

There is a need for reflection or prayer space and time for young people's spiritual wellbeing.

REFLECTION

- What does this space and quiet time look like for your child?
- How can you encourage this space for reflection in your home?
- Is this something you make time for in your own life?



We know that when children develop their spiritual life, this helps them to flourish as individuals, setting a strong foundation for life.

They face big questions: 'Why does God let people suffer?', 'Is there really life after death?'

How do I make sense of science and religion?', 'Is God even real?'

WHAT DOES OUR RESEARCH SAY?

Children are by nature inquisitive, and they ask questions about things they do not know, they do not understand and therefore want to know more about from their parents.

Common topics raised and discussed in the home include God, Creation, Death, Religion & Science.

REFLECTION

- What big questions has your child explored with you?
- How do these questions leave you feeling?
- Are they questions you had considered yourself?



Children are struggling more and more to make sense of the world around them.

They turn to us parents for guidance, often starting the conversation with one of the big questions.

WHAT DOES OUR RESEARCH SAY?

Children often initiate spiritual or faith-talk in the home. Children are active in seeking to find meaning and purpose.

REFLECTION

- Who tends to initiate spiritual or faith-talk in your home?
- What are the main topics raised by your child?
- What would you like to talk about with your child?



We might even feel embarrassed talking about spirituality and faith with our children, or sharing what we really think.

We may prefer to give a simple answer or feel there is someone else more skilled at handling these big questions.

WHAT DOES OUR RESEARCH SAY?

Some parents struggle with how to respond; others avoid or close such conversations down, often due to lack of confidence.

REFLECTION

- Do you struggle in anyway when your child asks questions of a spiritual or faith nature?
- Why do some adults feel embarrassed talking about spirituality or faith?

Parents have a unique place in our children's spiritual journey that no one else has. We may not always have the answers to the big questions in life, but we can do something else for our children.



We can see these questions as a precious moment of opportunity for us to step into our child's spiritual world.

Exploring these big questions with our children helps them to think deeper and to keep seeking, setting the foundations for them to grow stronger and more resilient spiritually.

WHAT DOES OUR RESEARCH SAY?

Children were often just seeking to explore these issues with adults. Many parents wanted to provide a definitive answer or solution. The children told us that the person most likely to know about their spiritual life was a parent or grandparent.

REFLECTION

- What do those precious opportunities of stepping into your child's spiritual life look like in your home?
- How do you encourage children to wonder and think more deeply?
- Have you shared your spiritual journey with your child?

When we stand shoulder to shoulder, something wonderful happens.

We too are offered the opportunity to explore our own spiritual life.

We are not alone on the journey, with church and school, we can create a web of connection which supports our child's spiritual development.

This is what we call a nexus of faith, where we place the child at the centre and home, school and church, working together, create the space for a child's spiritual life to grow.



WHAT DOES OUR RESEARCH SAY?

Flourishing connections between school, home and church nurtures relationships between individuals and these institutions.

The powerful impact these positive relationships have on aspects of family faith life is mostly unseen.

REFLECTION

- In what ways could you explore your spiritual journey of life with your child?
- What are the relationships that support your spiritual journey?
- How are you supported in your child's spiritual development through the school and local church community?

Parents play a unique role helping to nourish and grow our child's spiritual development, where we can stand alongside and guide them, giving them the confidence to discover a deeper grounding, setting the foundations for a resilient spirituality to grow, preparing them for the next steps of their journey.

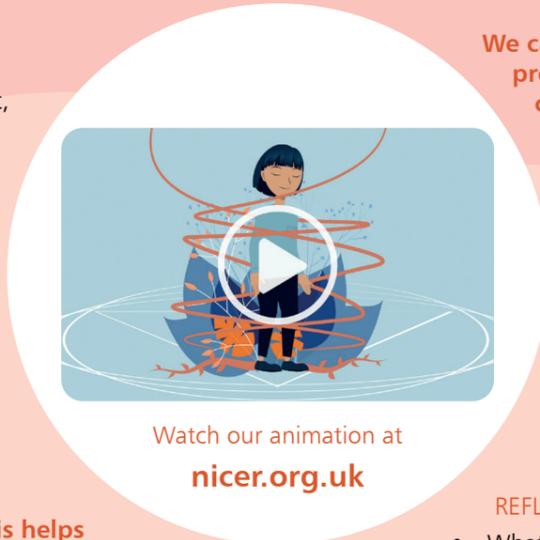


WHAT DOES OUR RESEARCH SAY?

Our research shows when we work together in a nexus of faith, with a child's spiritual needs held at the centre, we can help prepare them for the challenges they may face in today's complex and confusing world.

REFLECTION

- What are the key messages from the animation that stand out for you?
- How might the message of the animation inform your approach to spiritual exploration with your child?



Watch our animation at nicer.org.uk

FURTHER READING

For the full Faith in the Nexus report: Faith In The Nexus (nicer.org.uk)

