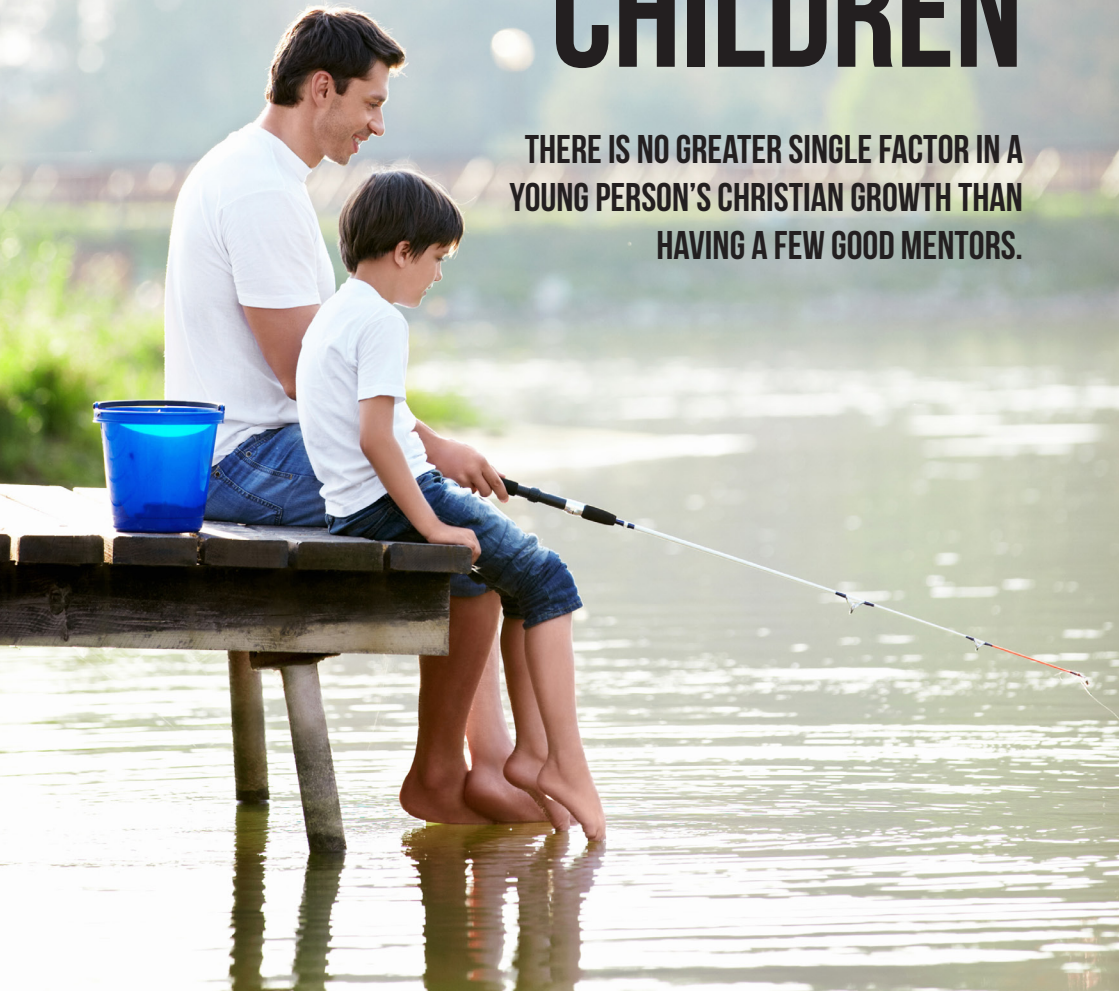


THE POWER OF MENTORING CHILDREN

THERE IS NO GREATER SINGLE FACTOR IN A
YOUNG PERSON'S CHRISTIAN GROWTH THAN
HAVING A FEW GOOD MENTORS.



Mentoring Matters

Once upon a time, there was an old man who used to go to the ocean to do his writing. He had a habit of walking on the beach every morning before he began his work. Early one morning, he was walking along the shore after a big storm had passed and found the vast beach littered with starfish as far as the eye could see, stretching in both directions.

Off in the distance, the old man noticed a small boy approaching. As the boy walked, he paused every so often and as he grew closer, the man could see that he was occasionally bending down to pick up an object and throw it into the sea. The boy came closer still and the man called out, “Good morning! May I ask what it is that you are doing?”

The young boy paused, looked up, and replied “Throwing starfish into the ocean. The tide has washed them up onto the beach and they can’t return to the sea by themselves,” the youth replied. “When the sun gets high, they will die, unless I throw them back into the water.”

The old man replied, “But there must be tens of thousands of starfish on this beach. I’m afraid you won’t really be able to make much of a difference.”

The boy bent down, picked up yet another starfish and threw it as far as he could into the ocean. Then he turned, smiled and said, “It made a difference to that one!”

Adapted from *The Star Thrower*, by Loren Eiseley (1907 – 1977)



**“If you are planting for a year, plant grain.
If you are planting for a decade, plant trees.
If you are planting for a century, plant people.**

Old Chinese Proverb

ORIGIN OF THE WORD MENTOR

In Greek mythology, Mentor was a loyal friend and adviser to Odysseus, king of Ithaca. Mentor helped raise Odysseus' son, Telemachus, while Odysseus was away fighting the Trojan War. Mentor became Telemachus' teacher, coach, counselor and protector, building a relationship based on affection and trust.

Mentoring today is synonymous with the process by which we guard and guide others. Mentors seemingly “adopt” those placed in their care.



WHY MENTORING IS IMPORTANT

Ministry to children today often seems to be about the best program, curriculum, activity or book. We often get busy doing church and running church but often don't get the time to just be. Significant mentoring relationships are often crowded out.

Parents get busy with work and the treadmill of providing the best in everything for their children that money can buy. Once again the investment of mentoring time into their children is lost in the busyness of life, yet mentoring is one of the most significant factors in passing on faith and a whole lot more to the next generation.

Wes Stafford, former CEO of Compassion International says, "I have become convinced that the more wealth a country accumulates, the more isolated and lonely its people become. The loneliest are usually the children and the elderly. Children learn what they live, and isolation in the 'village' is one of the most destructive messages we daily write on the tablets of their hearts."

When people who have grown up in the church are asked what made the difference in their spiritual journey, they will often name adults in their lives who invested in them and changed/extended their faith trajectory. Sometimes this mentorship is overt and at other times it is adhoc. Nevertheless it is these intergenerational connections that are a catalyst for significant growth and change in the lives of children especially in the area of faith.

Mentoring can be a life long relationship or it can be brief in fact Wes Stafford in his book "Just a minute" says "With each child you encounter, you have the power and opportunity



to build up . . . or sadly tear down. A life can be literally launched with as little as a single word, an uplifting comment, a well timed hug, a tender prayer, a compliment, the holding of a frightened hand, or the gentle wiping of a tear – all in just a minute!" In this crazy fast paced world, it is easy for the weakest, the littlest amongst us to get hurt in the stampede. They need our "just a minute" of safety and rescue that they so richly deserve."

In Hebrews 12:1-2 we read, "Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

We as individuals and a church have a duty to surround our children and youth with a "cloud of witnesses" we do not have to be perfect, we just need to be present to befriend, affirm, and journey together for a while or for a lifetime.

WHAT THE RESEARCH IS SAYING

Mentoring Relationships: Necessary but Largely Absent

One of Fuller professor Chap Clark's main findings in his research (*Hurt: Inside the World of Today's Teenagers*, 2004) on adolescents in the last decade has been that adolescents have largely been abandoned by adults to make their own way to adulthood. It isn't going well. "There are at least two consequences," Clark writes, "of parental and adult abandonment. First, the adolescent journey is lengthened, because no one is available to help move the development process along. Second, adolescents know that they are essentially on their own." One of the primary things the church can be doing to help youth in their adolescent journey is to reverse this abandonment.

"... adolescents have largely been abandoned by adults to make their own way to adulthood."

The quality of faith of adolescents is strongly correlated with the quality of faith of the significant adults in their lives

Sociologist Christian Smith and Princeton professor Kenda Creasy Dean, found that the main predictor of the quality of faith in an adolescent is the quality of faith in the significant adults in their lives. Says Dean about the National Study of Youth and Religion's findings: "[The study's] most incontrovertible finding is that parents generally 'get what they are,' in religion as in most things." (*Almost Christian: What the Faith of our Teenagers is Telling the American Church*, 2010)

This finding has been replicated by the research being done by Fuller institute in the College Transition Project (see Kara Powell and Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 2010). One of the main predictors they have found of "Sticky Faith" is significant, lasting relationships with adults from the church. In fact, contact with adults from the church is connected with stronger faith up to three years after high school.



Mentoring increases religiosity, increases self worth and decreases at risk behaviours

Valuegenesis 2 research by Barry Gane (2012, South Pacific Division), discovered that:

- “At-risk” behaviours are affected by the number of interested adults/mentors one has at church. Self harm is much less among those with four or more mentors in their lives
- having one or more mentor reduces probable participation in at risk behaviours, (alcohol consumption, early sexual experimentation etc.) an effect that increases at a lower rate with an increasing number of mentors.
- Self worth increases with the number of interested adults/mentors in a student’s life. Only 36% have high self worth where there are no mentors and this rises to 63% where there are four or more mentors. This pattern is seen in Christian commitment, faith maturity and denominational loyalty.



Lack of connectedness results in lower religious commitment

David Goodwin discovered in his research that our young people are working their way through our segregated children’s programs and upon graduating from their church youth group are leaving and many have made their decision to leave the church before they reach their teenage years. Goodwin believes that one of the big reasons children leave is the lack of connectedness with mentors in their congregations. They never truly belonged to the church congregation or participated in it. (David Goodwin, *Lost in Transition*, 2012).

Mentoring is one of the best ways to provide support for our children and to pass on our faith to the next generation. As children see how God works in the good times and more importantly in the not so good times in the adults that surround them, they are more likely to adopt the faith of the next generation.



A 5:1 Ratio of Adults to Children is Best

Kara Powell and Chap Clark found in their *Sticky Faith* research that our children and teens flourish when we surround them with five significant adults who can speak into their lives. These are adults who we trust, who know them by name and stand for the same ideals and values that we as parents stand for.

Ed Stetzer of Lifeway Research (2007) also found that teens who had at least one adult from church make a significant time investment in their lives were more likely to keep attending church. More of those who stayed in church - by a margin of 46 percent to 28 percent - said five or more adults at church had invested time with them personally and spiritually. "When adults pour their lives into young adults, both are better for it." Kara Powell and Chap Clark call this the "sticky web of faith" that we can all become involved in by providing a 5:1 ratio of five adults for every child in our congregations.

"Our children and teens flourish when we surround them with five significant adults who can speak into their lives"



Informal Mentoring is Best

In his doctoral dissertation at Talbot School of Theology, Jason Lanker (Jason Lanker, unpublished dissertation, Talbot School of Theology, 2009) demonstrated that adolescents who had natural mentors ("relationships with non-parental adults from whom high school students received support and guidance without the help of a formalized program") more deeply experienced God's presence, connected to God in times of suffering, felt realistically accepted by God and were secure in their relationships with Him.

The young adults in this study were so impacted by these natural mentors that the mentors' influence explained more of the young adults' spiritual maturity than either how many years they had been Christians or how well their parents had modeled the Christian faith. And apparently, the more mentors they had, the higher the young adult's score was on Lanker's spiritual life assessment.

In other words, there is no greater single factor in a young person's Christian growth than having a mentor.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

To people like Steve Jobs and Bill Gates, connectivity is the essence of today's society. The reality for our children however is that they might be connected through social media and online gaming to a whole host of different people. Some known and some unknown. The danger is however that this surreal world that our children surround themselves with is fake and our children often live in a dangerously competitive dog eat dog virtual reality. The key is for parents, churches and schools to create opportunities for our children to circulate safely in a web of informal mentorship. These informal mentors can come from a whole host of different contexts as outlined in the diagram below.

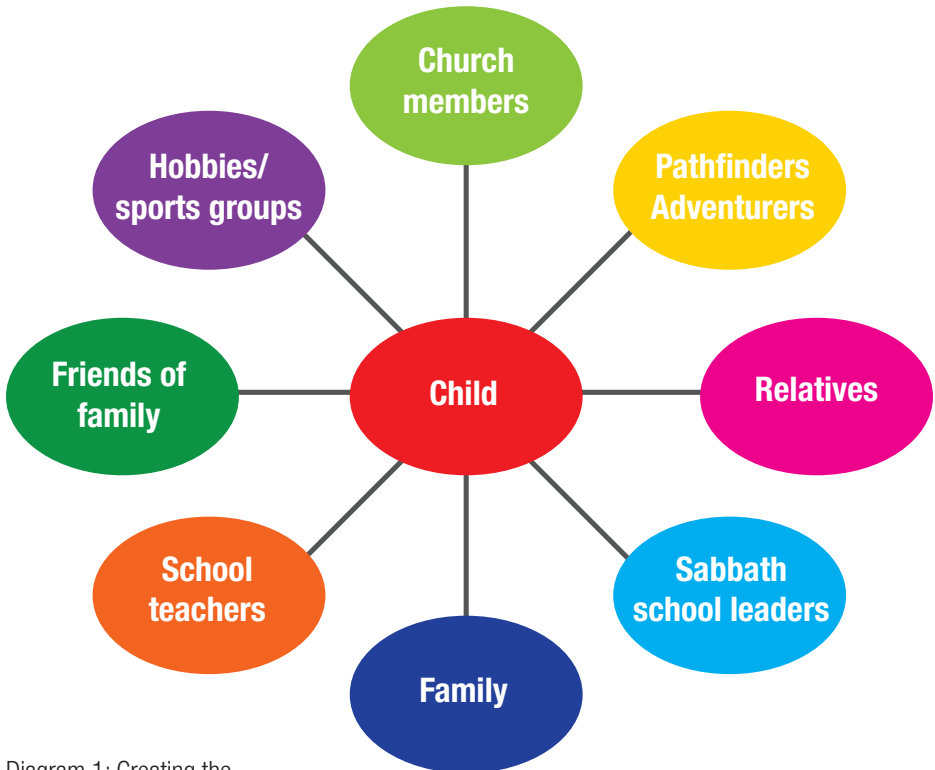


Diagram 1: Creating the sticky mentoring web



It is important for each child to be identified and in consultation with key stakeholders their key influencing communities are identified,

It is also helpful to think about both the positive and negative mentors in the child's life that need to be identified. Once negative mentors are identified, the positive mentors in the child's life can effectively double their efforts and crowd the negative influencers out.

Once the initial web has been created as outlined above, the child's key mentors can then be plotted onto the web. The closer the mentor is to the centre, (red zone), the stronger that mentor is. Hopefully it will be discovered that each child has a number of key mentors in each sphere of influence.

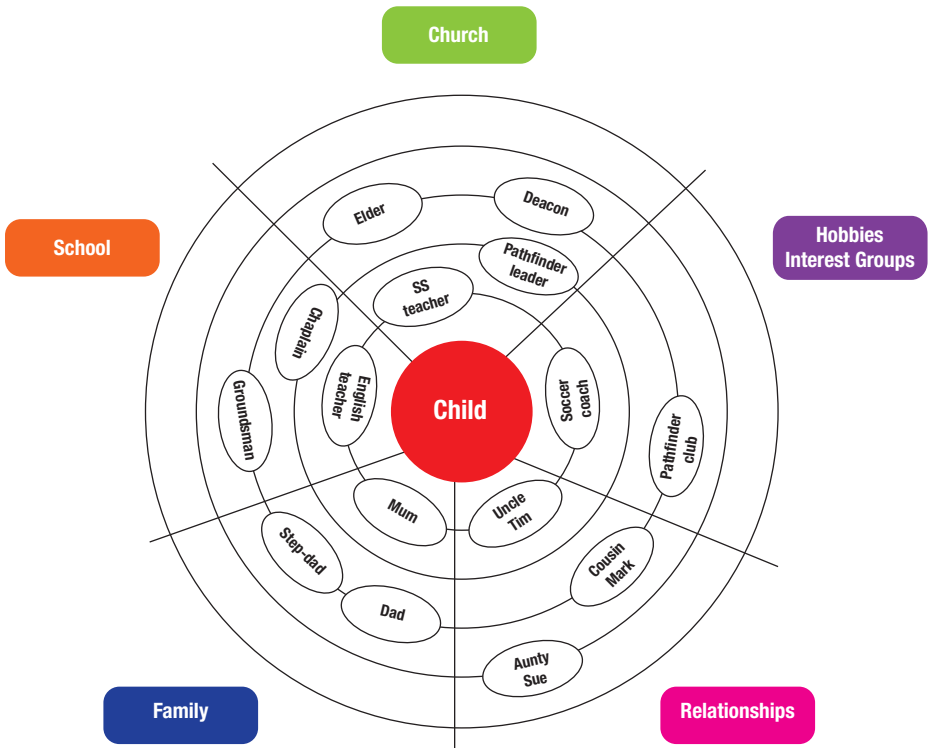


Diagram 2: A Child's Sticky Web

REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR EACH MENTORING WEB MAP

1. Size

Are there enough mentors in the life of this child? Where can we find more?

2. Diversity

Is there a broad range of experience, expertise, background, gender, race, age that will provide the effective web of mentoring for this child?

3. Density

How many mentors are in the red zone and how many could step up into the red zone with some nurture/encouragement?

4. Strength of Connections

What connections need strengthening to give this child the broad range of mentors they need.

5. Where is the power of influence?

How many of the mentors would you class as positively influential and do you need to add more?



KEEPING THE MENTORING WEB STICKY

Small Groups

Small groups is a powerful way to connect children to a mentor and help them flourish. Reggie Joiner et al in the book *Creating a Lead Small Culture* believe in the premise that “when we lead small we simply make a choice to invest strategically in the lives of a few over time so we can help them build an authentic faith.” The book provides five simple and effective strategies that will help to build authentic faith. This framework for small group ministry emphasises:

- Helping group members to connect their faith with their community.
- Creating a safe place for group members to grow.
- Helping group members to nurture their faith by engaging with their parents at a spiritual level.
- Inspiring group members by the leader's example.
- Giving group members the opportunity of missional serving.

The big idea in this book is that all programs, events and outreach gets focused, refined and catalyzed by the child's small group and naturally, effective mentoring is a strong outcome of the small group experience.

Hobby/sport/interest groups

This is the ideal way to allow mentoring to occur in an informal manner. Common interests and goals provide a focal point but also a distraction that adults and children can do together but also allows for the important informal mentoring to occur.



Family/Church Social Events

The church is in the unique position to provide events when families and mentors can socialize on a regular basis this also allows for the informal mentoring to occur in a safe setting. The church needs to be more intentional in providing mentoring forums and opportunities.

Service Activities

Church organised service projects is another way to create an event/program that serves others in the community whilst allowing families and mentors to work together. Mentoring must involve both preaching and practice, instruction and involvement, explanation and exercise.

Intergenerational Worship

We live in a world where children are often divided into age appropriate groups to allow effective and relevant instruction to occur. However children, especially when it comes to corporate worship, need to rub shoulders with the older generations in their congregations. This provides an environment where the child and mentors can rub shoulders and grow spiritually together. The key here is for leaders to create an order of worship that is relevant to all generations across the spectrum.

FINALLY

“You don’t shape a kid’s faith by teaching them doctrine (whatever you talk them into, someone else can talk them out of.) You don’t shape a kid’s faith by persuading them to have better standards. (They may ultimately give up if they feel like they can’t measure up.) You don’t shape kids faith by getting them to attend your events. (At some point they will compare the quality of your production to what culture produces, and you will probably lose.) **You can shape a kid’s faith by connecting them to caring adults who will be present in their life.**

Are we saying theology, lifestyle, and church attendance don’t matter? Not at all. But we are suggesting any of those things, without caring and consistent relationships, will have limited impact.” (Reggie Joiner et al, 2014)

You can shape a kid’s faith by connecting them to caring adults who will be present in their life.

“Jesus is the model for engaging people in conversation while doing real things. One scholar estimates that Jesus spent 13 months of his three-year ministry just walking from place to place. All the while, he engaged others in conversation: Paul Stanley says that Jesus asked 288 questions in the gospels.

“Come, follow me,” Jesus said. They did. And along the way he equipped them to change the world, and they did that, too.” (Jeff Myers, 2010)



THE SUM OF ME! WHY I AM WHO I AM.

As I travel ministering to families and children I am often asked the question about how I became a Christian and why I am a pastor. I can't give you a testimony of a dramatic conversion or a wandering in the wilderness of the world experience before I came back to the church. Why am I a minister in the Seventh-day Adventist Church? Let me tell you.

It all began in the sandbox at Kindergarten Sabbath School at the Mildura Seventh-day Adventist Church where a young teenage leader told me stories using biblical characters in the sandbox. As I watched her and listened to the stories she told about Jesus I thought that if Jesus worked for her then it might for me too!

Then there is my primary school teacher. She taught me in grade prep, one and two (I was in love with her) who didn't just teach me arithmetic and spelling but she was friendly and took an interest in me personally. She also taught me about Jesus but more importantly when I saw how Jesus worked for her, I thought it might for me too.

There was also my chaplain who probably took some great worships and told some great stories (I don't remember any of them) but I do remember that he played soccer and cricket with us at recess and lunch. When I saw how Jesus worked for him on the playground, I thought it might work for me too.

I also need to tell you about my uncle who used to be the head deacon of the church. He allowed me to follow him around as he stacked chairs, pulled down blinds, collected the offering and organized the foot washing bowls for the communion. Looking back I must have really annoyed him but he never told me to go away. I idolized him and when I saw how Jesus worked for him, I thought he might for me too.

My Pathfinder leader did more than just teach me at Pathfinders. He also allowed me to follow him through the bush on weekends as he caught

and banded birds for the Bird Observers Club. As we walked, he talked and when I saw how Jesus worked for him, I thought Jesus might for me too.

My head elder at Dareton Church was a bus driver/mechanic but he was also my mentor who mentored me into leading out in the adult lesson and preaching a sermon from the age of 12 onwards. I was placed on the rosters for helping out at church as well as preaching. Dareton was a church where the adults took a great interest in me and consequently the church was not just the adult's church but was my church as well.

I will never forget my state high school teacher, Mr Hick. He was also a Christian. He didn't just teach science. He took a special interest in his students and showed us what a Christian life in secular institutions looks like.

Then there was the church member who lent me a car to drive when I got my license and mentored me as a teenager and young adult. He is a great friend (a bit like an extra Dad). He showed me the face of Jesus too!

I could go on to list a whole host of adult mentors who invested into my life as a child and young adult and showed me what it means to be a real and genuine Christian. Hebrews 12:1 says that "Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us..."

No I don't have a dramatic conversion story to tell but I do have a whole lot of important people in my life who mentored me into the faith and showed me the different faces of Jesus. One day as a young child I asked Jesus to come into my life and I set my path on His course to work for him. I have run and I continue to run the race because of the "great cloud of witnesses" that surrounded me and I will do my best to be one of those witnesses to my children and our Churches' children.

Mentoring the children in our church is not hard to do and yet it appears to be one of the most significant factors in raising our church to grow in the church, remain in the church and contribute to the churches message and mission in significant ways. Recent research backs up this assertion. Kara Powell and Chap Clark in their *Sticky Faith* research (2011) found that “more than any single program or event, kids were far more likely to feel like a significant part of their local churches when adults made the effort to get to know them. One student beamed as he said, “We were welcomed not just in youth group; we were welcomed into other parts of the ministry of the church”:- See more at: <<http://stickyfaith.org/articles/the-church-sticking-together#sthash.pP0963lt.dpuf>>

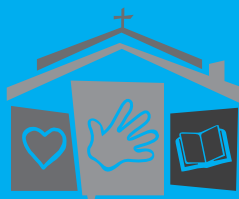
Mark Kelly (2010) in research by LifeWay (lifeway.com) discovered that children who had at least one adult from church make a significant time investment in their lives were twenty eight percent more likely to keep attending church. The figure jumps to forty six percent if the same child has five or more adults who spend time with the child and was there for them personally and spiritually. Chap Clarke (2011) calls this mentoring the 5:1 ratio (5 adults to one child). As a parent and a children’s ministries pastor I can do this. I can find those five significant people to invest in my children’s lives in little and big ways. Ivy Beckwith asserts that, “Adult lives need to be modeled in front of the children. – When the child brushes up against people of faith, they see models of faith. They see adults who struggle, who trust God, who make mistakes and are forgiven, who work for justice and mercy and model kingdom values. This modeling is more powerful than 100 bible stories or the veggie tale videos. Children will remember the people in their faith community more than what they learned.” (Beckwith, *Postmodern Children’s Ministry*, 2004).

We don’t need to be perfect mentors. We don’t need to understand the Bible completely or have all the answers. We just need to take the time or even a moment to get to know the children in our congregations and take a genuine interest in them. Our children need adults who learn their name, befriend them and spend time with them. Who knows, you might be the face of Jesus the children in your family and church need to see that sets them on a course to transform them into world changing spiritual champions.

Ten ways to be a mentor

- 1. Learn the names of the children in your church.**
- 2. Become a Sabbath School/Adventurer/ Pathfinder leader.**
- 3. Start a craft/hobby group for children in your home/church hall.**
- 4. Volunteer at your school.**
- 5. Run a regular vacation bible school.**
- 6. Adopt a grand child, pray for them and invest in them.**
- 7. Genuinely listen to the children in your congregation.**
- 8. Invite children and their families along on a regular service project.**
- 9. Grow a community garden.**
- 10. Be creative find ways to spend time and invest in the children in your church.**

Pr Daron Pratt is a Victorian who grew up in the Sunraysia area. He is currently the children and family ministries Director for the North New South Wales Conference of the Seventh Day Adventist Church. He is also known world wide as the “Balloon Man” on Arnie’s Shack seen on Satellite Television. He is married to Lisa and has two children, Andrew and Maddison.



CHILDREN'S
MINISTRY
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST
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