



How to ...

Pray with babies and toddlers

Advice for Churches Praying with Babies and Toddlers

Enabling people of all ages to participate in and contribute to times of prayer in church, as well as equipping people to pray personally throughout their daily lives is an important part of ministry. When preparing services and spaces for babies and toddlers within the life of your church, consider how those children and their parents can participate in that time of prayer. Be creative, put yourself in their shoes and experiment. There may be times when it is appropriate to encourage parents to invite young children to be as still and as quiet as they can for a short period of prayer. At other times prayer can be noisy, messy and visual and can stimulate the senses of little children.

Inclusivity is key as you seek out ways to include everyone in meaningful acts of prayer and worship, a little planning and effort can go a long way.

Advice for Parents Praying with Babies and Toddlers

Prayer can be a special time set aside, throughout the day or a bit of both. Begin by looking for opportunities throughout the day, this can help it feel more natural. Though it may feel a bit strange at first it is important that you include your child, encouraging them to join in. You could do this by sitting your child on your knee, holding hands, looking at one another, and saying Amen together.

It is important to find regular times in the day to take time together; getting up, meal times and bedtimes are perfect opportunities.

As your child gets older, you can encourage them to join in in different ways; with their body, verbally or by thinking together about prayers. Like all friendships; the more time you spend talking to God, the more the conversation flows!

There are many ways to pray; spoken, written, movement, lighting a candle or by being crafty and creative. Prayer should be part of everyday life; thanking God for what you have, others who are struggling, events and situations.

Begin in the morning by giving your child a cuddle, taking a moment to thank God for the start of a new day and to be with you through the day. Remember as you hold your child, God holds you both.

As you put your child to bed, talk about what you have done together; the good things, the not so good things and things where you need God's help.

Finding prompts like actions or sounds can help;

Getting dressed

Getting washed

Brushing teeth

While playing

Meal times

Nap time/bedtime

When outside

Turning the taps on

Going for a walk

Going out in the car

Hearing a siren or emergency vehicle

Really...Anything that you do!!!

When your baby is very small you will be praying on behalf of both of you. As your child grows, they can join in with you; using posture, bowing head, saying Amen, lighting a candle or with craft.

Running and jumping to thank God for having fun, being healthy and keeping still to think about people who cannot move.

Use craft materials, modelling clay or junk materials to make pictures or models

Dancing or singing to praise God

It is also important to say sorry for things you have done wrong and for the things that you haven't done and maybe should have.

When hearing a siren, ask God to help the people who are rushing to an emergency, give them the strength and courage to face whatever they encounter. And to be with the person or people needing help and their families, whatever they face.

Praying with your child can be a natural part of everyday life prompted by everything you do and see and experience together. Enjoy the experience, there are no rules, only an exciting relationship with God to share together.

Praying with babies... Some suggestions and ideas

This section has ideas of structured prayers that parents could participate in with their babies using the body as a prompt. Prayers could be led by a group leader in a group situation, or parents could be given one prayer idea to take home with them each week, or the ideas could be posted weekly to a blog or Facebook group.

This works best when baby is awake and alert, not too hungry or full. Think about the environment and how it may help or hinder prayer...Light or dimmed, music or quiet for example.

You do not have to use all the sections in one go, stop when baby becomes restless.

Lie baby on your knee, so they can see your face.

When they are too big for your knee, lie them at the side of you or on the floor.

As they get older they may prefer to sit or stand facing you and join in more; pointing to, or using the parts of their body and thinking about things they would like to pray about too.

1. Begin by just sitting quietly for a few moments; aware of God's presence

As you pray, use the following words or some of your own.

When you are both ready, start by stroking or cradling baby's head. Whilst doing this look at your baby and talk to God about your hopes and dreams for your child as they grow up but also about your fears. *Dear God, Thank you for the gift of ... I pray that you are with them as they grow and journey through life. Help them to fulfil their potential; developing their gifts and talents. Fill them with courage to face each challenge and new day. Amen*

Or

Dear God, Thank you for the gift of eyes to see, ears to hear and lips to speak. Help ...to use their eyes to see the beauty in the world, both in the gifts of creation and in people. Help them to listen and hear the truth. May ...use their lips to speak the truth. Give them the courage to speak out for injustice and the confidence to share your love through the things they do and say. Amen

2. Next place your hands on baby's shoulders

Ask God to help them turn away from negativity and help them make positive choices through their life. Ask God to help you as baby grows; with the challenges of daily life.

Dear God, Be with ..., may they trust in you and know you. Help them to turn away from doing wrong and towards you. Give them the strength to make positive choices in life and the courage to stand for what they believe. Amen

3. Thank God for making each one of us

We are all individuals; each with blemishes and areas we are not happy with but each one of us is created and loved by God. Think about the gifts God has given you and the challenges you face. Trust God and know that he is with you always, holding you in the palm of his hand.

*For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.
Psalm 139: 13, 14*

4. Hold baby's feet or lift them to standing

Think about where your feet may take you through life and ask God to be with you as you journey. Also ask for strength to stand strong through tough times.

Help us to follow you, loving Jesus, guide as we journey with you. Give us strength and courage when the path becomes tough or uncertain. Help us to keep trusting and looking to you. Amen

5. Move to baby's tummy

Think about saying thank you for the food we eat and those who don't have enough. Also give thanks for those who produce it; farmers, factory workers, truck drivers and shop staff.

Almighty God, Thank you for the sun and the rain which helps our food to grow and for those who help to produce it; farmers, factory workers, truck drivers and all the shop staff. We remember those who struggle to find enough food to feed their families and those who have too much sun or too much rain meaning that crops do not grow and they do not have food to eat. Amen

6. Take hold of baby's hands

Begin by clapping the hands together and thanking God for the gifts of creation, especially your baby. Ask God to help them use their hands to look after others and all things created by God, especially those who are struggling or in need.

Almighty God, creator of all things, Thank you for the gift of.... Help us to care for each other, our families and friends even when we fall out or disagree. Help us to be kind to people we don't know and look after your world. Amen

7. Hands can also be used to praise God

Baby can clap hands while you sing or clap and sing together. You could also spend some time exploring what hands can do; waving, pointing, clasping, tapping or banging.

8. Place hands over baby's chest and heart

The heart is often associated with health and love. Talk to God about the people you love and about health and health issues. It is also important to think about broken relationships and say sorry for when you might have hurt people, though words, actions and things you have not done.

Praying with toddlers... Some suggestions and ideas

Prayer with small children is often led by adults. It can be easy to forget, even little children can pray and with nurture, can develop a positive relationship with Jesus.

Here are several ideas that can be used with children especially children under 5 years to help them engage personally with God through prayer.

When thinking about prayer, it is important to remember that people pray in different ways.

Some people are comfortable praying out loud or in writing, while others prefer to keep the prayers to themselves. When praying toddlers it is important to make the experience creative, hands on and fun.

Idea : tsp prayers

It is important to introduce children to the three types of prayer; thank you, sorry and please.

An easy way to do this is through teaspoon prayers (tsp).

Buy a pack of plastic teaspoons and write a t, s or p on each one. Place them all in a jar. Invite each child to take a spoon and use it for prayer.

Idea : Prayer areas

Create an area for the children (and adults) to use as they choose.

Use things like :

Prayer tree with paper leaves

Washing line with paper clothing and pegs

Fishing net with paper fish

Paper stars on black paper

All these have the opportunity for the children to write, draw or just think their prayer on to the paper.

Other ways to collect prayers could be: tie ribbons on to branches or a rope; add stones to water or a pile; paper chains.

Create a special, quiet area for children to go to by placing a chair, cushions or a bean bag slightly away from the main play area. Place a basket in the area with a variety of different items to hold and explore. The items should be tactile and appeal to different senses. Try to include items made from natural materials but most of all they need to be safe.

Idea : Sand prayers

Sand trays are great for prayers! Invite the children to write or draw in the sand or stand in or place their hand in it to make an impression. It is particularly effective for sorry prayers where the children can see their 'wrongs' wiped away. You could also use blackboards or dry-wipe white boards in the same way.

Idea : Waterlily prayers

Using 10cmx10cm squares of coloured paper and a large shallow tray of water, create prayers which will inspire awe and wonder in the youngest of children. Take a piece of the paper and fold each corner into the centre to create a smaller square. Open the corners back up and in the centre write, draw or whisper your prayer. Then fold the corners back down 'capturing' the prayer inside. Place the paper (unfolded side down) on to the water. Spend a few moments watching as the waterlily opens to release the prayer.

Idea : Intercessional prayers

Create a box of items or pictures for the children to choose from. Include things like: a small globe; transport like car, bus, lorry, tractor; people of all ages; plants or trees; rainbow or umbrella; water; food; toys; someone sad or crying and someone laughing.

Use these items as the basis for prayer; invite the children, if they are happy to, to say why they picked it, it might be because they liked it!

Idea : Picture prayers

Similar to the prayers above, but instead of objects, walk around the local community and take a photograph of each place. Include anything you want from your community, it is an opportunity to think more about who is local to the group. You could include photographs of the following; shops, offices or places of work like factories, doctors' surgery, nursery and schools, residential homes, crossing patrol (lollipop person), park, church and church hall, village hall, police station

Idea : People prayers

Write a child's name on each stone and place into a basket. Either take each stone in turn or invite each child take one. Ask God to bless the child named on the stone and encourage children to pray for one another. You could include the names of the adults too!

Resources

Some useful websites for more information and resources:

www.buildingfaith.org

www.godventure.co.uk

www.going4growth.org.uk/

growth_in_faith_and_worship/prayer

www.flamecreativekids.blogspot.co.uk/

www.faithinhomes.org.uk

www.1277.org.uk

www.engagetoday.org.uk/playtime

www.messychurch.org.uk

www.themothersunion.org

www.barnabasinchurches.org.uk/ideas/#Prayer

www.faith-at-home.com

www.careforthefamily.org.uk

www.familyfaith.co.uk

www.churchofenglandchristenings.org

Some useful websites to purchase bibles, bible stories, prayer books, toys, crafts and C.D's that could be given to parents of young children or loaned out by the church:

www.eden.co.uk

www.123smartkids.co.uk

www.mustardseedkids.co.uk

www.GodVenture.co.uk

www.littlecraftybugs.co.uk

[www.TheBeginnersBible](http://www.TheBeginnersBible.com)

[www.Bible For Kids](http://www.BibleForKids.com)

[www.Children's Bible for Toddlers](http://www.ChildrensBibleforToddlers.com)

[www.Christian Music for Kids](http://www.ChristianMusicforKids.com)

Written by Ellie Wilson: Adviser for Under 5's at the Diocese of West Yorkshire and the Dales