



Children and Their Gifts, part 1 of 2—

# Those Incredible Gifted Kids!

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**H**ave you ever noticed the variety of interests and abilities of the children you are teaching? Very early in life, children show preferences for what they like to eat, games they enjoy, and how they spend their time. These early preferences can be an indication of special gifts and aptitudes. An exciting privilege of parenting is watching children discover their unique gifts and abilities.

Teachers are in a good position to observe the development of students' gifts and talents. Too often they let precious time pass before they realize the importance of helping children make the most of their inherent qualities.

There are critical periods in a child's development when he will gain optimum benefits from instruction, training, and experience. In the musical realm, for example, people with some musical aptitude can learn to play the piano at almost any age, but the peak years for beginning formal piano instruction are the elementary years. The skill-building years between 6 and 12 are the ideal time for children to gain confidence as they discover and develop their natural abilities.

An alert teacher can help a child discover his gifts and give him opportunities to use them in class. Sunday School and chil-

dren's church are ideal places for children to learn and begin to participate in ministry. Children can lead a class in prayer, lead worship songs, play musical instruments, help set up a sound system, organize a puppet show, set up craft and pre-session activities, share testimonies, take the offering, take attendance, and review the Bible story. Under the guidance of a teacher, older chil-



dren can assist younger children. Junior-age children enjoy helping preschoolers with crafts, interest centers, and playing games. They can serve snacks and read to children.

Children want to help—and they want to contribute something meaningful to their church and

school. We should challenge them to serve others and give them real ministry opportunities.

Children can easily identify with the little boy who offered his lunch to feed a crowd and with the little maid in Naaman's household who shared her faith. In these examples, the adults were open to a child's offer to help. We can help children by channeling their enthusiasm into appropriate areas of practical service. Involving them gradually and regularly will help them see that they really can be a part of the church's mission.

Churches that are alert to children's potential will guide them in ministry both inside and outside the church building. Missions projects and community service offer tangible ways they can be involved. Children can participate by assisting adults in outreach ministries, earning money for missions, collecting food for the homeless, helping with younger children, and visiting the elderly.

Children need to feel they are a part of the church. Those who attend only because their parents require it—and never feel personally involved—may leave the church. They will feel a true connection if we let them know the joys of ministry while they are learning and growing. If a child is well into the teen years before he is allowed to have a meaningful

part in the mission of the church, other interests will compete for his time, and he may lack the desire and confidence to try new things. This is especially true in areas that involve public ministry.

During the elementary years, however, children are excited about trying new things and seem less concerned about making mistakes in front of their peers. Most children want to help their

teacher when given the opportunity. Participation is a key work to remember when teaching children.

*(Part 2 will give you four tips to help children use their gifts.)*

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### Questions For Further Study—

1. How would you rate your ministry team on their ability to discover and utilize children's gifts? What improvements can be made? How can you help your workers to better discover and utilize children's gifts?
2. What training resources might you use to help your ministry team to better identify and use children's gifts?
3. Brainstorm ways that you can involve your children in ministry outside the church.