



CHILDREN AND YOUTH: Starting Strong

Church leaders share how parents and wards can help children become like the Savior.

Whether you're excited or a little bit anxious about the Church's new effort—Children and Youth—you probably have some questions: “How will it help my children?” “How do we do this?” “What is my role in it?”

Church leaders provide some answers.

Why is the Church making this change?

Sister Bonnie H. Cordon: As President Russell M. Nelson has taught, we all need to increase our capacity to receive revelation.¹ Children and Youth is set up to invite individuals and families to seek inspiration from the Spirit on how to progress and find joy on the covenant path. It's a wonderful parallel to what the prophet is envisioning for each one of us.

Brother Stephen W. Owen: President Nelson is also teaching us that we are a home-centered Church, no matter what our homes look like.² We're not a program-centered Church. Church leaders and teachers can help our children and youth learn and live the doctrine, but that responsibility begins in the home, and it's a daily responsibility.

As the prophet has taught, we need to seek revelation and follow the Spirit, and Children and Youth will help us do that—partly because it's a simplification. In the past, there have been hundreds of requirements for parents to track and understand in Personal Progress, Duty to God, Faith in God, and other Church programs as their children progressed through



Bonnie H. Cordon
Young Women
General President



Stephen W. Owen
Young Men
General President



Joy D. Jones
Primary General
President

their teens. This new approach invites youth and children to seek inspiration as they set goals according to their needs and interests.

Sister Joy D. Jones: This is an exciting opportunity for our children and youth, the rising generation, to deepen their faith in Jesus Christ. As they learn to seek and respond to the guidance of the Holy Ghost, they will better understand their eternal identity and purpose and how they can progress and feel Heavenly Father's love for them. The Children and Youth focus can bless and strengthen our youth and their families in establishing and nurturing relationships in their homes, at church, and with their Heavenly Father.

What are the first steps families can take to start applying Children and Youth?

Sister Jones: Pray together for the guidance of the Spirit. Parents can begin by talking with their family about the three areas of application in Children and Youth: gospel learning, service and activities, and personal development. What are they currently doing? How can they grow as individuals and as a family in these three areas? How will focusing on Luke 2:52 help guide their plans and goal setting to remember and follow the Savior? What a wonderful opportunity to strengthen youth, home, and family in very simple, consistent, and meaningful ways.

Sister Cordon: We start with a little bit at a time. Walking on the covenant path really is just placing one foot in front of the other. Make one goal. Start simply. The guidebooks for youth and children will give us a wonderful pattern to follow.

Brother Owen: We shouldn't make this too complicated. This is very simple. Read Luke 2:52. Start there. A parent can then sit down with their child or youth at home and talk about it. "How



are we going to help you grow in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man?” “What could we learn or do together?” “What goals can you set?” Just make it simple.

If there was one thing you wanted children and youth to know as this rolls out, what would that be?

Sister Cordon: This is an amazing opportunity to grow as the Savior did! If we’re wondering, “What do I focus on?” we can remember that we are already doing many things to become like Him. Gospel learning is happening in many homes and at church. We’re serving and participating in activities. This new effort is simply a way for us to be intentional and accountable about acting on what we are learning—and to focus that growth in the four areas that the Savior grew: spiritually, socially, physically, and intellectually (see Luke 2:52). This will bring joy, peace, and lasting happiness to us all as we follow the Savior!

Sister Jones: Development is focused on the Savior, centered in the family, and supported by the Church. This is simplification and personalization as we step away from past programs. Growth will come individually. I hope children, youth, leaders, and their families will understand that this is an attainable, adaptable way for all of Heavenly Father’s children around the globe to progress together and experience enduring joy on the covenant path. This won’t be a big change or a difficult learning curve. It is doing more of what we are already doing, as we are guided by the Spirit, so that our sincere efforts can expand our ability to lovingly and effectively follow the Savior.

Why is it important for youth and children to develop like the Savior?

Sister Jones: First and foremost, they have made covenants to always follow Him. They have made covenants “to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places” (Mosiah 18:9). So they need to develop as He did: spiritually, socially, physically, intellectually. Their covenants are not only the *reason* they should do so, but they also provide the empowering *ability* to help them accomplish their goals.

Brother Owen: Our whole purpose in life is to follow and become like our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. We want to be like Them. We start practicing this at a young age, so we have a pattern for the rest of our lives. And we are really following the Savior when we do the things He did.

Sister Cordon: The Savior is our example in all things. We study His life and mission and teachings because He is everything we aspire to become. But since each of us is unique, we each have attributes and skills that we need to develop to become like Him. This new approach gives children and youth a customized opportunity to grow in those unique ways, to develop their individual gifts, and to identify those things they feel prompted to do to become more like the Savior. That’s what makes this so personal. There is not a set checklist. The goals we each set to move forward on the covenant path will be different, but together we will be learning and growing and drawing closer to our Savior.

What do you hope children and youth will feel when they participate?

Sister Cordon: I hope they gain a deeper understanding of their eternal identity and feel that they belong. When we know who we are and Whose we are, we act differently. They’ll learn to recognize that what some social media says is not true, because they have experienced how the Spirit speaks to them. They’ll gain confidence in themselves and in their divine potential as daughters and sons of God.

Sister Jones: We want them to feel faith and hope in Jesus Christ, to feel the peace that comes from keeping the commandments, to experience healthy relationships, to learn resilience, to feel the joy of service to others, and to feel the happiness and fulfillment of participating in the work of salvation.

Brother Owen: I hope that children will understand the gospel in a way that will get from their head down into their heart. This is not about checking things off. It’s a process of learning and becoming like the Savior. I would

really hope that our children and those we minister to will feel confident enough in their gospel understanding to teach it to others. For example, I would hope that we could ask our children a question about the gospel and we would hear a very profound response because they have learned it and it's part of who they are.

How will parents know if Children and Youth is successful in their home?

Brother Owen: I would be looking for the fruits of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5, such as more peace at home. I think their children will be more kind, more loving. Their children will want to be with the family. They'll be more likely to pray and seek answers. They'll see improvement not just spiritually but also socially, physically, and intellectually.

Sister Jones: They will know it is successful as relationships are strengthened, as family members experience realistic improvement and keep trying even when they struggle, as they demonstrate mutual support and caring for one another, and as the influence of the Holy Ghost is actively sought after and present in their home. Family members might see a clearer connection between what they are doing every day and the life of Christ. Perhaps there will be greater appreciation of agency and repentance, improved attitudes, increased confidence, efforts to reach outward rather than turning inward, and a greater appreciation for the Savior, His life, His teachings, His example, and His Atonement.

What counsel would you give to parents who might feel a little anxious about leaving behind the previous Church programs?

Sister Cordon: Of course we love the previous programs, because each one of us developed and had an opportunity to see others develop within those programs. They were inspired for their time. But aren't we grateful for continuing revelation? The Lord needs us to continue to progress and change, and He needs our programs to progress and change to meet the needs of members worldwide. We are always striving to improve and to become the Church and people our Heavenly Father knows and needs us to be.

Sister Jones: We have been very blessed by the programs of the past and can be grateful for all that we have learned and experienced. This is a wonderful new season, and it is an opportunity to seek the Lord's guidance to learn and grow in new and inspired ways.

How can leaders help children and youth grow in personal development?

Brother Owen: First of all, I think the adult leader needs to see that child or that young man or young woman as God sees them, meaning who that person can become, not just who they are now. Start with the end in mind. Have the long view. This is going to take time. See what children and youth can become. Develop enough of a relationship that when you need to speak to the youth, they respect you enough to listen.

Also, get to know the parents. Find out from them how you can help. Respect their role as parents.

Sister Jones: Primary doesn't have the structure of quorum and class presidencies that young men and young women have. Primary leaders and teachers, as well as ministering brothers and sisters, provide help for children who don't have gospel support in their homes. It's important, however, that we always honor the relationship between children, youth, and their parents, whatever the home situation might be. Children and Youth can provide a way to invite the entire family to come and see and come and help. It could be a means of strengthening the entire family, whether or not they are members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Sister Cordon: We have many children and youth without their parents at church on Sunday but who still have loving parents. I would encourage leaders to get to know the parents and find out what dreams and aspirations they have for their children. We can help. As we work in tandem with parents, we'll strengthen the individuals *and* their homes and also encourage the children and youth to strengthen each other's homes.



What would you say to overwhelmed parents who fear that they won't be able to help their children succeed in Children and Youth?

Sister Cordon: The great thing is that we're already doing most of it. Families are already learning the gospel together. We're already doing service and activities. We have always had a personal development effort; now we're just focusing on the ways that Christ grew.

As we sit down with our children, I think we're going to really enjoy it. You can just listen to the heart of your child in a normal, natural way. Our Heavenly Father wants your child to grow, find joy, and return to live with Him. You will feel the Holy Ghost guide you as *together* you strive to make the gospel and our Savior Jesus Christ part of every aspect of your life.

Sister Jones: Begin in the way it works for your family. Trust that you will have heaven's help. Seek the Spirit's guidance. Children and Youth will be a valuable parenting tool. There are many demands on parents today as they guide and nurture their families. It is easy to sometimes feel overburdened. Children and Youth will help parents distill what is essential from what is important. Helping our families learn how to follow the Savior through the inspiration of the Holy Ghost is vital for all of us and will bring the Lord's love and blessings.

Brother Owen: I think you're going to really be able to help your children and youth. You don't have to do some great thing. It comes down to being faithful and prayerful and creating some holy habits and righteous routines in your family. Start with some basic, simple, righteous habits, and you will see miracles happen in the lives of your children. ■

NOTES

1. See Russell M. Nelson, "Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2018, 93–96.
2. See Russell M. Nelson, "Opening Remarks," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2018, 6–8.

RESOURCES TO HELP

In the *Liahona*:

- Wendy Ulrich, "Motivating the Rising Generation," *Liahona*, Jan. 2020, 26.
- Heather Bergeson and Amanda Dunn, "Children and Youth: A Focus for Everyday Life," *Liahona*, Jan. 2020, 52.
- Joy D. Jones, "A Little Better Every Day," *Friend*, Jan. 2020, F8.
- Brittany Beattie, "Ministering to Children and Youth," *Liahona*, Dec. 2019, 36.

Online: childrenandyouth.ChurchofJesusChrist.org

