



Thinking about Jesus when it matters.

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Recently I was presenting some research to a group of parents. We had been talking about research done with Years 3, 7 and 10 carried out in 2016 on how children resolve life-issues, especially moral ones. The parents were deeply impacted by this, and wanted to know how they can help their children think Christianly.

A basic Christian school belief is that God guides people about how best to live and relate with others in this complex world. For example, Psalm 16:10-11- says that God guides his people away from the “Pit” and into the “path of life” (NRSV). Also, Jesus said that unlike those who would steal from us and destroy, He came that we might have life and have it abundantly (John 10:10 RSV).

Many parents at our school desire to see their children follow Jesus and His teaching and so experience His abundant life. An important time for parents to invite students to include Jesus is when their child is faced with an unresolved life-issue. Children are often seeking a good

answer to their dilemma when under pressure and parents can help their children. A child may be disturbed by the way his or her friend is being bullied in a sly way, or a teenager may want to go to a party where there will be popular peers who take party drugs. These are golden opportunities to reflect on Jesus' way, rather than simply to give advice or blunt direction.

Consider what may be happening to a child when faced with a life-issue, such as how to help a class member who is being bullied. Wise parents will listen to hear how their child sees the situation, whilst silently praying for the Holy Spirit to guide their thinking. Listening to the child will reveal to parents the viewpoint their child is using. It is important not to be critical of Junior and Middle School children who are naturally likely to choose their "self-view" of a situation. "Self-view" is when they only consider the implications for themselves, and not others.

Our Excellence Centre "Personal Viewpoints" research results suggest that children who are able to use different decision-making processes can make decisions that are based on a larger picture of what could be done about the life-issues situation. Students in Year 3 and older are generally able to visualise an image of their teacher (or parents) with friends and can speculate what the various members of that hypothetical group might say regarding the problem.

Forming an image like this is technically called "taking the third person perspective". This thinking strategy enables children and adolescents to imagine what others, whom they trust, might think of a situation.

Christian parents will want to help their child include Jesus in the imaginary group (third person perspective). Including Jesus can help children transcend their normal sociocultural world to imagine what a more general or universal world-view might be. This strategy is similar to the question our Christian grandparents were taught to ask, namely: "What would Jesus say or do about this situation?"

The exercise of imagining a group of respected people is not as artificial as it may sound. The act of imagining the group is as powerful a method of exploring an issue as entering into a well-told Bible story, because it engages the person's whole being: body, mind and spirit. Many people find that when they take the third person perspective that includes Jesus, they discover options that often appear inspired. The process appears similar to the one recommended in Hebrews 12, of deciding how to act whilst taking into account the surrounding Biblical "cloud of witnesses" who have gone before us – and what a great encouragement that is!

