



# **BUILDING BRIDGES**

**BIBLICAL COUNSELING ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN + TEENS**

**JULIE LOWE**

“*Building Bridges* fills a profound gap in biblical counseling literature and is by far one of the most informed, thoughtful, and practical guides I have ever read on counseling children and teens. Lowe’s creativity in transitioning the riches of biblical counseling and theology into a practical form that helps counselors effectively draw out the hearts of some of our most cherished is unmatched. As a practitioner of almost twenty years, this book serves as a much needed and appreciated gift!”

**Jeremy Lelek**, President, Association of Biblical Counselors

“Now and again, an exceptional book comes out that will prove to be a classic on a topic. Julie Lowe’s *Building Bridges* is bound to become a classic biblical counseling resource for helping children and teens. Julie packs gospel-centered, grace-saturated truth in every chapter and ends the book with a trove of helpful exercises and worksheets. Pastors, youth and children’s workers, and parents should get a copy, read it, and deploy the wisdom from its pages.”

**Marty Machowski**, Pastor; author of *The Ology*, *Parenting First Aid*, *God Made Boys and Girls*, and other gospel-centered resources for church and home

“For those of us who sometimes feel a bit lost in knowing how to winsomely connect with and get to know the hearts of the children we counsel, Julie Lowe has given us a very helpful resource. *Building Bridges* is full of extremely useful ideas and activities for gaining entry and speaking God’s truth into the lives of hurting children. Anyone who wants to grow in their skills in counseling children will want a copy of this book.”

**Amy Baker**, Editor of *Caring for the Souls of Children*, Faith Resources

“Julie Lowe’s *Building Bridges* brings biblical ministry to children to a new level of understanding and practice! This tool will become standard fare in BJU Seminary’s course on counseling children and adolescents. Packed with case wisdom, biblical insight, and creative activities, this is the finest text available for discovering and ministering to the hearts of children in the counseling room. I highly recommend it.”

**Jim Berg**, Professor of biblical counseling at BJU Seminary; executive director of Freedom That Lasts®, a local church-based addiction recovery program; author of *Changed Into His Image*, *God is More Than Enough*, *Essential Virtues*, and *Help! I’m Addicted*

“Today there is a cacophony of voices, whether books, articles, or blogs bellowing, ‘*This* is how you parent. *This* is the secret formula to make your kids turn out right.’ Into this riot steps Julie Lowe. Eschewing false promises, *Building Bridges* offers wisdom—a broad framework for understanding children and their struggles as well as practical strategies for connecting with them. A triumph!”

**Benjamin Crawford**, Psychiatrist at Riverside Counseling Center

“This book is as theologically rich as it is practical. Julie takes great effort to be biblically sound in her approach to counseling and also takes just as much effort to give detailed examples of practical exercises to engage children. For any parent or youth worker that’s struggling to reach a specific child or student, this book will be a great resource.”

**John Perritt**, Director of Resources for Reformed Youth Ministries; author of *Mark: How Jesus Changes Everything* and *Insecure: Fighting Our Lesser Fears with a Greater One*; editor of the Track series

“Genuine love begins with taking the time to truly know someone. This is especially true as we seek to love those God calls us to counsel and minister to. In *Building Bridges*, Julie Lowe provides a treasure trove of practical activities and illustrations that are specifically designed to help us know and speak the truth of the gospel to the children and youth God has placed in our lives. I am eminently more prepared to love the children in my church (and in my home) as a result of having this resource.”

**Scott Mehl**, Pastor, Cornerstone Church of West L.A.; author of *Loving Messy People*

“It is impossible with a few words to capture the love, wisdom, and practical helpfulness that splashes across every page of *Building Bridges*. If you are a parent and you want to know how to love and be God’s tool of change in the lives of your children, you should read this book. If you are a teacher, children’s counselor, or in children’s or youth ministry, this book is absolutely essential for you. As a father of adult children, I read *Building Bridges* with gratitude for the many that it will help, but also with sadness that I didn’t have it when our children were young. We cannot lose another generation of vulnerable children, made in the image of God, to the evils of life in this broken, groaning world, and for this reason, I enthusiastically commend *Building Bridges* to you.”

**Paul David Tripp**, Pastor; author; international conference speaker

“‘Tell me about your problems,’ rarely gives us access to children because words can elude them when emotions are complicated. Julie has given us creative and engaging means of drawing out a child’s heart.”

**Edward T. Welch**, Faculty and counselor, Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation (CCEF); author of *A Small Book about a Big Problem*

“Counseling children and teens provides unique challenges to even the most gifted biblical counselors. Children and teens think and operate differently than adults, and connecting with them and understanding what lies within their hearts requires distinctive skills. *Building Bridges* is here to help. Julie Lowe has provided an excellent resource to explain the why, what, and how of connecting the truths of Scripture with the hearts of children and teens. Counselors, teachers, parents, Sunday school workers, and youth ministry workers will all benefit from the wealth of knowledge and tools in this work.”

**C.W. Solomon**, Executive Director, Biblical Counseling Coalition

“What a treasure Julie has given to the church and to parents in her latest book, *Building Bridges*. With the conviction that every child is an image-bearer of the living God, Julie offers practical exercises, tools, and methods to draw out your child in conversation. In a culture that is quickly forgetting the art of conversation, Julie draws our gaze back to Scripture and shows us Jesus’s heart for children. I am confident this book will bless and impact many families for the kingdom of God.”

**Jonathan D. Holmes**, Executive Director, Fieldstone Counseling; pastor of counseling, Parkside Church

“Truth be told, children and adolescents who are struggling with life often leave parents, teachers, youth ministry staff, and counselors mystified. Julie Lowe understands this and has written a book that is intended to fill in the gap between the theologically profound and the how-to practical. *Building Bridges* grounds the process of counseling children in a model that is not based on behavioral modification language but on the language of the gospel. Parenting, after all, is the most challenging form of discipleship that there is. *Building Bridges* provides the reader with a pattern of entering and exploring the life of a child and in that context winning their trust, providing hope to their heart, and offering a pathway to change.”

**Jeffrey S. Black**, Professor and Chair, Department of Counseling & Psychology, Cairn University; licensed psychologist; director of counseling services, Oasis Center



# Building Bridges

BIBLICAL COUNSELING ACTIVITIES  
FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

*Julie Lowe*



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## Chapter 1

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# Working with Children and Teens Requires a Different Approach

Tiana was a lonely teenager who had participated in “sexting” online, in order to fit in with a group from school. Unfortunately, that same group of “friends” circulated her pictures around school, eventually landing her in front of a detective, her parents, and the school administration.

Tiana was initially angry, resistant, and untrusting toward counseling. She did not believe anyone really cared. After several sessions of getting to know her, listening well, and finding ways into her world, Tiana shared that she connected best through music. I asked if she would be willing to share some songs and lyrics that reflected how she felt. We jumped on my computer and listened together.

After one song finished playing on the computer screen, Tiana sat back, nodding her head, as if in agreement. I asked, “How does this song connect to your life?”

Tiana quickly responded, “Well, I guess I feel like everyone has someone but me, just like the song says. So what do I have?”

“I’m sure it does feel that way, Tiana. It’s hard when it feels like everyone around you has a boyfriend or a group where they feel they belong. The question is, is our meaning and worth found in a boyfriend or peer group? Can we only feel valued if another human finds us valuable?”

Tiana thought for a moment. “I know the right answer should be that God is all I need . . . but I want to be accepted by my friends, too. I don’t want to be alone.”

I nodded and replied, “I don’t want to be alone either, and you and I are never really alone. I know it is hard to believe, but the Lord is right there and he cares. He sees your sadness, he knows how you feel and he sympathizes with you.”

I paused and watched Tiana tear up. “I can’t promise that people will treat you the way they should—or the way you want them to treat you—but I can promise that the Lord will never leave you, never forsake you, and that he will take every hard and

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lonely moment in your life and use it for good.” Tears streamed down Tiana’s face. My words were equally comforting and hard to hear. “I know it does not get rid of the pain of rejection, but it does help lessen it when we learn to embrace and long for God’s love, more than the approval of other people.

“What do you think about the both of us finding a song that speaks to God’s never-ending love when others fail us? We can both do some research and next week compare what we’ve found.” Tiana agreed, and I encouraged her to share her assignment with her parents; perhaps they’d have some helpful ideas as well. It was the first time Tiana had made herself vulnerable, and the first sign she was willing to engage honestly. What was once a godless vision of her future began revealing a glimpse of hope.

Several sessions later, Tiana not only found songs that shifted to a more Christ-centered perspective; she began writing her own music in counseling—music that moved from despair toward trusting the Lord and finding comfort in his love. Her circumstances had not yet changed, but her outlook was being transformed. Tiana was learning to find worth in the One who made her. She was slowly becoming more vulnerable with her parents and choosing to let go of the friends she once would do anything to impress.

\* \* \*

Young people like Tiana need wise adults who are willing to enter their world and experiences. They need us to sit with them and feel what life is like in their shoes, and they need a vision for something beyond such experiences. They need hope that there is more to their lives than their current circumstances, and they need us to find winsome ways to point them to the Lord.

As caring adults, it is both a privilege and responsibility to consider how we can woo a younger generation to the Lord. It must always be our goal to aptly apply Scripture to the uniqueness of each child, teen, or family. Biblical principles are unchanging; they are always at work and always effective; and we must continually be working to thoughtfully apply them to the needs of the moment. We want our wise, loving, godly care to be both vibrant and improvising, engaging and appealing. We need to take the time to help young people know what godly responses look like in the particulars of their experiences. The next generation needs to know that God really has given them everything they need for life (2 Peter 1:3).

This book aspires to help counselors, families, and other caring adults to build bridges—life-giving, gospel-infused connections—with young people in our sphere of influence. With each new generation, we have a biblical charge to teach young people the ways of the Lord. We are charged with bringing Scripture to life for each child and teen (Deuteronomy 6:4–6). In a culture where children and teens are increasingly looking to their own peers as the source of truth and knowledge, meaningful

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relationships with positive, wise adults will steer young people toward biblical answers to their questions and struggles.

Ministering to children and teens is different from ministering to adults. Many counselors avoid counseling children, knowing it requires a different approach. It is true that we can often make the mistake of relating to children as we do with adults. Many young people simply cannot interact at an adult level. If we want kids and teens to open up about their world, and if we want to minister to them effectively, we need to connect to them in a way that makes them feel understood and known. This means we do what we can to meet them where they are developmentally. It requires working hard to see life through their eyes. This practice reflects the heart of Jesus, who reminded us that we must become like children to enter the kingdom of heaven and that whoever receives a child in his name receives him (Matthew 18:2–4).

It is valuable to know young people both individually and developmentally. We can then speak into their world and help them understand themselves and their need for the Lord. At the same time, it's important to remember that the temptations, struggles and needs of the human heart remain the same regardless of the stage of life. The soul needs to be nurtured with gospel truth at any age. Each individual needs to know Jesus and learn about God's love and care at every age. Everyone needs to be challenged to love God and people. But even though biblical wisdom and principles are unchanging, the way we contextualize them and apply them to children is not always the same.

As adults, we often find it difficult to connect personally to young people. It can feel hard to draw them out or engage them in meaningful conversations. The disconnect usually revolves around our expectations—trying to have an adult conversation with a child, assuming teens are interested in what we are interested in, talking down to them, expecting them to be able to talk up to us, or making young people sit and have a conversation about things that have no felt interest or significance to them.

As counselors, some of us may feel more successful at connecting with children and teenagers than we actually are. We naively walk away from interactions feeling semi-successful. We kept the conversation going, got him or her to answer our questions, and may have even addressed a few struggles in his or her life. We may walk away from a session like this and think it went fairly well. However, when you ask the young person how it was, you might get a very different story: “It was awful. Boring. I hate counseling and don't want to go back.” The young person might walk away from such a session feeling as though someone just pulled their teeth, and they will do what they can to avoid another painful visit.

We want our bonds with others to come easily, effortlessly, and naturally. We want people to like us. We may even presume our counselees can or should be on the same intellectual, emotional, spiritual, or social level we are. But an effortless connection

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or shared understanding is rarely the case with any counselee, much less a child. We mistakenly believe that good relationships always come effortlessly and that hard work shouldn't be needed. When we think this way, we forget the lengths to which Jesus extended himself to love, share, and connect with us. He came down to us, and he continues to meet us in our weakness, feebleness, and childishness. He took on human flesh, humbling himself and entering into our experience, even experiencing death in our place (Philippians 2:6–8).

In light of everything Jesus has done for us, Scripture likewise urges us, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others” (Philippians 2:3–4, NIV). In our relationships with one another, we are called to have the mindset of Christ Jesus. How can we model this heart of Jesus in our interactions with the young people we counsel? What would it look like to approach kids and teens with the mindset of Christ Jesus?

We start by being committed to meeting young people where they are, not where *we* are, nor where we want them to be. We must be willing to work hard and thoughtfully to enter into their world. This will mean taking time to sit, observe, listen, and help children and teenagers feel known. It is not until we do this that we will have won the trust needed to influence them for the gospel.

I often tell the counseling students I train that their ability to work well with adults does not mean they will be competent to work well with children or teenagers. However, if they can learn to work with young people, they will likely be better equipped and skillful at working with adults. Why? Because they will have spent extra time learning the unnatural skill of entering into another person's world, striving to both know and love him or her well.

## DRAWING OUT CHILDREN AND TEENS

Drawing out young people means striving to unearth what is going on in their hearts and minds. We are uncovering their motives, desires, fears, hopes, temptations, and dreams. As Proverbs 20:5 says, “The purpose in a man's heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out.” That is our goal: to draw out the purposes of the heart, and then speak truth back in.

When drawing out a child or teen, often it is the skill of an adult that determines how effective counseling is, more so than the ability of a young person to articulate his or her inner world. We tend to chat with a child and be tempted to conclude after a few minutes that they lack insight, thoughtful responses, or even care about their situation. We tell ourselves that we tried to gain insight but that the child just lacks personal awareness or is unwilling to open up. Unfortunately, much of the time we

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are wrong. Given genuine care, consistent pursuit, winsome approaches, the patience of a listening ear, and the willingness to ask good questions, young people can and do share deeply.

It's not until you start to know a young person well that you can contextualize truth to meet their particular needs. This is a step that can never be skipped. Jesus modeled the idea of knowing people individually. In his life on earth, Jesus modeled specific care and personal interaction to those he encountered. The woman at the well was known intimately and given grace despite her many sins (John 4). Zacchaeus, a tax collector, was sought out for fellowship (Luke 19). The Pharisees and Sadducees were rebuked and called a brood of vipers (Matthew 12). The little children were told to come and were embraced (Luke 18). Each disciple was known individually (John 1:42, 47). Jesus often demonstrated that he knew his followers so well that he knew what they were thinking (Mark 9:33–34). He spoke to their doubts, fear, unbelief, *and* devotion (Matthew 8:26).

### Be an expert at knowing the child in front of you

We have a Father who knows us personally, intimately and completely. He created us, he formed us, and he knows the depths of our hearts. He can go places inside our heads and hearts no one else can reach, and he meets us there. We are called to model the love of God by seeking to know the children and teenagers we are interacting with in the same ways that God knows us.

Consider Psalm 139, beginning with verses 1–5:

O LORD, you have searched me and known me!  
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
you discern my thoughts from afar.  
You search out my path and my lying down  
and are acquainted with all my ways.  
Even before a word is on my tongue,  
behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.  
You hem me in, behind and before,  
and lay your hand upon me.

Verses 13–18 go on to describe how well he knows you and I:

For you formed my inward parts;  
you knitted me together in my mother's womb.  
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.  
Wonderful are your works;  
my soul knows it very well.  
My frame was not hidden from you,

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when I was being made in secret,  
    intricately woven in the depths of the earth.  
Your eyes saw my unformed substance;  
in your book were written, every one of them,  
    the days that were formed for me,  
    when as yet there was none of them.  
How precious to me are your thoughts, O God!  
    How vast is the sum of them!  
If I would count them, they are more than the sand.  
    I awake, and I am still with you.

In counseling or personal ministry, we learn to understand the nature of certain struggles, experiences, and emotional reactions. We pay attention to themes and motives, interpersonal and intrapersonal dynamics, and we learn how to speak into such things with biblical skill and wisdom. However, it is equally important that we treat each young person we work with as a distinct person. This means we make the effort to see him or her as a unique individual whom we strive to understand. It means that in imitation of our heavenly Father who knows us intimately, we commit to knowing the particular child or teenager in front of us. It means we take our time not just to know the struggle, but the person behind the struggle.

Each young person has innate traits that form, motivate, and influence his or her behaviors and intentions. Who are they? What makes them tick? What motivates them or discourages them? How can we speak to them, encourage, confront, or comfort in a way that is beneficial to this person? It requires us to build trust and bridges so that we both genuinely know and understand the individual before us.

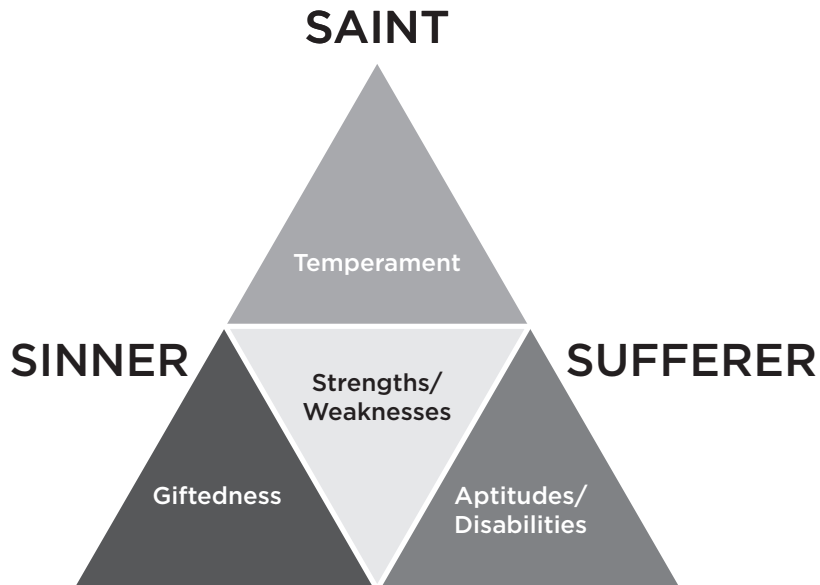
The pursuit of knowing young people well compels us to become people of wisdom and understanding. We strive to know their strengths, weaknesses, limitations, and temptations. We consider each family, lifestyle, parenting style, and the impact of these factors in children's lives. Equipped with this understanding, we then look for godly ways to speak wisely and lovingly into these areas of their lives and to nurture their growth in godliness. Thoughtful, effective counseling mirrors insight back to each child and teen so that they may know themselves better and see their need for Christ.

### A framework for understanding the heart

To develop a wise and biblical understanding of children, we need to have a foundational understanding of human nature. My colleague Mike Emlet has written extensively about the biblical view of man as sinner, sufferer, and saint.<sup>1</sup>

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Children are created in the image of God, and it is the redeeming work of Christ that transforms them into saints. As image-bearers, they are born into a broken, fallen world where they are impacted by suffering and hard experiences. Young people are moral responders, at war with their sinful natures that make them prone to wander from the Lord and corrupt the ways they experience and interpret life.



Our task is to help young people see life and their experiences from a biblical worldview. God creates, but the world corrupts. God made food, love, sex, relationships, pleasure, and our temperaments, but none of these factors is immune from being corrupted when we are not walking in submission to Christ. Good counseling and personal ministry require us to help young people gain insight into their own hearts and proclivities. It requires building a redemptive worldview where they can see that God created everything and everything points back to him (Psalm 19:1; John 1:3; Colossians 1:17). It calls for speaking, mentoring, and walking alongside them in whatever capacity we are given.

Children are not born blank slates. They come with innate personalities, aptitudes, giftings, tendencies, struggles, disabilities, and temptations, as well as temperamental strengths and weaknesses. We must endeavor to identify the unique mix of abilities, strengths, and weaknesses in our young counselees and consider how this informs the way we approach and guide them. Knowing children well gives us insight into their spiritual needs, helps us understand what motivates their behavior, and provides direction toward how to disciple them well.

Without this approach, we tend to revert to either our own natural style of relating (good or bad), assuming everyone interacts the same way, or we turn to other



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unbiblical approaches/methods/formulas. We look around to see “what works,” and embrace methods that may seemingly produce results but lead away from pointing people to Christ.

### REDEEMING THE WHOLE INDIVIDUAL IN CHRIST

The ability for adults to speak redemptively, and to accurately make sense of a child’s experiences and struggles, is crucial. We want every part of a child’s life to be understood in light of the gospel. We must aspire to always help kids see both who they are and what they experience in light of a biblical worldview. Regardless of the struggles or brokenness children and teens wrestle with, we want to infuse confidence in a loving Creator who knows them by name, sees their every thought, and knows the number of their days. When children learn to find identity in Christ, it creates a grid through which they can make accurate sense of hard things.

The diagram on the next page highlights how we are all made in the image of God, created to reflect his likeness. We all are impacted by sin and wrestle with a fallen nature, and are in need of redemption through Christ’s work on the cross. We are also influenced by creational traits—our physical strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes, personality types, communication styles, and more.

To be an image-bearer means that we are created in God’s likeness. We are made to magnify him, to reflect his glory. Every child and teen we meet is made in God’s likeness, and we are called to treat them as such. This requires us to see others as God sees us.

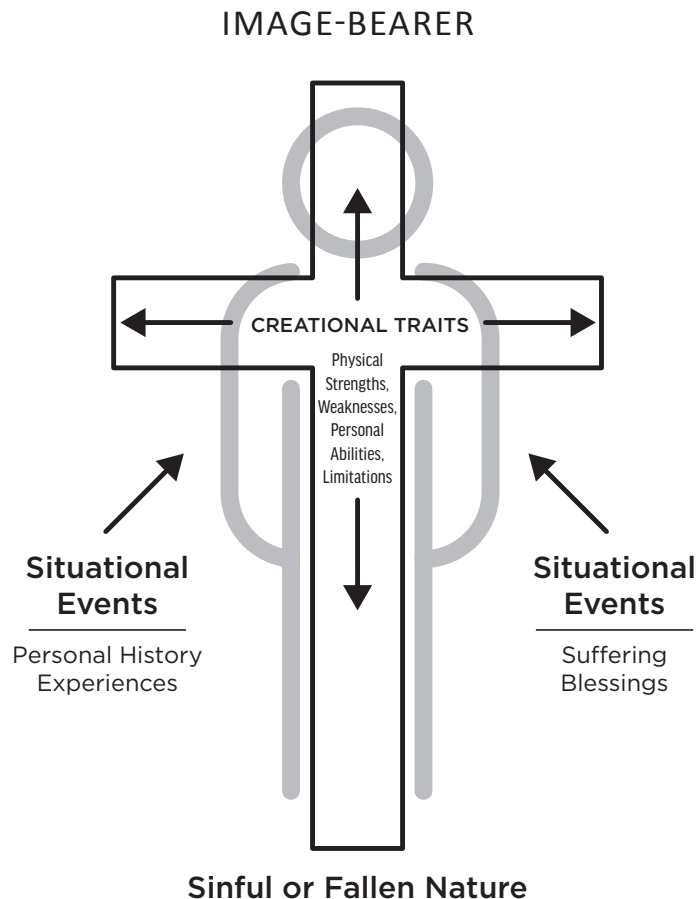
Sinful or fallen nature means that we are all in need of the gospel—believer and unbeliever alike. The gospel equally transforms each of us, turning our hearts of stone to hearts of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26). We are all prone to wander, and it is important to understand how young people are impacted by the flesh and sinful desires.

Much like the picture of the sinner, saint, and sufferer, we are all also impacted by the suffering and brokenness of this world. Suffering can take the form of creational strengths and weaknesses. Perhaps it is a disability, whether physical or cognitive. For a young person, it may be learning disabilities, struggles with social skills, physical handicaps, or deformities. Or, it could be giftedness with amazing talent, skillfulness, or a high IQ—which although they are blessings on one level, can make it hard for others to understand or relate to. These are traits we were given at birth and are incapable of changing, but which we need to work on and perhaps compensate for. We each must wrestle with living in a broken physical body.

Then there are situational events: the impact of having a one-parent or two-parent home, being an only child or having multiple siblings, growing up in foster care or an orphanage, or coming from a family of divorce. It could be a history of being bullied

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or being the star athlete. It could be abuse or growing up in a happy, healthy home environment.



Regardless of their history, blessings, or sufferings, children must learn to accurately make sense of their experiences in light of Scripture. As counselors, we need to come alongside children and help them make sense of how these factors impact the way they see and respond to the world around them.

Without a biblical understanding of human nature, identity, and innate personalities, we tend to misperceive children's actions and motives. In any counseling relationship, we must look at both the creational (physical or developmental) as well as the spiritual factors at play in a young person's life. If we ignore the central spiritual need for faith and obedience, then sin could be excused as a personality trait. Likewise, if we ignore creational and situational factors, some struggles your counselee faces could be incorrectly suspected as sin.

Counselors and parents often wrestle with whether what they are seeing is a sin issue or a creational/temperamental strength or weakness. Much of the time it is both. Children do not know what to do with their inattention, forgetfulness, or social

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awkwardness (which would be a part of their physical development and creational traits), so they will often compensate in sinful or foolish ways. Perhaps a child is embarrassed by a learning disability, so she acts up in class or makes jokes to deflect feeling inadequate. Maybe a teenaged boy who is small and stutters will pick fights or become a bully to wrongly try to feel powerful or accepted.

We all deal with situational factors in our lives—personal histories, sufferings, blessings, and other impactful experiences. Those might include the loss of a parent, adoption, trauma, constant lifestyle upheaval, growing up in a large or small family, disability, or living in poverty or wealth. These experiences prejudice the way a child sees relationships, the world around them, and themselves. Left to themselves, they will try make sense out of their experiences and often do so inaccurately. A child who is adopted may wrongly conclude they are unlovable or bad. A child whose parents have divorced may think they could have prevented their parents' failed relationship if they had done something different or behaved better.

Children interpret life and experiences whether or not we talk to them about it. Often we avoid discussing topics that are heavy, complicated, or confusing, believing that children will not think about these factors if we do not bring them up. The problem is, children already are thinking, interpreting, and drawing conclusions about their lives. If we do not engage them about these topics, they will draw their own conclusions about themselves, their lives, and God without any loving guidance or a redemptive worldview.

### Looking at each individual as a puzzle

Once you have your overall outline of a child in place, you can start working to understand the individual pieces to the puzzle that makes up who they are. A counseling relationship with a child is most often an investment, so keep the process in mind as you take the time to really know what makes a child tick. What motivates him, excites him, or causes him to cry? What does she dream about, what is she tempted by, and where is she naturally gifted? All of these factors will help you shine the light of Christ most effectively into his or her particular situation.

Imagine dumping out the pieces of a puzzle without having any idea what the finished picture looked like. It would feel a bit overwhelming. All of it lies before you, but the end result would not be clear right away. Early on we would begin making sense of it by putting together the obvious corners and straight sides, building a framework for what will unfold before us. Counseling is very much like this. We are slowly putting the pieces together and building a picture of the young person we are working with.

## Working with Children and Teens Requires a Different Approach

Often I start building my picture by asking the real experts of the child: the parents. Parents have spent years observing their children, and their perceptions come from thousands of little and big moments alike. Parents often express that they feel lost or confused about what is going on with their child; but when they are asked probing questions, they tend to be full of insights. Some questions I am likely to ask a parent are:

- Tell me what your child is like.
- What are his/her strengths and weaknesses?
- Where do you see him/her struggle?
- How does he/she respond to correction?
- What is he/she like around his/her peers?
- What makes him/her happy, anxious, angry, sad, etc.?
- Is he/she open about his/her feelings or closed off?
- What is he/she like in school? in church? in public?
- Does he/she show any spiritual maturity or sensitivity? How so?

We start with what we believe about human nature, sin, and individual temperaments, and this often helps us begin to grasp the outer contours of the child we are counseling. We don't yet know him or her well, but we can use these categories of human experience to begin creating a framework.

However, there are many, many "puzzle pieces" that make up the complete picture of who your counselee is, and understanding and piecing together the distinct components of his or her experience and strengths/weaknesses will take a bit of trial and error. As we get to know a child, we begin to get glimpses of why he does what he does, where he is developmentally, what his personality is like, how he is struggling, and what motivates him. As we understand all of these things, we can start putting the pieces of his puzzle together. Sometimes the pieces fit; sometimes we see later that they really did not connect at all. Only time, wisdom, and a commitment to knowing the child deeply will ensure an accurate, meaningful "knowing." This "knowing" is also dependent on the help of parents and other loving individuals in each young person's life.

Christ knows us by name. He knows our every thought, he sees past our behavior, and he knows what motivates us (1 Samuel 16:7; Psalm 139:1–24; Isaiah 43:1). We can't read children's minds and hearts, but we can be skillful in observing their behaviors; adept in reading what motivates them in various situations; proficient in seeing their gifts, weaknesses, aptitudes, fears, and insecurities; and wise in knowing how to speak hope into their experiences. We can excel at wooing them to a personal God

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who longs to work in and through them. It is not enough that we commit to knowing them well. We also want to help them understand themselves. We want children to know themselves wisely and know how to both live well before the face of God and recognize their greatest need is to lean deeply into him.

The Lord does not leave us to our own devices. He pursues us because he is a loving Father, a wise Counselor, and a good Shepherd. He meets us in our need, weakness, and frailty. The Lord is unwavering in his love for us. He shows compassion and is merciful and gracious. May we imitate him with a commitment to know, understand, and proactively pursue our young people.