

THE WAY FAITH GROWS

Ed had known Tom since birth. At the time of Tom's baptism, Ed was asked by Tom and the church to become a special friend for Tom. Ed went to Tom's birthday parties, prayed for him regularly and encouraged Tom to think about his place in the church. Now that Tom is fourteen, he and Ed have started to go to the football together and head out for pizza. They talk about all sorts of things, including faith.

The changes in the way that young people think and feel have an effect on the way that their faith develops.

As they start to think logically and rationally, a young person may question the beliefs they have. As they understand more about concepts like justice and integrity they may seriously question God's presence in the world and the hypocrisy they witness around them. As young people become increasingly self-conscious they are open to discovering a God who loves them without limit.

John Westerhoff, a Christian Educator from the USA has explained the process of developing faith by saying that we move through different styles of faith. Each have some characteristics that shape the way questions are asked and how people respond. Throughout our lives we may move back and forth among these different styles of faith and the young person you are in relationship with will experience this also.

Some young people will have what is sometimes called a **belonging** faith. Their experience of God's love and of the Christian faith comes through their relationship with others and this in turn helps them to become more aware of the presence of God in the world. The young people will be looking for a mentor who will help them feel as though they belong to a welcoming community of faith. This will help to show them where God is present in their lives and the world.

Many young people will have a **searching** faith. In this style of faith, the beliefs and values of faith are questioned and doubted. This is an important stage

of faith and should not be discouraged. People who give up questioning, give up faith. Doubting the things that have always been believed is a natural part of a young person's search for mature faith. The role of the mentor is particularly important here, as young people need support to face what can be some difficult questions. In almost all cases that support is much more helpful to a young person than being told answers. It's helpful to remember that sharing stories is nearly always more valuable than theological discussions.

For other young people there will come a time when faith just seems to have fallen into place. This may be a gradual process where that 'magic moment' can't be identified or it may be like a bolt of lightning. The young person makes a conscious decision to personally follow Christ and to live the Christian faith in their lives. As a mentor you can encourage the young person in their life of discipleship.

