

# Seeking the Faith Quotient

## Forgive

The teachers of the law, in the Bible story referenced by the Matthew verse, tried their best to trick Jesus into saying something that would turn the crowd against Him. Instead, Jesus summed up the ultimate goal of the Law; to teach us to love God and to love those around us. This is the ultimate goal of developing a Faith Quotient, also. We have emotional health and the freedom to use the gifts with which God has blessed us when we are learning to love God and love others.

The first four Faith quotient topics: love, repentance, humility and trust are how we are learning to love God in response to His agape love for us. The next four topics: forgiveness, hope, obedience and discernment are skills that help us learn to love each other. In the first four we begin to understand who we are and how God loves us. In the next four we learn to develop strong relationships with one another.

The most important thing we teach regarding forgiveness is that we are able to forgive because God first forgives us. This reminds the children that it is not about us - it is about God. This is the first step to developing empathy for others and to learn to identify the feelings that surround forgiveness.

The emotional intelligence that is developed in the process of learning to forgive is the building of relationships. Children are hard-wired to learn by observing, trying adjusting and trying again. We can easily see this in how young children develop language but it remains a strong method for learning social skills all throughout childhood. Your students watch each other and decide if they want to take the risk of attempting a relationship. Once the relationship begins the two of them work to build it up. When a disagreement happens or one child is wronged, the wall tumbles down. If a child cannot forgive, he/she cannot build relationships with anyone who cannot be completely controlled. Being able to forgive is an essential skill.

Forgiveness is also about empathy. When a child can move away from being ego-centric (seeing everything from only his/her own point of view) then that child can begin to understand a situation from another person's point of view. A child who cannot empathize will not be able to forgive. For him or her, it is "always about me." Empathy allows a child to see that he has been forgiven by God, so it is possible for him to forgive someone else.

Forgiveness is also about recognizing and using feelings appropriately. If children cannot use their feelings appropriately, their feelings will control them. Some children have very quick and boisterous tempers; some children will withdraw when they are hurt and will manipulate people into feeling sorry for them. These students have not learned to use feelings appropriately and they have not learned to forgive. When we teach the faith and children learn how God is slow to anger and quick to forgive, this gives them a model for their own behavior. It is an unattainable goal, for certain, but even the process of achieving that goal helps to develop emotional health.

*Jesus replied:  
"Love the Lord  
your God with all  
your heart and with  
all your soul and with  
all your mind. This is  
the first and great-  
est commandment.  
And the second is  
like it: Love your  
neighbor as your-  
self."*

*Matthew 22: 37-39*

*Be kind and  
compassionate to  
one another,  
forgiving each  
other, just as in  
Christ God for-  
gave you.  
Ephesians 4:32*

It is easy to see how the ability to forgive can affect learning and future success. Without the ability to forgive, one cannot build trust relationships. Without trust relationships, one cannot learn from others or participate well in learning that involved others. As human beings we do not learn well on our own in a cave on a deserted island somewhere. Whether we are in a classroom, on a faculty, part of an ad hoc committee or networking on computers we need to be able to work with other people.

God knew we would have trouble with this. He models forgiveness so we can in turn forgive others. In forgiving we develop understanding that helps us to live and work with each other; even if it means we will only have to forgive, again, another day.

## Group Discussion

1. How do the Faith Quotient skills of love, repentance, humility and trust relate to loving God with all our hearts, soul and minds?
2. How do forgiveness, hope obedience and discernment relate to loving our neighbors as ourselves?
3. Think of examples of situations where children are controlled by their emotions.
4. Was the inability to forgive partly responsible for the lack of control? Why or why not?
5. What happens to a relationship when there is no forgiveness? What happens to the social skill development of a child who cannot forgive?
6. What has worked for you in the past to encourage your students to forgive?
7. What if students say "I forgive you" but don't mean it? Is there value in this?

# Putting it into practice

## Teachers

When children have issues with each other they experience a range of feelings. Understanding what they are feeling and what the other child is feeling is a key to being able to forgive and build relationships. When children come to the teacher to tattle they should not tell the teacher, they should tell each other.

Place the children facing each other and give them each a chance to use the phrase; "I don't like it when \_\_\_\_\_." This way they will tell each other what they don't like and will learn what emotions their words and actions cause in each other. As the arbiter of the argument you will also see the whole event peel back. You can then name the feelings for the children as you help them work things out. Here is a typical example:

Student 1: I don't like it when you hit me.

Student 2: Well, I don't like it when you tell me I can't play the game with you.

Student 1: Well, I don't like it when you boss me around.

Teacher to Student 2: I think you feel mad when you can't play in a game.

Teacher to Student 1: I think you feel frustrated when your friend tries to change the game.

Most students can solve the issue with minimal teacher assistance. Of course, sometimes there are consequences for behaviors that occur beyond this exchange.

This works well for children ages 4-12. For younger children you might only get them to look at each other and say "stop hitting." But, that is a good beginning. As the teacher you will need to identify the feelings for them and you are encouraged to use feeling words to help the children to grow in their vocabulary.

Older students will benefit from this technique but are able to do it at a much more mature level. They are capable of seeing things from the perspective of the perpetrator and the victim, with some assistance. It is, however, very important to help them identify the true feelings behind the issue. Boys often show anger when they are sad and girls often show sadness when they are angry.

Compare this technique to what you are already using to arbitrate disputes among your students. Make some adjustments, as needed and record your observations of how this works with your students on the back of this page.

# Putting it into practice

## Administrators

Working with students to help them resolve conflict:

When students are sent to the office because of an argument it can be a challenge for you to determine what actually happened. When children relate a story to an adult they naturally put a self-centered spin on things that can get in the way of reality. Instead of asking them to tell you the story of what happened, ask them to talk with each other:

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Student 1: I don't like it when you hit me.

Student 2: Well, I don't like it when you tell me I can't play the game with you.

Student 1: Well, I don't like it when you boss me around.

Adult to Student 2: I think you feel mad when you can't play in a game.

Adult to Student 1: I think you feel frustrated when your friend tries to change the game.

Most students can solve the issue with minimal assistance. Repentance and forgiveness are usually indicated for both children and of course, there are often consequences for unacceptable behaviors that need to occur after the exchange.

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## Assessing learning with follow-up discussion

These questions can be used for a follow-up discussion after teachers have completed classroom observations:

1. Share examples of your use of the "I don't like it when technique" Share ways that you adjusted the technique to make it appropriate for your class.
2. Is it possible to be too forgiving? Can students put themselves in the position of being taken advantage of over and over again by being too forgiving?
3. How can we help children to forgive and forget but yet stay wise to the ways of the world?