Teaching Children About Confession

But if we confess our sins to God, He can always be trusted to forgive us our sins and take our sins away. 1 John 1:9 (CEV)

Key Points About Confession

- We need to understand how God is hurt by the things we do that hurt ourselves and others.
- We also need to see what we have done through God’s eyes, so that we can be truly sorry when we confess.
- Confession helps us to recognize our need to depend on God to help us grow in our spiritual development.
- Confession needs to make a difference to the way we will choose to act in the future.
- We are changed when we say how truly sorry we are for what we have done.
- Confession needs to be freely offered, not forced.
- Confessions need to be made for the right reasons – loving God, others and ourselves, rather than out of fear of punishment.
- We need to know that God can forgive any sin, and He longs to set us free from our sins.

Teaching about confession needs to be balanced by teaching about the grace and love of God, who freely forgives us each time we confess to Him.

Thinking about confession

Discuss one or two of the following questions with a partner.

- How did you learn the importance of confessing your sins in prayer?

- What challenges did you face when you were a child?
• What challenges do you face now?

• Did you ever have to unlearn anything about the process of repentance and confession?

• Why is it important for children to learn about confession?

• What would you like to have been taught about confession when you were a child that would have helped you as a teenager and adult?

Helping children to understand confession

Our natural inclination is to deny our sinfulness and cover up. How can we help children to acknowledge and confess their sins, and to understand and experience the benefits of confession in their own lives?

We need to be good role models ourselves:
• able to be vulnerable about our own mistakes
• able to admit our own sinfulness
• able to model asking for forgiveness
• able to talk about the positive effects of confession in our own lives

How can we teach children about confession so that this is something the children want to do? Write your ideas below.
Prayer activities that teach about confession

1. **Rice paper confessions**  
   Need: edible rice paper and pens, bowl of warm water, wooden spoon for stirring, small white cards, marker pens, selection of encouraging Bible verses  
   • Take a sheet of rice paper.  
   • Using the edible ink pens, write or draw something on the paper that reminds you of the thing that you have done wrong.  
   • Think about how what you did hurt God, someone else, and yourself.  
   • Place the paper in the bowl of warm water and let it sink to the bottom. Stir the water a few times, and, as you do so, pray, telling God how sorry you are for what you did and asking His forgiveness.  
   • God is very happy to forgive you! It puts a big smile on His face! Imagine Him smiling at you and giving you a big hug and telling you that your sins have been forgiven and they have all disappeared completely!  
   • Thank Him for forgiving you! Doesn’t it feel good to know you don’t have to worry about that sin anymore?  
   • Now think what you would like to do differently next time you face a similar temptation.  
   • Take a small white card and draw or write down what you would like to do differently next time.  
   • On the back of the card write one of the Bible verses that will encourage you to do what is right.  
   • Remember that God is willing to forgive you whenever you ask Him to.

2. **Salty prayer**  
   Needs: dish of free-running salt, sand, or small grains  
   • Use your finger to write a word or draw a symbol in the salt that represents something you want to ask God to forgive.  
   • As you pray for forgiveness, tilt and swirl the dish so that the word or symbol disappears.  
   • Remember that your sin cannot be found again, just as the shape you drew in the salt cannot be found again.

3. **Balloon confessions**  
   Needs: A variety of inflated balloons, a selection of permanent acetate (OHP) pens.  
   • Choose a balloon.  
   • As you hold it, think about a few things you would like to ask God to forgive.  
   • Write a few words, or draw a picture or shape that symbolizes the different things you want to ask God to forgive.
• Bring your balloon back to the group, and hold it as you stand in a circle.
• Stand together and silently ask God for forgiveness.
• When everyone has finished asking God for forgiveness, celebrate God’s forgiveness by cheering together and popping all the balloons.
• Just as you cannot find the air that has come out of the balloons, your sins also disappear completely when God forgives you.

4. Bubble prayer

Needs: individual bubble pots with wands

• Think for a while about the things for which you need to ask God’s forgiveness.
• When you are ready, take the bubble pot.
• Pray quietly and tell God that you are giving all your sins to Him.
• After you have prayed, blow a stream of bubbles.
• The bubbles represent you letting go of your sins.
• Just as the bubbles pop and disappear forever, so God takes care of your sins and makes them disappear without a trace.
• How far has the Lord taken our sins from us? Farther than the distance from east to west! Psalm 103:12 CEV.

5. Washed away prayer

Needs: small squares of white cotton fabric, special pens from sewing supply stores with water-soluble ink, bowl of water

• Take a square of white cotton fabric.
• Write a few words or symbols on the fabric with the water-soluble pen. Use pictures or words that represent the things you want to say you are sorry for.
• Place the fabric square in the bowl of water.
• Pray a prayer for forgiveness and then remove the piece of fabric from the water. The fabric should be all white again.
• Praise God for washing our stained lives and making them whiter than snow!
• (Alternatively – if you do this activity outside, invite the children to choose a dirty stone, and to wash it clean as a symbol of the way in which God forgives our sins.)
6. Wipe-clean confessions
Needs: clear acetate cut into people shapes (use a shape-cutting system if available, punch a small hole in the head and add a loop of coloured thread so the shape can be hung in a window), water-erasable acetate pens, permanent acetate pens, bowl of water and sheets of paper towel, or a packet of ‘wet-wipes’.
• Take one of the clear plastic ‘people’ shapes.
• Use one of the water-erasable pens (with a grey shell) and write words, or draw shapes that illustrate some things you have done that you want to ask God to forgive.
• As you pray for forgiveness, dip your plastic person in the bowl of water, and wipe the person clean with a piece of paper towel, or a wet-wipe.
• Dry the plastic person and use the permanent pen (with a black shell) to write ‘God forgives me!’ on the shape.
• Take the plastic person home and hang it somewhere to remind you that God can make us clean again when we ask for forgiveness.

7. Patchwork cross
Needs: A flat, thick board cross shape, or a cross shape cut from polypropylene sheeting, glue sticks, pencils, scissors, a memo-block of different coloured square paper sheets, clear adhesive film – sufficient to cover the entire cross.
• Take a few squares of coloured paper. Cut the paper into different shapes, if you wish.
• Write a few words, or draw a picture, on one side of a paper sheet, to illustrate a sin that you have committed.
• Take your papers to the cross and spread glue on the written or drawn side of the paper.
• Stick the papers, words or pictures down, onto the cross shape.
• As different people stick their papers on the cross, it will become covered with a colourful patchwork.
• When everyone has stuck their pieces of paper on the cross, hold hands around the cross and pray for forgiveness.
• Cover the cross-shape with the clear adhesive film to protect the pattern that has been created and to prevent people from lifting the papers to see what others have written.
• Keep the cross as a special decoration in the room where you meet or worship.
• Remember that God has covered us with His beautiful blanket of grace and love, so that our sins can never be seen.
8. White heart
Needs: a cross shape; an appropriately sized polystyrene, Styrofoam, papier-mâché or wooden heart shape - painted black; a stack of white typing paper; PVA glue, or other glue suitable for using on your chosen heart.
• Invite people to tear, cut, or fold white paper to represent something they want to ask forgiveness for.
• Invite them to bring their papers and leave them at the foot of a wooden cross, as they pray for forgiveness.
• After all the papers have been collected, work as a group and tear the paper into small pieces.
• Use PVA adhesive to stick the small pieces of torn paper onto a Styrofoam, polystyrene or wooden heart shape that has been painted black, until the heart is covered, and is white again.
• Pray together, thanking God for lovingly forgiving our sins and making our hearts as white as snow again.

9. Confessing different things
Needs: Something to represent God – such as a Bible, or a picture; a selection of wooden children’s ‘doll house’ dolls, representing people of different nationalities; a mirror; globe; signs saying ‘Saying sorry for hurting God’, ‘Saying sorry for hurting other people’, ‘Saying sorry for hurting the world’, ‘Saying sorry for hurting myself.’
• Set the four different sets of items on four different tables. (If you have a large group, place several of the same items on each table.) Place the appropriate signs on each table.
• Talk together with the children about ways in which we can hurt God, others, ourselves and the world, so that they can understand what each of the hurts mean, and understand what they might need to say sorry for.
• Invite the children to move from table to table, holding and touching the objects as they say silent prayers, confessing the ways in which they have caused hurts, and asking God for forgiveness for the hurts they have caused.

10. Praydough confessions
Needs: a bucket of play-dough or white ‘Model Magic’ (Crayola).
• Take a ball of play dough (praydough).
• Think about something you have done in the past week that you realize was wrong and recognize that you need God’s forgiveness for that wrong in your life.
• Shape the ball of dough into something that represents the thing that you have done wrong.
• Hold the shape in your hand and pray, telling God what you have done wrong, saying you are sorry, and asking for His forgiveness.
• As you pray for forgiveness, squeeze the shape you have made between your hands, and form it into a heart, to remind you of God’s love for you, a love that longs to forgive you and wants to help you feel better again.
• Bake the heart or let the heart dry out (according to the instructions on the packet) and keep it safe to remind you how much God loves you and will always forgive your sins.

11. Forgiveness-colour book
Needs: squares of card – white, red and gold; black marker pens; hole punch; hinged rings, or ribbons.
• Stack the card squares in a sequence: white, white, red, white and gold. Punch two holes on one side of the stack so that a small book can be created by passing a ring through each hole, or by tying a loop of ribbon through each set of holes.
• Give each child one of the books.
• Help them write ‘My Forgiveness Book’ on the white front cover.
• On the next white page use the black marker pens to make black spots, or to write some of the things that the children may have done wrong.
• On the red page write ‘Jesus loves me and died for my sins.’
• On the next white page write ‘Jesus forgives my sins and makes me clean again.’
• On the gold page write ‘I am a prince(ss) in God’s kingdom.’
• Talk through the book with each child individually to check that they understand the simple process of forgiveness.

What ideas do you have for helping children learn about confession and forgiveness?

Write them below or on the back of this page:

Check out more ideas in Karen’s book:
‘100 Creative Prayer Ideas for Kids (and grown-ups too!)’