

Creating Real Connections

For Children with Jesus, Each Other, and You

A Guide for Children's Sabbath School Leaders

Part 1: Teach the Why — Reinforcing the Big Picture

Children need more than individual Bible stories. They need to understand the larger story of the Great Controversy — why sin exists, who God is, and what He is doing about it. Build this framework early and revisit it every single Sabbath.

1A. The Annual Story Arc

Every year, anchor your teaching with these foundational stories:

- Start of Year — The War in Heaven & Creation: Help children understand why sin exists in our world.
- Throughout the Year — The Cross: How did Jesus dying repair our connection with God?
- End of Year — The Second Coming: How will God ultimately defeat sin, death, and hurt?

 **Keep it Age-Appropriate:** Don't frighten children. Always keep the focus on how God is going to overcome all evil and bring us to heaven. Frame the story around hope, not fear.

1B. The Heart of the Great Controversy

Every lesson ultimately comes back to one central question. Help children understand the two perspectives:

God's Side

Lucifer's Lie

Jesus is loving, good, and trustworthy. He wants what is best for everyone.	Jesus is controlling, bossy, power-hungry, and only cares about Himself.
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1C. How to Teach Any Bible Story

Whether the story is about David, Elijah, or Mary — let these three questions guide every story you tell:

- Talk about how the characters feel
- Talk about the choices the characters made — right and wrong
- Talk about similar challenges kids face today

1D. Revisit the Big Picture Every Week

At the end of every class, bring children back to the central questions:

- Whose team do you want to be on, who are you going to believe — God or Lucifer?
- What do you believe about Jesus and God's character?
- What evidence in today's lesson shows us who God really is?

Giving Children the Opportunity to Choose

- Give children a regular opportunity to make a choice to follow Jesus (weekly or daily).
- Never force a child to participate or make a choice — only offer the opportunity.
- Never call attention to any child's choice publicly.

Example: *At the end of class, say: "Raise your hand if you want to be on Jesus' team this week! I know I do!" The teacher raises their hand and allows children to join in, then moves on naturally.*

Creating Long-Term Memory Through Connections

Make connections from one lesson to the next. Regularly review past stories to build lasting understanding.

- Story of Joseph — Review the generational challenges: Abraham & Sarah, Isaac & Rebecca, Jacob, Leah & Rachel — how favoritism caused deep hurt across generations.
- Real-life connection — Discuss how everyone wants to be chosen as a favorite. When they are left out, it genuinely hurts.

Part 2: Circle Time — Building a Safe, Sharing Community

Every Sabbath, spend 10–15 minutes in a sharing circle. This is a sacred time for children to feel seen, heard, and connected — to each other, to you, and to God.

2A. Set Expectations Every Week

Before the circle begins, always restate the expectations. Consistency creates safety.

- Never share something unkind about another person or say someone's name to embarrass them.
- No one is ever forced to share — participation is always optional.
- Raise your hand to speak or wait until you are holding the talking object.
- If you agree with what someone shares, you can use a quiet "Me Too" hand signal.
- All comments must be loving and kind.

2B. What Children Can Share

Good Things from the Week

Invite children to share positive things that happened — answered prayers, fun moments, kindness they received or gave.

Prayer Requests

Allow children to lift up concerns for themselves, their families, or friends. Model how to pray together.

Lesson Connection Questions

Use a question that bridges real life to the Bible story you're about to teach. This draws children in with curiosity before the lesson begins.

Example: *"Have you ever lost something you borrowed from a friend?" Allow children to share. Then say: "Today we are going to learn about Elisha, who also lost something that was borrowed."*

2C. Building an Emotions Vocabulary

Help children name and understand their feelings. When they can identify emotions, they grow in empathy, self-awareness, and can develop skills to manage their emotions.

“Talking about our feelings — no matter how difficult, scary, or upsetting — makes them less overwhelming.” — Mr. Rogers

Emotion	Definition	Lesson Connection
Envy	Wanting something someone else has.	Joseph’s brothers wanted his colorful coat.
Jealousy	Fear of losing something you already have.	Different from envy — ask: “What might I be afraid of losing?”

Example: *“Have you ever felt envy — when you really wanted something someone else had? Today we are going to learn about Joseph’s brothers, who felt envy over his beautiful colorful coat.”*

Part 3: The Power of Your Personal Story

One of the most powerful tools you have as a Sabbath School leader is your own life. When you share authentically — your victories and your struggles — you show children that faith is not a performance. It is a real, daily relationship with Jesus.

3A. Why Your Story Matters

Children are watching you more than you realize. When you only present a polished, perfect version of yourself, you can accidentally teach them that following Jesus means having it all together. But when you share honestly (keeping it age-appropriate), you give them something far more valuable: a living example of grace.

- Your stories make the Bible come alive — they show that the same God who worked in Scripture is working in your life right now.
- Children feel less alone when they know their teacher has faced hard things too.
- Authentic sharing builds trust — and trust opens hearts.
- It models what it looks like to be on God’s team in the real world, not just in Bible times.

3B. Sharing Times You Have Succeeded

When you share a win — a moment where you chose God's way and it made a difference — you give children a vision for what following Jesus can look like in everyday life.

- Share moments where you chose to forgive someone, even when it was hard.
- Talk about a time you trusted God and saw Him come through.
- Describe a moment when choosing kindness changed a situation.
- Share how prayer helped you through something difficult.

Example: *"This week, someone said something that really hurt my feelings. I really wanted to say something back. But I remembered what we talked about last week — being on God's team — and I chose to pray instead. And you know what? I felt God help me let it go."*

3C. Sharing Times You Have Struggled

This is where your story becomes most powerful — and most sacred. Sharing your struggles with appropriate vulnerability shows children that Jesus is for imperfect people, and that grace is real.

 **Age-Appropriate Vulnerability:** You do not need to share everything. Choose struggles that are relatable to children's lives and that point toward God's faithfulness — not stories that are too heavy, too adult, or that could undermine your role as a safe leader.

- Share times you made a wrong choice and what you learned.
- Talk about when you felt left out, afraid, or unsure — and how you brought it to God.
- Be honest about ongoing areas of growth: "I still struggle with patience. Jesus is helping me."
- Never present your past struggles as fully resolved if they are not — children can sense when something is not genuine.

Example: *"I have to be honest with you — I did not handle something well this week. I got frustrated and said something unkind. I felt bad about it, and I asked God to forgive me and help me do better. That's what I love about being on Jesus' team — you can always start over."*

3D. Guidelines for Sharing Well

Sharing personal stories is a gift to your students — handle it with care.

- Always point your story back to Jesus and His character — the goal is never to make the story about you.
- Keep stories brief and on-topic — one well-chosen story is more powerful than several.
- Protect other people's privacy — never share stories that involve or identify others without their permission.
- Be mindful of the weight of your role — children look up to you; share in ways that strengthen their faith, not create anxiety.
- Use your story to open a question, not close one — invite children to reflect on their own experiences.

Stories That Build Connection	Stories to Save for Another Setting
Relatable to kids' daily lives	Involve heavy adult topics or trauma
Point toward God's character	Identify or embarrass someone else
End with hope or a lesson learned	Leave children without resolution
Invite reflection and conversation	Make you the hero instead of God

Remember: You Are the Connection

Children may not remember every Bible story — but they will remember how they felt in your classroom. When they feel safe, seen, and loved, you are showing them who God is.

Part 4: Connecting with Families

Your classroom does not end at the door. When you build a genuine bridge with families, the seeds planted on Sabbath take root all week long. Parents are your greatest partners. Invite them in.

4A. Sending Home Weekly Lesson Summaries

After each Sabbath, send parents a brief summary — a short note, a text message, or a simple handout — that helps them continue the conversation at home. You do not need to recap every detail. Just give families enough to connect learning to life.

What to Include in a Summary

- The main theme or big idea from today's lesson
- The Bible story or passage you explored
- One or two emotions or vocabulary words the children discussed
- How the lesson connects to the Great Controversy big picture
- Two or three conversation questions for the week (see 4B below)



Keep It Short: Three to five sentences is enough. Parents are busy. A brief, warm message they will actually read is far more valuable than a long one they set aside.

Example: *"This week we learned about Joseph and his brothers. We talked about a feeling called envy — wanting something someone else has — and how it led to some big choices that hurt the whole family. We talked about how God never stopped loving Joseph, even in hard times. Here are a couple of questions to explore with your child this week ..."*

4B. Conversation Starters for Families

The questions below are designed to help parents connect Sabbath School learning to their child's real life. Share two or three each week that match your lesson theme. Encourage parents to ask with genuine curiosity — not as a quiz, but as a conversation.

Questions That Explore Feelings

- Have you ever felt left out or like someone else was the favorite? What was that like?
- What is something that made you feel really happy this week? Really worried? Really proud?
- When something feels really big and scary, where do you go with those feelings?

Questions That Explore God's Character

- What did you learn today that tells you something about what God is like?
- Do you think God understands when things feel unfair? Why or why not?
- If you could ask God one question right now, what would it be?

Questions That Connect Learning to Life

- If you were one of the characters in today's story, what would you have done? What would have been hard?
- Has something like that ever happened to you? What did you do?
- What is one way you want to be on God's team this week?

Topic-Specific Example: The Five Love Languages

If your class is exploring the idea that people feel loved in different ways, send home this question for families:

Example: *"Ask your child: 'What makes you feel especially loved?' Then share some ideas together — getting a gift, hearing someone say something kind about you, spending time with someone you love, a hug or high five or snuggle on the couch, or someone doing something helpful for you. Which ones feel most special to them? Which ones feel most special to you? You might be surprised what you learn about each other!"*

 **Tip for Parents:** There are no right or wrong answers. The goal is simply to understand your child a little better and let them know they are seen and known. Sharing your own answer creates space for them to share theirs.

4C. Celebrating What You See in Each Child

One of the most powerful things you can do is regularly share specific, genuine observations about a child's strengths, interests, and responses — directly with their parent. This does two things: it tells parents you truly see their child, and it builds the trust you will need if a harder conversation ever becomes necessary.

Be Specific and Sincere

General praise sounds polite but does not land the way specific observations do. Instead of "He was so good today," try:

- "I noticed that Caleb was the first one to make room for the new child in our circle. That kind of quiet leadership is a real gift."
- "Emma has such a tender heart — when we talked about Joseph feeling alone, she got very quiet and thoughtful. I think she feels things deeply."
- "Your son asks the most thoughtful questions. This week he wanted to know if God was sad when Joseph's brothers were mean to him. That kind of curiosity is going to take him far."

Make It a Habit, Not an Event

Aim to share a genuine positive observation with each family at least once a month. A brief text or a few words at pickup is enough. You do not need to schedule a meeting — just make it part of how you connect.

 **Remember:** When a parent hears how much you love and notice their child, they lean in. That relationship becomes the foundation for everything — including the harder conversations.

4D. Approaching Parents with a Concern

There will be times when you notice something that requires a conversation with a parent — a repeated behavior, a concern about a child's wellbeing, or a challenge in the classroom. How you approach that conversation matters enormously. Done well, it deepens trust. Done poorly, it damages it.

****Sabbath school teachers should largely be sharing positive things about children with families. If there is a sensitive or ongoing concern you feel needs to be addressed, it is best to talk with your pastor before approaching the family for added wisdom on the best way to address the challenge and to make sure proper protocols are followed.***

Before You Speak to a Parent

Ask yourself these questions first:

- Have I connected with this child and built a real relationship with them?
- Am I approaching this with curiosity about the child, or with frustration about a behavior?
- Do I have a specific observation — not a label — to share?
- Do I have at least one suggested plan or next step to offer?
- Is my heart genuinely for this child?

 **The Golden Rule:** Never come to a parent with a problem you do not have a suggested solution for. A concern without a plan can feel like an accusation. A concern with a plan feels like partnership.

How to Frame the Conversation

Follow this simple framework to keep the conversation curious, kind, and productive:

Step	What It Looks Like
1. Start with connection	Begin by sharing something genuine and positive about the child. Let the parent feel your care before anything else.
2. Share an observation — not a label	Describe exactly what you have seen, in specific and neutral terms. Avoid words like “problematic,” “disruptive,” or “difficult.”
3. Approach with curiosity	Ask the parent for their perspective. They know their child better than anyone. Their insight may completely change your understanding.
4. Present a plan together	Share one or two ideas for how you can support the child, and invite the parent to add their own. Make it a collaboration, not a report.
5. Follow up with something positive	Within the next month, reach out to share a specific positive observation or moment of growth. Always close the loop.

Observations vs. Labels

The language you use shapes how a parent hears you. Observations invite partnership; labels create defensiveness.

Say This (Observation)	Not This (Label)
"I've noticed that when we transition between activities, Marcus sometimes has a hard time settling back in."	"Marcus is really disruptive."
"Sophia seems to need a lot of reassurance when she tries something new. I've been thinking about how I can build in more encouragement for her."	"Sophia is very clingy and insecure."
"I've seen that when another child gets attention, there are sometimes big feelings that come up for him."	"He is jealous all the time."

Example: *"I wanted to catch you for just a moment because I've been thinking about Lily. She has the most beautiful imagination — the way she engages with stories is really special. I've also noticed that during sharing time she sometimes pulls back, especially when the group is louder. I was wondering — is that something you see at home too? I have a couple of ideas I'd love to try, and I'd love to hear your thoughts as well."*

Following Up

A follow-up is not optional — it is part of the promise you make when you open a hard conversation. Parents need to know you are still paying attention and that things are moving in a positive direction.

- Within the next month, share a specific moment of growth or a positive observation with the parent.
- You do not need to schedule a formal meeting — a brief text, a note, or a few words at pickup is enough.
- If the situation has not improved, revisit the plan together with fresh curiosity and new ideas.

 **Partnership Principle:** Parents are not the problem to be managed. They are your co-laborers. When they trust that you love their child, they will walk alongside you through anything.

You Are Building More Than a Lesson — You Are Building a Family

When children feel connected to you, and parents feel seen and partnered with, the classroom becomes a community. That community is a picture of the kingdom of God.