



Never Too Early

How Awana Helps
Parents Teach
Preschoolers
Respect for God

by Roger Massey



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The sentence came out of nowhere and left her parents amazed — and laughing.



The family of four was heading home after Sunday morning church.

Mom and Dad were in the front seat and the two daughters were in back, the younger one — not yet 2 — sitting quietly in her car seat. The older daughter, who had recently turned 8, was complaining about how tired she was. This went on for several minutes, a play-by-play of how her exhaustion had affected everything she'd done that morning.

Her sister had a normal vocabulary for someone her age. She could generally get her meaning across and even put words together in phrases like "cookie please," or "no bath." But she'd never come close to arranging a complete sentence.

That's why it was so surprising when she looked at her sister and said, "So just go to bed, nitwit."

Her parents suddenly discovered several things about their younger child.

1. She could follow a conversation even when she wasn't a part of it.
2. She knew her sister was whining.
3. She understood comedic timing.
4. She grasped the connection between being tired and going to bed.
5. She knew how to string words together into a sentence.
6. She knew how to use the word *nitwit*, which was especially shocking since it was NOT a word generally used around the house.

Every Waking Moment

Humans are born in an *altricial* state — that means that they are completely unable to care for themselves. Perhaps this can best be understood by considering the opposite condition. Some types of birds are *super-precocial*. That means that their young break out of the egg fully-feathered, capable of feeding themselves and, in a few species, able to fly.

But while humans are helpless at birth, within a few short years they learn a tremendous amount of information — how to walk, how to communicate, how to function socially, how to care for themselves. Experts don't all agree on how humans learn, but most of them do agree that our capacity to learn is greatest during the first few years of our lives.

Your young child is capable of learning and is, in fact, spending every waking moment learning. Doesn't it make sense to use that time to teach him or her the most important thing there is to know? Doesn't it make sense to teach your child a view of the world grounded in respect for God?

There have been several moments where it became obvious that the concepts we were teaching our daughter in Puggles were sticking in her memory. She can quote the verses from each precept with little-to-no prompting (depending mostly, I think, on what mood she is in). And she can also recall the basics of what God created on what days; how God loves us when and where, etc. It's pretty amazing to me the recall power of a toddler's mind, and I'm grateful that Puggles has proven to be a tool to help us put biblical concepts and verses in her memory.

— Robyn



What's a Worldview?

A worldview is the system of beliefs on which a person makes decisions in life. It is the basis for one's associations, values and goals. Perhaps the easiest way to understand the concept of "worldview" is to see it as the filter through which you answer these questions:

- Where did I come from?
- Why am I here?
- Where am I going?
- Do I live according to absolutes?
- What can I know, and how do I discover knowledge?
- How do I explain human nature?
- What is right, and what is wrong?
- What is important in my life?

Everybody has a worldview. Some people develop their worldview as a result of training and deliberate thought. Others get theirs by default, absorbing the prejudices and beliefs of those around them and the culture in general. And yes, even our young children have a worldview. It can be easily summarized in the phrase "Me first!"

Built-in Sin

The hard truth is that our children are born sinners and that selfishness is their default mode. (And if you think your child is too young to be a sinner, you haven't been paying very close attention.) The apostle Paul makes this clear: *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom*

of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath (Ephesians 2:1-3).

Paul says, in verse 3, that we are objects of wrath by nature. Sin comes built-in for every person. And beyond our children's built-in sin natures, the "world" around them actively passes on its decidedly anti-God view via media, schooling and advertising. It doesn't take long for these messages to get solidified in their minds. If your child absorbs enough of this secular worldview, he or she will probably answer the questions something like this:

- **Where did I come from?** — I'm part of a process of evolution.
- **Why am I here?** — Mostly to have fun and search for happiness.
- **Where am I going?** — Does it matter? We'll all get to heaven if we're basically good, no matter what we believe.
- **Do I live according to absolutes?** — No, unless I feel that my personal space or rights have been trampled on.
- **What can I know, and how do I discover knowledge?** — I know everything I need to know, and most of it I learned from the Internet.
- **How do I explain human nature?** — There are some bad people in the world, but I'm not one of them.
- **What is right, and what is wrong?** — Anything goes as long as it's not hurting anybody. Murder is wrong. And so is trying to tell somebody else what to believe.



- **What is important in my life?** — My own self-esteem and happiness.

Wow. Those answers aren't very pretty, are they? Witness the sin nature in action!

So if sin (a state of active rebellion against God) is our default setting, this means that each of us must make a decision, at some point in our lives, to turn from that default setting and trust Jesus Christ for salvation.

And a person will be much more likely to trust Christ if he or she is trained in a biblical worldview.

Worldview 2.0

A biblical worldview, grounded in respect for God, will look a lot like this:

- **Where did I come from?** — God created me.
- **Why am I here?** — To glorify God in every aspect of my life.
- **Where am I going?** — If I've trusted Jesus Christ as my Savior, I'm going to heaven. If I haven't, I'm going to hell.
- **Do I live according to absolutes?** — Yes, based on my knowledge of God as revealed in the Bible.
- **What can I know, and how do I discover knowledge?** — God gave me a mind and expects me to think. He has no problem with exploration and scientific discovery, but greater than any knowledge I arrive at on my own is faith that God and His Word are without error. Anything that contradicts the Bible is wrong.
- **How do I explain human nature?** — God created man innocent and in fellowship with Him. Man's

choice of sin separated him (me) from God and left me in a position of unworthiness, unable to save myself from the punishment of death I deserve.

- **What is right, and what is wrong?** — Morals and values are based on God's character. God's will with regard to right and wrong is expressed in His Word.
- **What is important in my life?** — To live according to God's will, which includes growing in knowledge of His Word, ministering for Him, loving my family, serving others, praising God and avoiding sin.

Well, those answers are certainly better than the other ones, but does this stuff really work? Can you really raise a child in a certain way and guarantee that he or she will trust Christ as Savior? Unfortunately, no. Children grow up to be adults and adults are free to make their own choices. But the Lord is faithful and the Holy Spirit will work in your child's life. The Bible makes it very clear that parents are the most important human channel of that working of the Spirit. Remember what the apostle Paul wrote to Timothy? *I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also (2 Timothy 1:5).*

There is one thing that can be guaranteed. Your children will grow up with a worldview.

Which one will it be? And what's your plan for teaching it?

A 9-year-old girl went to Sunday school one day. Her parents had been going to that church her whole life and trusted the teaching in the children's department. But on this particular day, her teacher was sick and another woman, a young Christian who had recently begun attending that church, was asked to fill in.

In the course of the lesson, the subject of eternal security came up. The teacher told the class that they had to be good or they wouldn't be saved anymore. The 9-year-old girl spoke up. "My dad says that once we're saved, we're saved forever."

The teacher gently but firmly explained that her father was wrong.

But the 9-year-old girl had been trained at home. She responded immediately, "But the Bible says ..." And she quoted Romans 8:38-39: *For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

When the girl got home and told her parents about it, she didn't phrase it as a question. She KNEW she was saved. She had been taught a biblical worldview.



I love using Puggles at Home with my son. He loves it too. As soon as I start singing the Puggles song he starts giggling and running around. But he always sits down and folds his hands by the end of the song. The song works!

I love having set lessons. It makes it effortless to sit down and study the Bible with a 2-year-old. Without it, I wouldn't know where to start. And, I can talk about the things we learned throughout the day. Whenever my son points out a pretty flower, I can ask him, "Who made that?" He knows that God made the flower, and we can thank God for it.

I know that he is gaining a sense of God because I hear it in how he talks. His ears tweek to listen when he hears about God and Jesus as I talk with my husband or friends or listen to the radio.

Even at the age of 2, praying is becoming natural to him. He's not shy about praying in front of other people. It's normal and easy for him.

Puggles at Home even helps me. It has reminded me of the simplest truths about God, which help me to think about Him throughout my day. Since I'm teaching my son that God made everything and God loves me, that truth is going through my head all the time as I appreciate things in my life.

— Betsy

Building a Biblical Worldview

Most young children enjoy building with blocks. Not only does this activity encourage development, but it's a great creative outlet. Yet we've all witnessed their frustration as structures they've built come tumbling down. (And chuckled — or cringed — at the worldview reaction they usually have in that moment ... built-in sin strikes again!)

What these young builders don't fully understand yet is that their problems stem from an inadequate foundation. The proper building blocks, carefully put into place, establish the solid footing for their future plans.

The Awana® ministry is designed to build a foundation of faith in children and youth. Through research and observation of thousands of children, we have come to see that this foundation is constructed with the following blocks:

1. **Respect (ages 2-5)** — For human authority, for human relationships, but ultimately for God's standards and for God
2. **Wisdom (ages 5-8)** — That it's based on God's truth as revealed in the Bible and that that truth can be relied on for decisions in life
3. **Grace (ages 8-11)** — As a pattern of behavior and as the source of all the good things we get from God
4. **Destiny (ages 11-14)** — As found in following the calling and will of God
5. **Perspective (ages 14-18)** — To understand that God is in control and to interpret events in light of His sovereignty

Respect Comes First

We at Awana want to help you train your children in a biblical worldview, and we think it's never too early to start the training. That's why we developed the Puggles® curriculum. **Puggles recognizes the learning ability of 2- and 3-year-olds by introducing biblical precepts at church and equipping parents to teach them at home.**

Puggles concentrates on teaching respect for God and our response to God born out of that respect.

The materials begin with a focus on God as Creator. Toddlers are fascinated by the world around them, and this creates numerous opportunities to build respect for God and His wisdom, goodness and creative power.

The lessons then move on to God's love for us. He cares what happens to each of us.

Our response to God's creation and His love should be one of gratitude born out of respect for who He is, and that's where the Puggles lessons go next. Children learn to be thankful to God's Son, Jesus Christ, and for His Word, the Bible.

Never Too Early

Some question the effectiveness of introducing 2- and 3-year-old children to basic biblical truths centered on respect for God. Others even question the legitimacy of attempting to do so. At Awana, we simply see it as a stewardship issue. Our Puggles program helps churches and parents teach young children about their Creator and His love in an age-appropriate way that begins building a foundation for faith development and a biblical worldview.

Several thousand churches across the United States offer a weekly Puggles program as part of their Awana Clubs™ ministry. We welcome you to learn more and find a nearby Puggles club for your child by visiting awana.org/puggles.

However, some families don't live within convenient driving distance of one of these churches. Other parents feel that their young children need to be in bed earlier than Puggles club participation would allow. And there can sometimes be health or developmental reasons why a parent might not wish to have their young child in a Puggles program. (We understand — we're parents too!)

That's why we've now developed Puggles at Home™ — all the age-appropriate biblical precepts, proven teaching methods and fun, colorful learning tools from our Puggles program, adapted for use individually with a child at home.

Here's the bottom line for us: Whether your child is involved in Puggles at a local church or only with you at home, we want to help you be the most important spiritual influence in his or her life.



As a dad of young kids, God has really worked on my heart to understand how important it is to pass on my faith to them. Like most dads though, my time is limited and I simply didn't know where to start. Puggles is exactly what I needed. My 2-year-old son was super excited about the colorful teaching cards and loved hearing the lessons. They were absolutely appropriate for his age and he grasped the concepts quickly and reviewed them easily. They were short and impactful enough that I could do a lesson at the breakfast table before work or before I put him to bed at night. I'm thankful for Puggles and its huge help to me as a dad.

— Joel



Introducing the Puggles at Home Kit



The *Puggles at Home Kit* starts with a welcome booklet featuring an introduction to Puggles, instructions on how to use the materials, a deeper look at what you are trying to accomplish, a simple method for talking with your child about salvation and a look at supplementary materials that will help you make your child's Puggles experience rewarding and fun.

Your *Puggles at Home Kit* also includes access to a downloadable parent guide with lessons and other teaching resources for each unit. These lessons can be read on the spot with very little preparation time, although you might want to read ahead so you can grab recommended visuals. Each lesson also has its own printable Puggles coloring/craft page with instructions for giving your child some quiet time activities that also reinforce the lesson topic.

The teaching tools are 32 large, colorful, sturdy cards. The front of each card is a vivid color photograph to illustrate what you're talking about to your child. The back of the card contains the following:

The Puggles Precept — Four precepts are taught across the 32 cards for repetition and long-term retention. Yet each of the eight cards built around a given precept approaches it from a different sensory or experiential angle to help you create fresh, fun experiences for your child. Each card will feature one of the four precepts:

1. **God made everything.** (Genesis 1:1, John 1:3, Isaiah 42:5, Ecclesiastes 3:11)
2. **God saw that it was good.** (Genesis 1:10)
3. **God is love.** (1 John 4:8)
4. **Give thanks.** (Psalm 105:1)

Parent Pointer — Helpful insights to guide you toward being a more effective teacher

Puggles Parent Plan — An overview of what you're teaching and a list of items you'll need for that week's lesson

Five Day Teaching Plan — Things you can do throughout the following week to reinforce and help your child understand what he or she has been taught

Special Offer!



**Get the *Puggles at Home Kit*
AND all three Puggles Finger
Puppets for \$12.99**

Visit awana.org/store and search for item number **90212**.

Beyond all the value of the *Puggles at Home Kit*, you and your child will love playing with these cute finger puppets — Puggle the Platypus, Alice the Kangaroo and Sydney the Koala — the three main characters of Puggles. They can be a helpful teaching tool too.



**You can make up your own puppet
dialogue to go along with your
Puggles at Home lessons, or for only
\$9.99 you can purchase the *Puggles
Finger Puppet Scripts* CD.**

The CD features 32 printable scripts that correspond to each teaching card in your *Puggles at Home Kit*. Each script is written for an easy, one-person performance, with suggestions for simple props to give your story even more impact. To purchase this outstanding everyday value, visit awana.org/store and search for item number **79353**.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told His disciples: *And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you ... (Matthew 6:28-30).*

The place where He and His disciples were sitting was probably full of those lilies of the field. Jesus used very ordinary, common things — touchable things — to teach spiritual truths. This is a great way to teach spiritual truths to children too!

When children are Puggle-age, they do not think abstractly; they learn best through their senses — things they can see, hear, touch, taste and smell — and they are busy learning all about the world around them. These facts make the practical, hands-on method Jesus used here (and often) perfect for preschoolers.

Try to recognize the teachable moments that everyday things provide. Look for simple, gentle ways to introduce the underlying spiritual truths in the things he or she is familiar with. But in order to do this, you have to learn to be sensitive to these truths yourself.

It's not as difficult as it sounds. Since God created us and everything around us, the things we can see and touch reflect Him. For example, we all need food for our physical life and health. In the same way, we need the spiritual food of God's Word for spiritual well-being. The next time you are reading in the New Testament, take the time to notice how often the writers use ordinary things to illustrate aspects of our spiritual lives. Then share what you learn with your child.

Parents are Primary

Puggles materials are high-quality, educationally appropriate and have been proven effective with thousands of children — but they don't do the job by themselves. Young children learn first by observation and imitation. In order for Puggles at Home lessons to take hold, you have to model the principles you are teaching. Your child will learn to trust and obey God as he or she learns to trust and obey you, which raises some tough questions:

- Do you keep your promises?
- Do you set fair and reasonable boundaries — with appropriate consequences for disobedience?
- Do you offer unconditional love and forgiveness when your child does wrong?
- Do you submit to God's authority by obeying His Word?

Being a parent is a relentless task. Almost every moment of almost every day, your children are learning from watching you and listening to you. How can you possibly be alert all the time? How can you know what to say when? Are there tools you can use to help you accomplish your goals?

There are.

The **Awana at Home**[®] ministry reflects the heart of Awana — to see parents challenged and equipped to be the primary spiritual leaders of their children. (Puggles at Home is a key part of this effort, designed specifically to help parents establish this leadership early in their young children's lives!)

But the Awana at Home line of resources is for families of all ages. We offer parent handbooks and curriculum tie-ins in all of our club programs, as well as media-rich family faith night kits that include materials and instructions for discussions and activities to build faith at home. Check it out at awana.org/athome.

Continue the Learning

In the time it took you to read this book, your child probably learned three new things. Take advantage of this stage in life, when learning is easiest and your child most enjoys it, to teach the most important things. May God bless your family!

Learn more: awana.org/puggles

Follow us: twitter.com/AwanaPuggles

Ask a question: puggles@awana.org



What do my wife and I love about Puggles? For starters, it gives us a platform to teach our 2-year-old about God. In simple, basic form we have a tool to teach the basics of creation and God's love to our daughter. Toddlers have an incredible ability to learn and memorize. We are so busy teaching them basic educational things about the world around them, why not things of God? On top of that, the products themselves all work so well for a short time together at home each week — posters in her play room, teaching cards for our time together, a puzzle for fun and coloring sheets to match the lesson. Toddlers thrive on learning through repetition — everything in Puggles works together to make that repetition work for the message.

Lastly, doing this at home creates an opportunity for us to have family time together learning about God. We have plugged this into our schedule — every Thursday is Puggles night. Sure, it's only about 20 minutes of time (short attention span) but our kiddo looks forward to the weekly "Puggles lesson," runs to the couch and grabs Mom's Bible as we sit together to learn, read and pray. There is nothing magical about Puggles — but it's all come together to create quite an excellent set of tools for us to teach our daughter (and remind ourselves of) some of the most foundational elements of our faith.

— Kevin