



The Encircling Stage

The **Encircling Stage** (ages 4-8) is a season of wonder and growth where children begin exploring the world beyond your immediate reach. Though they are stepping out in new ways, they still look to you for safety, comfort, and guidance. This is a crucial time when your love and consistency help shape how your child will come to understand God's presence and care.

In this stage, your steady support models God's abiding love and begins to root their faith. As they engage with daily rhythms and relationships, they learn to see beyond themselves and build meaningful connections with others. Your consistent presence lays the foundation for lifelong faith.

"Abide in me, and I in you."

John 15:4

Tips for Caregivers

- Let your child see you helping others—small acts like bringing in groceries or sending a note show that service is a normal part of life.
- Choose age-appropriate acts of service that are tangible and fun, like baking cookies or drawing a card for a neighbor.
- Connect service to Scripture. Remind your child that we love and serve because God first loved us (1 John 4:19).
- Focus on the joy of giving, not perfection. Encourage your child with words of affirmation, such as, "That was a kind thing to do—God loves when we serve others."

Growth Model



Plant

Your child begins to experience life outside of your direct care, exploring the world with growing curiosity and independence.



Root

As your child tries new things, he or she begins to experience small successes that build a sense of accomplishment.



Growth

Your child repeats the actions they receive encouragement for and starts gaining confidence in his or her abilities.



Fruit

Over time, your child begins to take initiative in making kind, thoughtful choices on his or her own.

Activity: Serving Others

STEP 1 (The Why)

Helping others is central to following Jesus. This activity provides a simple, hands-on way for your family to grow in love and compassion through acts of service. When children learn to care for others, they begin to understand what it means to love like Jesus—freely, joyfully, and without expecting anything in return. Serving together helps children see that even small acts of kindness can make a big difference, planting seeds of empathy and generosity that will continue to grow as their faith matures.

STEP 2 (Activity Directions)

1 **Make a Serve Container**

Find a small jar or box and decorate it together. This will be your family's "Serve Container."

2 **Brainstorm Ways to Help Others**

Sit down as a family and talk about kind things you can do for others. Think about people like grandparents, neighbors, friends, or someone who might need a little extra care.

3 **Write Down Your Ideas**

Write each idea on a note card and put the cards in your Serve Container.

- Here are some ideas to get you started:
 - Bake cookies and include a kind note
 - Rake leaves or help with chores
 - Deliver flowers or balloons
 - Write an encouraging letter
 - Plan a picnic and invite someone
 - Help with pet care or babysitting
 - Leave a surprise gift on someone's doorstep

4 **Pick a Day to Serve**

Choose a day each month to pull a card from the container and do the kind act together.

5 **Celebrate What You Did**

After each act of service, write down what you did and the date in a special notebook. Keep this notebook near your Serve Container to remember the ways your family has shared God's love. Celebrate together by thanking God for the chance to serve and talk about how it felt to bless someone else!

Final Encouragement for Caregivers

Your children are watching how you love, serve, and encourage others. These early practices will shape how they relate to God and people for years to come.

"The kinds of relationships they experience will lay the groundwork for how they relate to others for the rest of their lives."

— The Whole-Brain Child, Siegel & Bryson