

Kids, parents, and teachers talk about safety at school

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God is in the classroom, too.

Here in Australia, where the school year starts in January/February, rather than in September as it does in many other countries, kids want to learn in a safe and caring environment. Parents want to feel confident that their children won't be in danger while at school. Teachers want to do their work free from harm.



Issues of safety can vary from country to country. And methods for achieving security at school may differ. But many who are involved in education are finding practical spirituality to be especially helpful. God is with our children and teachers at school. When kids, their parents, and teachers pray before, as well as during, school time, the quality of the safety improves. Here's what some of this year's parents and students have to say.

WHAT KIDS SAY:

God is everywhere. "I always feel safe at school," says Jacquie. "That's because I am always thinking about this idea from *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* by Mary Baker Eddy: "God is everywhere, and nothing apart from Him is present or has power" (p. 473). My Sunday School class has talked about this a lot. It's not only really helping me, but it must help everyone at my school."

The ark of safety and forgiveness. "At times I have felt unsafe at school in the playground when other kids just don't know when to stop," says Cody. "The name-calling or their going on about something you did by mistake can be annoying - especially when they won't get off your case. This can make me feel really pressured. When this happens, I get worried that I might lose my temper and hit one of them."

"When I find myself in this sort of spot (and I have a few times), I think about what I've learned in Sunday School. For instance, I love the story of Noah and the ark. In *Science and Health*, Mary Baker Eddy gives this definition of *ark*. Part of the definition says, "'ARK. Safety ..." (p. 581). I know that this safe place is in my thoughts. God is everywhere, so safety is everywhere, too. God is wherever I am. So even when I'm in a tight spot and feel that I might do something wrong, I know I'm safe."



"Something else that helps me is this thought in the Lord's Prayer: 'And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors' (Matt. 6:12). It reminds me to see other kids as the children of God. They're not bullies at all. They are made perfect by God, just as I am. We're all in the safe place. When I think about this, I'm able to forgive the kid who's hassling me. Soon I find myself feeling calm and considerate again. I get on, enjoy my day, and leave that pressured feeling behind. I am safe and always protected by God."

WHAT PARENTS SAY:

God's protecting power.

"I'm so grateful that my parents taught me to begin each day by acknowledging God's presence and control over everything," says Jeanine, mother of Natasha, Nathan, and Brady. "My fondest memories of going to school are of my mother giving me a hug and saying God 'shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways' (Ps. 91:11). This familiar verse from the 91st Psalm has been a life-long comfort to me, and now I say it to my children.

"I find that the whole of Psalm 91 speaks to me of God's protecting power. It reminds me that my safety and that of my family is assured no matter what dangers or fears we may face. A verse from Deuteronomy also puts it well. It says, 'The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by him; and the Lord shall cover him all the day long, and he shall dwell between his shoulders' (Deut. 33:12). It's comforting as a mother to know that nothing bad can touch my kids because they are always wrapped up in God's tender care."

Jeanine says she prays each day for the safety of her children. She starts by affirming that God is the one true parent of them all. She thinks about what Mary Baker Eddy says in her book *Science and Health*: "Father-Mother is the name for Deity, which indicates His tender relationship to His spiritual creation" (p. 331).

Jeanine also says: "It's easy for a parent to feel concerned for their children's safety and well-being while they are at school. That's why it makes me feel so good to see God as constantly fulfilling the parenting role. He does the caring, loving, and protecting. Each of us is His cherished child. This spiritual firmness helps lift the burden of personal responsibility from me.

"Recently the three children had fears and concerns about people and activities at their schools. Each time, we went to these ideas in a favourite hymn:

I walk with Love along the way,
And O, it is a holy day;
No more I suffer cruel fear,
I feel God's presence with me here;
The joy that none can take away
Is mine; I walk with Love today (*Christian Science Hymnal*, No. 139).



"I talked about how we all walk hand in hand with God. That God is a special friend, who helps us through the day. This all-powerful, all-loving, constant companion is with us every step of the way. No one need ever feel unsafe or afraid. I was pleased that through prayer the situations were taken care of."

The Comforter and bullying. "As a parent of two school-aged children," says Elizabeth, mother of Ray and Jacquie, "I have to know that the Comforter is with them, helping them remember what they are learning in Sunday School from the Bible and *Science and Health*. Jesus promised, 'The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you' (John 14:26).



"It makes me feel good to know that when they're at school - on the playground or in the classroom, the Comforter will send them the 'angel' ideas that will get them through the day and help them meet any challenges that might arise. "This thought has been a big help to me, especially since my son Ray and his best friend at school have been the victims of bullying. This friend has talked about going to another school. Ray believes, though, that prayer is the answer to every problem. He feels safe and happy at school. But he wants his friend to feel safe there, too. That's why each morning Ray and I pray. We realize together that 'nothing can interfere with the harmony of being ...' (*Science and Health*, p. 427). Nothing can interfere with Ray's harmony or with the harmony at school. Our prayer includes everyone. Ray's friend now comes to Sunday School with us. This boy is learning that everybody is God's child. God has made everyone gentle, kind, loving, and friendly. That fact never changes, no matter what anyone says or does. God's children are not evil. Evil isn't from God.

"Ray doesn't react to teasing. He says the boys at school that do this to him are bored. He doesn't let their teasing upset his harmony. He knows that the things they say aren't true. Most days are good. And often the boys that bully play happily with him. Ray is learning to be a peacemaker."

WHAT A TEACHER SAYS:

The Lord's Prayer and the 3 C's

"As a teacher," says Pamela, "I find it very important to start my day with the Lord's Prayer. It begins with the words, 'Our Father.' This reminds me that we all belong to God's family. The students I teach are God's children. In this sense, they are all brothers and sisters. It's natural for them to love and support one another. God's children are good. They aren't frustrated or angry. They are the 'representatives of ... Love' (*Science and Health*, p. 582). So they bring love to all they do. Their school is an expression of Love. That's why everyone there can feel safe and cared for."



"In my class, I teach students this: All children have the right to feel safe at school. Our behaviour code is centred on the 3 C's - **courtesy, consideration, and cooperation**. My students meet regularly to share ideas on how to solve problems like unfair play, kicking, bossing, name-calling, or being rough. The classroom is a community of learners. The children make responsible community choices and decisions for ensuring their safety. They find that a better and safer environment is achieved when they work together."

"It's my job to help the children solve their problems, take responsibility for changing inappropriate behaviour, and develop trust and support toward each other. That's why I pray at school - especially during my daily playground duty. I do this by feeling grateful for the love, joy, and energy that every child represents. I'm grateful to God for His love, goodness, and presence - right there in the playground. I know He keeps us safe and protected."



Praying at school helps Pamela when situations come up. It makes her feel ready to be part of the resolution process. One time, during a class, an angry 11-year-old boy cut Pamela's finger with a pair of scissors. The boy ran from the room. Immediately she prayed to forgive him.

"I knew instinctively," she says, "that forgiveness was crucial to the healing of my finger and the problem behaviour. When he returned to class, we spoke about the incident. He was remorseful, and relieved to know that we could move on and learn from the experience."

I notified his parents. When they visited me the next morning, I told them about God's love for each of us - that forgiveness was all I was concerned with. They were amazed that I could feel forgiveness for their son when he had injured me quite badly.

"But as the result of prayer, the injury to my finger had been healed overnight. In fact, the next day, staff members who had cleaned the wound commented, 'You must be healthy to be such a quick healer!'"

Since that time, I've never had any uneasiness about this student's behaviour. I have a good relationship with him and his parents. While this incident was threatening to me, I have no lingering fear. I feel safe and at peace around him."

Whether you're just starting the school year or you're well into the middle, it's good to remember that no matter where you live, God is keeping kids, their parents, and teachers safe. He is protecting and guiding everyone. That's something we can count on.

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