

Principles and Resources for Supporting BYU Students with Faith Questions and Concerns
Assembled by Jane Birch (Faculty Center) • October 16, 2019

When students have serious questions about faith and the gospel, how we treat them is often even more important than the content of what we say. This document provides some principles for how we treat our brothers and sisters when they have faith concerns or questions, especially those that trouble them. Below these is a list of selected resources

Elder M. Russell Ballard counsels us, “Gone are the days when a student asked an honest question and a teacher responded, ‘Don’t worry about it!’ Gone are the days when a student raised a sincere concern and a teacher bore his or her testimony as a response intended to avoid the issue. Gone are the days when students were protected from people who attacked the Church.” (M. Russell Ballard, 2016 CES talk, [“The Opportunities and Responsibilities of CES Teachers in the 21st Century”](#))

<p>Be an example of the believer/scholar of faith.</p>	<p>You don’t need to be perfect or without challenges, but if you are deeply troubled, your students will feel it and be influenced by it.</p> <p>If you are firm in your faith, even if you still have questions, students will know that and be strengthened by it.</p>
<p>Be worthy of the Spirit and allow yourself to be guided by the Spirit in the moment.</p>	<p>Having the Spirit is key to providing the service the Lord would have us provide in this person’s journey.</p> <p>With the guidance of the Spirit, we can do our part and leave the ultimate outcome to God.</p>
<p>Love the other person.</p>	<p>Let the person know you care about him/her, that you want to help and will be here for the long haul.</p> <p>Build a relationship of trust.</p> <p>Don’t downplay their feelings/questions.</p>
<p>Listen to the other person.</p>	<p>We need to do a lot more listening and a lot less talking. Listen to the heart, not just the words.</p> <p>Welcome conversation with an inviting, open attitude.</p> <p>Listen without judgement or personal agenda. Make it a safe environment.</p> <p>Most people just need someone to talk to who won’t judge them. Often people can answer their own questions if we allow them to talk freely.</p>

	<p>Don't give unsolicited advice.</p> <p>Start where THEY are, not where you are.</p>
Share yourself/be vulnerable.	Let students see your humanness.
Bear your testimony as moved on by the Holy Spirit.	If not a formal testimony, allow the Spirit to help you convey your testimony and faith through even the way you listen.
Exhibit deep respect for the person's agency.	<p>Fully respect the person's intelligence, goodness, and ability to discern truth and make good decisions.</p> <p>Don't use pressure or overwhelming logic.</p> <p>Leave space to disagree or have different opinions.</p>
Be humble, never defensive, dogmatic, or rigid.	<p>Don't overstate claims. Much of the damage that has been done has come from faithful Latter-day Saints overstating the case or making definite statements that have not stood the test of time.</p> <p>The gospel does not require that we all think similar thoughts or believe the same ideas; there can be a diversity of opinions and interpretations on many topics.</p> <p>Be willing to look at things from different angles and change your opinion when you find more light and truth.</p>
It is not your job to make sure the faith issue is resolved.	<p>It is not your job to save someone else; that is the Savior's job. We are instruments in His hands.</p> <p>Each of us has unique gifts to bring to these encounters.</p> <p>The Lord has a bigger plan for this person. You only need to bring your gift to the situation.</p>
You don't have to have all the answers. There are no quick or complete answers to deep faith issues.	<p>Help others understand that these issues are often deep and complex and can take some time to work through.</p> <p>Be an example of one who has been through this process, searched, studied, and still believes.</p> <p>Help others understand the purpose and value of putting difficult issues "on the shelf" when answers are not immediately forthcoming.</p>

<p>Instead of providing a list of answers to difficult questions, help students understand how to approach such questions.</p>	<p>There will always be new challenges to the gospel, so it is less important to give students fish than teach them how to fish (putting issues in context, researching several sides of an issue, using good sources, etc.)</p> <p>Learn some of the basic strategies for dealing with dilemmas (strategies commonly used by critics) once you recognize the patterns, you can develop ways to address new questions as they arise.</p> <p>Don't give "easy answers to hard questions" but help the person strengthen his/her ability to answer his/her own questions.</p>
<p>Where appropriate, address questions head on.</p>	<p>Don't brush off the questions or act as though they are not real. If asked, humbly share your thoughts and direct students to useful resources.</p>
<p>Realize that the root of the faith crises may be a very challenging personal trial.</p>	<p>Part of the human condition is experiencing anguishing trials which may lead us to question God's love and even His very existence. Knowing that a current faith crisis could have started as a deep personal trial can be helpful in dealing with some individuals.</p> <p>Often it is not easy to find peace when answers seem to go unheard. Gently caring for others with patience, love, and understanding are all important.</p>
<p>See the questioning person as a truth seeker on a journey.</p>	<p>Don't be afraid of questions and doubts; they are important part of the human journey</p> <p>Questions are good. We can learn together through our study of these questions.</p> <p>Trust that the doubter will find his/her way.</p> <p>Remember: This is just one chapter of this person's life.</p>
<p>Help the person connect with what they know to be true (or have had a witness that it is true).</p>	<p>Help them connect to the Spirit and what it has testified to them of Christ and the atonement and principles of faith.</p> <p>Help them to remember sacred experiences where they have heard the voice of truth speak to their hearts.</p> <p>Encourage the person to doubt their doubts before they doubt their faith.</p>
<p>Stay engaged with the person. Continue to show love/support.</p>	<p>Let that person know you are open and available whenever they desire to interact with you.</p>

Resources for supporting BYU students with concerns that trouble them

Compiled by Jane Birch, Faculty Center, 6-14-17

Selected resources that focus on the *process* of helping people (directed toward people who want to help people with questions)

Henry B. Eyring, 1993 CES talk, [“And Thus We See’: Helping Students in the Moment of Doubt”](#)

Jeffrey R. Holland, Feb. 2015 CES talk, [“Be Not Afraid, Only Believe”](#)

M. Russell Ballard, 2016 CES talk, [“The Opportunities and Responsibilities of CES Teachers in the 21st Century”](#)

Ally Isom, 2016 FairMormon address, [“Faith-Centered Dialectics: Talking About Differences Transforms”](#)

Patrick Mason, 2016 FairMormon address, [“The Courage of Our Convictions: Embracing Mormonism in a Secular Age”](#)

Grant Hardy, 2016 FairMormon address, [“More Effective Apologetics”](#)

Selected resources that focus on *providing answers* to difficult questions (directed toward people with questions and those wanting to help them)

Jeffrey Holland, 2013 General Conference, [“Lord, I Believe”](#)

Dieter F. Uchtdorf, 2013 General Conference, [“Come, Join with Us”](#)

Sheri Dew, 2016 BYU-I Devotional, [“Will You Engage in the Wrestle?”](#)

Terryl Givens, [“Letter to a Doubter,”](#) *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 4 (2013): 131-146.

Terryl & Fiona Givens, [The Crucible of Doubt](#) Deseret Book (2014)

Patrick Mason, [Planted: Belief and Belonging in an Age of Doubt](#) Deseret Book (2015)

[FairMormon](#), most comprehensive Latter-day Saint apologetics website

Laura H. Hales, ed., [A Reason for Faith: Navigating LDS Doctrine and Church History](#) (2016)

Michael Ash, [Shaken Faith Syndrome: Strengthening One's Testimony in the Face of Criticism and Doubt](#) (published by FairMormon in 2013)

Adam Miller, [Letters to a Young Mormon](#), Second Edition (2018)

Robert Rees, ed., [Why I Stay: The Challenges of Discipleship for Contemporary Mormons](#) (2011)

Thomas McConkie, [Navigating Mormon Faith Crisis: A Developmental Map](#) (2015)