

## Resource Article

# Will This Child Ever Change?

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At-risk and vulnerable children and teens face extremely difficult challenges and usually lack hope for the future. They may feel it is impossible to persevere. What about you? Do you ever struggle to persevere as you teach them? Are you beginning to lose hope that they will ever change? What can you do to help them to change?

The answer is to give them time. Children and teens need time to change. This is especially true when they have come from difficult life situations, such as poverty, lack of opportunity, abuse, and hardships. Children and teens like these need time to heal and be restored.

A wise caregiver once said that children spell love T-I-M-E. Children and teens who have been hurt, neglected, or deeply wounded need to be able to rely on an adult's desire to be a consistent part of their lives. As they realize that you are willing to invest in them, they will begin to trust and change.

When children and teens change, it is not usually a steady, slow progress. They will have ups and downs. Children and teens need our patience. They need our permission to fail and start again after the failure.

## Giving Children Time to Change

God said that He would make all things new when we come to Him. So, why isn't this child or teen changing? In 2 Corinthians 5:17, we read, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" The Bible does promise us that we are new. But we do have to consider another passage as well. Roman 12:2 says, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

God made us new, but now we must learn to live as new people. Transformation takes time. We need to give children and teens time to be transformed—time to practice what it means to live for Jesus. We can pray for them, but we also need to come alongside them and be with them even in difficult times. Just because we do not always see the new person the Bible promises, we dare not give up on them. We should never expect that becoming a Christian will change their behaviour and attitudes instantly. Accepting Jesus does not take away past hurts, but it offers an opportunity for healing.

When a person has a serious wound, it takes a long time to completely heal. Poking into the wound reopens it, and this hurts a lot. In an open-wound situation, we realize that time is needed for the healing. And once the wound is healed, there will still be a scar, possibly for the rest of that person's life, but the scar will not hurt anymore.

The same is true for the emotional wounds that many children and teens carry. These wounds need time to heal. We must care for them with patience and understanding until the wounds are nothing more than scars. If we are patient with this healing process, we will see the transformation happen. What a reward for all of our investment!