

Chatting Faith is all about 'normalising the spiritual,' encouraging families to have relaxed, natural conversations about faith, using secular children's books as a starting point. Six schools and parishes across Winchester and Portsmouth Dioceses joined our trial in September 2023. They each selected a group of families to work with, who were given a set of books and goodies and encouraged to start chatting about the message of the books and how this might relate to the Christian faith. We gave them some suggestions for relevant Bible stories and a set of prompt cards using CHAT as a mnemonic. (**C**hat about the book, **H**ow does it make you feel? **A**sk about the deeper meaning and **T**alk about what God might think.) Following feedback from some participants, we have now added a further card, **CHAT** to God about what you think, encouraging the idea that prayer too can be relaxed and natural.

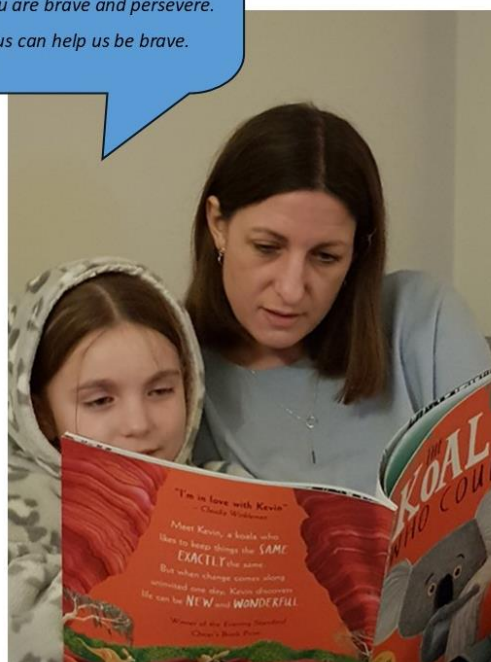
Some families have had great conversations about the books they have read. One mother commented that she was now looking at stories in a new way and trying to find deeper meanings in other things too. She also realised that her Bible knowledge isn't as good as she'd like, so she's asked the church for more help with this.

The book *The Koala Who Could* led one family to talk about what to do when you feel scared, and how Mary trusted the Angel Gabriel when he told her she would have a baby. Another family ended up discussing David and Goliath and how you can do great things when you take a step in life, while another talked about how the koala's friends supported him and how Jesus also had a group of special friends. Originally we had thought of linking each book to one specific Bible story, but these conversations show the value of letting families develop their chatting in different directions.

The Koala who could:

*I learnt that even if you are
scared of something you can do
it if you are brave and persevere.*

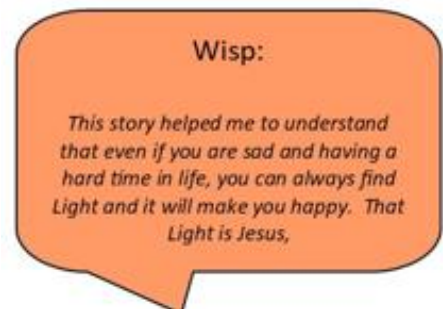
Jesus can help us be brave.





The trial revealed that the project worked best where a teacher or church worker met regularly with parents and modelled how to read and discuss the books with children. We realised that while some parents could confidently draw out the deeper meaning from a children's story, others found it hard to get beyond the words on the page. One parent told us, 'these books are too easy for us,' but we discovered that they didn't know how to move from the story to a conversation about hope or sibling rivalry. The headteacher in that school is now meeting with parents over tea and biscuits to talk through the meaning of the story before they read it at home with their children.

One of the main lessons we have learned is the importance of relationships and good communication. Our second cohort started in January and we have invested more time in talking with schools and churches about the project and the importance of working together. In turn, they are spending more time supporting families with their faith conversations. We're now talking about new ways to develop the project; some churches are interested in adapting this for toddler groups, or using films or songs as a springboard for faith conversations. Most of our money this year has been spent on books, which has been a real blessing for families in some more socially deprived areas, but going forward we need to think about whether churches could set up lending libraries of books and children's Bibles, which would make the project more sustainable. Our second cohort is exploring using the resources with refugee families and young mums from a local refuge, which is exciting!



You can see more about the project in our Chatting Faith video [here](#).