

## **Is Your Ministry Friendly to Parents?**

### **OVER COMMUNICATE**

Life is busy in the home! Teenagers have a lot going on in their life and parents have an incredible task attempting to balance all the different demands on their time. Make the commitment to help your families and clearly communicate with your parents. Make it a goal to try to over communicate (we dare you). Let them know about upcoming events (which doesn't mean the week of the event), content that'll you'll teaching on, ministry successes, changes, costs, activities, etc. Your communication doesn't have to be long, but it should be consistent and clear and speaks to the parents' world. Learning how to plan well will make this much easier. Here are three articles we wrote on planning:

### **SPEAK HIGHLY OF PARENTS**

We're on the "same side" with parents, so make sure to take every opportunity to speak highly of them when you're around teenagers. Resist the urge to join in when a teenager is verbally bashing his/her parents. We've noticed that this is a common way newer youth workers try to "build a bridge" with a teenager...but it doesn't work. Trying to leverage this type of common ground doesn't build Christ-like character.

### **SPEAK HIGHLY OF THEIR KIDS**

Affirmation is a powerful gift! Each time you see a parent, consider using this opportunity to praise their son/daughter. Parents love to hear great things about their kids and when it comes from someone who knows them and really cares about them, the affirmation is even more powerful. Returning home from camp is a great opportunity to brag to parents about their kids and set a positive tone for post-camp family follow up. There are few things more rewarding to parents than hearing good words about their kids. This is a gift that doesn't cost you anything.

### **FINISH YOUR PROGRAMS ON TIME**

If your small group or Bible study is scheduled to end at 9pm, try to be done at 8:55pm. You are friendly to families when they don't have to wait around in the car and waste time. We heard some youth workers say, "We had to end late, the Spirit was really moving." We have two responses to this.

...| Doug's response: the great things that happened have the potential to be "undone" by an angry parent. Consider very carefully before keeping parents' waiting. Once once in a while it isn't a big deal, but don't make a habit out of it.

...| Matt's response: Oh really? Are you telling me the Holy Spirit can't keep working if you end your meeting on time? Or that he can't work when you call that student the next day? Or when you meet next week? Surely the Spirit wouldn't move in such a way where teenagers couldn't honor their parents. This principle also applies when returning home from camps/retreats/events: you don't want parents sitting in the parking lot for a hour while you're driving down the mountain. Take your planned arrival time and add an 30 minutes or so or update a church answering machine with your estimated time of arrival. If the teenagers have to wait to be picked up, they can help you clean up.

## **PLAY THE PRICE IS RIGHT**

It's expensive to run a family! When you build budgets for your youth ministry events, be sensitive to how the cost impacts your families--especially families with multiple kids. For a family with three kids, a summer filled with church programs can so expensive that their kids can't be involved. Think through ways to design a powerful event that doesn't require your parents pay a king's ransom.

## **INCLUDE THEM IN THE BIBLE TEACHING**

Let your parents know what you're talking/teaching about. Keeping them in the loop raises your credibility and it empowers the parents to talk to their kids about what they are learning at church. Provide a few simple discussion questions so the Christian education can make its way into the home (where it ultimately belongs). Consider making this a regular habit, as a little extra work can go a long way with your families.

## **RESOURCE THEM**

Help your parents develop their parenting skills by pointing them toward good books, or websites or seminars that you've heard other parents talking about. Every parent wants to be pointed to a helpful idea. Also, figure out a way to offer a parenting class a few times a year. If you don't have teenagers, get someone else to teach it who is a seasoned parent (parents would rather learn tips from an experienced parent rather than a youth worker who has "theories" of parenting).

A word of caution: if you're not a parent of teenagers, be careful when offering any type of parenting advice.

## **WORK THE PARKING LOT**

At the end of a program, go out to the parking lot and be visible to parents. Talk to them, build relationships, and give encouragement about their child. Don't worry, you can clean up the youth room after everyone has gone home (or create a team of teenagers to do it for you while you're out talking to parents). You only have a short window of time to be with parents, so use it wisely. Your ministry wins big when parents know they have regular and easy access to a youth leader. You don't want to be that invisible youth worker who kids talk about but their parents never see.

## **SUMMER CALENDAR**

Parents plan vacation time a lot further out than many youth ministries plan their summer events. Work to nail down summer camp dates so you can let your parents know ASAP. You don't need to worry about all the details--dates are what is most important. You can create tension at home when parents want to vacation and kids want to go to the church summer camp--don't put parents in a bad spot.

## **OPEN THE DOOR FOR SERVING**

Many parents can make great youth workers and they have a lot to offer the teenagers in your ministry. Every parent isn't a great fit for relational ministry, but they can make a big impact in the ministry through serving behind the scenes. Let your parents know about your ministry needs and you'll find that many would be eager to serve.