



 **entrusted**
///// tweens. parents. leaders ///

///// Partnering with Parents
of Tweens & Teens

By Pete Sutton





It has often been said that parenting is the hardest thing God asks anyone to do. There is little in life that involves as much heart, vulnerability, personal investment, selflessness, sacrifice, confusion, prayer and opposition as parenting. As kids enter the tween and teen years, the stakes and the struggles only increase. This is why you'll never meet a tween or teen parent that wouldn't say they could use a little help. Consequently, one of the most important questions for youth leaders and volunteers to ask is this; "How can the church help parents of tweens and teens do the job God has called them to do?" We can be categorized the answer by four "C's," create, consolidate, communicate and cooperate.

If the church is going to develop healthy youth ministry we must create events and opportunities with parents in mind. Instead of asking, "What would the kids in my group enjoy?" we should ask, "What would the parents of my kids appreciate?" As we answer this question, we should think not only about the types of events we create, but also the opportunities these events create.

- Rite of Passage: opportunities for parents to bless their children and celebrate steps of growth and development.
- Etiquette Training: opportunities for the church to reinforce the manners and conduct parents emphasize at home.
- Parents' Night: opportunities for parents to join kids in silly games, worship, Bible lessons and spiritual discussions.
- Family Game Night: opportunities for families to get out of the house and have affordable fun in a friendly and safe environment.
- Pot Lucks & BBQ's: opportunities for parents to get to know other families with kids at similar stages.
- Family Free Night: opportunity not to be at the church

Once you begin to develop ministry with parents in mind, the next step is to consolidate these opportunities and events so that they are convenient. Most families don't struggle with boredom and most churches don't schedule out busy-ness. Imagine the impact an additional free night or weekend might have on a family! Here are some ideas for consolidating ministry.

- Schedule children's, youth and adult ministry on the same night so that calendars aren't packed with church activities every night of the week.
- Rather than adding occasional meetings like service projects, training meetings, baptism classes and information meetings, consider replacing standing ministry with these.





- Consider the financial cost of your ministry calendar; how much are parents asked to pay to participate in ministry activities. Determine a ceiling and keep your activities under it.
- Keep it simple by doing just a few things well. Focus your attention, resources and people on what is most important and productive for developing spiritual maturity and unity.

The secret to consolidation is convenience and the goal is simplicity. If we can consolidate well and make ministry convenient, we might be surprised by the spike in attendance, consistency and participation. However, this won't happen overnight. Along with efficient consolidation, we must practice excellent and effective communication.

Social scientists tell us that the average person is confronted with up to 5000 advertisements per day. American corporations spend over \$400 billion dollars on advertising every year. Thank God for spam blockers and the national do-not-call list! The truth is, because of this communication overload, most people have a built-in spam blocker and their default response to most mail and email is dismissal. Excellent and effective communication then is not about getting the house or email address right; it's about connecting with a real person in dialogue. This means that parent communication must involve more than a monthly newsletter, a weekly email or a blurb in the Sunday bulletin.

Here are some creative and effective ideas for connecting with parents.

- Leverage a free social media site to create online community with parents. Blogs, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and other sites can be used to push information and provide a place for parents to ask questions, interact and connect with ministry leaders and peers.
- Create time in your calendar to call each family once a month. Use this call to update parents on upcoming opportunities, pass along feedback regarding their children, gather prayer requests or just offer an encouraging word.
- Send a birthday card! Everyone loves a birthday card and people are more prone to pay attention to mail around this special day.
- Send a survey to parents each year to see how you're doing as a ministry and if there are ways that you can better serve your families. SurveyMonkey.com is an excellent and free place to start.
- Keep your web page up to date and keep it clean and easy to navigate.
- Consider a mass texting tool. In 2010, the average person sent over 3000 texts a month while averaging only 646 minutes in talk time.
- Set up an information counter at church where parents can connect with real people to find information, advice and a friendly face to greet them. Make sure that information is available, quick and easy to read with clear contact information.





- Start of each new ministry season with a parents' meeting where they can meet pastors and ministry leaders who will be caring for their kids throughout the year.

The most important thing to remember regarding parent communication is to make it a dialogue where feedback is quick, easy and welcomed. When parents feel that the church honors their time, resources and opinion, creating healthy cooperation is simple and inevitable.

Cooperation however is more than just getting parents on board with the church's agenda. Genuine cooperation, like effective communication, must be a two way street. As a church, we need to discover ways that we can support what parents are doing at home. Furthermore, we need to equip parents for what God expects parents to be doing at home. The key to cooperation is helping parents see the church as their greatest asset and support in raising their children.

Here are some creative ways to cooperate with parents.

- Always start and end on time. This demonstrates appreciation and generates cooperation.
- Free your schedule of tasks at the beginning and end of ministry so that you can develop face-time and conversations with parents.
- Keep an open door policy in your ministry environments. Welcome parents to observe and participate with their children. This is an excellent way to multiply volunteers and create healthy buzz about what you're doing.
- Keep your eyes open for articles, seminars and opportunities that would be of interest to your parents and their families. Pass these along with regularity.
- Develop an up-to-date resource list, lending library or book table that would provide parents with resources for understanding their children and addressing the various developmental stages of early, middle and late adolescence.
- Invite local experts like teachers, doctors, counselors, police officers and specialists to conduct seminars for parents about topics relevant to raising teens. (Don't forget to consolidate events to make it convenient for schedules.)
- Provide a monthly Bible reading plan or devotional resource so that parents can explore the Bible with their families at their own pace at home. Develop standard questions that can be applied to any message, passage or lesson in order to discover opportunities for application.
- Make curriculum and lessons available online via audio, video or pdf for families to download on weeks they are traveling, sick or unable to attend.
- As you develop a parent ministry within your church, continue to use these four "C's" as a directive as well as a diagnostic tool. Let them direct your steps as well as evaluate your progress. Consistently ask yourself and your parents how you're doing at cooperating with moms and dads as they raise their children to know and walk with Jesus.



