

Practical Ministry Skills: Ministry to Young Families



Contents	PAGE
Leader's Guide	2
Serving the Children	
HOW TO INSTILL A BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW IN KIDS <i>by Jim Wideman</i>	3
HOW DO YOU HANDLE MISBEHAVIOR? <i>by Beth Bauer, Andrea Minor, and Kristin Smith</i>	5
THE FOUR E'S <i>by Brian Vander Ark</i>	6
Partnering with Parents	
BUILDING TRUST WITH PARENTS EARLY ON <i>by Otis Price</i>	9
GETTING ON THE SAME PAGE WITH PARENTS <i>by Jean Jespersen</i>	11
CONNECTING PARENTS TO THE MINISTRY <i>by Becky Arthur</i>	13
WHEN FAMILIES SERVE TOGETHER <i>by Dick Gruber</i>	15
BEING A SECOND VOICE FOR PRETEENS <i>by Jim Kast-Keat</i>	16
Serving the Parents	
SINGLE... WITH CHILDREN <i>by Barbara Schiller</i>	18
NOBLE MASCULINITY <i>an interview with Robert Lewis</i>	20
Resources	
FURTHER EXPLORATION	23

MINISTRY TO YOUNG FAMILIES

Error! Reference source not found.

Leader's Guide

How to use "Practical Ministry Skills" by BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS in your regularly scheduled meetings.

Welcome to *BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS: Your Complete Guide to Leadership Training*. You've purchased an innovative resource that will help you develop leaders who can think strategically and biblically about the church. Selected by the editors of *Christianity Today International*, the material comes from respected thinkers and church leaders.

"Practical Ministry Skills" training tools are designed to be completely flexible and easy to use. Each theme focuses on a particular area of church ministry and comprises several brief, practical handouts. The handouts offer succinct guidance for some of the most common challenges or issues in this ministry area. You might use them at the beginning of a meeting to help launch a discussion, or you could hand them out as brief primers for someone new to a particular ministry.

This theme on ministry to young families is designed to help your church serve both parents and children in the congregation. You may use it for a training session or give it to key people involved in a relevant ministry. Simply print the handouts needed and use them as necessary.

One assumption we made in assembling this resource is that children's ministry should not be a substitute for a parent's spiritual influence; rather, a ministry empowers parents and then comes alongside to play a supporting role in their children's formation. In this way, a ministry serves entire families.

For ten ways that parents and pastors can guide kids' thinking, read "How to Instill a Biblical Worldview in Kids" (pp. 3–4) by Jim Wideman. To see one church's paradigm for ministering through every stage of a child's development, read "The Four E's" (pp. 6–8). All the articles within the next section, *Partnering with Parents*, are designed to help you collaborate with parents and involve them in your ministry to their children. The last two articles in this resource—"Single...with Children" (pp. 18–19) and "Noble Masculinity" (pp. 20–22)—can help your church better serve both single parents and fathers in its congregation.

We hope you enjoy this theme as you equip your congregation to raise another generation of faithful believers.

Need more material, or something on a specific topic? See our website at www.BuildingChurchLeaders.com.

To contact the editors:

E-mail BCL@christianitytoday.com

Mail BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS, Christianity Today International
465 Gundersen Drive, Carol Stream, IL 60188

MINISTRY TO YOUNG FAMILIES

Error! Reference source not found.

How to Instill a Biblical Worldview in Kids

Ten ways to help them learn to think truthfully

Psalm 78:1–8

There are many voices in our lives that challenge a biblical worldview. As a parent and a pastor, I cannot block out every voice that speaks to my family and to my congregation, nor should I. Nevertheless, I have spent my life pointing out that God’s Word contains truth and the truth of the Word is what will set us free. For both pastors and parents, here is my top-ten list on how to instill a biblical worldview in your children:

Always be open and honest with your children about every subject. One thing I see in the ministry of Jesus is that he never was too busy for questions. Encourage your kids to ask questions. Listen to what they are asking and give them the “why” as well as the “what.” If you freak out, they’ll stop asking. Help them understand that there is a difference between a question and doubt and unbelief. Never be too busy for questions. It’s a big part of spending time with your kids. The more time you spend with them and the less you freak out, the more questions they’ll ask at home and at church.

Model to children what you want them to do when they grow up, and place other models around them. Never forget: when it comes to biblical living, when you point at others, there are three fingers pointing back at you. In other words, there can’t be one set of rules for you and another for them. Follow Paul’s words as he says, “Come follow me as I follow Christ.” At the heart of Deuteronomy 6 is the fact that the parent must set the example: “These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”

Teach principles, not facts. The number one mistake in teaching the Bible to children is to fill them with facts instead of instilling in them the principles of each story and teaching. Facts go in our head, while principles go in our heart and help us to walk out the truths within. Kids need the principles of the Word to apply it to their everyday life. Do your children at home and at church know the principles within the stories or just the stories?

Let children know that wisdom is better than money or fame. One of the greatest lessons I ever learned is that the voice of wisdom and the voice of God always is the same thing. That’s why I need to know God’s Word because it also contains his wisdom. The world tells kids that life is about fame and fortune. I know parents who are more concerned with instilling an ability to produce wealth than instilling the pursuit of wisdom and truth above all else. The Bible says that wisdom is better than riches or gold. Have you instilled this in your child?

Teach them that just because it’s on TV or in a movie doesn’t make it right or true. I’m not sure when the TV changed roles with parents, but in many households it has. Because of the craziness of our schedules, we never really watched anything when it came on. We had to record it, and it turned out to be a tremendous blessing because we were able to fast forward through some stuff and pause and talk about other stuff! When I was a child, Lucy and Ricky couldn’t even sleep in the same bed. Today our kids are bombarded with messages that are contrary to the Bible. Whether it’s a TV program or the news, you need to tell your children the truth. It seems as if the media only want to talk about bad news. I know some stories need to be reported, but I want to point out the promises of God that work in every type of economy. We still serve a God who is more than enough. He is our supply and our provider. Feel free to correct the wrong voices and remind kids what the Bible says.

Here’s a wonderful project for both church and home: have your children research a topic or a viewpoint and write down what the media—TV shows, movies, magazines, and newspapers—says about that topic. Then let them then research what the Bible says, and let them see for themselves how the two sources are different.

Teach them that the Bible is the infallible Word of God and has the answers for everything in life. Whatever the answer you seek, it’s in God’s Word. How should I treat others? Whom should I forgive? With

MINISTRY TO YOUNG FAMILIES

whom should I be friends? How should I treat my parents, my family, and my employer? The Bible is not just for Sunday and Wednesday—it's also for Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. One of the activities you can do with your children at home and at church is gather the questions kids need to know and give them the answers from God's Word.

Teach them that Jesus is the only way to the Father, and he lived a sinless life by following the words of Scripture. Every time Jesus faced the devil or demonic opposition, he spoke the Word. Our tongue has the power of life and death when we speak words of life. As parents and pastors, we need to help kids watch their words and be intentional about saying what the Word says. This is also how we build our faith. Faith comes by hearing. When we say God's Word, it pumps us up and builds our faith like reps with dumbbells and barbells. The number one question we all should ask and teach kids is, "What would Jesus do?" Then we need to do it!

In what confessions should you lead your children to get God's Word in their hearts? One Scripture I have taught my children and myself to say is, "I am the Lord's sheep, he is my shepherd, and I know his voice. The voice of a stranger I won't hear!"

Point out wrong thinking anywhere you see it and don't let it take root. Our children need to see that what the Word says and what the world says can be different. When we are faced with a choice, we choose the Word. Take advantage of teachable moments anywhere and anytime! Kids don't need devotions—they need to be taught to live a devoted life based on the Word. As you do life, take every opportunity you are given to make God's Word real to your kids.

Quote the Bible to your kids and let them see that you feed on the Word constantly. What's good for the goose is good for the gander. You should model to children and families a life built on the Word. If your kids don't see you doing these things, they won't do them either. If we are what we eat physically, we also are what we eat spiritually. The more I pray, read, and meditate on the Word, the more it helps the kids around me do the same.

And when kids ask for our advice, give them the Word. They need the Word more than anything else you can give them.

Teach the importance of attending and being active in church. One of my favorite Scriptures is Luke 4:16. It tells us that Jesus went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as it was his custom. Jesus modeled for us the habit of attending church. It never was up for discussion whether or not my daughters would attend church. If they wanted to take a dance class on a church night, they didn't take the class; they went to church. However, not only did they attend, they served. They were active in things for their age group, but they also gave back to others. I was not the only person in our family involved in ministry. We were a ministering family. Now that they are adults, they still are doing what they were trained to do as children. Yancy is in full-time ministry, but she still gives back to her home church. Whitney doesn't just attend a small group—she's the small group leader. Parents, if you make your children eat green beans because "they are good for you," why not have them in church? It's also "good for them!" Don't just tell them to do it, set the example of attending, serving, learning and growing.

— JIM WIDEMAN is a widely known voice in children's and family ministry. He is the associate pastor of *Next Generation at World Outreach Church in Murfreesboro, Tennessee*. His website is www.jimwideman.com.

Adapted from *Collaborate: Family + Church*, by Michael Chanley + the Group of 34, © 2010 Ministers Label. Used by permission.

Discuss

1. Which of these tasks are already carried out in your children's ministry?
2. Which of these tasks are hardest to carry out? Why?
3. Which of these tasks do you think your church needs to implement in its ministry?

MINISTRY TO YOUNG FAMILIES

Error! Reference source not found.

How Do You Handle Misbehavior?

Give your preschool volunteers these guidelines.

Ephesians 6:4

Discipline is a difficult subject, especially in early childhood, because you don't know what—if any—discipline the child receives at home. Almost any tactic could cause the child to fear or create conflict with parents. Corporal punishment, of course, is never an option. At the same time, you don't want your small group leaders to be victimized by tyrant tots. How do you handle a disruptive, disobedient, or destructive preschooler?

Conflict Assistance

When a child is being disruptive in the small group, don't let the leader sweat bullets. The room leader, coach, or even student assistant needs to recognize when a rambunctious group or individual is ready to mutiny. At that point, move in to remove the child from the circumstances for a minute. It's not a "time out," but an opportunity to sit with the child and say, "Jimmy, you need to come out of your group for a minute to calm down and listen. If you can't listen, you can't go back to the group." When the child is ready to rejoin, move him back in and keep a vigilant eye.

Afterwards, have a brief conversation with Mom and Dad. Don't label or criticize the child. Simply say, "Jimmy had kind of a hard time today. I don't think he really wanted to listen. Perhaps you might talk with him about it, and we'll see if next week goes better." The goal is simply to open dialogue with the parents and be honest about it.

If the problem is recurring, the coach or lead staff person might pull the parents aside and say, "I know the small group leader talked to you before. But can you help us? Can you help us figure out how to meet Jimmy's needs better?" This is important wording. You want to invite the parent to give input on how to help *you*, not to criticize the parent or complain. Some parents may give legitimate feedback. Others may just need someone to talk to about the struggles with their child and may even ask for help. Your goal is not to make the ministry run smoothly, but to create an opportunity to minister to the family.

More Severe Problems

When a child is chronically disruptive, violent, or bites (a common problem with preschoolers), more severe action is necessary. In the case of violence or biting, fill out a report and inform the parents. If injury occurs, seek instant medical attention as well and recommend follow-up with a doctor at home. Parents need to know you take it seriously.

When you talk with the parents of an offender, explain, "Hopefully this won't become a pattern, because other parents react pretty strongly to it. If it does happen again, however, we're going to ask you to remain in the room with the child for a time until the behavior ceases." Later you can say, "Jimmy has done great these last few weeks. Why don't you go back to the service? If it happens again, we'll just go back to trying it with you here." Allow parents to handle severely troubling behavior, rather than attempting to correct it yourself.

— BETH BAUER, ANDREA MINOR, AND KRISTIN SMITH; adapted from "The Unique Challenges of Leading a Preschool Ministry," © 2006 Willow Creek Association. Used by permission.

Discuss

1. Why might most forms of discipline be troublesome in preschool ministry?
2. Why is it important to bring parents into the solution?
3. What can you do to train your volunteers in responding to misbehavior situations?

MINISTRY TO YOUNG FAMILIES

Error! Reference source not found.

The Four E's

One church's plan for teaching its children, from the nursery to high school.

1 Corinthians 3:2

The premise of family ministry is that as a pastor or church leader it is not my exclusive role to bring children and students to maturity. God has assigned a great portion of that role to parents. My role as a leader is to equip and encourage parents as they pass on faith to their children. Sure, we stand in the gap to be another voice, to be the church, to give the vision of what God desires, to tell and model the truth when parents aren't engaged in faith.

If it is true that parents have the God-given responsibility for faith formation and the church has the responsibility to share Christ and the vision of God for each of us, then we must get on the same page.

What the church can do best is communicate and execute a clear strategy that equips both parent and church to fulfill their God-designed roles. A strategy creates a sustainable pattern and rhythm that covers the life cycle of a child and parent and promotes the maturity of child and student and parent together.

Develop a Plan

A family ministry plan needs to include:

- Memorable hooks and narratives for children, students, parents *and volunteers*
- Components that cover a child/parent life cycle
- Programming directed to child and student, with built in cross-stage priorities
- Parent resources to assist parents in their role as spiritual nurturers
- Parent/Child milestones that celebrate and propel faith formation
- Multiple communication strategies

At Ada Bible Church near Grand Rapids, Michigan, we developed a plan we call the "four E's." Four words describe the curriculum goal of each age stage and of progressive maturity. Each "E" has a memorable tagline or hook to remember the focus of the age stage. Curriculum, parent resources, and milestones all line up under each.

With this approach, a child or student can expect consistent teaching around the goal for each stage. For example, in elementary a student knows that the Bible truth will be centered on who God is and what he says. Parents know what we will discuss in the classroom and what they can work on at home.

For our volunteers, we call the E's their "one word job description." When a volunteer is serving, they know what to do and they know if they have fulfilled their role. The E's are a memorable way to put everyone on the same page.

The “Four E’s”

	EMBRACE	EXPECT	EXPERIENCE	EXPRESS
Age	Nursery/Preschool	Elementary	Junior High	Senior High
Tagline	“Embraced by God’s love”	“Expecting God can be trusted”	“Experiencing connection with God and people”	“Expressing faith and relationship throughout God’s world”
Description	The most basic and foundational truth we all must learn is that the God who made us also loves us. Also, this truth does not require words to understand.	Building on God’s love, those in elementary ministry learn what it means to trust God. In discovering God’s character, a child sees that God’s ways are best and he can be trusted. A child also begins to understand his own character and his need for a Savior!	With the onset of puberty, both the mind and body are rewired, and we believe that the heart, too, is rewired. Knowing God’s love and character, students practice living in a trust relationship with God and experience connection with others in their daily lives.	Senior high students take their faith experience and begin to express it uniquely in their everyday lives. With increasing maturity, they see and respond with God’s thoughts and action to the world and to people around them.
Themes for Parent Resources	First-time Parents; Setting the Parenting Priorities for your Preschooler	Parenting Your Child through the Early Elementary Years	Parenting Your Child through Early Adolescence; Sexuality Series; Internet and Culture	Parenting Your New Adult; Sexuality Series II; Internet and Culture
Milestones	Child Dedication (Blessing and Future)	Walking Wisely (Values and Character)	Passing Your Story (Salvation and Spiritual Heritage)	Senior Getaway Parent Event (Blessing and Recognition of Adulthood); Baptism (Spiritual Maturity and Community)

Programming Directed to Child and Student

The E’s serve as a continuum that is descriptive of both salvation and maturity. While a certain biblical aspect is emphasized at a particular age stage, it does not mean that the other aspects are not discussed or presented as part of the year’s curriculum.

The first two E’s were derived from Reggie Joiner’s work and the curriculum he developed, *First Look* and *252 Basics*, and my own research on child spirituality. I am convinced by Joiner’s understanding of preschool foundational truths as well as his understanding of God-centered character development. In my opinion, research on child spirituality and development confirm his findings. The second two E’s come from my years of working with students, and they are confirmed by adolescent development research.

Parent Resources

The second component of our four-E strategy is providing parent resources. Our goal is to help a parent have unintended conversations about spiritual matters with their children by being intentional with the resources we give them. We offer a weekly parent page that comes with the curriculum we use, and we supplement those through our service bulletin and graphic displays.

Besides curriculum-based resources, we provide a targeted parenting class for parents whose children are entering each stage. Our goal is to set a parental framework for each stage and to have an initial conversation with a parent to address our priorities for the child’s spiritual development. We also address the parent’s role and review concerns during this age stage. This offers face-to-face time between parents and ministry leaders so all remain on the same page. At this point, we are finding that new parents are more open to this than parents of high schoolers!

MINISTRY TO YOUNG FAMILIES

Because of our culture, we have added a couple classes that we believe are essential for every parent. We offer an Internet awareness and media class. We are finding that parents do not understand what teens are exposed to in their culture, and they are not tuned in to what their kids are doing on the Internet. We offer age-stage-based sexuality classes and resources to support parents as students enter puberty and navigate our sexualized culture.

Milestones

The third component of our strategy is offering milestone celebrations. These events celebrate the intentional passing of faith and values between parent and child within the context of the church community. Each milestone is centered on the goal of each particular age stage.

In elementary ministry, parents and children celebrate together as a community the passing on of character, values, and wisdom. In senior high, we have two milestones: one is centered on the parent-student relationship and the other is centered on and dependent upon the student's response to God. These events do more than affirm a child or student's individual well-being; they help affirm the community and remind community members of their obligation to witness and model a thriving relationship with Christ.

Communication

If you come to Ada Bible Church, you can't enter the building without being confronted by an "E." Volunteers walk around with their E shirt on (the E word that describes the stage with which they work), the monitors have E slides, the rooms sport E posters and, yes, we sometimes put an "EMBRACE" sticker on babies to tell Mom and Dad we prayed for their child. We discuss E's at every volunteer meeting and give out E brochures to visitors. We even have "E-mail": constant contact describing upcoming "E-vents." (Is it obnoxious yet?)

Our congregation has embraced the "four E's." They expect them to be part of their child's curriculum. They experience the benefit of meaningful milestones, and they often express their gratitude by inviting more families to Ada. Parents have the ability to be far more engaged than they were before the E's were developed. Staff now has a context and language to discuss goals with parents. When questions arise about teaching or events, staff has a purposeful response. The E's have given staff a way to evaluate why we do what we do and the ability to say "no" to things that do not further the strategy, no matter how "good" the idea seems.

But the four E's is always a strategy in progress. My hope is that as my staff and I serve Jesus day in and day out as equippers and encouragers, we truly will be a catalyst so the home can be re-energized as often as it needs to be.

— BRIAN VANDER ARK *is senior pastor of Family Ministry at Ada Bible Church in Ada, Michigan.*

Adapted from *Collaborate: Family + Church*, by Michael Chanley + the Group of 34, © 2010 Ministers Label. Used by permission.

Discuss

1. Do you have ways of keeping your children's and student ministry workers all on the same page?
2. What could your church borrow from the "four-E" approach, even if you didn't adopt those four concepts as your goals for your children and students' formation?
3. How does 1 Corinthians 3:2 both parallel and *not* parallel children's and student education?

MINISTRY TO YOUNG FAMILIES

Error! Reference source not found.

Building Trust with Parents Early On

Parents of infants and toddlers will appreciate you for taking these steps.

Psalm 127:3–5

Four Areas of Concern

Parents will naturally worry about these four aspects of a childcare environment. Go through each of these areas and consider how you might be able to improve in any of them.

Appearance: The first thing a young family checks out is how the area in your infant space looks. Establish a more inviting environment by asking these questions:

- Where is your infant ministry located in the church? Is it in an attractive area? Is it convenient? Are there directions posted?
- Does there appear to be room for the child? Is it crowded or noisy?
- Do volunteers look eager to welcome each child? Do they give the impression that they can't wait to be the next one to hold a baby?
- Does the area look fun? Are the toys age-appropriate?

Safety: Give parents confidence by evaluating questions like the following:

- Are the furniture and toys in good condition? Have you removed or repaired broken or damaged items?
- Is the room infant friendly? Are outlets covered and doors safety-latched?

Cleanliness: Closely related to both appearance and safety, cleanliness is a key factor in developing trust. Consider the following tips for maintaining a clean nursery:

- Use a ten-to-one bleach solution to clean toys afterward. If you have more than one session, use an alternate set of toys for the second session while the first set of toys dries.
- Keep floors clean (that's where babies often are) by asking volunteers to wear socks or to wear hospital scrubs over their shoes, and make sure to vacuum between sessions.
- Develop and post a wellness policy regarding sick children and workers.

Security: Safeguard both children and the church with the following suggestions:

- Require identification for child pickup, and require parents to sign their child's name to a list each week, giving you a quick evacuation list in case of emergency.
- Ensure sufficient supervision by establishing a 2:1 ratio of infants to volunteers and 4:1 with toddlers.
- Develop a child protection policy, and make sure two adults are present at all times. Never leave an infant alone with a volunteer.
- Give parents who want to come into the nursery a specially-colored tag, marking them as a visitor who may ONLY handle their own child.
- Handle checkout one family at a time, ensuring parents that it is for their children's safety.

MINISTRY TO YOUNG FAMILIES

Four Ways to Build Bridges

The following ideas for reaching out to new and expectant parents came from different churches whose children's ministry leaders attended a Willow Creek Children's Ministry conference.

Baby Showers: A baby shower—especially a shower for first-time parents—can be a great time to introduce people to your infants and toddlers ministry. Whether you send a representative to an already scheduled shower, or incorporate shower planning into your ministry, it enables families to get connected and begin building trust before their baby is even born.

Welcome Packets: When you hear of a new family or a new pregnancy in the church, introduce the parents to your infants' ministry through a comprehensive and creative information packet. Include items like the following: a welcome letter, a vision of ministry statement that demonstrates how much is in store and how intentional you are about meaningful ministry, a copy of room policies and check-in procedures, and something fun, like a personalized bib or card.

It can be challenging to keep up with new families and baby news, so find someone who appreciates the value of this packet (like someone who was blessed by it themselves) to commit for a year to personalizing the packets and distributing them.

Try to distribute the packets along with face-to-face contact—at a baby shower, when you visit a home, or when you schedule events.

Meals for Moms: Churches often bring meals to families in the weeks following the birth of a child. Volunteers make the meals and then visit the new family in their home briefly, offering congratulations and other practical means of help. Include members of your infants' ministry in the home visits (and make sure to bring along a welcome packet). When the new family begins bringing their infant to the nursery, they will remember and recognize at least one friendly face.

Open Houses: Regularly schedule ministry open houses, inviting new and expectant parents who haven't yet utilized your infants' ministry. Make it a special day just for them. Conduct an orientation (including welcome packets), and allow them to tour the area. Make sure your regular volunteers are there, so families can start connecting with the people they're going to see. Have the families do a mock check-in and check-out, so they know what to expect and so you can explain the steps you are taking to keep their baby safe.

And for those parents who can bring their children, send them home with a “Look what I made when I visited the infants' ministry” project. At Willow Creek's children's ministry (called Promiseland), we used a kid-friendly, washable inepad for making handprints on take-home cards. One child was asleep, but his parents opened his hand, pressed it down to make the print, took the print home, and framed it. This was the first time that their family had visited Promiseland, and they wanted to remember it.

—JEAN JESPERSEN; adapted from “Experience the Wonder of Life Change,” © 2005 Willow Creek Association. Used by permission.

Discuss

1. Which of the “four areas of concern” is your church strongest in? Which are you weakest in?
2. What opportunities exist in your community to build bridges with new parents? What opportunities could you create?
3. Who in your ministry might have the gifting and heart to reach out to new parents?

MINISTRY TO YOUNG FAMILIES

Error! Reference source not found.

Getting on the Same Page with Parents

Communicate your mission and listen.

Proverbs 19:20

Why Managing Expectations Is Important

Whether they verbalize it or not, parents bring their children to your ministry with expectations. They expect their children will be safe, will have fun, will learn, and will see a familiar face if they come again. If a parent brings her child for the first time, those expectations are the measure she uses to judge your ministry's trustworthiness.

Naturally, you will want to fulfill parents' expectations in order to earn their trust and the privilege of ministering to their children. Parents, however, come with a wide variety of expectations—some realistic, some not. You can't fulfill them all. Neither can you fulfill them if you don't know what those expectations are.

Imagine a parent who brings her toddler, expecting that the child will have a great time. Is fun a priority in your ministry? Is that a realistic expectation? Imagine another parent comes and he expects you'll simply babysit, without trying to "push too much doctrine on my son." Is that realistic? Another parent wants her toddler to memorize Bible verses. Is that part of your plan? Can you fulfill all these expectations? Can you fulfill them if you don't even know what they are?

Without a plan for first communicating to parents the scope of your ministry and then listening and responding to their expectations, you risk subjecting yourself to conflict and undermining mutual trust.

How Mission Makes a Difference

You need to be clear in presenting to parents what your ministry is, what you can offer, and what you can't. You simply cannot set out to meet every parent's expectations. If you did, could you ever satisfy today's consumer society? No. You would be constantly pursuing more and more, while never achieving what was truly important.

Establishing a mission statement, however, can give you a clear message that expresses exactly what you intend and helps prevent many unreasonable expectations. The statement needs to be brief, clear, and fit within the church's mission statement. Write the statement to identify the nature of your ministry.

For example, you might state that you "partner with parents" or "lay a biblical foundation" or "provide a fun introduction to Christian life." Rather than generalities (like, "to glorify God"), include concrete language that identifies what you plan to do in your time with the children.

Then, work to communicate that mission statement, through your volunteers, in written and promotional materials, and at every opportunity. It's up to you to let parents know clearly what they are bringing their children to and why. Doing so will be the most important step in avoiding misunderstandings later.

MINISTRY TO YOUNG FAMILIES

Four Ways to Listen

Parents learn to trust those ministries that listen to their concerns. The following four ways of listening to parents will not only develop trust but will also improve your ministry. So effective are these methods, you may even want to recruit a volunteer to champion each of these ways of gathering perspective.

- **Informal Listening:** Conversations are going on about your children’s ministry, whether you like them or not. So make an effort to listen in. Ask people about their impressions of the ministry at church functions, after church, in the parking lot, at Bible studies, and at socials. Find a social person that could get out there and listen to what the parents are talking about. If your volunteers can address questions and concerns, let them. If not, encourage them to respond by saying, “Oh, I know just the person to get that answer. Can I go back and talk to that person about what you just said?”

Consider being regularly available in the halls. Some leaders have found that simply standing in the same place every week after the service gives parents with feedback a familiar (and more positive) place to go with questions or concerns.

- **Take a Short Survey:** Consider creating a short survey that asks a few questions and leaves room for comments and questions. Make it short—so parents will actually fill it out—and either put it in a mailing, or hand it out when parents drop off their children. The parents can then fill out the survey and return it when they pick up their children. A survey has the potential to give you a wealth of helpful information and also helps parents feel valued because you asked for their input. Consider a survey only once or twice a year, but especially when making any significant changes to the ministry, as parents will feel more involved in the transition.
- **Listen to the Community:** Be intentional to listen outside of the church as well. Are the parents and children of your church inviting their neighbors to your ministry? What’s the word on the street about your church? Do people know what you’re doing? You may even want to encourage your church’s parents to use your ministry as a reason to invite their neighbors to church.
- **Listen to Your Church Leaders:** Understand what leaders and pastors in your church think parents want. Sometimes families have expectations, but take them to the pastor instead of the children’s ministry. Meet with church leaders, not only to hear their perspectives, but also to work out a mutually helpful process for answering parents’ questions and concerns. In fact, regular meetings with all ministry staff can create opportunities to work together, plan joint ministry, and avoid scheduling conflicts. You may even find a new spirit of cooperation and mutual affirmation.

—JEAN JESPERSEN; adapted from “What Parents Want in Early Childhood,” © 2006 Willow Creek Association. Used by permission.

Discuss

1. Does your ministry’s mission statement help parents understand what to expect?
2. In which of these four areas might your ministry improve its listening?
3. Who might be recruited or appointed to lead a listening initiative in the area of children’s ministry?

MINISTRY TO YOUNG FAMILIES

Error! Reference source not found.

Connecting Parents to the Ministry

Eight ways you can encourage parents to partner with you

Deuteronomy 32:45-46

What are we supposed to be doing in children's ministry? The bottom line is we're in ministry to help mold kids so they live as Christ followers. And we're painfully aware that, in the church, we have little time with the children to accomplish this. However, the full responsibility is not on us. As the church, we are here to help parents and be their partners in this effort.

For this partnership to work, both parents and the church must understand how their responsibilities complement each other. Our parents need to understand and apply a biblical worldview when raising their children. They have to model daily how to be a Christ follower if they expect their children to be Christ followers. The value of this cannot be underestimated. Then, as the church, we come alongside parents and reinforce what they are living out on a daily basis in the home.

Now let's make a few assumptions. Let's assume our children's parents regularly attend church. Let's also assume that these parents love their children. Finally let's assume that these parents want their children to become adults who are Christ followers. If all these assumptions are true, then here are some ways in which children's ministries can partner with parents.

Communicate. It is important to let parents know on a regular basis what is taught in the church. Here are some of the methods we've used: sending take-home papers; projecting children's ministry teaching information on the screen during the main worship service; offering information on the website; teaching in conjunction with the adult curriculum to create family discussion. We know that none of these ways are 100 percent effective, but they provide help to the families who wish to use them.

Create family events. We started making children's events family-oriented. We ask that a parent be present at every teaching or social event. For example, our fall festival is a family event that doesn't require many volunteers, and it brings families together with other families in the church.

Discontinue the kids-only VBS. We have restructured our vacation Bible school to be a family VBS so parents are involved, too. In this type of structure, the parents are brought along in the teaching automatically. We don't dismiss the adults for a separate lesson—they stay with their kids the entire time. This is a great opportunity for families to enjoy quality time and a shared hands-on experience together.

Dedicate parents. For years, we have held Baby Day. There are lots of "oohs" and "aahs" as beautiful babies and proud parents are introduced to the church family. Make no mistake, though—this is not a baby dedication but a parent dedication. While this is a great way for a parent to make a public, verbal commitment, we have increased the impact by requiring that parents attend a special class before participating in the actual ceremony. Parents learn why it's important to dedicate themselves to godly parenting, and we provide parenting tools and resources. It's invaluable to educate parents at this juncture about their responsibility to teach their child about matters of faith. If they can form a habit of spiritual education in their family, they have a much better chance of sticking with it in the latter years.

Build a Backyard Bible Club. The main goal of Backyard Bible Clubs is to help church members see the influence they can and should have outside the walls of the church building. Each club is held in a church family's neighborhood and hosted by one or two families. The club is an outreach to the neighborhood, and it creates a way for families to work together to invite neighbors. This is a great opportunity for parents to model that faith is something to be shared on a daily basis.

Include parents. We offer a Bible 101 class for children who want to make a commitment to Christ. This is a four-week course, and it is mandatory for parents to participate the first and last week. The purpose of the class is to make sure the parents are informed about what their child will be learning. It's also to instruct and encourage parents to be involved in their child's experience of making a decision to follow Christ. The

MINISTRY TO YOUNG FAMILIES

children are given a booklet to work on at home with their parents, and some questions require parents' input. Hopefully, the parents will become an integral part of their child's spiritual growth.

Organize family teaching. We allow and encourage families to teach together. We have several families who teach a Sunday school class as a family unit. This is yet another opportunity for the parents to be spiritual role models in service and attitude.

Mark spiritual growth. One area that we plan to develop is a way to applaud spiritual benchmarks of the children. I think this will be significant for the parents. If we are communicating what we expect the children to learn and then acknowledge these steps when they are accomplished, it will reinforce the importance of spiritual growth.

It is possible to only teach and never offer opportunities for parents to use what they have learned. It also is possible to offer opportunities, but never educate the parents on how to be spiritual leaders in their families. It would seem that our most effective efforts to bring family and church together are through teaching and coaching the parents and providing them with opportunities to use their knowledge in practical ways. These approaches go hand-in-hand.

Since there is limited time spent with the children in our ministry, we need to be effective partners in raising Christ followers. As children's and family life ministers, we have a timely and exciting challenge before us. Let's step up to the challenge!

— BECKY ARTHUR *has been children's minister at Harvester Christian Church in St. Charles, Missouri, for 15 years.*

Adapted from *Collaborate: Family + Church*, by Michael Chanley + the Group of 34, © 2010 Ministers Label. Used by permission.

Discuss

1. If you began involving parents in more of these ways, how would that affect your volunteer needs?
2. Do you think some parents in your church like to be able to hand off their children during a Sunday school class or VBS? How do you balance the value of giving parents a break with the value of encouraging families to minister together?
3. Does your church honor parents as it celebrates the milestones and progress in their children's lives?

MINISTRY TO YOUNG FAMILIES

Error! Reference source not found.

When Families Serve Together

A few ministry areas in which parents and children can team up

Romans 12:4–5

For every church in which I have ministered since 1979, the strength of the children’s ministries came from parents and children serving together.

Bible Quiz: It began with our Bible quiz program. Interested parents approached me about starting this important ministry of memorization and recall. Under my limited supervision, parents and older teens served and created a family-friendly atmosphere in every practice session. This attracted more families. Since that first pastorate, I have tried to launch this program without family involvement. It has never worked as well that way, so I have learned to step back and allow Bible quiz to be family and parent-driven.

Children’s Church: From quizzing, the concept leaked into other areas of my ministry. Soon I had families serving side-by-side in children’s church. Often I allowed children who were “too young” to participate in children’s church as attendees to instead serve alongside mom, dad and older siblings. There is no greater joy than seeing a family act out a Bible story, or watching a father teach a lesson while his four-year-old holds the lesson’s object high for all to see.

Sunday School: I first noticed the parent-child connection in Sunday school classes during what we used to call Promotion Sunday. Parents who happened to be serving in a classroom with their own children requested to move up with their children. Obviously, this left holes in my recruitment plan, and I fought the notion that these were overprotective, unspiritual believers.

What I failed to see at first was the value of a child being served by his mom or dad. I also failed to see the possibilities as these parents involved their own children in preparation, prayer, and presentation of the lessons. Mom and Dad were teaching their children how to minister.

I began to notice that in classes where parents served, more children became involved in the lesson. As I jumped on God’s bandwagon and began to recruit parents to serve in their own child’s room, I saw a growth in our classes both numerically and spiritually. Parents genuinely care about their children and the friends of their children, and they seek to make every child feel accepted and needed.

Special Events: Our church has two big events that flourish with family involvement: Neighbor Outreach Week and We Love Kids Banquet. Neighbor Outreach Week began as a summer outreach held in the yards of parishioners. During that week, puppets, clowns, stories, and songs were used to present the gospel to people in those neighborhoods. This became a program in which families would team up to minister, with both children and parents acting as clowns, puppeteers and storytellers. At our church plant here in Pennsylvania, we put this into practice before we even had our first service, in the form of parties we call Backyard Bashes.

The We Love Kids Banquet honors children with child-friendly food, activities, and entertainment. When we first tried this idea, it wasn’t that big. But because of parental involvement, it grew to more than 500 children being served by moms, dads, and older siblings. Add to that the time spent by families preparing place settings, gift bags, and decorations, and you have a family outreach event that is successful in every way. Some of our families would plan their child’s birthday party for that evening and bring the whole group to our church. (Note: More details on Backyard Bashes and banquets can be found at www.dickgruber.com.)

— DICK GRUBER is children’s ministry specialist at Valley Forge Christian College in Pennsylvania.

Adapted from *Collaborate: Family + Church*, by Michael Chanley + the Group of 34, © 2010 Ministers Label. Used by permission.

Discuss

1. How do you handle parental involvement in children’s Sunday school classes?
2. How could your church adapt and put on one of these special events?
3. How might parent-child ministry teams be more effective in outreach?

MINISTRY TO YOUNG FAMILIES

Error! Reference source not found.

Being a Second Voice for Preteens

Learn how your church can stand behind parents.

Deuteronomy 6:5–7

We don't know what to call 10-, 11-, and 12-year-olds. At times, they're the innocent kid of their past, and other times they're the mischievous teenage rebels of their future. They're somewhere between the two at a unique stage in life—ready to grow up but still wanting to just have fun.

“Preteen” is a fitting label that identifies them as what they are becoming (rather than what they just were: “post-kids”). These years entering adolescence are crucial. Everything in a preteen's life, world, and worldview begins to change, leaving them ready for their next step or desperately scrambling for their last. During this time, preteens need their parents to be intentionally present and their pastors to intentionally partner with parents.

The family of a preteen, specifically the parents, is the “first voice” in their life. This first voice always will be the most influential. The role of a preteen ministry is to serve as a “second voice,” supporting the formation already present and reiterating the first voice in words, actions, and shared experiences.

The Role, Need, and Purpose of a Second Voice

The role of a second voice is filled by anyone who spends time with a student other than his or her parents. These second voices are coaches, teachers, friends' parents, pastors, and more. Instead of trying to tell a student brand new things, a second voice should support the points said and led by a student's parents. In this way, coffee shops, car rides, and any time between pastor and preteen becomes a sacred moment to say the things students have been hearing all along—only in a new way, a way that will help the words from both the first voice and the second hopefully sink in even deeper.

Try this:

- Ask your preteen's parents, “If I could tell your son or daughter one thing, what would you want it to be?” You can ask them in person, email them, or have them fill out a card.
- Hold a parent forum. Create space to listen to the first voice students hear: their parents. Listen to what they say, and then talk to your students as a second voice, affirming and giving new resonance to the first.

Partnering with Parents along the Way

Being a second voice does not mean that we rely on parents for every ounce of content and curriculum. While our words, actions, and shared experiences continue to support the formation already present in a preteen's life, a preteen ministry provides something necessary and unique: an age-appropriate space for the story of God's redemption and restoration to come to life in a fresh way, a way that invites 10-, 11-, and 12-year-olds to participate in it.

We create small group activities and discussions, plan lessons, tell stories, and teach at our weekly programs. But as we do this, we communicate with parents.

Parents are used to hearing about their children's church activities, but these communications are typically filled with dates, times, and prices. Many of these details are necessary, but we can say more. We can include information about upcoming content and curriculum. By giving parents a glimpse of what their children will experience this week, I empower and improve their voice and my voice. The partnership becomes a dynamic give-and-take, where my words and actions build into their words and actions, which build into my words and actions, and so forth.

Try this:

- Host a meeting to generate and capture ideas and methods for your program and activities. Invite your team, your volunteers, and even your parents and students.
- Invite everyone's voice to help make them even better.

MINISTRY TO YOUNG FAMILIES

- Send out a weekly email to your parents, but include more than just dates, times, and costs of events. Share with them what you will be teaching and what their son or daughter will be experiencing that coming week. Give them questions to ask their son or daughter or activities to do together. This will take the things you lead even further and deeper in their formation and create a culture where the program is only the beginning of an even larger and longer conversation.
- Don't stop with just an email, but include a link to a video of yourself talking about the upcoming Sunday. This makes the email easier to read and allows parents to know you even more (watching me flail my arms while I talk says so much more about me than pixelated letters on a computer screen).

— JIM KAST-KEAT is a writer, speaker, pastor, and pathological optimist. He leads Fifty6, the fifth- and sixth-grade ministry at Mars Hill Bible Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. For more information, visit: www.jimkastkeat.com or www.twitter.com/jimkastkeat.

Adapted from *Collaborate: Family + Church*, by Michael Chanley + the Group of 34, © 2010 Ministers Label. Used by permission.

Discuss

1. Do you think your church functions as more of a first voice or second voice for its preteens?
2. What messages do you think parents want your children's and preteen ministry to be echoing?
3. How could your ministry more clearly communicate to parents what their children are being told in church?

MINISTRY TO YOUNG FAMILIES

Error! Reference source not found.

Single...with Children

How churches can help single parents

Ephesians 4:16

Jennifer knocks nervously on the pastor's door. She wonders if she can find the courage to explain her story of a painful marriage, physical abuse, and divorce. When she enters the office, the pastor sees the pain in her eyes. "Jennifer, I think I know why you are here. You and Dave are divorcing."

After an hour of talking, Jennifer feels neither comfort nor support from her pastor. But they do pray together. As she leaves his office, Jennifer wipes back tears and looks for her car. She has no idea how she is going to support her three children. She has been a stay-at-home mom for eight years. She feels alone, confused, and afraid of the future. Praying with the pastor was good, but Jennifer is losing hope. Her pantry is nearly empty, and she doesn't have the courage to tell anyone how desperate she is.

When Jennifer arrives home, her kids ask, "Mommy, what's for dinner? We're hungry!"

There are countless Jennifers in our churches today: single parents who have to do nearly everything alone, like working full-time, keeping house, maintaining the car, paying the bills, and ferrying the kids to school, church, Little League, and piano lessons. While many churches are helping single parents with practical and financial needs, the churches that most effectively assist single parents also listen to the needs of the heart.

Make Them Visible and Valued

Alan and Linda Kibble of Faith Community Church (now Faith Bible Church) in The Woodlands, Texas, first became aware of these needs when their daughters befriended children from single-parent homes. Realizing these single moms needed encouragement, they presented the need for single-parent ministry to their church's governing board and offered to help meet it. The result is a ministry called the Oasis.

The goal of the Oasis is to encourage single parents by making them a visible and valued segment of the congregation. The Oasis team does this in four ways:

1. "Bless a Single-Parent" connects families with goods and services. An insert in the bulletin lists material needs, projects, and ministries the congregation can provide. Church leaders personally participate in meeting these needs.
2. Activities and classes. The church offers many educational and social opportunities, and childcare is provided at weeknight meetings so single parents can participate in the programs and ministry teams.
3. [A website](#) that lists all the church's programs and support available to single parents, including financial guidance, car maintenance, and free clothes.
4. Single Parent Sunday. Worship services are dedicated to and hosted by single parents, giving them opportunity to be recognized for their role in church life.

According to Alan and Linda, this is the most effective event Oasis sponsors. The message is "We welcome and value you." For moms or dads raising their kids alone, who feel apart from the two-parent culture, they need to hear that often.

"A woman in her thirties came to the Oasis Sunday school class," Alan says. "She was unmarried, pregnant, withdrawn, and alone. She had experienced more than her share of rejection. She was in a town where she knew no one, and the father of her baby was gone. She had little church background. We welcomed her to the group and tried to make her feel comfortable.

"One Sunday after class, with teary eyes, she told us she felt no one cared about her. She said she wanted someone who would always be there for her no matter what happened."

In Faith Community Church, she found a church that welcomed and encouraged her. She also found someone who would always be there for her; she received Christ that morning.

"Today," Alan says, "she continues to blossom into a capable, loving Christian mother of a beautiful three-year-old daughter."

Offer Connections

Laura Dodson, a single mother and former coordinator of family life at Church of Our Savior in Cocoa Beach, Florida, wanted to know what caused her church's families to struggle. She and the pastoral staff developed a

MINISTRY TO YOUNG FAMILIES

survey and placed copies in the pews at every service. Eighteen responses were from single parents, and they *all* requested a support group.

Laura then planned an ongoing support group, not only for the single parents, but also their children. The evenings began with a fast food meal for everyone. After dinner the children, working in two age groups, were given opportunities to explore and express their emotions through puppet shows, craft projects, and other activities. The parents went next door to a video-hosted discussion on issues like alienation, finances, and the grief slope. Before rejoining their children, parents were given a key question to prompt discussion of the night's activities at home.

Fellowship for single parents doesn't always have to take the form of a traditional support group. Crossroads Church in Corona, California, does not offer a separate single-parent ministry. Yet the church has been successful in ministering to single parents.

Carl and Noryne Mascarella, both on staff at Crossroads, saw that the church's singles had much in common with its single parents. In fact, the single parents insisted they didn't want to be separated from the other singles. Instead of dividing the two groups, Crossroads created an All Singles' Night for the whole community.

To facilitate the mixing of singles and single parents, Crossroads Church offers free childcare during the weekly Friday night gathering. During the evening there is a meal for everyone (children included), a lesson and discussion time at round tables, and an activity. The activity might be a movie, a concert, board games, or even dance lessons. Carl says, "Think of it as a date night, with you and a hundred of your closest friends."

Provide Ears and Opportunities

Pamela McKnight lost her husband to a lengthy illness while a member of Richland Hills Church of Christ in Fort Worth, Texas. Her plight awakened the church to the growing number of single parents in the congregation, so they decided to hire someone to work with single parents and their children. During their search, the leaders recognized something else. Pamela had a tender heart and a vision for single-parent families. So they hired Pamela!

They learned that enabling and empowering single parents can address many needs at the same time. Pamela seeks to do for other single parents what the church did for her. She networks single parents with reputable community resources, including financial and mental health counselors, to help them build a secure foundation for family living. As an example, Pamela reports this story:

"Cathy, who is in her forties with two kids, had been away from the church for several years. She owned her trailer, but then lost it, was driving a borrowed car, was out of work and unable to return to her trade because of a neck injury.

"When Cathy heard about our ministry through a mailing, she met with me one-to-one. A year later she is working successfully at a Christian business, is living in a house as part of our church's homeless ministry, has a car that was donated by a member of the church, and has completed counseling."

Pamela says the individual attention she offers may be the most important factor in single-parent ministry. She often takes people to lunch and simply listens to their journeys, to assure them that in this church, the single parent is more than a faceless statistic.

These churches succeed not because of programs and budgets, but because they listen to practical needs and prayer requests. And they listen to what single parents desire most: to be valued, to be part of a supportive community, and to be empowered to build a new and healthy family life.

— BARBARA SCHILLER; adapted from our sister publication LEADERSHIP journal, © 2002 Christianity Today International. For more articles like this, visit www.Leadershipjournal.net.

Discuss

1. Do single parents who come to your church have a safe place where they can land?
2. What kinds of opportunities do you think single parents in your church would benefit from?
3. What are other churches in your area doing for single parents? What could you learn from them?

MINISTRY TO YOUNG FAMILIES

Error! Reference source not found.

Noble Masculinity

Minister to families by building up fathers.

1 Timothy 6:11–12

At Fellowship Bible Church in Little Rock, Arkansas, 1,100 men gather Wednesday mornings at six to hear pastor Robert Lewis teach on what it means to be a man. Some are members of Fellowship Bible; many are not. Many are not yet Christians.

With fractured families and alternative family forms increasing, Lewis's approach is changing his church and his community. He's helping harried working parents to cut back their kids' over-programmed schedules and to take charge of their moral and spiritual development. He's taking well-to-do suburban men into the inner city where there are few fathers and giving kids a hope and a future. And with his wife, Sherard, he's raised four children. Their youngest son is in high school.

Lewis founded Fellowship Bible Church with Bill Parkinson and Bill Wellons in 1977. They are still the preaching team today. Lewis is author of [The Church of Irresistible Influence](#) and [Raising a Modern-Day Knight](#). Leadership editors Marshall Shelley and Eric Reed met with Lewis to talk about his notable work with men and their families. [Note: These biographical details may have changed since the interview was held.]

What is your definition of manhood?

A test! (laughter) We compared the first Adam with the last Adam, Christ, and we found four differences. They are our four foundation stones for authentic manhood.

A real man is one who rejects passivity, accepts responsibility, leads courageously, and expects the greater reward, God's reward.

It gave our sons understanding of who their fathers are and what we expect and hope of them. Our boys are mostly grown now. Of the seven, four received their rings. My oldest son will be the next to finish college. We'll have a big party and dub him into manhood.

Your ministry to the family seems to be about building up fathers.

Men. If men aren't reclaimed, you can say good-bye to the family. I think that's the most important challenge of the church today, to create new masculine heroes rather than complain about how dads don't do enough and how families are falling apart. Young men want to grow up; they just don't know what up is. I think the most powerful thing that has happened in this church has been this new identity for men. Our men know what a man is; they know what up is. It has energized our church to be a force in the community.

How is the lack of parenting in the previous generation, particularly the lack of a strong male identity, affecting the family and the church?

It shows up in two ways in church life: One is a young man's inability to make and keep commitments. They've been raised without a noble calling, and, naturally, it's made them selfish. They demand more from the church and they give less.

The other is the busyness of families but the passivity of fathers. There's a lot of activity in families, with kids and Mom and Dad all busy with their own schedules. But they don't do anything together.

I surveyed young families of our church. Many rarely sit down and eat together. I think a lot of this non-stop activity is masking pain and a lack of direction. Suburbia tries to buy it off with sports camps and things that often give kids a narcissistic focus, but little substantive meaning and purpose.

Even in families where parents have stayed together, there's not much real parenting. We have a lot of hang loose dads. He knows he's supposed to attend his kids' games, but aside from that, he doesn't take an active role in parenting his children. He's there, but directionless.

How do you prevent the church from contributing to the over-scheduling of the family?

At Fellowship Bible Church, we expect only three things: regular worship attendance, participation in a bi-monthly small group and the ministry that flows from it, and spending time with your family. If you don't do all three of these, you're not a member here. You go on what we call "independent status." You're doing your thing, not ours.

I tell them, "I'm pastoring a church of 5,000, and I'm at home with my family at least four nights a week. If I can do it, you can too."

MINISTRY TO YOUNG FAMILIES

And to make time for families, we limit the elective ministries we offer. The staff meets once a year to "cleanse" the calendar. We put on the calendar what each ministry wants to do, then we put on our "family hats." We go through month by month and ask, "Is this too much for the families of our church? What are we going to drop?" And we drop a lot of stuff.

We tell our people, "Choose your church activities carefully. You don't need to do everything." Families are too busy, and somebody must give them permission to say no.

From your own account, the present-but-absent-father scenario describes your childhood home. Is this "father fracture" something men think about? How do you get "closed-off males" to start talking?

I ask, "How do you remember your father?" In a few minutes they can quickly see the fracture they have with their fathers. Then the stories start pouring out. I usually tell them to go to their dads, if they're still living, and talk it out. Get in his face and say, "Dad, do you love me? Are you proud of me?"

Sometimes, it's the fathers who recognize they've wounded their sons. One man, whose son was about to graduate from medical school, heard me. He got on a plane, flew to the East Coast, and took his son to lunch. He said, "I'm sorry. I didn't know what it meant to be your dad. Will you forgive me?"

Before the man arrived back home, his son had called. He said, "Mom, I met with Dad today. It was the finest day of my life."

Isn't that incredible stuff?!

The pastor's role seems central to a life-transforming men's ministry. How can the pastor who hasn't had your personal experience guide men?

Some pastors aren't going to lead from a position of family brokenness. They're going to have to say, "Guys, I never lived this. My parents were there for me." They can speak out of strength and help men see what spiritual health looks like.

Our churches are full of guys who are killing themselves working, trying to make up for the pain in their pasts.

One guy said to me, "I remember when we lived in Ohio. We lived outside of town in an old trailer. Every day I would step outside to go to school, and I'd say to myself, *I'm gonna get as far away from this trailer as I can.* And I have. Today I'm a millionaire. I've owned hundreds of restaurants. And I work 100-hour weeks. Today, I found out why: I'm still trying to get away from the trailer."

Many men are trying to get away from their "trailer" and they don't know why. They have to identify the source of their pain, deal with it, and move on. I'm not talking massive amounts of therapy. But men need to understand much of their behavior comes from the hurts of the past, and they need God's help addressing it if they're going to be the men he created them to be.

What can the church provide for men that their own fathers did not?

Robert Bly said, "If you're not being admired by other men, you're being hurt." That struck a chord with me. As I talk with men about their struggles, I realize many men are languishing because nobody is recognizing the noble things in their life. Men need male cheerleaders. If no one cheers for nobility, men are going to collapse back into a dumbed-down masculinity that follows the cheers of the world—obsessive careerism, selfish pursuits, and ignoble deeds. We try to cheer men on—for the right things.

How do you help men find the right cheerleaders?

I can do two things: first by talking to men about the importance of male cheerleaders, and second, by challenging older men to cheer on the next generation.

I had one man tell me, "I'm old. I'm sick. I have no purpose in life."

"Oh, no," I told him. "You've got a lot of things you can do."

"Like what."

"Tell younger men your story."

He objected. "Nobody would want to listen to me."

"You've got seventy years' experience, and here's a generation of guys who haven't had anybody to share real life with them."

He sputtered, but said he'd meet with a younger man if he had the opportunity.

MINISTRY TO YOUNG FAMILIES

Later at a Men's Fraternity meeting, we were talking about teammates in life. I told them the story of this guy and that he was available. Young guys came up after the meeting wanting to meet with him, and to this day, the older man meets with five or six guys a week and has a waiting list of more.

Every time I mention it in Men's Fraternity, we have young guys who want a mentor. They want to know what's real. They want to know was the marriage worth it, how you spent your time, and what you did with your money. They want to learn from an older man's successes and failures.

I ask the younger guys to initiate the mentoring relationship, because older men aren't likely to. But when asked, the older guys often say yes. We call it "investing down."

Your new book details your shift in philosophy from programming for church success to "investing" in the community. Has that grown from your investment in men?

Definitely. Given their new identity, we first saw men stepping up to the challenges in the church. Now we have no shortage of male volunteers. They even lead our children's ministries. Then we saw men investing in fatherless boys and girls within the church.

Then men and their families started going into the community. Eastgate, which was one of the most violent neighborhoods in Little Rock, is one example. When we first began ministering there, there was just one father in the whole community. The rest were pass-through males.

We started reading readiness programs and sports programs. Church members started working down there, and today we're operating a gymnasium and teaching all kinds of life skills. We take the kids to summer camp. And we're offering college scholarships for those who finish high school. Now a bunch of men involved with Men's Fraternity have started Sportsman's Quest. They mentor young boys from single-parent homes and take them on duck-hunting weekends with the guys. And those are just a few of the ministries our men are leading.

Today's congregations are filled with single people. How do you preach about family in a way that doesn't increase their brokenness?

We hold up the family relationships God intended us to have, and if we're willing to help people move closer to those ideals, there's no need to apologize for it.

In preaching, I want to give our people a North Star, something to guide their family life by. That is, of course, Jesus Christ. Christ and his Word are above all we are and do. Our families aren't perfect. We're all different distances from the goal, but at least we all know where we should be headed.

By calling men up, I feel I'm helping, not offending the single mother. The woman raising a child alone can see the importance of a male role model for her son. And when the men offer to take her son fishing, she believes what we've been preaching. One single mother spoke to our church recently. Her son was about to go into high school. She said, "I want to recognize the male mentors who carried me through the last eight years with my son. He looks up to all these guys."

Another woman walked up to me the other day and said, "I hated men till I came to this church. And I still struggle some. But," she said, "I've been in a small group, and I've watched how respectfully the men treat their wives. I'm beginning to believe there could be a man like that."

— Adapted from our sister publication LEADERSHIP journal, © 2002 Christianity Today International. For more articles like this, visit www.Leadershipjournal.net.

Discuss

1. Does your church struggle with getting men to step up and fulfill their responsibilities?
2. Are older men mentoring younger men in your congregation?
3. Does your church's programming interfere with family time? How do you discern where the line is?

MINISTRY TO YOUNG FAMILIES

Error! Reference source not found.

Further Exploration

Books and other resources to help your church minister to young families

[BuildingChurchLeaders.com](#): Leadership training resources from Christianity Today International.

- “[Reaching Every Generation](#)” Assessment Pack
- “[Connecting with Parents](#)” Children’s Ministry
- “[Outreach-Focused Children’s Ministry](#)” Children’s Ministry
- “[Reaching Out to Families with Special Needs](#)” Children’s Ministry
- “[Children’s Director](#)” Orientation Guide
- “[Intergenerational Ministry](#)” Practical Ministry Skills
- “[Ministry for Remarriage](#)” Practical Ministry Skills
- “[Ministry to Men](#)” Practical Ministry Skills
- “[Ministry to Women](#)” Practical Ministry Skills

[LeadershipJournal.net](#): Our sister website offers practical advice and articles for church leaders.

[Association of Marriage & Family Ministries](#): This organization strives to train, equip, and resource the church in marriage and family ministry. Its website includes a number of related articles.

[Visionary Parenting](#): Started by pastor Rob Rienow, this ministry includes a number of resources for churches who want to empower families in their congregation to shepherd their children well.

[Children’s Ministry in the 21st Century](#) by *Craig Jutila, Jim Wideman, Pat Verbal, et al.* Ten experts look at ten trends shaping children’s ministry and offer a variety of practical ministry ideas. (Group, 2006; 978-0764433894)

[Collaborate: Family + Church](#) by *Michael Chanley et al.* A few excerpts from this book appear in this download. The book is made up of 35 chapters, each written by a different person, on how families and churches can team up in shepherding children. (Ministers Label Publishing, 2010; 978-0692004395)

[Making Your Children's Ministry the Best Hour of Every Kid's Week](#) by *Sue Miller with David Staal.* This book offer a host of children’s ministry ideas based on Willow Creek’s Promiseland ministry as well as other ministries from around the country. (Zondervan, 2004; 978-0310254850)

[Perspectives on Family Ministry: Three Views](#) by *Timothy Paul Jones, ed., Paul Renfro, Brandon Shields, and Jay Strother.* This book lays out the historical context and foundation for family ministry and then lets three pastors explain the particular models they favor in their own churches. (B&H Academic, 2009; ISBN 978-0805448450)

[Shift: What It Takes to Finally Reach Families Today](#) by *Brian Haynes.* This book on family ministry focuses on how to orient ministry around seven common milestones in a child’s life. (Group, 2009; ISBN 978-0764438981)

[Think Orange](#) by *Reggie Joiner.* A former family ministry director makes the case for why parents and churches must synchronize their efforts with their children. (David C. Cook, 2009; ISBN 978-1434764836)