

# Discipling Teens



CONGREGATION & VISITORS



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**DISCIPLING TEENS****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" is completely flexible and designed for easy use. Each theme focuses on a practical area of church ministry and comprises brief handouts on specific aspects of that ministry. The handouts give a succinct and practical overview of the issues most relevant to your goals. You may use them at the beginning of a meeting to help launch a discussion, or you may hand them out as brief primers for someone new to a particular ministry.

This special theme on **Discipling Teens** is designed to help you build relationships with and minister to teenagers in your church. You may either use these handouts for personal edification or for a group training session. Or you may choose to provide copies to the church board, staff members, or those involved with specific ministry teams at your church. Simply print the handouts you need and use them as necessary.

For a grounding in the concept of discipleship, read Larry Lindquist's, "Biblical Principles of Teen Discipleship" (pp. 3–5). For practical tips on how to develop deeper relationships with teenagers, read Doug Fields' "Developing a Relational Style of Youth Ministry" (p. 6–7). To understand more clearly the need for intergenerational discipleship in the church, see Kara Powell's "The Importance of Intergenerational Discipleship" (pp. 11–12).

We hope this training tool will guide your efforts and encourage you as you seek to better disciple the youth of your church. And ultimately, we hope that your congregation, your ministry, and you will be blessed as you see God working through your ministry.

Need more material, or something on a specific topic? See our website at [www.BuildingChurchLeaders.com](http://www.BuildingChurchLeaders.com).

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## DISCIPLING TEENS

**Biblical Principles of Teen Discipleship**

*What does it mean to grow fully devoted followers of Christ?*

Luke 2:52

Defining *discipleship* can be difficult. At times, I feel like jazz great Duke Ellington, who was asked for a definition of *rhythm*. “If you got it, you don’t need no definition,” he responded. “And, if you don’t got it, ain’t no definition gonna help!”

Most of us in youth ministry have a tacit understanding of what we want our students to know/believe/experience/do before they leave our ministry; but many leaders lack a clear definition of discipleship, and this lack of clarity may hinder efforts to guide students toward being full-blown disciples of Christ.

The Bible tells us about three key aspects of this important topic:

- Dimensions of Discipleship (What knowledge, experience, and relationships are essential?)
- The Process of Discipleship (How does one become a disciple?)
- The Marks of a Disciple (What is the nature of Christlikeness, and what do we need to keep in mind as we develop curriculum to teach Christlikeness?)

In reality, most of us emphasize one dimension of discipleship more than the others. Some of us default to the practices that helped us grow. Perhaps taking a serious look at the subject will help us be more theological and intentional in our approaches.

**The Four Dimensions of Discipleship**

Luke 2:52 gives us a window into the adolescent years of Jesus, telling us that he grew in two ways: horizontally (in favor with man) and vertically (in favor with God). These two dimensions also are modeled in the cross. Vertical discipleship includes being reconciled to God (Rom. 5:10), while horizontal discipleship means we must be reconciled with others (Matt. 5:24; 25:40).

This two-dimensional approach is superior to the one-dimensional “Jesus-and-me” approach promoted by some leaders. Although the vertical dimension is critically important, no one can grow as a disciple of Christ in isolation.

Still, I don’t think the two-dimensional model goes far enough in describing the multi-dimensional reality of human experience. I prefer a four-sided approach modeled on the pyramid, which has three visible sides and a base. I use the pyramid model to illustrate the following four dimensions of discipleship.

**A) Belief**—This is the cognitive side of making a disciple. What are the core beliefs students need to know to provide them with a biblical foundation? Teaching and rehearsing these foundational truths is a critically important dimension of discipleship. Romans 10:2 speaks of those who “have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.” It is a scary thing to observe ignorance on fire! Yet in our effort to disciple students, we sometimes have more zeal than knowledge, more pep rally than content. The reverse can be true, as well, when we create brilliant slugs.

**B) Relationship**—Accountability comes with relationship. Fruit of the Spirit is exhibited in community. In John 13:35, Jesus tells us exactly how people will be able to recognize his disciples, and it is not by how well they do on a Jesus pop-quiz. He reminds us that we will be identified as his disciples by our love for one another. Knowledge is important, but the context of community is where discipleship is practiced and observed.

**C) Conviction**—This backside of the pyramid may be unobservable at times, although it is vital to discipleship. This is the passion that drives our obedience. Without it, students are simply duty-driven in following Christ. Paul speaks of this dimension of discipleship in 2 Corinthians 5:14 where he declares the

love of Christ compels him because he is convinced. These words are filled with passion and personal conviction.

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Here are three concepts you need to understand. Orthodoxy means *I know the right things*. Orthopraxy means *I do the right things*. Orthopathos means *I have right passion and conviction to motivate me*. If we ignore this attitudinal dimension (as difficult as it is to observe or measure), our discipleship endeavor is simply the dead obedience of legalism.

**D) Mystery**—This fourth dimension of discipleship is the hidden base of the entire pyramid. Though often overlooked, the role of the Holy Spirit in discipleship is an essential dimension that we cannot orchestrate, manipulate, or control.

How often have you planned a discipleship event that seemingly fails to produce any fruit? Then later, at a time and place when you least expect it, God decides to move in and students are profoundly changed. We plan, plant, and water, but growth and sanctification are under God's control (1 Cor. 3:6–7; 1 Thess. 5:23). It is his timing, and there's not a thing we can do to manipulate it. Prayer is our most powerful resource in cultivating this mysterious dimension of discipleship.

### The Path and Pace of Discipleship

God has wired each of us differently; although we might embrace this conceptually, we don't always acknowledge it practically when we disciple students. Each of us experiences God differently; and the rhythm and pace of our growth will vary, as well.

In his book *Sacred Pathways*, Gary Thomas identifies nine paths of spiritual formation. The naturalist grows closer to God while summiting a 14,000-foot peak in the Rockies or looking in awe at a spectacularly starry night. The intellectual finds God most profoundly in the pages of the Bible and books of theology. The enthusiast encounters God when participating in full-throttle, unashamed worship. The ascetic finds spiritual growth in the places of quiet solitude with God.

Students who may experience nothing while having their “quiet time” may be profoundly deepened in their relationship with Christ while actively helping the poor or building a home for the homeless. One size does not fit all.

One of the most common and costly mistakes made by youth leaders while discipling students is the assumption that their students will encounter God most profoundly in the same way the leaders themselves did.

Part of the cure is to accept the idea that God has wired students differently. The other part is to identify how our students are wired and lean into their lives appropriately. Youth ministries that focus on a single type of spiritual path will frustrate the discipleship of those who need other paths.

The New Testament depicts the disciples' variety of pathways and pacing.

The apostle Paul was biblically accurate and theologically sound. He was well-trained and wrote letters filled with deep truth and instruction. Maybe you have some students in your group who find spiritual growth through profound study of God's Word. How should you disciple them?

Thomas seemed to experience God most profoundly when he could see, touch, and speak with him. Although some of us have been a bit skeptical and suspicious of our senses, there are those such as Thomas who find in them an important part of their spiritual growth. Henri Nouwen sat in front of Rembrandt's painting “The Return of the Prodigal” for days, visually learning the detailed story the painting told. I'm too ADHD to spend three hours staring at a painting. However, music, strong visual presentations, and experiences such as touching the roughness of a cross may be exactly the way some of your students find deep, significant, spiritual insight. How would you disciple a sensate such as Thomas?

Peter was emotional and impetuous. He had a short fuse. He hacked off ears and blurted out statements that came back to bite him. It seemed Jesus had to repeat things to Peter a few times before they stuck. He tended to act and then think. I anticipate if we had Peter in our worship service, he would be jumping on chairs or on his knees. Yet, he seemed to grow most deeply when he was actively engaged with Christ. Peter wept bitterly when he realized how he had hurt Christ, and ultimately he died a martyr's death. How would you disciple an enthusiast such as Peter?

### Marks of a Disciple

If our goal in youth ministry is to graduate fully devoted followers of Christ, then describe what it means to be such a follower. I am amazed by the quizzical looks and the pushback I receive when I have that conversation

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with youth leaders. Some resist creating lists of behaviors, fearing the rigidity of legalism. Others create a vague, fuzzy picture of some uber-spiritual creature that sounds wonderful but unrealistic.

I believe most leaders have never articulated a clear description of a disciplined student. When students graduate from your ministry, how will they be defined? What is your curriculum for Christ-likeness? If you don't have a clear understanding of where you want them to be when they leave your ministry, they will have a difficult time knowing what is expected. Aim at nothing and you'll hit it.

Sometimes we better grasp a concept by understanding its opposite. In his book *The Divine Conspiracy*, Dallas Willard includes a chapter titled "Curriculum for Christlikeness" in which he describes what a curriculum promoting Christlikeness is not:

It is not simply external conformity.

It is not special experiences.

It is not faithfulness to the church or a profession of perfectly held doctrine.

When I have asked students in my courses at Denver Seminary to begin writing a definition of a fully devoted follower of Christ, their descriptions include the Fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22), the Beatitudes (Matt. 5), and other great biblical citations.

Let me challenge you to do a similar exercise. Create your best definition of discipleship, keeping your "finger in the text" and resisting the press of political correctness, as well as cultural relevance.

The dimensions of discipleship, the path and pace of discipleship, and the marks of discipleship provide a solid foundation on which we can discuss methodology. Without that foundation, our discipleship endeavor will be susceptible to fads and formulas that may provide immediate but unsustainable growth.

—LARRY LINDQUIST is a speaker, writer and teacher of youth and family ministries, worship, evangelism and discipleship, as well as chair of the Leadership degree at Denver Seminary; originally appeared in *YouthWorker Journal*, © 2010 by YouthWorker.com. Reprinted by permission.

## Discuss

1. How is our ministry addressing the four dimensions of discipleship (belief, relationship, conviction, mystery)? How could we do a better job of incorporating them?
2. How do I encounter God most profoundly? How does this impact the way I teach and relate to students? What are some other ways I could try to communicate with kids who think and learn differently than me?
3. Do we have an understanding of where we want our kids to be, spiritually, as a result of going through our ministry? What marks of a disciple would we like to see in them? How could we be more intentional about reaching these goals?

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**Developing a Relational Style of Youth Ministry***Build deeper relationships by spending time together.*

Matthew 22:37-39

To have a relational style of youth ministry, you and other leaders must work together to purposefully develop it. You'll find that most of the recommended action steps listed below require attitude adjustments rather than extra time from your week. I encourage you to make sure everyone on your team reads through the steps and uses them as a checklist to evaluate his relational time with students. Some of these steps seem difficult at first, but, given some time, they'll begin to feel more natural.

**Understand the power of presence.** Many new youth workers feel like they have to force conversations to get to know students. Relax. Just be there for a while. Don't expect students to come rushing up to you and say, "Hi. Welcome. Are you a new leader? I'm so glad you're here. Why don't you come sit by me?" But over time, when you show up at church, at their campus, at their games, at important community events involving teenagers, they'll learn that you're not an obnoxious stalker, but that you're a caring adult.

**Take someone with you.** Would you like to do effective relational ministry without adding hours to your workload? Whenever possible, take students with you as you live your life.

What's on your agenda next Saturday that you might be able to do with a student? Washing your car? Shopping? Painting your house? Eating dinner? Lifting weights? Watching a movie?

Consider calling a student or two to join you. You won't get anything done as efficiently as you could by yourself, but you'll create great opportunities to talk, and you'll establish memories that impact students forever. Your students will come away with a message: "She thought enough of me to ask me to join her."

**Ask strategic questions.** Asking good questions is one of the greatest attributes you can have as a youth worker. A strategic question draws the focus away from you and allows a student to share as much as he's comfortable sharing, while not simply responding with a one-word answer. For example, you might ask a student, "How are you doing?" A quick, safe response is, "Good." End of conversation.

Instead, try something like, "Tell me one thing you did today." This opens up the possibilities a bit more. Even if a student replies, "Nothin'," a natural nonthreatening response could be, "Well, if you could have done something fun, what would you have done?"

**Learn to listen.** During my early years, I had no idea how important listening was to the health of youth ministry and to the power of relationships. Now, every year I'm more aware of hearing these words from students, "No one ever listens to me." Let's be the exception to that cry for help.

**Be real.** Transparency is risky. Some people in your church may want you to be perfect in the eyes of your students. They want your life to be so different that you're unaffected by temptation. They'd like you to be above their problems. Well, the only people who aren't affected by temptation are dead, so why pretend that life's struggles don't affect you? If you pretend to be something you're not, it's dishonest, hypocritical, and damaging to students because they'll eventually find out the truth.

On the other hand, I'm not suggesting that you be totally transparent and reveal your worst sins; your students should not serve as therapists. But be real with students and help them see how you're learning to walk through the challenges of life.

**Know when to nudge.** One complaint I hear from youth workers when I emphasize the value of relational ministry is that, if they focus so much on being friends, they'll never get an opportunity to challenge students to align their lives with God's Word.

When opportunities arise or when you need to challenge students, don't be afraid to nudge them. That's a necessary part of the disciple-making process—to lovingly point them toward Christ or to challenge them to develop new habits. Students expect you to ask about their spiritual lives, their prayer requests, their home lives, what they did on their dates, and so on. If they're expecting it, you might as well follow through! But timing is everything. So part of your relational journey is learning when to talk about God and when to talk about other topics.

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**Be available.** Obviously, you can't be available to students 24 hours a day, but relational ministry requires your presence when a tension arises or a crisis hits. It would be wonderful to choose the timing of crises in the lives of adolescents. Since that's not realistic, I ask my leaders to communicate "perceived availability."

For example, I might tell a student, "If you need to talk, I'd love to be there for you!" We might not have an immediate meeting, but the student knows he has access to me. Being available doesn't mean being on call, but it does mean expressing interest and concern.

**Establish boundaries.** In youth ministry, you'll need to establish some boundaries. Whether you're married or single, you cannot and should not try to meet every need at every hour on every day. If married, your family will love you for learning the art of saying no. If you're single, your future spouse and children will thank you for learning to say this important word and developing good relationship habits.

If you're relational but you don't establish some boundaries, ministry will keep you from having a personal life.

**Learn to refer.** When you do meet with students or parents about significant issues, sometimes the best plan is to listen, pray, and refer to a professional counselor—or at least to an individual with more experience on the subject. Don't feel guilt about referring. Make it clear that you're not a counselor but you'll be happy to listen and to offer the name of counselors to contact for additional help.

—DOUG FIELDS is a pastor, communicator, resource-provider, writer, and leadership mentor and is currently working with Simply Youth Ministry & Azusa Pacific University (HomeWord's Center for Youth/Family); adapted from *Your First Two Years in Youth Ministry: A Personal and Practical Guide to Starting Right*. © 2002 by Youth Specialties. Used by permission.

### Discuss

1. How could I be more transparent with students so they see "the real me" without sharing too much?
2. What boundaries have I set between ministry and my personal life? How have I communicated these? Which end seems to be getting the short stick?
3. Who could I refer students to when they come to me with a problem I'm not equipped to handle?
4. What changes or adjustments might I need to make to develop a more relational ministry?

**DISCIPLING TEENS****Ten Commandments for Relationship Building**

*Avoid these common traps.*

Acts 2:42

My guidelines and promises to myself in discipling others:

1. Thou shalt not bring thine own “stuff” into the relationship and make everything about you. So many times I see people do this, and I even do it myself. Something the person I am discipling says triggers something I remember about my own life. It’s okay to share a story, but this can get out of hand quickly.
2. Thou shalt come prepared. Arrive early, spiritually nourished, emotionally stable, and having prayed. Everyone has bad weeks, but that should be the occasional occurrence, not the norm.
3. Thou shalt wait. Don’t come into the meeting with lots to say before you even make eye contact. Things may have changed since the last meeting, or you might just need to listen. Don’t arrive with your guns ready.
4. Thou shalt not wait. Don’t be afraid to jump into a situation that needs clarity, needs interrupting, or needs your help. You have been invited into that if you are in a discipleship relationship. Don’t flinch.
5. Thou shalt not make this into therapy. Though it may look like it at times, discipleship is not therapy.
6. Thou shalt not call out every problem you see. Often there are lots of issues going on all at once. It’s like golf—you can’t focus on your grip, your stance, the position of your arm, your backswing, your head, your eye contact, and the many other minutiae all at the same time. Don’t overburden disciples with all that they need to work on. Give them one thing, or two.
7. Thou shalt not condemn when you don’t see the progress you wished for. It’s not fair or helpful to show too much disappointment in someone who is working through their problems. They know they didn’t measure up this week. They need safety and support, and they came to you for it.
8. Thou shalt not micromanage. Too many suggested solutions create codependence and enabling behavior. It feels good to be needed, but don’t cave to giving all the solutions. Let your disciples start coming up with their own solutions.
9. Thou shalt always challenge AND affirm. One of these is completely ineffective without the other. Both need to be present for a consistent movement forward.
10. Thou shalt have faith in God to do the work you can’t. You can’t make the real changes. Those are God’s realm. Be faithful to what you are called to. Don’t try to be God, and don’t take credit for God’s work. Just be faithful.

— PAUL MARTIN lives in Birmingham, Alabama and serves at St. Peter’s Anglican Church; adapted from Being Ministry. Used by permission.

**Discuss**

1. Which of these commandments have you been guilty of breaking in the past? Which represent areas you will really have to work at?
2. How do you prepare for a discipleship meeting? How might more, or different, preparation help you better follow these guidelines?
3. To what extent do you hold yourself responsibility for the outcomes of your discipling relationship?

**DISCIPLING TEENS****How to Connect with Students**

*Advice for being in, but not of, youth culture.*

John 17:16–19

In the spring of 1994, William Lishman flew from Ontario to Virginia in an ultralight aircraft with 18 Canadian geese in his wake. Lishman was leading the birds in their first winter migration, because they were hatched in captivity and could not migrate on their own. The birds followed Lishman's light-winged contraption even though it was featherless, many times their size, and equipped with a whirring motor instead of a squawk.

Sometimes doing youth ministry can feel like being up in Lishman's ultralight. Although you fly with the geese, you're not quite one of them. The situation presents some important questions: *How do you find the balance between being a friend and being an authority figure? How do you minister in youth culture without being a part of it? How do you gain the trust of geese when you're an airplane?*

While there is no formula for earning students' respect and trust, there are three basic principles that will help youth workers foster healthy relationships with students: consistency, genuine interest, and shared insight.

**Time and Consistency**

Perhaps the most basic building block of any relationship is time together. It speaks volumes to students, especially when it's voluntary. It implicitly tells students that they're worthwhile, that they're wanted, and that they're chosen. Regular time together placates the voice that exists inside of all teenagers and screams for acceptance.

This doesn't mean that teenagers will verbally recognize your time as a gift. What they will do is notice when you show up and when you're absent. Consistency and longevity are crucial. The more time you spend with students, the more their trust will have a chance to grow, and if all goes well, the more you will enjoy them.

**What you can do:**

1. Show up to events on time and stay until the students go home.
2. With the approval of the youth pastor, plan informal hangout times with students apart from youth group meetings. Consider inviting a small group over to your home for a movie or game night.
3. Give yourself time to fit in with the students; commit to serving in student ministry for at least two years.
4. Don't underestimate what your presence communicates to the students.

**Mentally Present, Genuinely Interested**

As you hang out with students, it's not enough just to be there. You have to engage students in conversation, find out what interests them, and be mentally present. As the adult, you should expect to initiate most conversations and be ready with questions to keep them going. Some students are naturally shy around adults and may answer any questions put to them with halting, short answers or an "I'm too cool for you" exterior, but this isn't necessarily a reflection that they don't like you or don't want to talk. Be persistently friendly and try to ask questions that lead to common ground—about their siblings, their classes in school, and their interests.

If you aren't a natural conversationalist, being interested in what they have to say may be a struggle, but prayer can be of great help. When you pray for students, your heart becomes tied to them and you become interested in their lives in a new way. It's Matthew 6:21 come true: where your treasure is—your time, your prayers, your passion for ministry to teens—there your heart will be also.

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Give your students the gift of your full attention. Listen to what they're saying, and as you listen, don't rush in with advice. Avoid throwing platitudes at them or trying to band-aid their wounds with a quick Scripture verse. Students need space to get out what they're trying to say. Unsought advice, particularly if you haven't built a strong relationship, can come across as patronizing. Rather than rushing in with suggestions, ask questions that may lead the student to a broader perspective of the situation.

It is also important to be sensitive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit as you talk. One youth worker recalls:

*I can remember one incident where a student in genuine pain started talking about how hurt she was, how she didn't understand why God would let these events happen; she was just so angry. I remember thinking of some verses that I thought would be helpful, but the Spirit told me to be quiet. So I kept my mouth shut, letting her talk herself out, until I felt free to respond. Later she thanked me, quite specifically, for "not spouting off Bible verses at me when I just needed someone to listen to me and not judge me." Lesson learned.*

While it's often difficult to sense what to do or say in a given situation, trust that God will give you the words to say—or sometimes, not to say.

### **What you can do:**

1. Ask questions that get students talking, and really listen to their answers.
2. Listen for themes in the student's conversations; try to pick up on what's important to your kids, as well as what is going well and not well.
3. Pray for the students as specifically as you can.
4. Don't be discouraged by reluctant answers. Keep in mind that your main objective isn't to be liked—it's to be a good role model and spiritual guide.

## Speaking Truth, Offering Insight

Out of a relationship of trust and respect, built by spending time with students and being genuinely engaged in their world, you will have chances to share insight. Over time, there will be things that you'll be able to see about the students that they can't recognize in themselves. Most often, you'll be able to offer encouragement to students who are bombarded with negative messages from every side. Students need to be affirmed that God has created them and that his love—not what they can or can't do, not what other people think—defines them. As an adult who is not their parent, you have a unique opportunity to be a voice of truth in a student's life, and your words will have a rare, valuable staying power.

As students confide in you about their lives, there will be times when a word of challenge or correction is necessary. Your response will depend on two things: your relationship with the student and whether or not they have actually asked for your advice. If you know the student well and she has asked for guidance, the door is wide open for you to share. If you're talking with a student for the first time and something he says sends up a red flag, follow the Holy Spirit's promptings for guidance about how to respond. Students will be guided by your reactions to what they tell you, so don't make excuses for their behavior, but listen and take them seriously.

Be careful not to shy away from loving confrontations out of fear for how teens will react. One youth worker advises: "Teens often bond more with an adult who corrects them with love and calls them forward with praise and exhortation. Some of my most significant relationships with teens have resulted from confrontations." Following that advice, it's important to remember why you are serving in youth ministry—not to be liked—but to love the students, to be a role model and a spiritual guide. As you confront a student, make sure you speak out of genuine love and concern for the student's well being, and make sure they know it.

### **What you can do:**

1. Encourage and affirm the spiritual gifts of your students.

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2. Take time to reflect on your past, and especially on your student years. This will enable you to empathize better with the teens you serve.
3. Offer wise, measured, biblical advice.
4. When a student confides in you, don't let your first response be surprise, disgust, or condemnation.

Gaining the trust of teenagers takes hours of shared experiences and conversations, but the chance to walk alongside young women and men on their spiritual journeys is a fulfilling and humbling privilege. Although in an airplane you'll never quite be one of the geese, you can lead them a little farther along in flight.

—RACHEL WILLOUGHBY has worked with youth in a variety of ministry settings; © 2007 Christianity Today International/[BuildingChurchLeaders.com](http://BuildingChurchLeaders.com).

**Discuss**

1. How often are you meeting with students? How could you actively make this a higher priority?
2. How can you share common interests with students, and use these common interests as a way to build stronger relationships?
3. How often do you make time for serious, spiritual conversations? Have you communicated your availability to your students?

**DISCIPLING TEENS****Checklist for Relationship Building**

*Focus on relationship, growth, and development with your teens.*

Proverbs 19:20

An important part of being an effective mentor is developing a meaningful relationship with the person you are mentoring. This short checklist offers a guide for getting to know your mentee.

**Who Are You?**

This focuses on relationship and friendship. To develop a deeper relationship with your mentees:

- Pray with them. Ask what you can pray for on their behalf.
- Take a genuine interest in their family.
- Regularly write them notes of encouragement.
- Call them or send them cards on their birthdays.
- Make sure you know their life story.
- Make a point to have fun together.

**How Are You?**

This focuses on transparency and accountability. To help your mentees in their personal growth:

- Share what God is teaching you. Take them to Scripture.
- Share personal struggles and victories.
- Share the value of assessing spiritual health from your personal perspective.
- Assess their spiritual health together and then work up a “health plan.”
- Challenge and encourage them to take their next spiritual steps.

**Where Can I Help You?**

The following focus on developing and equipping your mentees:

- Go through a book together.
- Do a prayer walk together.
- Pray and fast together.

—LIFE TOGETHER; adapted from our sister website [SmallGroups.com](http://SmallGroups.com), © 2003. For more articles like this one, visit [www.SmallGroups.com](http://www.SmallGroups.com).

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**Challenging the Hearts of Student Leaders**

*Nurture potential to grow student leaders.*

## 2 Timothy 2:2

*Bring a few together.* One of the greatest ways to encourage student leaders and foster their passion for the Lord is to allow them to be with others who are like-minded. Iron sharpens iron; sharp students will sharpen peers who show leadership potential. Gathering them together doesn't need to be a monthly structured time, but look for occasional spontaneous opportunities to accomplish this.

*Provide heart resources.* Take them with you to leadership-building events and buy them copies of great books you're reading. When I was in high school, John, a 50-year-old adult volunteer, gave me *Spiritual Leadership*. I wasn't eager to read it because it was ... well ... a book, and it didn't have any pictures. But John was a respected youth worker in my church. He told me, "Doug, I see leadership potential in you, and I want you to read this book. It's influenced me, and I think it will be helpful for you. I bought it for you as a gift, and you'll give me a gift back if you read it so we can discuss it."

A gift? Wow! I couldn't believe he thought enough about me to buy me something. After I read it, we talked about it. Some of the principles in the book have shaped my life, but the most important influence was that an adult leader invested in me when I was a student leader. I'm a different person today because of people like John who have taken the time to point me toward resources and experiences that have made me a stronger Christian and a better leader.

*Lead by example.* You must model what you expect from others. If I walk past empty soda cans or trash at church, so will my student leaders. They'll follow my lead. If I only have superficial conversations about the weather, sports, or school, they'll never learn to ask questions that prick the hearts of others. Leadership students watch everything you do, pay attention to what you read and the music you listen to, and take notes on how you treat your family. They're the sponges and you're the water. Your example of leadership will be a significant part of their personal development.

*Hold them accountable.* I don't wake up looking for trouble, but when I avoid confrontation in my relationships, trouble finds me. Ignoring students who frustrate you or avoiding the tough conversations hurts everyone. Students need to be lovingly challenged so they can learn and grow.

When teenagers commit to be student leaders, tell them you're going to go face-to-face with them when the need arises. If you find behavior inconsistent with the established leadership guidelines, talk to the student. You'll model leadership by having the tough conversations.

In addition to a willingness to confront students, you need to unashamedly hold students accountable for significant issues, such as supporting your ministry's strategy, setting and achieving goals in their personal lives, and living a lifestyle above reproach.

—DOUG FIELDS; adapted from *Your First Two Years in Youth Ministry: A Personal and Practical Guide to Starting Right*. © 2002 by Youth Specialties. Used by permission.

**Discuss**

1. What signs might indicate a potential leader? How can you spot these signs? What have you done to develop your student leaders? What could you do?
2. What kind of example are you setting? Think about your past few conversations with teens—what did you talk about? How are you modeling what it means to be a leader?
3. To what goals or standards am I holding students accountable? How could these be improved to help form better disciples?

## DISCIPLING TEENS

**The Importance of Intergenerational Discipleship***An interview with Kara Powell.*

Titus 2:1–8

The statistics are grim. Rainer Research estimates that 70 percent of young people leave the church by age 22. Barna Group argues that the figure increases to 80 percent by age 30. The Southern Baptist Convention, America's largest denomination, recently observed that growth in their churches is failing to keep up with the birth rate. Taken together, these findings suggest a startling fact: not only are we failing to attract younger worshippers, we're not holding on to the ones we have.

As executive director of the Fuller Youth Institute at Fuller Theological Seminary and a former youth pastor, Kara Powell has her eyes on the youth dropout trend. She is currently in the midst of a three-year College Transition Project, a study that involves over 400 youth group graduates and is focused on understanding how parents, churches, and youth ministries can set students on a trajectory of lifelong faith and service. Though research is ongoing, it is already revealing a positive pattern: youth involved in intergenerational relationships in church are showing promise for stronger faith in high school and beyond.

*Leadership* journal spoke with Kara about her research and what it means for the local church.

**What can churches do to increase the likelihood that our kids stay in church after they graduate?**

I think the future of youth ministry is intergenerational youth ministry.

At this point in our research, we've found that one thing churches can do that really makes a difference is getting kids actively involved in the life of the church before they graduate.

There is a strong link between kids staying in church after they graduate and their involvement in intergenerational relationships and worship. It's important, we're finding, to get beyond a token youth Sunday and start thinking about how to involve kids as ushers and greeters and readers and musicians in our services.

We're also finding a relationship between teenagers serving younger kids and their faith maturity when they graduate from high school. Teens should not only be the objects of ministry; they need to be the subjects of ministry as well. It's the 16-year-old that has relationships with 66-year-olds and 6-year-olds who is more likely to stay involved in a faith community after she graduates.

**How else can churches foster intergenerational relationships?**

There's a standard ratio in youth ministry: one adult for every five kids. My colleague here at Fuller, Chap Clark, says we need to reverse the ratio and strive for having five adults build into one kid.

When I say that to youth workers or pastors, they tense up. I'm not talking about five Bible study leaders or five small group leaders per teenager. I'm talking about five adults who care enough about a kid that they learn her name, ask her on Sunday how they can be praying for her, and then the following Sunday ask her, "How did it go with that science test?" Our study shows that even these baby step connections can make a real difference.

**So relationships are as important as worship styles?**

More important. And I think one of the real advantages of being a smaller church is that there is a lot more potential for intergenerational relationships and longer lasting faith. It's a general rule that the bigger the church the more segmented the age groups and generations are from each other. So I look at a church of a hundred and think, *Man, what potential there is to have meaningful relationships.*

**Does that mean larger churches are stuck with age-segregated programs?**

No. We're seeing real potential for intergenerational relationships with justice and service projects, too. There's richness in getting folks from the youth group and adult Sunday school classes, for example, serving together. Have the youth ministry do a trip with the senior adult class. Lots of churches have told us that that's been really powerful.

I don't meet many adults who want nothing to do with kids, but I meet a lot of adults who are intimidated by teenagers and don't know how to talk with them. Serving together levels the ground. When we've got a hammer in one hand and a paintbrush in the other, all of a sudden we've created a shared experience, and age is irrelevant.

## DISCIPLING TEENS

### How is this different from traditional mentoring?

Traditional mentoring typically focuses on kids in whom we see some kind of potential, the best and brightest. The danger with focusing on the best and brightest is it's not good for anyone, because it only reinforces an identity based on achievement and performance for the kids who are good at performing. For those who aren't good at performing, it's just one more way that they're being judged and found failing. Some kids may not be verbally oriented, but they show mercy in amazing ways or they have great cross-cultural sensitivity. And there are adults who feel called to step into relationships with those kids.

If adults in a church caught a vision that every kid needs to have their name known by five adults in the church, then an adult who's interested in computers can connect with a teen who is interested in computers. And it's through things like service that we get to know each other and can follow up later to deepen the relationship.

### What are some of the obstacles to this sort of ministry?

A lot of youth workers fear resistance from other church leaders, parents, and even the kids themselves.

### What advice would you give youth pastors who are eager but fearful?

First, I'd tell them that there's research that backs up the effectiveness of this type of ministry. And parents are very open to research.

Second, I tell them the change process often starts small. Look for a subgroup of parents and kids who will embrace this and can help you bring changes into your youth ministry. I'm a big believer in the axiom that people support what they create. So get people involved from the very beginning.

Then experiment and tell people, "We're going to try this, and if it doesn't work, that's okay." Continue to explain why you're making the changes. If the congregation isn't fully onboard, it may be because it hasn't really been explained to them.

Our church has held a couple of donut focus groups with youth group kids who had graduated. And we asked, "What are the most important things that contributed to your faith? What do you wish we did more of?" Any church can ask these questions of current kids, kids who have graduated, and parents, and learn a whole lot about what God is doing and maybe what's hindering what God wants to do.

### How can you reassure adults who are worried about changing their church's approach to teen ministry?

I remember what a privilege it was to be invited to the adult table. Adults underestimate how much kids want to be with us. Kids are far more interested in talking to caring, trustworthy adults than we think they are.

—MARSHALL SHELLEY AND BRANDON O'BRIEN; adapted from our sister publication *Leadership* journal, © 2009. For more articles like this one, visit [www.leadershipjournal.net](http://www.leadershipjournal.net).

## Discuss

1. What "warning signs" have we seen in our church or our youth ministry that suggest a lack of depth or growth in our teens?
2. How many adults are investing in the lives of each of our teens? How can we encourage more adults to pursue intergenerational discipleship?
3. How can we communicate this to our teens and parents in a way that will get them excited about the opportunity?

## DISCIPLING TEENS

**Further Exploration**

*Books and other resources for discipling teenagers.*

 **BuildingChurchLeaders.com**: Leadership training resources from Christianity Today International.

- *“Is Our Church Discipling?” Assessment Pack*
- *“Essentials of Discipleship” Focused Training Resources*
- *“Mentor” Orientation Guide*
- *“Building a Culture of Discipleship” Training Theme*

 **LeadershipJournal.net**. This website offers practical advice and articles for church leaders.

**Your First Two Years in Youth Ministry** by Doug Fields. (Youth Specialties, 2002; ISBN 9780310240457). Fields offers 10 valuable steps to beginning a successful program. You’ll learn the importance of going before God, focusing on relationships, communicating your desires, identifying your personal values, developing and teaching your purpose, pursuing leaders, evaluating and creating programs, and more.

**Simple Student Ministry: A Clear Process for Strategic Youth Discipleship** by Eric Geiger and Jeff Borton. (B&H Publishing Group, 2009; ISBN 9780805447941). Emphasizing strategies that will lead your kids to mature faith, Geiger and Borton fine-tune proven methods of clarity, movement, alignment, and focus to help you ground students in the life of the gospel. This book includes case study data that illustrates the success of the program.

**Ministry by Teenagers: Developing Leaders from Within** by Jonathan McKee and David R. Smith. (Youth Specialties, 2010; ISBN 9780310670773). If you’re searching for passionate, committed, creative leaders for your youth ministry, you could be sitting on a gold mine! *Ministry by Teenagers* is jam-packed with ideas, resources, and practical strategies to help identify teens with leadership potential, foster their missional spirits, and give them opportunities to discover and use their gifts in ministry.

**Together: Adults and Teenagers Transforming the Church** by Jeff Baxter. (Zondervan, 2010; ISBN 9780310578741). Does youth ministry in your church exist on an island, disconnected from the larger church? Does your youth ministry accomplish the church’s overall goals for making disciples of teenagers? *Together* helps answer those questions and more.