

BEST PRACTICES:

HOW TO PARTNER WITH PARENTS

CODY DUFF // ROCK CHURCH, FAIR HAVEN, MI

1. REMEMBER YOU'RE AN INFLUENCE, NOT *THE* INFLUENCE

- At the most, you have 7 years of semi-consistent influence with a student; parents will be directly involved in that student's daily life for 18+ years.
- Partner with parents by working to build THEIR influence more that you work to build yours.
- Parents need to know that you're trying to help them, not replace them.

2. ALWAYS CONSIDER YOUR IMPACT ON THE FAMILY

- Consider the price of camp (or other events) for families with multiple teenagers.
- Consider when you schedule events throughout the year—dates and times (e.g., don't schedule a lock-in for Christmas morning).

3. DON'T UNDERESTIMATE LITTLE EXPRESSIONS OF THOUGHTFULNESS

- Return from an event on time, not 30 minutes late.
- Write a simple, handwritten note to a family stating your appreciation for them.
- Share a daily update posted on a Facebook page parents can read or watch during summer camp.
- Offer a smile and the honest words, "I'm praying for your family."

4. TAKE THE TRAUMA OUT OF TRANSITIONS

- When a new student starts attending, call the parent and introduce yourself. Answer their questions and address any concerns.
- When a small group leader steps down, call the parents and let them know before you tell the students. Assure them you will be personally involved with that group while searching for the right fit to lead it moving forward.

5. ENCOURAGE PARENTS ON THEIR JOURNEY

- Parents crave affirmation and long for positive reinforcement about their parenting skills—they love to hear optimistic comments about their children.
- When you return from an event (e.g., winter retreat, camp, convention), don't rush off to clean the van. Instead meet parents in the parking lot, look them in the eyes, and tell them a story emphasizing a positive interaction or characteristic you noticed about their child.
- Building up a family with your words is one simple practice every youth worker can pursue regardless of age or parenting experience.

6. ALLOW PARENTS TO MINISTER TO PARENTS

- Over the years, we've learned that parents can minister to other parents effectively, more effectively than most younger volunteers.
- An easy win would be to write a simple "job description" for the role of Parent Ministry Coordinator and look for a healthy parent who could coordinate some of your family-friendly efforts.

7. HONOR THE PARENT

- Some children struggle with authority. No, scratch that—all children struggle with authority. But remember this: if you are not on the parent's side, you are not on the kid's side.
- Model what it means to respect not only your own parents, but theirs as well.

8. COM-MU-NI-CATE (**SO IMPORTANT**)

- This is one of the best ways to earn trust with your parents!
- When you communicate to the parent, give them the right information at the right time so they can make a move to do more than they would otherwise do.
- They definitely want a heads up about the sex series you're planning next month.
- Whatever you do, **DO NOT** rely on your students for this. They make for poor messenger pigeons. Make a plan for parents to receive information directly. If you need help with this, enlist your parent point-person.