4 CONVERSATIONS TO HAVE WITH PARENTS

Has a parent ever asked, "Can we talk sometime?" These words alone can send a chill down your spine, but they don't have to. These words can be so scary if we haven't created a regular rhythm for one-on-one conversations with parents. We're big believers that **meeting face-to-face with parents and caregivers is pretty important**—not just for them to talk about the challenges they may be facing but for you and your ministry, too. Through these conversations, parents get to know you care about them, and you get to communicate how much you value them.

These conversations can also be a great opportunity for you to evaluate how well your ministry is doing when it comes to supporting families. So, you can use these conversations strategically to help you continue to adapt your ministry and vision in ways that help kids grow, help equip parents, and help build trust with parents.

But you don't have to go into parent conversations without any kind of preparation. Opening up a conversation with "So, what do you want to talk about today?" isn't the most strategic plan. Instead, we've found that most parent conversations fall into one of four categories...

- **FAMILY CRISIS:** When a parent reaches out to you to help navigate through a crisis within their family. These are times when you can be emotionally supportive while also offering tangible help for when they reach out for support.
- **BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS:** These can create sizable challenges within your ministry. These conversations happen whenever we need to talk with a parent about the behaviors their kids or teenagers display that negatively impact the other kids, teenagers, or adults within your ministry.
- **PARENT QUESTIONS & CONCERNS:** These will probably come up throughout the year. You might get an unexpected request from a parent to have a conversation about something confusing or concerning to them. They may be angry or just curious. This is a great opportunity to find clarity and to receive feedback directly from a parent!
- **PARENT RECRUITING:** For the times you've found a really awesome parent in your church. These conversations give you space to do your due diligence and ask questions designed to discern what this parent could bring to your volunteer team while also getting them excited about jumping in with you!

You can't always predict when a specific type of conversation needs to happen, but you can do some work to prepare beforehand. You can start by building up a template of questions you might ask in each of these conversations. What's the most important part of each conversation? How can you make sure you're listening to what a parent may have to share with you? How can you approach a conversation to build trust with a parent rather than defend yourself or your ministry? It's a lot to consider, but it's a great way to get you thinking through your strategy for parent conversations.

HOW TO APPROACH EVERY CONVERSATION WITH A PARENT

Even though you'll navigate through each of these conversations uniquely, you can do a few things in each conversation.

- **INVITE:** Offer to buy them a meal or a cup of coffee. Let them know you'd love to make time to connect with them in person.
- **PREP:** Before you begin a conversation with a parent, prepare by reviewing the questions you intend to use to guide the conversation.

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- **GET CURIOUS:** Besides coming prepared with the right questions, it's also important to come prepared with the right attitude. As you prepare for your conversation, assume a posture of humility and curiosity. Remember, this conversation isn't just about that parent. It's designed to help you understand some of your own weaknesses and potential areas of improvement.
- **PRAY:** Once you've prepared your questions (and your attitude), consider any specific questions, issues, or concerns you'd like to discuss with the parent you'll be meeting with, and spend time in prayer for them. Ask God to give you a posture of generosity, compassion, and understanding toward them.
- **GET FEEDBACK:** If you anticipate a difficult conversation with a parent, ask for feedback from a coworker or supervisor in advance. Then develop a plan for how you'll address your concern with that parent in a way that assumes the best about them.

When you're finally sitting down with a parent ...

- **CONNECT:** Be sure to always start your conversations by connecting with them personally. You might primarily work with kids or teenagers, but you're also ministering to their families as well. After you've caught up, ask the open-ended questions you've prepared.
- **ASK FOR FEEDBACK:** Ask questions that invite them to evaluate you and your ministry.
- **ASK IF YOU CAN GIVE FEEDBACK:** If you have any feedback you need to give a parent (especially if it's difficult to hear), be sure to ask if you can give them some feedback first. If they're not ready to have a difficult conversation, that's okay—ask them when would be a good time to have that conversation or share that feedback.
- **FOLLOW-UP:** Follow up with them with a quick text thanking them for their time after your conversation. If you had a challenging conversation, be sure to follow up with them about that as well.

Having a face-to-face conversation with a parent might feel intimidating, but it doesn't have to! With a little planning before your conversation and the understanding that most conversations fall into one of four categories, you can be better prepared and more strategic with how you spend time with and minister to parents and their families. (And if you've never thought about a strategy for parents and families, feel free to steal ours for kids or for students!)

And, if you're using Grow Curriculum, we've already done the work to make these conversations easier for you! In Grow Kids and Grow Student Curriculum, we've created Conversation Guides with everything you need—PDFs and editable documents of questions and templates—to help walk you through each of the four conversations.



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