HOW TO PLAN AN OPEN HOUSE FOR FAMILIES IN YOUR YOUTH MINISTRY

Do you ever wonder how teenagers end up in your ministry? We're not talking about what draws them in or who invited them, but how did they *actually* get there? Sometimes, you turn around, and there are teens standing in the doorway, ready to go, but you hardly ever see their parents or caregivers.

But what would it be like to have a connection with those parents? Imagine what it could look like to talk with them and have them engaged and invested in what's happening in your youth ministry. It might seem like a dream, but it doesn't have to! You can get parents connected to your ministry, and we'd love to help!

If you feel like you're struggling to connect with parents, you're not alone. When we ask youth ministry leaders about their biggest struggles, we often hear how they want to...

- **Be better at connecting with parents.**
- Help parents view **youth ministry as more than an extra-curricular activity.**
- **Meet the needs** of the teenagers and families they serve.

Those seem like simple goals, but sometimes they're easier said than done. But if we want to reach those goals, we'll need to get parents involved. Working with parents is a crucial part of your ministry. Every teenager in your ministry is being parented by at least one adult (who may or may not be their biological parent.)

But as we know, we only have so many hours in a week to prep a sermon, design a game, train our volunteers, and disciple teenagers. So, we tend to forget to minister to parents and families, and we trust someone else will take care of that. By doing so, we might accidentally signal that we don't care about how a family grows in their faith together, which can keep parents from fully putting their trust in us.

Thankfully, there are ways for us to build trust in parents while also ministering to them. And, as an added benefit, they don't need to cost a significant portion of our annual budget. Some of these are even every youth pastor's favorite word—**free!**

Every year, we recommend you hold just a few events that are intentional about connecting with parents and families to cast vision, build trust, and get valuable face-to-face time. All you have to do is be strategic about which events you hold, who is invited, and where they fall on the calendar.

So, let's talk through one of our favorite simple, short, and free events you can hold for parents—a **Family Open House!**

WHAT IS A FAMILY OPEN HOUSE?

Did you ever get nervous right before starting a new school year? You might have experienced sweaty palms, weak knees, and an insatiable desire to memorize the school map so you wouldn't get lost (Okay, that last one may not have been a universal experience).

When we start something new, we tend to have a lot of big feelings about it...

- We can get nervous.
- We may be full of questions about what to expect.
- We may wish we had a friend (or a friendly face) to walk through it with us.

These are the types of things a Family Open House can help with! It's an event you should hold just before the beginning of the school year to help introduce new families to your ministry and those who have been lingering on the fringes.

A great Open House is fun, informational, and inspiring. Most importantly, it helps families see how

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your ministry wants to serve them because you won't earn the trust of a teen's parent or guardian if you don't first meet their needs. Because, let's just say it, as much as a new teenager might be full of questions and nerves, their parents and families are, too.

They'll have questions like...

- Can I trust these people?
- Is this ministry safe?
- Will they teach my teenager about Jesus?
- Will my teenager have a good time?

So, not only is an Open House a great chance for you to welcome in new teenagers, but it's a great way to answer these questions with your words, actions, and philosophy for ministry.

It's all a part of building trust with parents, which means you'll want your Open House to ...

- Introduce families to your staff.
- Introduce families to their teens' small group leaders.
- Familiarize new families with your ministry.
- Familiarize families with your ministry calendar.
- Inspire grown-ups to engage with your ministry.
- Answer families' questions.

WHAT TO DO

The great thing about an Open House is it can be as simple or elaborate as you'd like. You'll just want to make sure it's sustainable, repeatable, and in line with your regular weekly environment. Remember, the goal is to **help teenagers and their families get familiar with your program,** so this might not be the best time to break out your costumes and crazy lights (unless that's what a typical week looks like for you!).

You *will* want to set a timeframe for your Open House. Your event should be at least 30 minutes before or after your weekly service to give parents and families time to mingle, meet your volunteers, and ask their questions. Once you've settled on those details, here are a few more things to consider...

ENVIRONMENT

Again, you don't need to do anything very out of the ordinary for your Open House. You want families to get familiar with your ministry as it is every week. However, you might want to consider a few helpful signs to point parents in the right direction. Oh, and a fun playlist never hurts.

TOOLS

Parents will be much more likely to remember the information you share with them at your Open House if you give them a few tools to take home. This is a great chance to hand out some of the following tools...

- **FAMILY HANDBOOK:** This Handbook is one way to put the most important things about your ministry into writing so it's easy for parents to digest. This should hold your safety policies, a snapshot of your vision, and staff contact information.
- **ANNUAL FAMILY SURVEY:** This Survey is a simple way to learn from and about the parents and caregivers in your ministry. This should include contact information, preferred communication methods, and a couple of questions about their experience raising teenagers and how your ministry can help.
- **VOLUNTEER BUSINESS CARDS:** Since your Open House is a great opportunity to connect families with the volunteers who are investing in them, Volunteer Business Cards are the perfect tool to solidify that connection.

And if you need help creating these tools or want to know how they can help you build trust with parents, we have a great article for you here!

INFORMATION

The point of an Open House is, of course, to get families acquainted with what your ministry does and what they can expect. To do that, you'll need to cover the basics of your ministry. Think about sharing information like...

- The names and roles of your ministry staff.
- Your ministry's mission.

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- The structure of your weekly program.
- Your vision for the upcoming year.
- How your ministry seeks to serve families.
- Photos and videos from your ministry.
- Upcoming events.

Oh, but here's a tip: the information you share doesn't need to be boring. Make your presentation fun, engaging, and inspiring—just like your ministry. Throughout your talk, remember to point parents back to your Family Handbook. That way, they'll know if they miss something or want to know more once they've gone home, then you've got them covered!

VOLUNTEERS

You should involve your volunteers in your Open House whenever possible—especially your small group leaders. You may not be able to get every single team member to attend, but it's probably a good idea to at least have your small group leaders in attendance. They'll be the ones leading your new teenagers and families, so this can be an important time to start investing in those relationships.

The same is true for your other volunteers, too! As you prepare for your Open House, cast some vision for them to grasp. This event is a simple time for them to start connecting with new teenagers and families as they transition into your ministry.

THE SCHEDULE

So, let's recap. You've got a plan for what you'll talk through. You've picked out your playlist, and your team of volunteers is confirmed to be there. So...what do you do with your 30 minutes? Here's a sample of what this might look like.

10:20–10:30 FAMILIES ARRIVE

Encourage families to show up early so they can walk around your environment. Make sure you've got your playlist going to feed some energy into the room. This is also a great time for your volunteers to welcome families as they enter and start to cultivate those relationships!

10:30–10:45 WELCOME

Introduce your staff. Briefly share your ministry's mission and vision. Familiarize families with your weekly environment, vision for the year, and important upcoming events. While you share, ask parents to complete the Family Survey.

10:45–10:55 INTRODUCE VOLUNTEERS

Talk about the importance of having multiple adults investing in their kids' lives. Encourage families to meet your team (especially their teen's small group leader) and have your volunteers hand out their Volunteer Business Cards as needed.

10:55–11:00 DISMISS

Encourage families to hand in their Family Surveys, stick around to chat, and pick up copies of the Family Handbook on their way out.

That's it! That's all it takes to host your own Open House. After the event is over, be sure to encourage your team of volunteers and thank them for showing up. You can also start to reach out to families and thank them for their time and trust as you filter through the Family Surveys!

ANNUAL PARENT EVENTS

Parent events like the Open House are simple ways for you to make connections with the families in your ministry. They give you a chance to **cast your vision, make connections,** and start to **build trust with the parents and caregivers** in your ministry. They're also a great way to **get your volunteers more invested** as they lead the way in investing in teenagers and their families.

If you're looking for a few more events to help you build trust with parents and get them more involved, we've got a few more ideas for you. A Parent and Small Group Leader Breakfast or a Parent Workshop might be just what you're looking for, and each of these events is part of our Annual Family Strategy!

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And if you're ready to start planning your own youth ministry Open House, we've made some stuff that can help. Inside each volume of Grow Students Curriculum, we include full parent event guides, planning timelines, shopping lists, editable graphics, and marketing materials. Plus, you'll get twelve months of teaching content, events for teenagers, discipleship activities, our full annual strategy, and more!



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