HOW TO PLAN MEETINGS PARENTS WILL ACTUALLY ATTEND

No one wants to sit through a meeting that could have been an email — especially the parents in your ministry. Too many parent meetings happen because they're full of *information* rather than chances for connection. Really, **parent meetings can be an effective part of your ministry strategy!** (And if you don't have a parent strategy yet, feel free to steal ours!) Parents need information and training at key points throughout the year, and a meeting is often the best way to deliver it. That's why it's so important to schedule meetings with parents throughout the year as needed.

When we think about doing ministry alongside of parents, we have to remember to focus on building trust with them throughout the year. Parent meetings give us a chance to meet face-to-face with the parents of the kids and teenagers in our ministries, letting us connect, share stories, and remind each other of the ways we're invested in helping their kids and teenagers grow closer to God *together.*

KEEP IT FOCUSED

If we only think of parent meetings as something we "have to" do, we'll be tempted to just throw a meeting on the calendar and call it a day. But when we remember these meetings can help us build trust with parents, we can be more strategic with how we schedule them.

We've found that there are a few different types of meetings you'll need to hold throughout the year.

- **NEW FAMILY ORIENTATION:** Meetings give new families the chance to get to know you, your ministry and your vision. These types of meetings are a great chance for you to hand out some tools for parents to connect with your ministry or a small group leader for their kid or teenager.
- **BEFORE & AFTER AN EVENT:** Meetings give you the chance to brief and debrief parents on an event. These meetings are great chances for parents to ask questions, hear stories, and recap the events you hold throughout the year.
- **TRAINING:** Meetings let you gather a group of parents and train or teach them about a specific topic. These meetings let you share new resources, offer advice, and hear about the challenges parents are facing as they raise their kids and teenagers.
- **MINISTRY TRANSITIONS:** Meetings are a space for you to share about changes in leadership, staff reorganization, strategy, meeting time, or any of the other major changes that may happen. These meetings help everyone stay on the same page about the transition and how to make it as smooth as possible.

So, before the beginning of each school year (but after you've already planned out the rest of your ministry calendar), take a look at your annual calendar to determine when you may want to meet with parents and hold these different types of meetings. Consider...

- When might you have a new influx of families who will need an orientation to your ministry?
- Do you have any big events that parents will want to connect with you about before and after?
- What kinds of situations might require a meeting that you can't plan ahead for?

When deciding how often to meet with parents, don't go overboard, though. You want to schedule enough meetings so parents have all the information and help they need, but not so many that they feel burdened by your ministry schedule and requirements. Save your in-person meetings for the *really* important stuff — the times when you want to teach, discuss, and connect with parents.

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FOR EVERY MEETING

When you're ready to plan a Parent Meeting ...

- **INVITE:** We recommend scheduling your meetings when families will already be at church, like Sunday afternoon for lunch or Wednesday night before your program. At least a month before your meeting, announce the meeting time, place, and *topic* — and let them know there will be food (and maybe even some giveaways)!
- **PREP:** We recommend scheduling one-hour meetings that include food, fun, celebrations, information, discussion, and announcements. To prepare ...
    - Prepare your **training material and discussion questions!** Think through what type of meeting you're holding and what it's about. Prepare for your talk and draft up discussion questions to get parents talking and learning from each other.
    - Prepare your **screen graphics!** Visual aids are so help
    - Prepare your environment! Play some happy music, set up a few tables or cozy sofas, and maybe add some cute decorations. If you're holding a meeting that requires discussion, make sure your **environment** can help facilitate conversation!
    - Prepare your **food!** If you're asking parents to meet during lunch, be sure to provide a full meal for them. If you're asking them to meet before or after your weekly program rather than during a meal, provide a snack like doughnuts and coffee, a nacho bar, or a make-your-own sundae station.

When you're finally sitting down with parents ...

- **DON'T DELAY:** While your volunteer meetings should always include some hang-out time, fun, and games, meeting with parents is a little different. Parents most likely are showing up for information and not for socializing. Respect their time by keeping your meetings on time and concise.
- **MEET:** Depending on the purpose of the meeting, we recommend 15-45 minutes of total meeting time. Informational meetings before events might only need to be fifteen minutes in total, but meetings that require both training and discussion should be longer. Do what works best for you and helps you achieve your meeting goals, but always be sure to include both training and conversation — even if the "conversation" is just a simple question-and-answer time. When deciding on your schedule, consider the purpose of the meeting.
    - **INFORMATIONAL MEETINGS:** When you have some simple information to share with parents (like the details of an upcoming event or deadline), fifteen minutes should be all you need.
    - **TRAINING MEETINGS:** When you'd like to train parents on a subject that's more than just information, you'll need extra time to share and discuss. Because these meetings require more time, you'll want to always include food and a more thoroughly planned schedule.
- **FOLLOW-UP:** After your meeting, follow up with parents with a quick email thanking them for their time. If you had a challenging conversation, be sure to follow up with them about that as well.

Parent meetings don't have to be boring *or* scary. They're helpful ways to connect with parents, share vision, and build trust within your ministry. Planning a parent meeting that's worth attending might seem like a lot of work, but the parents of your kids and teenagers are absolutely worth it. And hey, if you're using Grow Curriculum, we've already done the work for you. We have everything you need to create great parent meetings—training content with discussion questions and scripts, an annual calendar for planning your meetings, shopping lists, and more!

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