PLAN A YOUTH MINISTRY BREAKFAST TO CONNECT PARENTS & SMALL GROUP LEADERS

Every few years, we ask youth ministry leaders like you about their biggest struggles in ministry. Somewhere between telling us about their teens texting throughout their sermons and the neverending search to find dependable volunteers, youth ministry leaders across the board tell us that one of their biggest struggles is with parents.

- How do I **get parents involved in my ministry?**
- How can I **change the perception that youth ministry is just another extracurricular activity?**
- How can I **help meet the needs of the families I serve?**

These are just a few examples of the questions we've heard from ministry leaders worldwide, and we want to help!

If we want to be ministry leaders who help build teenagers' faith, we'll need to get parents involved. As a youth pastor, family ministry is important because every teenager is being parented by at least one adult (who may or may not be their biological parent).

But if our schedules are a sign of what we value in ministry, not many of us can say we spend hours and hours each week focusing on parents and families. The great news is there are ways to show parents how much you value them that don't require you to spend a third of your budget or most of your office hours. (But don't be afraid to buy a few gift cards to say, "Thanks for trusting me!")

You can spend a few hours each year creating a handful of events that can (literally) open the doors to new relationships and engagement. Plus, you can share your vision for ministry and get valuable face-to-face time with parents. All you have to do is get strategic about which events you hold, who is invited, and where they fall on your calendar.

So, let's talk through one of these simple, effective, and relationship-building events you can hold for parents—a **Parent and Small Group Leader Breakfast!**

WHAT'S A PARENT AND SMALL GROUP LEADER BREAKFAST?

A Parent and Small Group Leader Breakfast is an event designed to help the parents or caregivers of teens connect with their teens' small group leaders. It's as simple as that! It doesn't require much programming, but it does require intentionality on your part. You'll need to be intentional about casting vision for your small group leaders, and your small group leaders need to be intentional about inviting and encouraging their teenagers' grown-ups to show up.

When it comes to parents and small group leaders, we're pretty convinced of three things. First, **the best thing the local church can do for a teenager is to surround them with caring adults (like a small group leader) who will love and pastor them in the long term.** That probably doesn't mean they're going to be a teenager's small group leader forever (because that would be weird), but it does mean they'll build a relationship that will last for a long time—if not a lifetime.

Second, **a parent or guardian is the most important person in a teenager's life—**more important than their pastor, small group leader, or anyone your church could possibly recruit to help influence that teen's life and faith.

Third, **the local church's best chance at influencing a teenager's life and faith is to connect that teenager's grown-ups with other caring adults** so they can support each other and work together to influence the teen they love.

But in order to do that, three things have to happen:

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- Your **small group leaders need to see the value of parents.**
- **Parents need to see the value of your small group leaders.**
- And **both small group leaders and parents need practical ideas to help them connect and support each other.** That's where this event comes in.

So, **to meet those goals, we recommend hosting an event that gets parents and small group leaders in the same room...**maybe over breakfast. Because, after all, the first step toward getting parents and small group leaders to work together is to get them to connect. We suggest doing this a few months into the year because, by then, your small groups should be solidified, small group leaders will have had a chance to meet parents, and there will be enough history and relationships built between your small group leaders and teens that the small group leaders will have things to chat with parents about.

The secret of this event doesn't have anything to do with your ability to teach, program, or create a great experience. It has everything to do with the power of relationships and your team's ability to cast vision about the potential relationships between parents and small group leaders. A great Parent and Small Group Leader Breakfast will simply...

Connect parents with their teenager's leader.
Reinforce your church's desire to serve parents.
Create space for great conversations.
Feed everyone a yummy breakfast.

WHAT TO DO

As long as you have a large enough space, this event can work with any number of small group leaders and parents. You can also host it as several small get-togethers organized for each small group leader individually. Do whatever works best for you!

But this event has one big secret—it's not on you.

Think of the Parent and Small Group Leader Breakfast this way: ***parents* are the guests. *Small group leaders* are the hosts. You are simply the event planner.** With this event, parents should feel like their teen's small group leader is the one making this event happen— not you or your ministry. How do you do that, you ask? Here are three ways...

- **Ask small group leaders to personally invite parents** rather than make a series of announcements at church.
- **Brag about your small group leaders** during the event and in front of parents.
- **Make your small group leaders the stars of the event** by labeling tables with their names, giving them volunteer business cards to distribute, and encouraging them to see themselves as the host of their parents.

Once you've understood the big picture, here are a few specific things to do...

MENU

While we think a Saturday morning breakfast is typically a great time for this event (for both parents and small group leaders), you might find that another day or time works better for you. That's great! Whatever you choose, either arrange for food to be prepared and delivered or ask a few volunteers in your church to prepare a meal.

You don't need to spend a million dollars on this event, but we recommend providing food and drinks a few steps above typical milk and cereal.

Here are a few ideas you could try...

- Create Your Own Bar with a variety of cereals and milk to sample.
- Stack Your Own Pancake Bar with different varieties of pancakes.
- A donut wall with your favorite selection of donuts!

Breakfast can be fun, creative, and budget-friendly. Just make sure to prep plenty of coffee for everyone!

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MARKETING

In our experience, this event works best when you turn your traditional approaches to event marketing on their heads. Usually, when you're advertising an event to parents, you probably...

- Print tons of flyers.
- Make an announcement in the adult service.
- Write plenty of emails and social media posts.
- Ask for space in your church bulletin.

But don't. **Don't do *any* of those things.** This isn't that kind of event. For this breakfast, you want the experience of an invite-only event. You want a marketing campaign that cuts through the white noise of your church's other fifty events and lets parents know that this breakfast isn't just another time of "food and fellowship"—it's an essential, strategic investment in the life and faith of their teenager.

But how do you do that? Here's the key: instead of promoting this event publicly, keep this event private. Instead of promoting the event widely, **have your small group leaders take ownership of inviting the parents of the teens in their small group.** In fact, you should give your small group leaders so much responsibility over the marketing of this event that, if the parents of their teens don't hear about this event from their teens' small group leader, they won't hear about it at all.

Maybe that seems crazy, but there are two reasons for this (one philosophical and one practical). By placing the marketing responsibility on your small group leaders' shoulders...

- Your leaders will be forced to start communicating and creating relationships with parents before the event begins.
- If one of your leaders isn't able to make it to the event, you won't run the risk of a parent showing up and wondering where their teen's small group leader is.

Get the idea? Now, here's how to pull it off...

STEP 1: CAST VISION

For this to work, **casting vision to your small group leaders is absolutely essential.** Meet with your leaders about three months before the event. Talk to them about the importance of connecting with parents and this breakfast event. Tell them your hopes. Then, ask them to take ownership of getting the parents of their teens to this event.

As your small group leaders reach out to parents, write personal invitations, and communicate with them about this event, they will already be making huge strides in their efforts to partner with those parents. **The event is important, but so is everything leading up to the event.**

Even if a small group leader only has one parent show up to the breakfast, the connections they make with all of their teenager's parents during the promotion process will still be something to celebrate. Communicate this to your leaders. Let them know that while parents showing up to the event would be the ultimate win, their small relational investments along the way matter, too.

STEP 2: RESOURCE YOUR LEADERS

If you want your small group leaders to win at this whole promotion thing, they're going to need some resources to help them get the job done. But don't worry. We made them for you. You just have to edit them and hand them out. Here's what you should give every small group leader:

- **PARENT INVITATIONS:** Ask them to write a personal invitation to every parent. It's best if they can hand them to their teens' parents in person, but you probably want to offer to mail the invitations, too.
- **FLYERS:** After your leaders have sent their personal invitations, they can continue reminding parents by handing out flyers or even texting them images of your completed flyer. Give them both physical and digital versions of the flyer to send out.

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- **PROMOTION TIPS:** Along with the invitations and flyers, be sure to give your small group leaders each a set of tips to help them be more effective in their promotion efforts.

STEP 3: FOLLOW UP

As you prepare for the event, be sure to follow up with your small group leaders regularly. Ask how their promotion efforts are going and ask for regular updates on their RSVP counts. Use software like Google Sheets, Airtable, or Excel to track the number of small group leaders and parents attending.

ENVIRONMENT

If you've made it this far, we have some great news. This isn't a highly programmed event. Most of your work has to do with leading and resourcing your small group leaders ... and ordering breakfast, of course.

You won't need to prep a sermon or plan a 30-minute keynote to train parents and small group leaders. Instead, just plan to take a few minutes to share about your ministry philosophy and strategy. Then, you can let your leaders take things away!

To open the event, you should share a little bit about ...

- The names and roles of your ministry staff.
- How your ministry strives to serve families.
- Why support and connection between parents and small group leaders is so important.
- Why teens need a positive influence from multiple adults (other than their parents) during their adolescence.

Plan to keep it short and sweet. Then, move on to the real reason everyone is there: to eat and have a conversation.

Now, because so much of this event hinges on the conversations that will happen around the breakfast table, most of your attention should be on those physical tables rather than the room or stage.

Here are some things to do and consider ...

- **DECOR:** You don't need to go crazy decorating for this event, but if you're looking for a fun way to spruce up your environment, balloons (in colors that match your event graphics) should do the trick.
- **FOOD:** Set up your food and beverages in a buffet line, along with your plates, cups, and napkins. This will keep your tables relatively clear and draw more attention to the goodies you'll be placing on them.
- **TABLES:** Set up one round table for every small group leader (or multiple round tables in a figure-eight or small cluster if a small group leader has more parents attending than can fit comfortably at one round table). Pull up a chair for every parent who has RSVP'd (plus a couple of extras, just in case). Cover each round table with a black tablecloth. (These will look great and hide any coffee spills nicely.)
- **PLACEMATS:** Print out simple placemats with your ministry logo on 11" x 17" paper. You'll need one placemat per seat. These placemats are also a great place to list out some icebreakers, upcoming events, or social media handles for parents.
- **TABLE CARDS:** Print out double-sided table cards and cut them in half. Write your small group leaders' names on them with the grade they lead, and then place them in acrylic sign holders at the center of each table.
- **SMALL GROUP LEADER CONVERSATION STARTERS:** Create and print enough copies of small group leader conversation starters for each of your leaders. You can either hand these out to them as they arrive or place one copy on each table for them. Include questions like...
  - What are some of your teen's favorite hobbies or interests?
  - Is there anything you'd like me to know about your teenager that I don't already know?
  - How can we pray for you, your teenager, or your family right now?

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- **PARENT TOOLS:** This event is a great chance to hand out any parent tools you have, like a Family Handbook, Volunteer Business Cards, or an Annual Family Survey. If you have these, you should hand them out at the door when parents arrive, leave them at the center of each table, or hand them out to parents before they leave. (And if you don't have any tools to hand out to parents, feel free to steal ours!)
- **INDEX CARDS AND PENS:** Place a handful of blank index cards and pens at each table for parents to leave feedback at the end of the event.

AFTER THE EVENT

And that's it! That's all it takes to hold your own Parent and Small Group Leader Breakfast. After the event is over, don't forget to encourage every small group leader who participated. For those who weren't able to make it to the event, follow up and help them set up a breakfast just for them and the parents of their teenager. You can use all the same resources, just on a smaller scale!

ANNUAL PARENT EVENTS

Parent events like the Parent and Small Group Leader Breakfast 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 learn more about how you can specifically minister to teenagers and their families. They're also a great way to get your volunteers more invested by asking them to take on larger responsibilities and lead conversations.

If you're looking for a few more events to help you get parents involved, change their perspective of youth ministry, or meet their needs, we've got a few more ideas about hosting an Open House and a Parent Workshop that might be just what you're looking for. They're all a part of our Annual Family Strategy!

And if you've already got breakfast ordered but need some help with the other details, we've got some stuff to help you host a Parent and Small Group Leader Breakfast. Inside each volume of Grow Students Curriculum, we include full event guides, planning timelines, editable graphics, placemat graphics, conversation starters, flyers, marketing materials, table cards, suggested schedules, and shopping lists. Plus, you'll get 12 months of teaching content, events for teenagers, discipleship activities, parent and volunteer emails, our full annual strategy, and more!



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