4 THINGS TO INCLUDE IN YOUR MINISTRY'S PARENT HANDBOOK

Imagine this ...

A new family comes to your ministry. They're full of questions about how you teach and disciple students, what your program looks like, and the ways they can expect you to communicate with them.

Congratulations! You have a family that's curious and interested in your ministry and how it functions.

So now what?

What do you tell them? How do you start explaining your vision of ministry? What's the most important piece of information you could give them to start building their trust as they hand off their kid or teenager into your care?

Sometimes we make it harder than necessary to build trust and communicate our ministry goals with parents. Often, focusing on parents and developing a strategy for connecting with them is one of the last things on our mind (And if you've never developed a family strategy, here's one for kids and for students!) But it doesn't have to be this way. **We can be strategic in how we approach parents by doing a few simple things,** including preparing a Parent Handbook for any family who walks through our door.

Inside the Parent Handbook, you can cover so much about your ministry and vision, so it's an essential part of getting parents and families familiar with how you approach ministry and the ways you'll be working to disciple their kids and teenagers. You can give it to a parent early on in the year for the times they have questions about what happens during your program or if they want to talk about your ministry with someone else. It's easier for them to pull up their handbook than to remember what you said about discipling kids and teenagers.

The only problem with a Parent Handbook is ... where do you start? What's the important stuff you need to include? What can you leave out? If you have those questions (or any others), we're here to help!

Here's some stuff you should definitely include inside of your Parent Handbook.

WHAT TO INCLUDE IN YOUR PARENT HANDBOOK

1. A WELCOME

Like any good handbook, Parent Handbooks should start with a short introduction to help parents get situated. Greet them warmly and give them a simple view of what it is you do. The goal is to ease them in and build trust from the very first page. Consider thanking them for trusting you with their kids and teenagers and assure them they don't need to be the most over-the-top, involved parents within the ministry. They can show up and participate in things just as they are.

2. THE BASICS

Next up, give parents some basic information about your ministry. Be sure to include ...

- **YOUR STAFF:** You'll want to include a list of all of your staff members, complete with headshots, titles, and contact information. Give a simple, fun job description for each person. This section will help parents and families understand your role at your church and give some insight into your personality. Plus, it gives them an easy, memorable place to find out how to contact you in case they forget. Put this right after your overview to communicate how you're always ready and willing to connect.

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- **YOUR MINISTRY LOGISTICS:** After introducing your staff, the next section you'll want to include contains all of the information about your weekly programs—time, location, and a little bit about what happens during each of your programs. For kids, this might include information about preschool and elementary programs, while youth pastors might include middle school and high school programs.
- **YOUR MINISTRY ENVIRONMENT:** On top of your weekly meeting information, you'll want to summarize each of your environments. How do you connect and do ministry with kids and teenagers? What's your plan or strategy for events? How do your weekly programs work to disciple kids and teenagers? What's the point of small groups? How else do you connect with and disciple kids and teenagers? Use this space to give parents a short snapshot of what you do throughout the year and why you do it. You don't need to go into too much detail since the next section contains most of the important stuff.

3. YOUR STRATEGY

This section is the most important section for parents. It gives them insight into the heart of your ministry and how you approach leading kids and teenagers in a relationship with Jesus. Don't be afraid to make this section the longest part of your handbook because it's really, really important to be clear about your vision and strategy. It's helpful for you because you get to communicate why your ministry functions the way it does, and it's helpful for parents as they see ways they can help contribute to your vision or reinforce it at home.

In this section, you'll want to talk about what your goals are for your students and how you hope to lead them through these goals. This isn't just "We want kids to know Jesus" but also "Here are the things we focus on *to help kids get to know Jesus*."

If you're using the Grow Strategy, you'll know we focus on building four spiritual habits in kids and teenagers. We believe when people learn to spend time with God, spend time with others, use their gifts, and share their stories, they can grow and build up their faith. Again, be really clear about what you do. The more clarity you bring to your strategy, the more parents can understand it. And when parents know, understand, and believe in your strategy, you build more trust with them.

This is also a great time for you to unpack how you approach topics like discipleship or working with volunteers. How do these things connect with your vision, strategy, and goals for the kids and teenagers in your ministry? When can parents expect to meet their small group leader? Why even have small groups to begin with? It's a lot of information to spell out, but the good news is you only need to do it once! From there, you can just update and tweak your vision and strategy as needed.

4. POLICIES & PROCEDURES

Policies and procedures might sound a little boring, but being transparent about them with parents is key to building trust with families.

Your job as a pastor is to help keep kids and teenagers safe. Your Parent Handbook is the best, most accessible way for you to inform every parent about each of the safety guidelines for your ministry. Include information about how you screen your volunteers, the physical and relational boundaries you set, room ratios, permission slips, check-in, and check-out procedures, and how you report dangerous situations. For kids, you'll also want to include information about allergies and which situations might require you to page parents. These are really important policies to consider and put into writing for parents so they know all about the ways you'll keep their kids and teenagers safe before, during, and after drop-off.

Wrap up your handbook by including the various ways parents can reach out and contact you. Even though you may have put your email address in your staff bio, drop it here again. Be sure to include any social media pages parents may want to follow. And, if you're using discussion groups, this is a great space to let parents know about those too!

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That's just about everything you should include inside of your Parent Handbook. Remember to clarify your vision and safety guidelines and then give this Handbook to parents with the other tools you've prepared to help them as they raise their kids and teenagers.

And if you're using Grow Curriculum, we've done most of the work for you! You'll find a customizable Parent Handbook in every volume of Grow Kids and Grow Students. It's designed around the Grow Strategy for kids and students! It includes all of the sections we've talked about today, ready for you to edit, adapt to your ministry, and hand out to the parents and families in your ministry!



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