



Families

A Relational Discipleship
Kickstart Field Guide

TEN×10

Goal: Relational youth discipleship includes supporting parents and caregivers so families are connected to a faith community that is shaping their lives at home.

Faith Formation Framework



Shared
Faith *shared* by adults.

Internalized
Faith *internalized* through spiritual practices and learning.

Applied
Faith *applied* through service and justice.



Catalyzed
Faith *catalyzed* by family intimacy and intentionality.

Prioritized
Faith *prioritized* by the entire faith community and leadership.





Introduction and Context





A youth leader we know, Sofia, recently shared about her first part-time ministry role. The message from the senior pastor was clear. Much like Ken from the movie *Barbie*, Sofia had one job. Ken's job was Beach. Sofia's job was Youth—specifically, making sure youth were getting to know Jesus and follow him.

At first, she tried focusing on just that one job, but there was more to it than met the eye.

Sofia realized she could design a great series with compelling Bible teaching, small groups led by caring adults, and fun times for teenagers to build community. But there was a lot more influencing young people than what was happening during their gatherings—primarily, their family life.



- Jordan showed up sporadically because he often had to help care for his younger siblings during evenings and weekends while his mom was at work.
- From their clothes to their accessories and cars, Kylie's parents were clearly sending her conflicting messages about where she should find her identity.
- Bre was being raised by grandparents who were strict about good grades and acceptable friends. It felt like a cloud over her that kept other experiences and priorities from coming through.
- Taylor's parents had conflicting views on religion and faith. Their arguments and approach caused Taylor a lot of confusion.

At the same time, Sofia saw that many households were having a deep positive impact on their teens' faith formation:

- Marisa's mom, Ana, called to tell Sofia that Marisa's Abuela wasn't doing well. Although they were sad and scared, Ana and Marisa were hopeful because the love from family and friends felt like God's care. They also felt more connected to each other and to God as they prayed for Abuela together in the evenings.
- Trina and Jae found Sofia after church to seek advice for helping their son, who was struggling with the dynamics of being one of few Black kids in his largely white school. They were already talking about Jesus' radical remaking of the world, God's deep heart for justice, and the freedom Christians have to pray boldly and honestly. "Anything else?" they asked. "That's pretty solid," she said.
- Tatem's mom texted Sofia to see if some other young people might want to join her and Tatem when they volunteered together at the women's and children's shelter once a month.

Those check-ins reminded Sofia that rich experiences and conversations were happening during meals, after school, and in the last moments of the day before sleep. No matter how intentional, well-planned, and Spirit-filled their youth gatherings were, her time with these teens was only a tiny fraction of what they spent with their families. **Everyday faith – a beautiful and complicated work in progress – was happening far beyond her church’s formal programs.**

We can probably all relate to Sofia’s experiences. Young people aren’t lumps of clay waiting for youth leaders to shape and mold them into who God

wants them to be. They have been and are still being shaped, positively and negatively, by a complex mix of culture, peers, media, and, most of all, their families.

Families come in many shapes and forms, and no two are exactly alike. But in all families, and for every teen in your ministry, adults have a huge influence.

In other words, even if your main role is Youth, it can’t just be Youth. If we want to make a real, lasting, life-long impact in helping young people come to know and follow Jesus, we must include and work with the parents, caregivers, and other adults in their homes.

**When a church connects
with their whole family,
young people win.**



Reflection Questions & Action Steps

Take a moment to think about how your own family influenced your life and faith.

What are you grateful for about yourself, your personality, your sense of community, and/or your faith that you know came from your family?

What are some ideas, messages, or habits you wish you could just be rid of—and which do you know carried over from your family?





Why Families Are Important in Shaping Faith



While important influences from outside our families often stick out most in our memories, research consistently shows that the single best predictor of a young person's faith is the faith of their parents.¹

It's also true that the more emotional warmth that exists within a family, the more likely a teenager is to value the faith of their family of origin.²

This makes sense. After all, the time young people spend with the adults in

their families adds up to much, much more than we'll ever get in our youth ministry or church settings. And, if a young person feels warmly toward their caregivers, of course, they're more likely to follow in their footsteps when it comes to faith.

So even if our main role is Youth, we'll have a more meaningful, lasting impact with young people when we find ways to partner with and include parents and other caregivers.

¹ *National Study of Youth and Religion*. University of Notre Dame, <https://youthandreligion.nd.edu/>.

² Dameron, Emily, and Marcie C. Goeke-Morey. "The Relationship between Meaning in Life and the Childhood Family Environment among Emerging Adults." *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, vol. 20, no. 11, 2023, article 476, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10252346/>.

Before we get into some practical ways to build those partnerships, let's recognize some realities. Engaging families likely won't be easy, because:

- Families are overwhelmed.³
- Adults (i.e. parents and caregivers) are lonelier than ever.⁴
- Adults are increasingly unsure if it's wise to trust big institutions, including churches.
- Some people raising teens feel uncertain of what it means to be "successful" in their role, including whether faith should be priority and, if so, how that should look.
- Some adults are most comfortable and familiar with sending their teens to their youth ministry, parish, or church and leaving all of this faith formation stuff to "the professionals." Encouraging more and deeper involvement requires a shift that some families will resist.

On the other hand, these challenges highlight areas where your church could provide families with a deeply meaningful source of support. And when a family is supported, connected, and growing, everyone in that family benefits.

³ "Office of the Surgeon General. Parents Under Pressure: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Mental Health & Well-Being of Parents." *U.S. Department of Health and Human Services*, 28 Aug. 2024, HHS.gov, <https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/reports-and-publications/parents/index.html>.

⁴ American Psychiatric Association. "New APA Poll: One in Three Americans Feels Lonely Every Week." *American Psychiatric Association*, 30 Jan. 2024, Psychiatry.org, <https://www.psychiatry.org/news-room/news-releases/new-apa-poll-one-in-three-americans-feels-lonely-e>.

Reflection Questions & Action Steps

Take a minute to think about the households in your faith community.

Who are the parents and caregivers in your faith community?

How would you describe the lives and faith journeys of the families of your teenagers?

How well do you know them? Do you know what is happening in their lives?

What do you long for when you imagine better, more impactful relationships with families?





How Can Faith Communities and Youth Workers Support Parents and Caregivers?



It starts by prioritizing whole families. We can't overemphasize this point: When the whole church cares for the whole family, everyone benefits. Encouraging and equipping the whole family should be a pillar of your community's approach to youth faith formation.

Let's look at three main areas where you can offer meaningful support to adults – which, in turn, will benefit youth.

**Providing Encouragement
and Education**

**Facilitating Experiences
They Share With Their Teens**

**Equipping Caregivers for Meaningful
Conversations About Faith**

**Let's take a
closer look at each one.**





Equip Families Through Communication, Encouragement, and Education



Simply put, parents and caregivers want to be in the know. They appreciate knowing not only what's on the youth ministry calendar but what you're teaching and why it's important. They also want to know more about what's going on in the world in which their teenagers live.

Maybe that includes emails, texting, social media, or an app, but parents need information. They need to know where to look for information related to your ministry when they need it. At the same time, how we talk to parents and caregivers matters. In every communication we send to parents, we should include encouragement and the reminder that we are for them.

To help encourage and educate caregivers, develop a consistent **communication strategy**. Here's how:

Decide which mediums you will use to communicate with the adults of your youth. This could include email, social media, texting, or a specialized app.

- Choose something you know adults in your community are already using. This will increase engagement and flatten the learning curve.
- Consider offering a social media feed for your ministry with adults as the target audience, separate from the feed for youth (similar to how schools have targeted tools for their parents and caregivers devoted to what they need to know).



Use these tools at least once a week to share:

- What you will be talking about in your parish, church, or ministry
- Any special upcoming events
- Ideas, tips, and resources to help caregivers learn how to walk alongside teens in their faith formation

Aim to send this information out on the same day of the week in advance of your regular gathering. This helps for two reasons: First, when you send the topic ahead of time, you offer families the opportunity to respond with questions or concerns. Remember, for some adults, church feels risky, and this transparency grows trust. Second, when adults know the upcoming topic, they are better equipped for follow-up conversations with their child. (We'll talk about this more in a minute.)

Every week, when you contact caregivers, include:

- A greeting and a note of encouragement
- An update on what you will be discussing this week and what you hope teens will take away from it
- A question or two that caregivers can ask to discuss the week's topic with their teenager
- An update on relevant upcoming events (who, what, where, when)
- Something that will help caregivers deepen their connection with and understanding of their teens, like a link to a helpful article or podcast

**Check out the end of this Field Guide
to see a sample caregiver email.**



Another way you can educate and encourage parents and caregivers is through periodic in-person opportunities. Here are a few ideas:

- **Coffee and chat:** Host a monthly informal time before or after your weekly worship service(s) where adults can find you (and possibly your volunteers) and talk face-to-face. Caregivers want to know who you are, hear why you care about their kids, and feel a connection with you. Not all caregivers will show up, but even offering an informal gathering can build trust, especially for adults who aren't plugged into the larger church or parish.
- **1:1 meet-ups:** Reach out to parents and caregivers to schedule a personal meeting about their teenager. Aim to do this a couple of times each year for each family. Similar to a caregiver-teacher conference at school, this is a chance for you to specifically affirm their child. Come prepared with at least two concrete, positive things you see in their teenager to share, and ask how you can support them.
- **Offer a book group:** Select a book you think would be helpful for parents and caregivers. Schedule time to gather and discuss it, either in sections over several weeks or as a one-time discussion after they have read the whole book. Prepare questions that invite caregivers to share personally, but not too vulnerably. Sharing stories will help them relate to and build trust with one another, provided it doesn't feel too emotionally risky.

Example: "In Chapter 3, the author talks about building family traditions. Did you have any traditions when you were young? What were they?" Followed by, "What's one tradition your family has now—even if it's something silly or small?"

If you don't feel equipped to facilitate a book group or need help creating questions, invite another adult from your ministry to play that role. Then join the discussion with the group.

Reflection Questions & Action Steps

What platform will you use to communicate with adults?

Do any articles, podcasts, books, or other resources that you might share come to mind? The more you can list now, the less time you'll spend in future months searching for new ideas.

What way of meeting with caregivers face-to-face would fit best for you and your context, and for the lives and schedules of your teens' families? When can you get started?





Support Families Through Experiences They Share



**Quality time together
strengthens the whole family.
When it comes to quality time,
more is more.**

It's not just important that families have quality time together; it's the quantity of quality time that makes the most impact. As a church or parish, you can support families by offering two particular types of quality time together: **worship and service**.

Worship together

The experience of worshiping with multiple generations is powerful for young people. It was one of the most influential practices for youth in the *Sticky Faith* study.⁵

We know worshiping together is important, but here's the thing: Putting all age groups in one room isn't

enough. Simply sharing space does not make magic happen. It's *meaningful participation* in worship that makes this practice valuable. You and your church or parish leadership can discern together how intergenerational worship will happen best in your unique culture and context.

In some parishes and churches, kids and youth might never worship with adults. In other settings, multigenerational worship might be the norm. Whether you're just getting started or are ready to take multigenerational worship to the next level, there are a few important things to consider.

⁵ Kara Powell and Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).

To begin, you'll almost certainly need to meet with other members of the leadership team to talk about this. In your conversation, aim to determine:

- **Frequency:** How often does it make sense to have all-generation worship?
- **Age range:** In our context, what ages of kids will be encouraged to participate in all-generation worship?
 - Some faith communities might decide everyone from age 0-101 should participate, some may decide those in middle school and older will stay, and some may decide that just babies and toddlers will have other options during all-generation worship gatherings.
- **Worship with youth:** Having young people join the main gathering is great, but how can you also have adults join the youth in their worship or prayer time, whether that happens in evening gatherings or in parallel Sunday services? What are some ways you will share the vision and invitation with adults?
- **Music:** Have we picked songs that most people in the community are familiar with? Or at least ones that are easy to learn?
- **Message:** Will the sermon, homily, or message focus on a topic most people in the room can relate to? Does it include real-life examples relevant to each generation? Consider having a brainstorming meeting with key leaders—including youth!—to create a list of topics and passages that could enrich every age.
- **Leading in worship together:** How can young people play a role in leading parts of the worship experience? Can they greet, play music, assist with communion, read scripture, make announcements, or offer a personal story?

Mario is a bi-vocational youth worker at a church with worship services in both Spanish and English. He realized that the teenagers preferred the English service and were rarely seen at the Spanish service. But Mario's church also loves using short video testimonies from people in the congregation, which they translate for both services. By coordinating with the team that produces these videos, Mario got them to agree to add a young person to the mix about every fourth or fifth video. This had several benefits: Teens felt included (even if they weren't the young person in the video), parents and grandparents were thrilled to see their teenagers on the screen (which opened up conversations), and all the adults in the congregation—including in the Spanish service—started to notice the young people in their midst.

Serve Together

One of TENx10's drivers for "faith that matters" to young people is the chance to apply their faith through service. We've talked before about how to make serving meaningful for young people. The cool thing is, the impact of service multiplies when families participate together.

How can you help make this happen?

First, think about the types of service the youth in your community connect with. It can be tempting to start by thinking about logistics, but first, think about the big picture. What issues do your teens and families care about? Starting from this point will help families connect with why they're taking time to serve.



Next, research possible nonprofit partners who address those issues. Do they need volunteers? How many, and when? Are there age requirements? Do volunteers need to do anything prior to being able to serve? Will there be roles for participants of all ages? (This last part is important: We want the family to be able to serve together, not have some fully participate while others sit on the sidelines.)

Once you've asked these questions and narrowed your list, reach out to the organization's volunteer coordinator. They'll give you specifics that might not be listed online.

Finally, schedule dates—ideally, on a regular basis—where parents and caregivers can join their teens (and possibly younger kids, too) to serve together. If there is any pre-work or training required, be sure to account for that in your planning process.

On the day you go to serve:

- **Before:** Have everyone arrive early enough to handle logistics, like gathering waivers. Allow 10-20 minutes to share with the group about the task and why it matters. What faithful work of this nonprofit are families supporting as they serve together?
- **During:** Plan to be available to float as families serve. This allows you to jump in to help if a need arises, and more importantly, it allows you to connect relationally with families throughout the day.
- **After:** Stop for a meal or cold beverage together. Take 15-20 minutes to debrief. It can be as simple as asking:
 - What stood out to you today?
 - What is something you love about this nonprofit's work?
 - How can we pray for the people we encountered or the situation we helped with today?

How one church put this into action:

Gin's church has an awesome food bank that helps people in her community, totally run by volunteers. Until recently, all of those volunteers were adults. Gin thought about trying to get some of the youth involved, sort of as a youth group activity. But then she realized this was a fantastic opportunity for families to serve together. She started small by sharing the vision for this with a couple of moms she knew well and joined those families with their teens as a bit of a beta test.



The families had such a great experience serving together that Gin now has stories to use in promoting this serving opportunity to all the parents and caregivers in her church.

Reflection Questions & Action Steps

Take some time to consider how worship and service experiences can happen in your unique context.

What opportunities are there for youth to experience multigenerational worship?

How could your church increase multigenerational worship opportunities for youth and make them more impactful?

What ways of serving might the youth in your community most connect with? What issues do they care about? What organizations in your area might connect with those same issues?





Support Families by Equipping Adults for Conversation



If we want youth to develop a faith that matters, adults need to have conversations with them about how faith connects with other important issues.

Some of those issues may be personal: *What does my faith matter to my friendships or my future?* Others may be topical: *I care a lot about this social justice issue—does my faith connect to that at all?*

We know youth and their families grow together in faith as they have regular, honest, open discussions.

We also know adults want to have important conversations with their kids, even if they don't totally know how.

Sometimes caregivers think they don't know enough, or that young people

don't want to talk. Sometimes they simply aren't sure what to say to get a conversation to expand beyond one-word responses.

But even though these conversations are challenging to begin, most caregivers want to be able to have them. That means youth workers like you can meet a real need by equipping adults for conversation. When you do, you're helping the whole family grow together.

So, how can you help parents/ caregivers and teens have better conversations?

Regularly share questions and talking points from the week's youth ministry gathering.

You could share this on a printed handout, on your social media page for parents and caregivers, as part of your weekly email, or all three! In whatever format you use, summarize the key idea in a couple of concise sentences.

Example:

Today we talked about FOMO (fear of missing out) and what it might mean to 1. Be more deeply rooted in God's love for us when we feel like we're missing out, and 2. Be better at including other people. Our main passage from the Bible was Ephesians 1:4-8, a little piece of the introduction to the letter that names something powerful about who we all are because of God's love.

- **Provide one question, talking point, or idea for a follow-up conversation.**

Here are some example follow-up questions and things to talk about:

- What is FOMO?
- I felt FOMO when *[adult shares a story of a time when, either as a teenager or recently, they felt left out and how they handled it—or didn't handle it well!]*
- What is it like for you when you feel left out at school, or when you see people's posts on social media about something you weren't invited to?
- How do your friends act when they feel left out?
- Who do you notice at [school, practice, church, etc.] who you think might be lonely? How can you tell?
- Do you think your friends feel loved unconditionally by God?



- **Offer practical suggestions to help things go well.**
 - The car is a good place for conversations. We don't have to make direct eye contact, and that can be more comfortable.
 - Teens often get quiet and shrug us off when we ask what they think, but asking them to tell us what their friends think can get them talking. If your teen isn't sharing, try rephrasing the question to focus on their friends' perspectives and see where it goes.
 - Asking open-ended questions like "What do you think God thinks about that?" allows for a conversation where young people know the goal is not to come up with the "right" answer.
 - Answer the questions yourself! Remember, we want to have good conversations, and that means both people share.

Set up times to check in with caregivers about how conversations are going.

Ask if they have felt ill-prepared to talk about any particular topic. This gives you the chance to offer a helpful suggestion in the moment or circle back later with ideas or resources, like a post or podcast. No matter what they share, encourage caregivers in their efforts to have these conversations. A clumsy conversation is better than no conversation!

For caregivers who would like more support, Axis' video, "[Simple Mentoring for Parents and Grandparents](#)" or the handout, "[How Parents Can Talk to Teens About Pop Culture](#)" provide helpful thought-starters for caregivers on how to engage their youth in conversations that are authentic, lead with questions, and point to Jesus.



Create an “Adults and Their Teens Talking About...” series.

Sometimes conversations don't happen unless someone gives a big nudge. Try creating a conversation night a few times a year where families gather for a meal, and a leader facilitates a conversation for the group, providing questions everyone responds to at their table. The leader should share key information about the topic for everyone to learn together, then send families home with a follow-up activity to keep the conversation going.

One church we know of hosted an annual “Adults and Their Teens Talking About Sex” night, facilitated by a couple who were licensed sex therapists. Families came together for a time that opened up the conversation about an important topic that sometimes gets neglected for fear of dying from embarrassment.

Share resources with parents and caregivers to help them on their family faith journey.

Wanting to help their teens can be a great motivation for caregivers to go deeper in their own faith formation. Make a practice of including references to great resources in your ongoing emails, and, over time, build your own resource list of tools for adults and the young people they care about.

Great examples include TENx10's [Faith Foundations series](#). *Faith Foundations* is a series of videos and discussion guides created to ignite theological dialogue between young people and the adults in their lives about the foundations of the faith. There are many other great examples, including [Alpha's video series](#) or classics like C.S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity*.

The point is to build your own list of theological and spiritual formation resources over time that you can share with caregivers as their own questions arise.



Action Steps

Make a list of three or four parents and caregivers you could invite to coffee over the next six weeks. Text or email them to plan a time to get together.

Brainstorm questions you could ask each caregiver. The goal is to get to know each family more so you can support them and help them find ways to get better conversations started at home, or take them to the next level. A few ideas:

- **What's something you love about your family?**
- **What are some ways your family likes to spend time together?**
- **What are the current stressors in your family or relationships you'd like to see become deeper or less tense?**
- **How natural (or not) does it feel to have conversations about God and faith in your family?**
- **Does your family have other families you like to spend time with? Do the caregivers/parents in your family have strong friendships where they can talk about joys and struggles, or are those relationships something you'd like to see develop?**



Action Steps

- **Is there anything you'd like to have a good conversation about with your teen, but you don't know the best way to get started?**
- **How can I and/or our church better support your family?**

Ministering to parents and caregivers, in addition to ministering to teenagers, probably feels like a big responsibility. That's because it is. And it might not be exactly what you thought you were signing up for. But the truth is, these efforts are SO worth it. When we support parents and caregivers, we are helping teens experience the love of God more fully.

Taking small steps today to engage with and support your teens' adults will contribute to building a faith that lasts for teens and their whole family.



Tool: Sample Caregiver Email

Hey Families!

We are looking forward to another [weekend/Wednesday night] here at [ministry name] and we want to keep you in the loop!

NEW HERE? We send a weekly [email/text/social media post] with info about our upcoming events and connection opportunities. It also shares what we'll talk about in [ministry name] this week. We hope that helps you...

1. to be able to continue the conversation with your teen during the week.
2. to feel free to reach out and ask me if you have any questions or concerns about the topic. Want to know how we'll be saying something? Wonder what the vibe will be about a tricky subject? Please just ask. You can even visit to hear for yourself.

THIS WEEK:

We'll be talking about [PASSAGE] and [MAIN POINT]. We hope teens walk away with [a big question to think more deeply about, a faith practice they feel more equipped to try, a new idea they understand more fully, etc.].

COMING UP:

- EVENT 1, DATE, TIME, COST:
 - Details here about event: who, what, when, where, why.
 - To do's: [list what the adult needs to do ahead]
 - Specific needs: [provide info that will help a student with allergies, accessibility needs, another disability, or budget challenges participate]
- Repeat for other upcoming events



Tool: Sample Caregiver Email

SAVE THE DATE:

- List what is coming up 4-12 weeks out that is major for your families: camps, holiday services, all-church events, etc.

BUILDING BETTER CONNECTIONS WITH YOUR TEEN

At least once a month, send adults an article or podcast that offers insights into the world of young people. These can be about nurturing faith, navigating challenging topics, or new findings about teens and screen time, mental health, friendship, etc.

- Link to list

Close with one or two of the following:

- A link to a good read or listen related to their teenager or to family life
 - There are many options in the Fuller Youth Institute Parent Resource Library: <https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/parent/library>
- An informative idea caregivers can use to take an immediate practical step to build family connection and conversation
- An encouraging verse of scripture
- A couple of sentences of gratitude for caregivers

Example:

Rituals like family meals have many positive effects on your kids and your family bond (wherever and whenever you eat together!). Take a second to plan a time or two when you can eat together this week. Learn more in this article: <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/20/well/family/ritual-mental-health-wellbeing-.html>



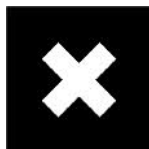
Tool: Sample Caregiver Email

Example:

"I hope you know how important you are in your kid's developing faith, even if it isn't obvious some days. Every time you share a little of your own faith experiences—whether that's ways God has blessed you, things you are praying for, or something you are questioning or wondering about—you are opening up needed reflection and conversation space for them. Thank you for being the kind of adult who makes that space for your kids."

Example:

"Remember that your kid's faith is in process, and there's no such thing as perfect. Just keep going together. I'm so grateful to be doing this along with you."



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