

Leading Young Families: Creating Family-Centric Communities

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When we think of a young adult ministry, we typically think of a group of young, hip, and cool twenty-somethings fresh out of high school or college. Usually these are groups of single people. But a group of overlooked young adults are young adult families. Unintentionally, young adult ministries can exclude or not acknowledge young families with young kids. I think this is a large, missed opportunity.

I am a part of a young family. My wife and I have two kids: a three-year-old daughter and a six-month-old son. At our church, we are blessed with a good community of young families. Our young adult group is different. Our group consists of 90 percent married couples. About 33 percent of our group is made up of families with kids under ten years old. Because of this, I have learned several things about ministering to young couples and families. Being surrounded by them has helped me know how to connect and reach them.

1. Young families need connection.

I am not blind to the fact that, of course, everyone needs a Christ-centered community in their lives. But most young families are desperate for connection. They want other couples to eat dinner with, they need help to watch their kids, they need hand-me-down clothes from friends, they need other kids for their kids to play with, and more. They need each other for emotional and spiritual support. Families in our group are constantly looking to the other families in the group for advice and support. It's important for us to offer a community where young families are welcome and supported.

2. Young families are looking to establish roots.

Most couples who are about to have kids or just had kids are looking to establish roots in their lives—in their career, their home, their church, etc. It is important for our young adult groups and churches to be a consistent Christlike community. Then young adults will want people to stay and establish roots with us. For the growth and strength of a young adult group and the church at large, longevity is important. Young families seek a church that they can be a part of for the long haul.

3. Young families get close quick.

Because they desperately need connection, young families grow close quickly. Young families have instant relatability. They know the struggles of potty training, tantrums, and everything in between. They connect very quickly with other families, but also in general to everyone in the community.

This has been a key part of our young adult group's growth. New families, couples, and singles alike get connected more quickly because our group has existing deeply established relationships. **Families accelerate that connection.** I have seen growth in our group from this kind of connection. New families come in and find instant connection. Families, couples, and singles sense a strong love and bonding within the

group. New people feel welcomed and accepted. When your group already has a great sense of community built in it, you will grow as well.

4. Young families need escape.

Don't get me wrong, I love my kids. Everyone loves their kids. But, as parents, we would be lying if we said we don't need to get away every now and then. Two of the greatest things a young adult group can give young families are a Christ-centered community and a safe escape from their kids. The word *escape* sounds a little harsh, but if you've been a family with young kids, you know it's accurate. Again, I love my kids, but our young adult small group is a time every week my wife and I can get together with other young adults. We hang out and discuss life with them, but *without* the distraction of toddlers running around or babies crying.

This isn't just how I feel; other young families also love the chance to get away for an hour and talk. Talking with someone who isn't wearing diapers is great! So as leaders of young adult groups, we need to be facilitating chances for families to get away.

You still need to consider the kids for every event. Some parents may not often get a chance to be away from their kids. When possible, provide childcare during young adult activities. Almost every time there is a young adult group meeting or event, we make sure to have childcare available. If we can't, we make it known beforehand. From a practical standpoint, not having childcare during a young adult event stops families from coming. While finding consistent childcare is difficult and not something we want to do, if our goal is to build community and make disciples of Jesus, we need to not draw lines in the sand to keep people out, even when those lines are unintentional.

You can call me biased, but I think young families are vital to a young adult group. The most growth and connection I have seen out of our group is from these families and young couples (soon-to-be young families). As young adult leaders, we should allow a space for them, because they deeply desire community with other people and families, and they also facilitate growth and connection with those around them.