
Small Group Leaders: Bridging the Gap Between Church & Home



XP3

Whether you're a student pastor or a small group leader, one of the most important aspects of student ministry is partnering with parents. Student pastors are faced with a challenge found only in student ministry—teenagers. How do you invite parents to partner with you in ministry without trespassing through a teen's perceived territory? How do you get parents and students to have a serious dialog about anything—especially difficult subjects like relationships, influence and faith—when a teen is vying for their own independence? Of course, there is no perfect answer but it's important to at least try to make headway on building that bridge between the church and the home. And, Small Group Leaders (SGLs) make for a great support in this process.

Why It's Important for the Student Pastor

SGLs Make You (More) Orange

Repeat this phrase: Two combined influences are greater than just two separate influences. If you've been around Orange very long, you've heard this more than a few times. A small group leader fits into this idea as the "bridge" or link between church and home. When a small group leader dialogues with parents about what's happening at church, they bridge the gap. When they reinforce what the parents are communicating at home with the student, they bridge the gap.

SGLs Reinforce Communication

As a student pastor, you probably spend a good deal of time communicating with parents. When you allow your volunteers or leaders to facilitate some of the communication, you lighten your load. In larger student ministries, it might be almost impossible to personally connect with the parents of every teenager. Not so for a small group leader. Small group leaders have the time and ability to talk about details, to know stories, to get past name-face associations and really know the story behind the student.

SGLs Give the Church a Touch-point with Un-churched Parents

Of course, not all students involved in student ministries come from Christian homes—and that's a great thing. In cases like these, small group leaders have the unique opportunity to connect relationally with un-churched parents based on a common interest: the student. They truly have the opportunity to be the light of the Church to these families.

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Action Points for Student Pastors

- Create an environment to connect small group leaders and parents at the beginning of each school year. Make sure to have separate programming for students. This not only sets up small group leaders to win, but is especially important for newly formed small groups, like freshmen being introduced to high-school ministry.
- Figure out what communication can be delegated to the small group leader. When you do this, you take work off of your own plate AND provide another touch point between your leaders and parents. An example of this within XP3 Students would be for small group leaders to send out the Parent Cue each week.

How it works for a small group leader

For the small group leader, bridging the gap between church and home simply means connecting with parents relationally. It's important to remember to keep a regular dialog about what's being taught at church, what's happening at home, and any pivotal circumstances in the life of the teenager. A simple plan for communicating with parents could look something like this:

Weekly or Monthly Touch-points – Communicate what your students are learning—the aim and direction of a current teaching series. This is a quick form of communication with parents and does not need to be overly personal (addressing concerns or emergencies should be a personal phone call). Here are some great tools for weekly and monthly touch points:

- XP3 Students Parent Cue – your student pastor can provide this for you to pass along to parents. It does a great job of outlining what is being taught as well as providing action points for parents to connect with their teens.
- Facebook: Setting up a group allows dialog between parents.
- GroupMe: A mobile app that allows you to set up texting groups.

Quarterly Gatherings – It's always a good idea to get all the families of a small group together a few times a year. Getting families to hang out together promotes community and is an experience that parents and students can share. It not only promotes community but can also serve as a catalyst for dialog. These gatherings can be mostly fun and organic, with maybe a few cues to promote the development of relationships. A Back to School BBQ or Christmas party are great examples of what these gatherings might look like.

Six Month One on One's – Whether it's necessary or not, it's always a great idea to give parents the *opportunity* to meet with you face to face every six months. These meetings

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would probably be over a meal or coffee. Take time to talk about what's happening in the student's life, trends, personal growth, concerns, or anything going on with the family. It's important to lead these conversations with what's happening in small group, while at the same time not betraying the trust of the student.