



PARENT
HANDBOOK



HEY THERE!

So you're the parent of a teenager, huh? Congratulations! You have one of the most important (and sometimes the most difficult) jobs on the planet.

We know your job isn't always easy, but here's what we want you to know: we're here to help, in any way we can. Sure, we're a "youth" ministry, but teenagers aren't the only people we care about. We care about you too, because it's you, *not us*, who are the primary influencers in the lives of your teens.

No matter how connected (or not connected) you are with our church, this Parent Handbook will show you some of the ways we're trying to care for your teen and serve *you* at the same time.

Thanks for letting us be another voice in the life of your teenager. Your trust and partnership means a lot to us.

We can't wait to see what this year has in store!



WHAT'S INSIDE

THE BASICS

Our Staff	1
Our Ministry.....	2
Our Big Win for Students.....	6
Discipling Students	8
Engaging with Small Group Leaders	9
Our Big Win for Parents.....	10
Asking Good Questions.....	12

RESOURCES

Know What's Available	14
Know Who's Available	16

THE FINE PRINT

Safety Guidelines	17
Contact Us	19

THE BASICS

SOME OF OUR STAFF



Kate Fox

Director of Student Ministry, East Lexington
KFOX@GRACE.ORG

Kate loves being able to serve with students on our campus. She believes that teenagers are the best people on this planet and wants to help them discover their potential as active participants in God's kingdom.



Ruthie Seiders

Pastor of NextGen Ministries
RSEIDERS@GRACE.ORG

Ruthie gets to oversee all Children and Student Ministry across Grace's 5 campuses. She just can't get enough of being around teenagers.



Tom Lee

Campus Pastor, East Lexington
TLEE@GRACE.ORG

Tom gets to be pastor of our East Lexington Campus and community. He served as a youth pastor for many years before coming to Grace and is committed to including them into the normal life of the church.

OUR MINISTRY

OUR MINISTRY MODEL

INCARNATIONAL, RELATIONAL YOUTH MINISTRY

OLD WAY: Believe → Become → Belong

For decades, the process thought most effective by the church was to convert (believe), to have them live out their new faith (become), and then welcome them into enjoy the community of the church (belong). But this isn't the way of ministry that Christ modeled for us.

NEW WAY: Belong → Believe → Become

Christ brought people in, seeking relationships and community first. Through those relationships, He helped nurture belief through disarming curiosity. As their views and beliefs transformed, so did their being...and they became followers and disciples.

OUR PROGRAM FLOW

We take this relational, incarnational model with us into everything we do.

SUNDAY RETREATS | 1st Sunday of the Month 5:30-7:30pm

Middle and High School students are invited to come together once a month for a retreat like experience. Students will gather at the table for a meal before getting into a time of worship, teaching, games, and spiritual practices. This is a helpful reminder that you don't always have to go away to be on a retreat. Sunday Retreat takes place at the Lexington Campus.

HOUSE GROUPS

High School: 2nd + 3rd Sunday of the Month 6:30-8:30pm

Middle School: 2nd + 3rd Tuesday of the Month 6:30-8:30pm

House Groups meet in homes around the Lexington/Arlington area for deeper activities and spiritual practices from Sunday Retreat themes and intentional time for Sabbath through games and snacks.

WEEK OF JUBILEE

The final week of the month, we take the week off from programming to allow you to fit family time in. This week is scheduled in so that you can rest and have time to simply be present as a family. Discussion guides will be available if you would like to create intentional conversation around topics covered that month.

OUR MINISTRY

OUR ENVIRONMENTS

There are four types of environments for teenagers in our ministry. Each one is designed to strategically invite teenagers on a journey into deeper relationships with their peers, leaders, and Jesus. Each environment is designed with every teenager in mind - the kid who's grown up in church and the first-time visitor too.



THE FOYER: When you walk into a new home for the first time, this is usually where introductions take place. Names, school, grade, interests and maybe a little laughter to break the ice. So, we've created some "Foyer"-type environments where students can get connected with people.

These environments are about providing safe and fun experiences where students can get connected. These types of environments often include, but are not limited to:

House Groups, the Fall Retreat, the Winter Retreat, summer gatherings, Mystery Events, movie nights, game nights, you get the idea...



THE LIVING ROOM: After the foyer, once you feel a little more comfortable, you're then brought into the living room. You're invited to get kick your feet up and start to find out some more details about the people you're with. You discover things you have in common and the conversations start to go a

little deeper. **These environments are about providing fun and relaxed spaces students to dig in to the Bible and life, listen and share and develop community.** These types of environments often include, but are not limited to:

Sunday Retreats, the Fall Retreat, the Winter Retreat, small groups, and community service projects...

OUR MINISTRY



THE KITCHEN: You know your part of the family when you can just walk right in and help yourself to anything in the kitchen. You grab a stool, sit around the island, munch on some homemade goodies and eventually start talking about “what’s really going on” in your life. These conversations are often

intimate and intentional. **These environments are about nurturing intentional community where students are “doing life together”, engaging with Christ, serving together and becoming rooted in community and Christ.** These types of environments often include, but are not limited to:

Small groups, bible studies, mentorships with leaders, and join a Cross-Cultural Learning Experience (CCLE or “mission trip”) together...



THE PINEAPPLE: The pineapple is a sign of hospitality. You’ve gone from being invited into a home to inviting others because that home has become yours. **These environments are about encouraging, equipping and challenging students to lead, serve, and change the world.** These types of

environments often include, but are not limited to:

Student leadership, CCLE’s, community service projects and student-lead initiatives in their homes, schools and communities...

OUR MINISTRY



East Lexington Student Ministry

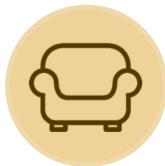
Discovering life with God for the good of the world.

What does that look like at ELexSM?



THE FOYER:

First visit, new, sticking with the person they know or the friend who brought them. Getting to know you...



THE LIVING ROOM:

Making new friends. Slightly deeper conversations and growing relationships.



THE KITCHEN:

They feel so comfortable, they just help themselves to what's in the fridge, sit down and talk about life.



- House Groups
- Retreats
- Special Events



- Sunday Retreats
- Retreats
- Small Groups
- Service Projects



- Small Groups
- Bible studies
- Mentorships
- Mission Trips



THE PINEAPPLE:

The pineapple is the sign of hospitality. For these people, this space has become like their home and they become the hosts. They welcome, start conversations, and lead others into what they have experienced.



We win when a teenager **takes steps in owning their faith.**

OUR BIG WIN FOR STUDENTS

It's hard sometimes to know when you're winning with teenagers, you know? Like, is anything we're teaching actually sinking in? Are teenagers really growing in their faith? That's why we decided to go ahead and define the big win for our ministry. It's the one thing that we, as a ministry, want to achieve. It's the goal we want to keep in mind at all times. And it's what motivates and guides everything we do. It goes like this...

WE WIN WHEN A TEENAGER TAKES A STEP TOWARD OWNING THEIR FAITH.

TAKING A STEP

Now, we say "takes a step" for a reason. It's because there's no finish line or certificate of completion when it comes to spiritual growth. Instead, spiritual growth is a journey (a life-long journey) and no two journeys are identical. That's why our big win doesn't have anything to do with a specific skill or achievement. Instead, we win anytime we see a teenager take a single step closer to owning their faith.

OWNING THEIR FAITH

What, exactly, does it look like for a teenager to own their faith? Well, we believe there are four things that both lead to, and are a result of, spiritual growth. We call these four things our four spiritual habits.

- 1. SPEND TIME WITH GOD:** This is an obvious one, right? Sometimes it's the only spiritual habit we can name. After all, isn't "growing spiritually" synonymous with "spending time with God"? Well, not exactly, but it's still pretty important. After all, if teenagers are ever going to make their faith their own, they've got to start spending time with God on their own. It means opening the Bible on their own, having conversations with God on their own, and discovering how they best connect with God through worship on their own.
- 2. SPEND TIME WITH OTHERS:** Engaging in healthy community can, and should, be a spiritual habit we help our students develop. But "healthy community" doesn't just mean hanging out with Christians. This spiritual habit is about growing in Christ-like relationships with everyone.
- 3. USE THEIR GIFTS:** Teenagers need to know that God made them unique, and special, and with really specific gifts, talents, passions, and resources. Then they need to use those gifts to love God, love others, and influence the world around them. Because when teenagers begin to discover who God made them to be, and then use their unique identity to love both God and others, they grow.
- 4. SHARE THEIR STORY:** Teenagers need to learn how to talk about God. Sharing your story is the spiritual habit of making faith a regular, every-day, go-to topic of conversation in our lives. Because when we talk about God and His place in our story (or, more accurately, our place in His story), it helps us believe, helps us understand, and helps us take ownership of our own faith.

We count it as a win whenever a student takes a step toward owning their faith by practicing one, or maybe even all four, of these spiritual habits.

DISCIPLING TEENAGERS

Do you know the last thing that Jesus said to His followers while he was on earth? Some people call it The Great Commission: “Go and make disciples.” Duplicate yourselves. Go and make more of you. Take your faith and pass it on to someone else. When we talk about helping teenagers begin to own their faith, we’re really just talking about discipleship. So what is discipleship? Here are three thoughts...

DISCIPLESHIP IS ABOUT LIVING, NOT LEARNING

Rather than asking, “What can we teach a teenager about God?” we ask, “How can we help a teenager live out their faith?” It’s not just about teaching them about Jesus - it’s about modeling what faith in Jesus looks like. That’s why our small groups spend time together outside of church. Because discipleship isn’t taught in a classroom - it’s modeled in everyday life.

DISCIPLESHIP HAPPENS IN COMMUNITY

In the Gospels, you don’t really see Jesus doing one-on-one discipleship. That’s because discipleship happens best in a community of people. That’s why we focus so much energy on getting teenagers plugged into consistent small groups, why we emphasize the role of parents and families, and why we surround teenagers with tons of Jesus followers. Because discipleship takes all of us!

DISCIPLESHIP IS A PROCESS

Discipleship is never really complete because learning to live out our faith is a life-long process. And because we know discipleship takes time, we want to put people in the lives of teenagers who are in it for the long-haul. That’s why our small group leaders don’t bail on their teenagers after a few months, but stick with them for several years - because it’s a process.

ENGAGING WITH SMALL GROUP LEADERS

As a parent, you are making a huge impact in your teenager's life. The impact you're making is far more significant than any impact we, their church, could ever hope to make. **You are the most important voice in your kid's life, both now and for a lifetime.** *You* are the primary influencer in your kid's life, not us. But...

In all of our time caring for teenagers, we've learned something really important. (We drew a picture to help you remember it.) We believe that, in every teenager's life, this is true: your best chance at influencing your teenager's faith and future is to recruit other adults to influence them with you.



Dr. Kara E. Powell and Dr. Chap Clark, authors of *Sticky Faith*, encourage parents to “develop a sticky web of relationships” for their kids. We love that idea!

Especially during the teenage years, when your kid is beginning to pull away from you in their search for independence, we want to come alongside you by creating a pool of trustworthy adults who can help you influence your teenager.

That's why our ministry is so committed to small groups. Small groups are about more than just good discussions. **Small groups exist to connect your kid with an adult you can trust so you can better influence their faith and future.**

OUR BIG WIN FOR PARENTS

Like we said, we believe that you, parents, are the primary influencers in the lives of your kids, both now and for a lifetime. So, if we really do believe that, then it's not enough to simply say it, we have to act like it's true, which means that Student Ministry isn't just about ministering to students. It's about their family's too. We strongly believe that Student Ministry is Family Ministry. This means that we have to define what a "win" looks like for parents as well. For you, we have two wins in mind:

WE WIN WHEN EVERY PARENT IS INVOLVED IN A FAITH COMMUNITY

WE WIN WHEN EVERY PARENT IS HAVING SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS WITH THEIR KIDS AT HOME

FAITH COMMUNITY

We don't just believe that small groups are important for your kids. We believe that small groups, some kind of consistent faith community is important for you as well. This may be a bible study, a small group, or just meeting regularly with a community of believers who can walk with you in your faith journey, as a man or woman of God, and as a parent. This is why we are so excited about the Week of Jubilee every month. It gives you as a parent the opportunity to come along side of your kid and help minister to them through intentional conversation and fun!

OUR BIG WIN FOR PARENTS

SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS

The students who are pursuing a relationship with God into college and adulthood are most often the ones whose parents have been having regular conversations with their kids about God and their faith.

These aren't just teaching conversations. These conversations should be full of genuine curiosity for what your kid is experiencing in their relationship to or with God. We challenge you to offer your own doubts and experiences. It's not enough to say, "...and then I trusted God and it got better," or "...I was doing something I shouldn't and then God showed up and really helped me." There's power in the appropriate amount of detail, like, "...it was really hard to trust God with a relationship with a guy that I thought was 'the one' even though I knew God didn't. I felt lonely and like I didn't matter and that made me angry with God..." Help your kids see that you were once a teenager too and that they're not alone in their doubts, questions, frustrations and disbelief.

DID YOU KNOW?

That every Wednesday night, you'll get an email/text from us on what we talked about along with some potential conversation starters and follow-up questions for the ride home? We run these questions through the "cheesy question" filter with the hope that it can be a starting point for you to go deeper.

ASKING GOOD QUESTIONS

The quality and direction of our conversations is often determined by the quality and origin of our questions. Are these questions shallow, cheesy, and targeted coming from a place of fear? Or are they intentional, offering space for discovery, and coming from a place of disarming curiosity and love?

ASKING GOOD QUESTIONS

Jesus was asked 183 questions in the NT. He answered 3 with statements, but responded to the rest with 307 questions. Asking good questions is one of the most important skills a group leader can develop. If you're like most leaders, you probably don't think of yourself as the most skilled question-asker. The good news is, with some practice, you can develop this skill.

BENEFITS OF ASKING GOOD QUESTIONS:

- They help people think for themselves and that creates ownership.
- They help people problem-solve.
- They keep you in control of the conversation.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD QUESTION?

Good questions are *discovery-based*. They're motivated by a genuine desire to understand and connect with the other person from a place of humility and curiosity.

TAKE ACTION:

How can you use these 4 levels of questions in our ministry to students?

LEVEL 0: Assessment
What are their needs right now?

LEVEL 1: Engagement
Gather Details

LEVEL 2: Involvement
Gather Context

LEVEL 3: Challenge
Explore Outcomes

ASKING GOOD QUESTIONS

Here's what those questions may look like on each level:

LEVEL 0

Before you begin with students

- 1) What does this student need *right now*? (presence, questions, encouragement?)
- 2) What is the most loving thing I can do? (as opposed to the "right" thing)

LEVEL 1

Strategy: Engagement / **Goal:** Gather Details

- 1) Who?
- 2) What?
- 3) Where?
- 4) Why?
- 5) When?

LEVEL 2

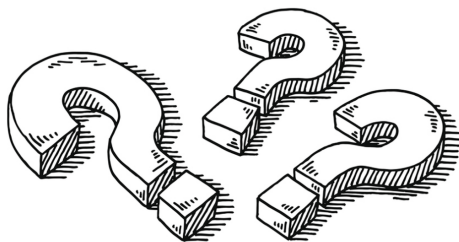
Strategy: Involvement / **Goal:** Gather Context

- 1) What did you do next?
- 2) How did you feel?
- 3) How did you respond?
- 4) Tell me more about that.

LEVEL 3

Strategy: Challenge / **Goal:** Explore Outcomes

- 1) What will you do?
- 2) What do you think?
- 3) How can I help?
- 4) If you could go back in time, what would you do differently?
- 5) If you could sit down with that person, what would you say?



RESOURCES

You are the primary influencers in the lives of your kids, not us. This is why we believe that youth ministry is family ministry. Often times the best way to support your kids is to support you. Here's a few resources we hope you find helpful.

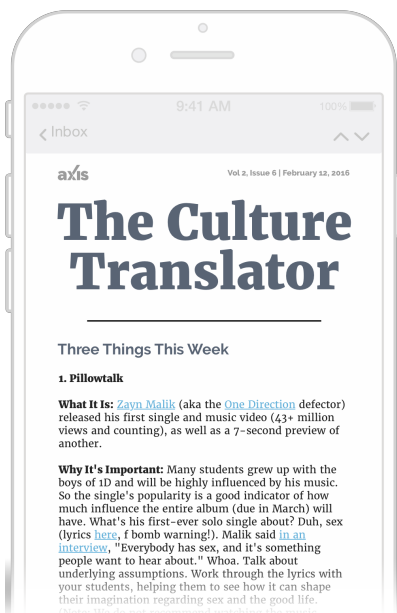
KNOW WHAT'S AVAILABLE

The Culture Translator

Axis.org is an online resource dedicated to equipping parents. Their mission is to empower the next generation to think clearly and critically about what they believe and to take ownership of their faith. They do this NOT by *outsourcing* parents, but by *resourcing* them to disciple and transfer legacy to their kids as they face life's questions and challenges. One of the ways they do this is through **The Culture Translator**.

This weekly newsletter gives insight into how the latest trends and vocab in pop culture, technology and media are influencing your students.

You can sign up for this weekly newsletter at axis.org/ct or get links through our monthly email. (Hint: because of the fast pace nature of changing trends and social media, signing up for the weekly newsletter will ensure that you're hearing about influences in your teen's life when it happens.)



Parent Cue Phase Guides

You have approximately 936 weeks from the time your child is born until he or she graduates high school. It goes by fast. It's as if they change just as you're starting to figure them out! It can make the responsibility to shape a child's faith and character feel overwhelming.



So! Since kids aren't born with instruction manuals, we've found the next best thing: Phase guides. They are 18 concise and interactive journal-style books that simplify what parents need to know about each phase of a kid's life and give them the opportunity to discover more about their kids—so they can make the most of each phase.

You'll discover what's changing about your kid over the next 52 weeks, the 6 things your kid needs the most, and 4 conversations to have in whatever phase they're in. Wanna try one out? We have all 18 books! They're also available on Amazon for \$15.

Resources on the Go

On occasion, we stumble across a great article, book, or talk that we either print out or sum up in a kind of printed blog post. While we may include these online, sometimes it's helpful to have these kinds of things in writing.

Feel free to contact Kate with any particular questions about additional resources that might be helpful to you!

KNOW WHO'S AVAILABLE

Sit with Us

Whether it's coffee or hot chocolate made to look like coffee so you can pretend you're an adult :) We'd love to sit down with you, get to know you, get to know your family and hear about your teen (your heart for them, dreams for them, struggles with them). Or maybe *you* just need community and are looking for a way to plug in and get connected.

Kate and Tom would love to meet with you, listen and do what we can partner with you, not just as a parent, but also a person.

Our contact information is in the "Staff" section of this guide as well as the "Contact Us" section in the back. Just reach out and ask.



THE FINE PRINT

SAFETY GUIDELINES

The safety of your teenager is a priority for our ministry, so we wanted to get you in the loop on how we plan to care for and protect them.

WE SCREEN VOLUNTEERS

Before any volunteer is permitted to serve with us, they undergo a rigorous application and interview process, including a criminal background check.

WE SET BOUNDARIES

We have set a number of guidelines for our youth ministry staff and volunteers. As a parent, you can help us make sure your child is well-cared for by helping us maintain these boundaries.

- No staff member or volunteer should be alone with a student of the opposite gender.
- No staff member or volunteer should initiate a one-on-one meeting with a teenager without the knowledge and consent of you, their parents.
- All staff members and volunteers must maintain appropriate physical boundaries with teenagers at all times.

WE REQUIRE PERMISSION SLIPS

- Each year you will fill out an online general permission form that asks for your consent in order for your teenager to attend any event, retreat, or gathering outside of our regular weekly program. You can find this on our website.

WE REPORT DANGEROUS SITUATIONS

Every staff member and volunteer in our ministry is a mandated reporter, which means we are legally required to report any dangerous or potentially dangerous situations immediately, including...

- If a student is being harmed, neglected, or abused.
- If a student is harming or abusing someone else.
- If a student is harming or at risk of harming themselves.

WE ARE ALWAYS AVAILABLE

If you ever have a concern about your teenager's care or safety, please reach out to us. We're just a phone call or email away!



CONTACT US

LET'S STAY IN TOUCH

This year, we'd love to stay in conversation with you. Here are a few ways we're hoping we can keep the lines of communication open . . .

EMAIL

We send an email just for parents every month. It's packed with information on our ministry and on how to be a more awesome parent of a teenager. But never hesitate to reach out to us by email, too.

SOCIAL MEDIA

We post photos, videos, and updates from our ministry each week. Follow along at . . .

FACEBOOK:

www.facebook.com/gracechapeleastlexington/

INSTAGRAM: @gcelxsm

