

## What Is Relational Ministry?

### A focus on relational youth ministry...

**... gives students access to a non-parental, committed adult who cares for and loves them.** Research shows that the faith of a student who has a significant relationship with a caring, committed adult may be more sustainable. And, students are less likely to fall through the cracks when they are connected to a caring leader because they feel they are known and loved. A caring adult can help a teen navigate through the process of adolescence, which can often be rocky and confusing. In order to do this, it is important for adults to intentionally build relationships with students in their small group, especially if the relationship building is done outside of the church context. So, doing things together apart from the Sunday gathering is key. The apostle Paul valued face-to-face contact work as well (1 Thessalonians 2:17-20).

#### 6 Ways to Find Common Ground With Students

- Be natural. Be yourself. Students don't need another "cool" friend. They need you to be you.
- Be real. Use discernment to figure out when to be appropriately vulnerable. Make sure you are approachable by dropping your walls but steer away from talking about your personal life and issues. For example, "Back in high school, I was drunk all the time."
- Be respectful. Don't condemn behavior but rather figure out why the student made a bad decision. For example, "Tell me about that party you went to on Friday."
- Be simple. Every word needs to be accessible. Try to find a common language between yourself and the student.
- If you can, remember what life was like without Christ. Remembering what it was like not having Jesus in your life helps you understand where the student is coming from.
- Look forward to hindsight. As a small group leader, look forward to the time when your students will take the Gospel seriously by living according to God's Word. Hindsight is a motivational force that will help you "imagine the end" and stay committed to the students God has given you to disciple.

#### **... gives students an advocate.**

To become an adult, students need to feel that they are understood and recognized as unique individuals. Adolescents are dependent on family systems and other caring adults to learn how to insert themselves into adulthood. Therefore, a leader can cheer a student on in their journey into adulthood by affirming who they are, how they matter, and where they belong.

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***... gives leaders a more realistic picture of the mindset of today's students.***

Students are lonely and are in need of multiple, committed adults to speak into their lives. Relational youth ministry makes leaders aware of the day-to-day life of a teen; things like suffering caused by deep emotional wounds, neglectful parenting, faith questions, broken friendships, and poor self-identity. Don't hesitate to bear the pain and brokenness of your students. Stronger relationships in a small group promote more discussion, and discussion will go beyond the usual chatter. Relationships provide safety, and when students are safe they open up. Once students trust their caring and committed adult leader, most likely they will begin to become transparent and talk about what is really going on in their world.