

# Building Relationships With Parents



For more information contact  
Diane Smith,  
Children's Ministry Strategist,  
Emerging Leaders Team  
800.ALL.BGAV Ext. 2256, [diane.smith@vbmb.org](mailto:diane.smith@vbmb.org)



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## Looking on the Surface

Each Sunday morning Trisha and her teaching team arrive early to prepare for a fruitful morning of Bible study with their class. They have planned together as a team, making sure each activity is crafted with excellence and the Bible truth is woven throughout every learning experience. They set aside time every Sunday morning to pray together for the children that will soon be entering their classroom. They have prepared to provide the absolute best for their children, or have they?

Elizabeth shyly approaches the room where her Sunday School class meets. Her mother, just as quiet, gently kisses her goodbye. The teacher smiles at Elizabeth's mother and stoops to greet Elizabeth. With a warm voice the teacher welcomes Elizabeth and invites her to join one of the learning activities in the classroom. She engages Elizabeth in conversation and walks with her into the room. Elizabeth's mother turns and walks away, assured that her child is happy and secure. The teacher has appropriately greeted this family, or has she?

## More than Meets the Eye

Teachers in preschool and children's areas may see their only function as nurturing the spiritual development of the child. Frequently, it is forgotten that the whole child must be ministered to each week. Children are reflections of their parents and the home environment. Children's leaders may have little, or no actual time with a child's parent on any given Sunday; however, to deny the impact of the parent's spiritual condition on the child is like riding a horse with blinders down the interstate. Preschool and children's teachers must be intentional about connecting with the parents or guardians of the children. A family-centered ministry is the solid foundation on which Bible study teachers build each week. Knowing the family provides priceless insight into the thoughts and actions of a child.

## The Common Link – The Child

- *Share positive classroom experiences.*

Tell the parent about any spiritual insights the child had during the Bible lesson. This will take planning so that one teacher is responsible for greeting parents at the end of the Bible study. Avoid conveying "cute" behaviors. Some children who catch on to this may begin to act out just so adults will have funny stories to tell.

- *Send a monthly newsletter into the home, telling about upcoming month's studying and how the study benefits the children.*

- *Plan occasions for leaders, children, and parents to be together.*

A spaghetti lunch after morning services? A family picnic in the park? The key to such events is intentionally having Bible study groups sit together with the leaders. This provides a relaxed atmosphere for parents to see you interacting with their children, you to see families interacting, and children to see teachers and parents interacting. Make an effort to connect with the parents. Ask open-ended questions, for example, "Tell me about Jeffrey's favorite thing to do when he's at home." Most importantly, be an active listener. Listen for insights into the child and parent's life.

- *Realize ministry takes place outside the physical boundaries of the church building.*

Be alert to opportunities to meet the parent's felt needs outside the boundaries of the church building and scheduled church activities. This may require creative thinking and keen awareness on behalf of the leaders. It will mean leaders must concentrate on greeting parents as well as children. Remember Elizabeth's mother? She could be a single parent who is new to your community. She may have little adult interaction because she is home with a preschooler every day. She may be living on a small fixed income. Could you take her to lunch? Connect her with single parents' Bible study in your church? Visit in the home? Attend sporting events and sit with her?

- *Pray for families.*

During planning meetings, pray specifically for the families of the children. Ask God to show you how to connect with parents and minister to families. Be aware and responsive to the Holy Spirit's prompting. A quick phone call to ask a parent how you can pray for him or her during the week may be the greatest gift you can give a family.

- *Share your story.*

Tell parents the impact Christ has in your life. If the parent is struggling with spiritual issues, share any struggles you may have had in the past. Keep the conversation focused on God. Always be ready to share your testimony about coming to know Jesus as Savior. What an amazing gift you give a child when you lead his or her parent to the Lord!

## Two Fishes and Five Barley Loaves

Offer to the Lord the time and energy He needs for an effective ministry. The little boy gave to Jesus all he had, and Jesus multiplied it to feed thousands. Give to the Lord the time you have; He will multiply it to meet the needs of others.

Take the first step now by making every effort to personally greet adults that bring children to Bible study. Seek natural opportunities to connect with the parent and child. Watch in anticipation as God blesses your efforts to minister in His name to the whole child!