

Youth leaders deal with three different groups of people: students, church leadership, and parents. We sign on for the youth. Church leadership, the senior pastor, or other pastoral staff provide support and accountability. Parents? They bring us the youth and occasionally help us with rides.

Other than those roles, parents are seen as invisible or even the enemy; invisible because they are not seen as central to the success of a thriving and active youth ministry; the enemy, because they call and complain. They are the enemy when they don't require their students to be at all our events. They are the enemy when they tell us that our programs are too "edgy."

There is another factor to consider. Most youth leaders are young. The average youth pastor is in his or her mid-twenties to early-thirties. Many of our group's parents could actually be our parents! On this level, we might feel a little threatened. Some of these parents are probably on boards overseeing our ministry!

What are the potential responses to these circumstances? Here are four possibilities using the metaphor of a team:

**1) Avoid them and hope they will quit the team** – "Don't call us, we'll call you" is a great quote to illustrate this point. If parents are not actively invited to have input or be generally involved, then the hope is that they will get distracted with their own busy lives and not feel the need to be on the team.

**2) Let them be on the team, but sit on the bench** – This strategy features the art of allowing parents to be involved, but only in handling projects.

**3) Sign them up as cheerleaders** – In this scenario the youth leader gives parents increasing involvement to help support the youth ministry through finances, good words to boards, or recommendations to other potential youth ministry families. It is the role of the youth pastor to keep the "team" playing well so the cheerleaders can do their work.

**4) Give them playing time** – Parents want to be involved. While they may be busy, they love their children and want to be involved in various ways beyond #2 and #3.

How do we give parents quality "playing time" without driving away or stifling students? How do we

involve parents without compromising the effectiveness of the youth ministry? Here are seven suggestions for a successful "coach" to consider:

**1) Invite them to be an active member of your team**

– Some parents are not only good parents, but they are also excellent youth leaders. They genuinely care for teenagers and want to see kids grow in their faith. Their qualifications of loving youth and being a parent may be your best asset. Before you start dreaming of the possibilities, tread carefully as you undoubtedly have youth who also happen to be sons or daughters of these parents. Welcome their input. If they are in any way uncomfortable, then identify alternative positions for the parent.

**2) Assemble a prayer team**

– Prayer is not a "behind-the-scenes" ministry. Invite parents to be on this team, send a regular email to update them on ways they can pray. Watch what God begins to do!

**3) Keep them informed** – Don't depend on your students to get information to parents. Parents are the ones who often provide the money, the ride, and most of all the encouragement. Informed parents are your best allies in getting the word out. Give students information, but mail, email, and communicate with your parents. They feel like a team member when you keep the information coming to them.

**4) Talk to them when you phone their son/daughter** – Addressing parents by name and engaging them in a short conversation when you call for students help to build a relationship. Connecting with them whether by phone, email, text, or face-to-face helps them to feel important and acknowledged.

**5) Give them resources** – Refer great books, seminars, podcasts, or other information to your parents. They will appreciate your gift and recognize your wish to see them succeed as a valuable team member.

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# Off The Bench

## Let Parents Be More Than Cheerleaders On Your Youth Ministry Team

**6) Pray for them**

– We pray for students, but what about parents? As team members they need our prayers, encouragement and blessing. Let them know you pray for them.

**7) Deploy them for special tasks**

– Strategically use parents to take part in events or growth opportunities. Let them know the importance and purpose of their contribution. Bless them with thanks.

Most parents care as much or more about students than you. Their experience, their love, and their support equal a winning team. Let them work with you. Enjoy the blessing, reward, and effectiveness of true team ministry.