



APPLICATION TOOL 10

Principles for Family-Friendly Congregations and Youth Ministries

- **Focus on the family as a system.** Recognize the power of the family system on the faith and values of adolescents. When we minister with adolescents it is important to recognize the entire family context from which they come and will return.
- **Build on family strengths.** All too often our ministry efforts focus on what is wrong with families or on correcting family problems. Focus on promoting family strengths, healthy values, and effective family life skills. Help families discover their mission, unique gifts, and strengths. Teach skills for family living and growing in faith; support and encourage families.
- **Respect the individual and cultural differences among families.** Families come in all different sizes, shapes, and colors. Recognize this diversity and incorporate distinct features in our ministry and programming to respond effectively to the diversity.
- **Respond flexibly to family needs; offer a variety of programs, activities, and strategies.** Family life is dramatically different today than it was only two or three decades ago. The diversity in family structure and family ethnic heritages, the pressures of family time and commitments, and the changing work patterns require flexible rather than rigid policies, programming, and scheduling. Gone are the days when a one-program-fits-all approach will work.
- **Reach out to families, rather than demand participation in programs.** Offer programs, services, and resources for families at home or in home-like settings. The basis for our ministry with families should not be participation in church programs. The issue is not how many people come to a program, but how many families you are reaching through a variety of programs, activities, and strategies. Decrease reliance on gathered programming as the primary way to minister with families, and increase the emphasis on reaching out to families at-home or in small groups of families. A contemporary approach to families strikes a balance between gathered programs and a variety of activities and strategies designed for home use by one family or a cluster of families.

- **Treat families as partners in ministry.** Instead of working in isolation, develop a partnership approach which includes assessing the needs of families with adolescents, consulting with parents on the direction of youth ministry, inviting parents to participate in the planning of programs and to take leadership roles at church programs or in home groupings. We treat parents as partners when . . .
 - We support families with diverse programs, resources and strategies.
 - We incorporate a family perspective into the life and programs of the congregation.
 - We build a bridge between youth programming and the home.
 - We consider carefully the impact on families when developing programs, policies and ministry strategies.

Criteria for Family-Friendly Programming

When designing programs and activities be sure to keep in mind several important criteria for family-friendly programming.

- The program accounts for the different family forms represented by the families of adolescents (for example, single-parent, blended, and dual career families).
- The program accounts for the variety of ethnic groups in the church and their particular needs.
- The scheduling of the program reflects the busy and, often, complex calendar of families with adolescents.
- The program addresses the needs of the adolescent in relation to his or her family or the overall needs of the entire family.
- The program improves the capacity for families to master the family life cycle developmental issues appropriate to families with adolescents.
- The program has a process that helps the participating adolescents and their families deal with the change and growth the program encourages.
- Parents are involved in planning, implementing, and evaluating the program.
- The program improves the relationship between youth ministry and the family.
- The program empowers the family to share and live the Christian faith at home, and helps them grow together as a family.
- The program provides families with resources and activities for in-home use.
- The program helps families connect with other families in family groupings or intergenerational groupings to share their faith, celebrate their faith, and/or serve others.