

TRANSITIONS

ENSURING FAITH FORMATION IN CHILDREN AND YOUTH



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SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

Transitions: Revealing the Cracks Children and Youth Can Slip Through

James^[1] was new in my (Alvin's) youth ministry. Invited by a friend, he definitely had a lot of energy (some might say too much). After a while, James accepted Christ at an outreach gathering hosted by several other churches. I remember sitting with him as he made that decision. In the months to come, his faith seemed to explode. He told others about Jesus, invited them to youth group and read his Bible. He made every attempt to incorporate faith in every walk of his life. His parents, who were not Christians, remarked on his change of attitude. There was definitely a transformation in his life.

After high school graduation, he went to Kingston, Ontario, for post-secondary studies. As I moved on from that church, my connection to James faded. From what I heard, James seemed to grow distant in his faith. The spark didn't seem to burn deeply anymore. I've lost contact with James. Many of his youth group friends did as well. I don't know where he ended up. James fell through the cracks during a transition and became another statistic, like so many other young adults who have walked away from the Church.

We probably all know of children and youth who have slipped through the cracks during transitions. While there are plenty of resources for helping with micro-transitions (like a commissioning service or a tool to bridge graduating high school students into post-secondary), many churches do not know how to address this from a macro, comprehensive level. The purpose of this resource is to highlight key elements that churches, specifically church leaders, can use in supporting children and youth—and their parents—as they move from one life stage to another. We aim to create a conversation surrounding the topic of how churches can invest in children and youth as they move through different life stages, both from a developmental as well as a programmatic perspective. Through our combined ministry experiences, the shared expertise of others serving in children and youth ministries, and the research and trends that currently confront us, we have become convinced that it is necessary for churches to adapt their approaches regarding discipleship of the next generation.

Together, we will consider some “big picture” elements that church leadership needs to address, from defining discipleship to setting a structural foundation that moves churches forward together. We will approach transitions from a programmatic need as well as the necessary investment into individuals (which we call “Sharing Life”).

It is our hope that this would serve as a helpful resource for our family of churches as they consider their approaches to ministry and discipleship of young people. This is intended to offer both theory and practical ideas.

1 Not his real name



SECTION ONE

A Response to the “Hemorrhaging Faith” Report

In August 2012, James Penner and his associates released “Hemorrhaging Faith: Why & When Canadian Young Adults Are Leaving, Staying & Returning to the Church”, which was commissioned by The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada’s Youth and Young Adult Ministry Roundtable. Its purpose was to understand this demographic’s engagement with the Church in Canada.^[2]

1. Children Leave the Church During Transitions

One of the key findings of the “Hemorrhaging Faith” report was that, as suspected, almost two thirds of children raised in the Church had minimal to no involvement in organized church by the time they reached adulthood. However, the report revealed that the majority of the departures happened in the earlier transition points, not just after high school graduation. In fact, the greatest drop-off transition was from children’s ministry to youth ministry. The research in “Hemorrhaging Faith” reveals that “we are losing more young people between childhood and adolescence than between adolescence and young adult years.”^[3]

Based on the research, the following conclusions were made:

The transition years to middle school, junior high and high school are highly stressful—many churches don’t expect and plan for supporting kids through these transitions.^[4]

We lose young people when they “graduate” from the ministry group for one age to the next (and ministry transition points may also include times when youth and church leaders are in their own transition periods)—especially if they are tightly connected to a youth ministry that gives them little exposure to other members of the church community.^[5]

Based on these findings, we recognize the need to identify key transition points and effectively move students through each stage, whether at a personal or corporate level.

2. The Impact of Early Adolescence

It may surprise some people, but the data seems to reveal that early adolescence may be an even more critical time on which to focus when it comes to nurturing an environment that fosters faith development well beyond the teenage years.

2 Dr. Dave Overholt gives a great overview of the report at www.canadianyouth.net/?i=2306&mid=1000&id=411431

3 See “Hemorrhaging Faith” (110)

4 Ibid

5 “Hemorrhaging Faith” (113)

What Is Early Adolescence?

Adolescence is a term coined by G. Stanley Hall in 1907 to explain the period from puberty until someone was a fully functioning, contributing adult in society. Currently, adolescence is from ages 8 to 25. Early adolescence occurs between ages 8 and 14.

Adolescence is typified by an individual's search for identity. They are searching for meaning and value in their lives. They often struggle with conflicting identity issues, weak self-esteem and significant peer pressure, in addition to struggling with academic, athletic and other performance-based activities. However, over the last two decades these physical, psychological and spiritual changes and challenges are happening earlier.^[6] This stage in life, known as early adolescence, is a time of transformation for children in grades 4 to 8, who range in age from 8 to 14.

Early adolescents are trying desperately to understand themselves and their world, and where they can fit in successfully and happily. It is a time of great turmoil for some, while for others it is a time of great excitement and wonder. For most, it is both an exciting adventure embracing a larger world than their own and a terribly anxious time of uncertainty.^[7] Peers become more important than parents are during this time. There is a yearning to be accepted. Behaviour is often erratic and inconsistent. Independent, critical thinking begins to form (although it is not fully completed) during early adolescence. Andy Kerckhoff wrote a book called *Critical Connection: A Practical Guide to Parenting Young Teens* that helps readers understand this unique stage of life and how to better connect with young teens. Sarah-Jayne Blakemore elaborates through her 15-minute TED talk "The mysterious workings of the adolescent brain" (bit.ly/1fUgG6e).

How Does This Impact Transitions?

Understanding this critical time of development is key to developing an effective transition strategy.

First, acknowledge there may be more overlapping developmental issues than in previous generations between children and youth ministry. Typically, a youth ministry begins at grade 6 or 7 (i.e., ages 12 to 13). However, because of early adolescence, the children's ministry may need to begin addressing issues that were typically seen as "youth ministry issues". For example, sexuality was discussed in a high school youth ministry. However, given the biological changes happening in some children^[8], some of those issues may need an appropriate, initial addressing in children's ministry. Therefore, both the children's and youth ministry needs to have a common understanding so their messaging is consistent. Much of this is based on holistic discipleship as defined by a church.

6 The field of early adolescence has grown so much that there is now a scientific journal dedicated to it called *The Journal of Early Adolescence* (jea.sagepub.com).

7 See growingupwell.org

8 The onset of puberty can now begin as early as age 8 (www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/nov/04/why-is-puberty-starting-younger-precocious).

Secondly, the actual moving of students from children's ministry to youth ministry is vital. As noted by "Hemorrhaging Faith", many students tend to "drop out" from church between these stages because there was an inefficient bridging between the two ministries. It can often be an overlooked area of ministry because this age group is "too old" for children's ministry but not yet ready for the youth ministry. It may also be a challenging stage for adults, as young teens are often very unpredictable in their behaviour. However, it is important that churches consider the ways they minister to kids moving through this period. We will go more in depth in another section 4.

The Biggest Faith Influences in an Adolescent's Life

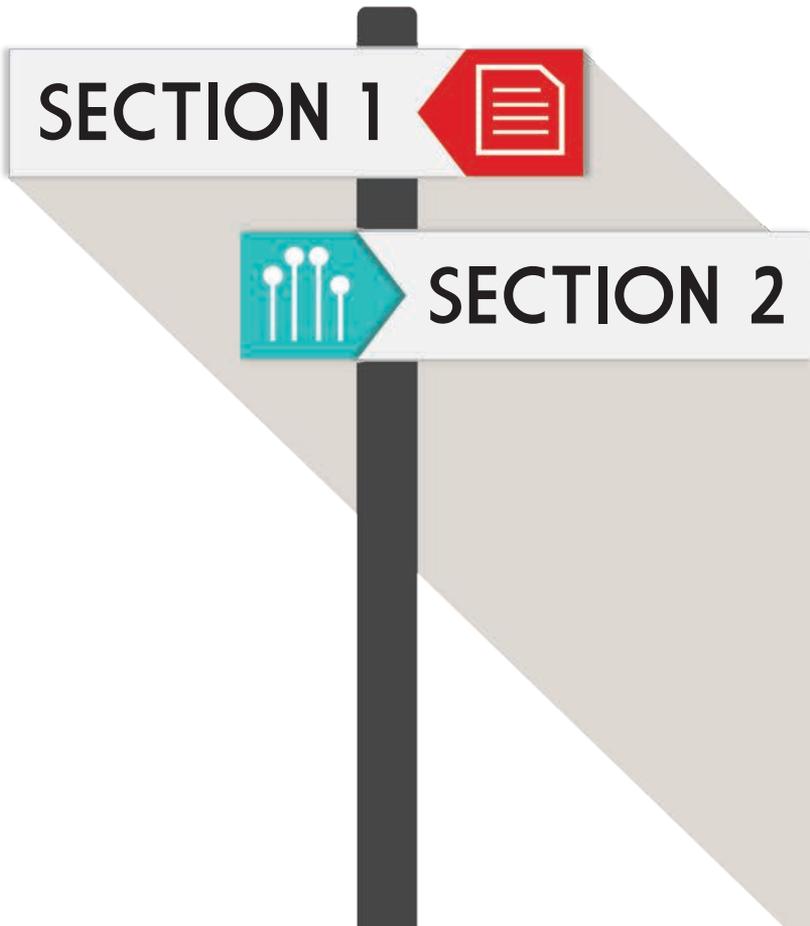
The "Hemorrhaging Faith" study found four key drivers influenced lasting faith development and young adults staying connected to church. (To understand these four key drivers, see Dr. Overholt's review: vimeo.com/66670908.)

Here is a summary:

- **Parents**
Parents are still strong influencers in their children's faith development, whether positive or negative. Many respondents to the "Hemorrhaging Faith" study showed the faith practice (beyond going to church and praying at mealtimes) and lifestyle their parents exemplified and modeled were key in their own spiritual development. Unfortunately, some ministries have seen parents as obstacles in a student's life. If we do believe that parents are the primary caregivers, ordained by God to raise their children (whether they are Christian or not), our ministries need to work alongside that mandate. This isn't just keeping parents in the loop; it involves parental care in supporting them as they raise their kids. At the same time, we also know some situations where parents are neglectful or absent. We will address this later (see page 8).
- **Experience of God in Unique Ways**
There are moments when a person reflects and acknowledges the presence of God at a specific time in a specific place. These could be answers to prayer, a specific event where the outcome is attributed to God or witnessing God's actions in a particular circumstance. These "God moments" help to anchor a person's faith walk, especially in times of doubt. Such examples of experiencing God in a unique way come through experiences such as retreats, missions trips and Christian camping experiences.
- **Community**
It's clear, both biblically and anecdotally, that people need each other. It's part of our social needs. However, this isn't just a community of similarly-aged peers. Intergenerational friendships are vital in both the practice and journey of faith. These relationships allow for a broader understanding of how faith is lived and provide a unique support that's different from parental or same-age peer relationships. "Hemorrhaging Faith" found that being in mentoring relationships was a key driver.

- Teaching and Beliefs
It's not only the accuracy of doctrine that is important, but also the space to doubt and process. God's truth can be difficult to comprehend at times. Students are looking for a space to process and wrestle with how God's truth intersects with their lives in a meaningful way without losing their belonging in a community. These spaces are vital in allowing for faith growth in an individual.

"Hemorrhaging Faith" gave us a snapshot of the issues we need to address. It also gave us hope in seeing that we can foster life-transforming, Spirit-driven opportunities for students to thrive.





SECTION TWO

Recognizing All the Players

There's an old and wise saying: "It takes a village to raise a child." This is just as true in a child's faith development. Ultimately, we recognize it is God who desires children to develop profound, life-changing faith in Jesus. No one person is responsible for the entire faith development of a child. After all, the Apostle Paul reminds us that God assigns various roles and responsibilities to different people^[9], recognizing that no one role can complete the discipleship process on its own.

In a church ministry context, we identified four key roles that complement one another in that faith development process.^[10] In this section, we will clarify the influence of the key roles and how they are complemented by the other roles.

1. Parents

As noted in the previous section on the significance of parental influence (see page 6), parents play a key role in a child's development, faith or otherwise. From a sociological perspective, the majority of parents are the dominant influencers, especially at an early age. As a child grows older, influencers will come from a growing range of sources, whether from people, content or life circumstances.

In an ideal world, parents would be the catalyst in a child's faith formation. They would begin teaching and passing on the stories of God to their children, training them in the ways of the Lord. In essence, they would be making disciples who happen to be their children.

However, even in an ideal world, parents cannot be the sole influence. As children move into adolescence, they attempt to make sense of this faith that has been passed to them. To do so, children will question, wrestle, doubt and revisit their faith. This is what makes the community of God so essential in faith formation. Parents can draw on others to come alongside their children as voices of influence—not to be a mouthpiece of the parents, but to pass on the stories of God. This isn't to say parents can now shift the responsibility onto someone else, but that responsibility is shared more broadly with others.

In our world today, we recognize that not all children have positive role modeling happening at home, specifically in regards to a parent or parents living out the Christian faith. In some circumstances, parents may be neglectful or absent in this role. In these cases, it is even more imperative that churches come alongside the child and, if they are willing, the parents to support the whole family in this journey.

9 See 1 Corinthians 3:5-9

10 We recognize that faith development does not happen solely within the local church community. There are other parachurch organizations and agencies that have a role. For the purpose of this discussion, we will focus specifically on the local church community.

What parents can look for in:

- Church leaders: As the overseers in the discipleship process for all its church members, church leaders can help parents understand how they and their children fit into the “big picture” of faith development. They help to provide the 10,000-foot look at what ways churches support families in discipleship, both individually and as a collective.
- Sharing Life relationships: These individuals provide voices of influence specific to their child. Parents can seek out key individuals to invite into their child’s life. Just as important is for parents to have mentors and trusted fellow believers to support them in this stage of their child’s life.
- Ministry leaders: They provide shared opportunities to understand and stretch faith for all children and youth. Parents can look to ministry leaders for key resources to help understand their children and ways to deepen their own parenting.

2. Church Leaders

Church leaders, whether they be the senior pastor, elders, deacons or the church council, are responsible for the intentional and strategic disciple-making process in their church context. After all, Jesus’ mandate to his church via his disciples is to go and make disciples. While they may not be intimately involved in every church member’s development, they need to understand the overall scope of the faith formation process and how people can grow closer to Jesus and his church at different stages. They help to ensure all the appropriate resources and ministries are available in their context to all members of the family.

What church leaders can look for in:

- Parents or guardians: These people typically have lived the longest with that child. While they may not understand everything that’s happening with their child and how to respond, they usually know their child the best. Ask parents for input in how they see their child developing, and what kinds of supports they need.
- Sharing Life relationships: If Sharing Life is an ethos a church as a whole embraces, church leaders should expect ALL their Christ-following members to be engaged in a mentoring or Sharing Life relationship. While church leaders aren’t expected to coordinate those connections, they can hold congregants accountable.
- Ministry leaders: While church leaders oversee the overall framework for discipleship, ministry leaders give insights on it can work best. Ministry leaders take ownership in how that particular ministry group can effectively disciple children and youth in conjunction with the other ministry resources in churches.

3. One-on-One (Sharing Life) Relationships

One-on-one intergenerational relationships are a vital influence on a child and especially a youth. Each Christ-following member of the Church has a mandate to pass on the stories and teachings of God to the next generation.^[11]

¹¹ See Psalm 78:1-4

While some may do so as ministry leaders, all Christians have the responsibility to do so, no matter what their ages. (We will discuss the concept of Sharing Life on page 12.)

What Sharing Life friends can look for in:

- Parents and guardians: Parents can give day-to-day insights on what the child is experiencing, and other factors that could impact the child's faith formation.
- Church leaders: Church leaders need to give clarity in the biblical mandate of discipleship and how they as individuals can contribute to it.
- Ministry leaders: Ministry leaders usually are the primary teachers of faith understanding and knowledge. By knowing what's being taught, the Sharing Life friend can help the student unpack it and make it applicable.

4. Ministry Leaders

Ministry groups (i.e., children, youth, seniors, etc.) give a common-ground foundation for a particular age and stage. They establish the common metanarrative and vernacular of the group in age-appropriate terms. Usually, ministry leaders are specialists in that age group, and have key insights on the culture of that age range.

What ministry leaders can look for in:

- Parents and guardians: Parents can give day-to-day insights on what the child is experiencing, and other factors that could impact the child's faith formation.
- Church leaders: Church leaders need to set the overall direction and understanding of discipleship.
- Sharing Life relationships: Sharing Life friends need to take the teaching done within the ministry group and help the student to apply it in his or her life.

BONUS: Peer-to-Peer Relationships

Peer-to-peer, age-similar friendships are unique from the other roles. As a child gets older, those friendships become a more prominent voice of influence. Since these peers are on a similar journey as the student, they may not be able to grasp the overall faith formation process. However, whether intentional or not, they play a key role in the faith development of a child. The Church, by caring for each individual, helps to establish a more fertile space for faith growth as a peer group.



SECTION 3



SECTION THREE

The Underlying Foundation

Before we can address transitions directly, we need to look at four key factors or influences that precipitate this discussion of discipling our children. These factors provide both the launching points and a framework of understanding what it will take to facilitate effective transitions.

- A holistic definition of discipleship is foundational.
- Mentoring and Sharing Life relationships are key in this process.
- Parents are the primary faith influencers in a child's development
- The church's role is to equip and encourage parents in raising their children while assisting in their children's faith development process.

1. Holistic Discipleship

Common understanding and vision are key when it comes to addressing transitions. Without them, every person and ministry splinter into a buckshot of their own ideas and objectives. To have that common understanding gives everyone a defined starting point and the vision gives direction.

This begins with a shared definition of discipleship. Discipleship is a word regularly used in our Christian lexicon but it has ambiguous connotations.

- What is a disciple?
- What elements are core to the disciple-making process in children and youth?
- What are characteristics that they demonstrate after coming through your next generation ministries?

As a local church body, there must be consensus of what the discipleship process (or disciple-making experience) looks like. This isn't just a one-sentence definition, but instead a clear, concrete understanding of where the disciple-making process takes a person. It must include markers that serve as signposts after each stage (e.g., at ages 5, 11, 13, 17, 20 and 25) to ensure intentional bridging through life stages. Some people define it through a discipleship matrix.

Here are a few examples of how different traditions define growth in discipleship through various matrix systems:

- Faith United Methodist Church (for small children): bit.ly/1F4AoGn
- Family Land Map created by Family Matters: bit.ly/1lqd08E
- Excellence Ministry Coaching: bit.ly/1E3CQsJ
- Heartland Community Church: bit.ly/1zVSkE8
- Dr. Shawn Anderson, author of Living Dangerously: bit.ly/1E3CUZw
- CRCA Resource Center: bit.ly/1Fi3lwd

By having that high-level understanding, the various ministries recognize what

their overall objectives are and how each ministry's mandate achieves them. That way the different ministries can know, to some extent, the general needs, strengths and challenges of students they are receiving and what kind of student they intend to send out into the next stage of life.

It is important to recognize that not everyone enters the discipleship process at the same time. Some people begin very early in their lives, many in their tween years, others in high school and some in adulthood. What this means is there is another dimension to the discipleship matrix that needs to include both spiritual development and life stages.

In this construct, a discipleship matrix does not become a linear progression, but as with almost all matters of faith, there is an ebb and flow that doesn't necessarily follow a sequential order; thus, the need for other "dimensions" in this matrix. Still, having those common markers are critical to ensure churches know what direction to move towards, both at the collective and individual levels. Otherwise, we're pulling people in fragmented directions that do not help disciples to thrive in their faith development.

One challenge we've come across is that discipleship is seen as a program. North Point Church refers to this in their document "Practically Speaking" (insidenorthpoint.org/practically-speaking). Their Practice #2 is "Think Steps, Not Programs", which entails understanding the end goal or objective and formulating the appropriate steps to reach it. In other words, it's not about creating cycles of activities for a person to go through like an assembly line. Rather, given an individual's unique faith journey, it's identifying where God is taking that person and providing the appropriate tools and experiences that will help move that person forward well. When there are overlapping opportunities that God is moving a person towards, we can then synergize and cluster them into a "program".

As a family of God, if we're to walk alongside others in building their faith, we need to have a clear idea of who God created us to be, and then move towards that end as a collective effort.

2. Sharing Life and Mentorship

Mentoring has become the buzzword in the discipleship of children and youth, yet it is more than that. It's the biblical model of discipleship that Jesus demonstrated and Paul with Timothy exemplified. It has been shown to be one of the most effective and high impact means for supporting students in their faith development, because mentors are able to address very specific developmental needs (while ministry groups address chronological needs). Studies show that intergenerational relationships are vital and formative in faith development.

James Frazier, author of *Across the Generations*, says, "The best way to be formed in Christ is to sit among the elders, listen to their stories, break bread with them, and drink from the same cup, observing how the earlier generations

of saints ran the race, fought the fight, and survived in grace”^[12]. However, there aren’t many children and youth relating deeply with adults from their communities, despite the research showing that young people desire to be mentored. There are several reasons adults typically give for not mentoring:

- They don’t have time to mentor on a high level every week.
- They’re not sure what mentoring is really. (Many adults have never been mentored themselves.)
- They’re uncomfortable being around youth. This usually translates into fear of conversing or relating to youth because some adults just “don’t get them”.

While mentoring is part of a Christ-follower’s biblical mandate (cf. Psalm 78:1-8), we can’t expect people to just “do it” without equipping them to mentor. What is important to note is that investing in the next generation is not just for youth or children’s ministry workers. This is something that every mature follower of Jesus is called to do. Therefore, as the Church, we need to equip people for this calling. Jumping right into being a mentor might be tough for some, so we use Sharing Life as a term to broaden the scope that leads to mentoring. Think of it as an on-ramp. While this may not fit the strictest definition of mentoring, Sharing Life is a way to build intergenerational relationships that foster trust.

We’ll use a six-degree scale to break down different aspects of this continuum. Think of them as degrees of involvement instead of a sequential progression. People can move between these degrees of involvement depending on their life circumstances.

1st Degree (1D)

Every relationship begins with some basic knowledge of the other person. What’s his or her name? Parents’ names? What grade? Which school? What interests? The key to this is consistency. Is that adult^[13] regularly connecting with that student? This doesn’t have to be a long conversation (maybe just a couple of minutes), but it does need to be consistent. It’s proactively interacting with students each week—greeting them, seeing how they are, and finding out about their lives (e.g., “How was that math test last week?”). What is crucial about this level is following up. The key is reminding students they are noticed and are missed if they are not around. It is a way to demonstrate that they have a place in this community.^[14]

2nd Degree (2D)

This is the deepening of the conversation from 1D. Whereas 1D’s purpose was to connect for a brief time, now the adult extends the conversation. Consider this the 2+ level conversation. Here’s an example:

¹² See Intergenerational Christian Formation (17)

¹³ While we use the term “adult” in this section, this person can be a youth Sharing Life with an elementary student. It refers to the older individual in that relationship.

¹⁴ In CBOQ Youth’s ministry cycle, the first step for most students is the recognition they belong before they identify with a personal faith (cboqyouth.ca/about-us).

A: How was your math test last week?

C: It was really hard.

A: What did you find most difficult?

C: I still have trouble with fractions.

A: How much time did you spend studying?

C: At least 3 hours.

A: It sounds like you've put a lot of effort into this. I'm proud that you took that much time.

This degree maintains that consistency but delves deeper into students' lives. To engage the next generation is to enter into their world rather than pulling them into yours.

3rd Degree (3D)

At this level, the adult is looking for ways to enter the student's world. This can include:

- attending special occasions like a sports tournament or a recital (mentors may consider bringing along their families);
- meeting at a coffee shop after class near their school.

It doesn't have to be frequent. However, entering their world gives a vantage point into other areas of the students' lives. It also broadens their familiarity with the mentors by seeing them in a context outside of the church building. (We've all had moments where we recognize a face but forget a name because we see someone in a completely different context.) Stepping into their world deepens the sense that adults are making time for them on their "turf".

4th Degree (4D)

At this level, adults have gained trust so now they can begin to invite students into their world. In Doug Fields's book *Purpose-Driven Youth Ministry*, he uses the example of bringing them along to run errands. Perhaps an adult would like to invite the student's family over for dinner. Adults can even partner with a friend and invite both of students and families for a meal. 4D looks for opportunities for the student to see the adult living outside a church context.

5th Degree (5D)

One great way to share life is by serving together. Typically, this involves common interests and/or gifts. The key here isn't just ministering together, but continuing those God-exploration conversations. It also provides ways to share common experiences where they may begin to see each other more as peers versus leader and student. For example, an adult may teach a student how to use the soundboard. The adult intentionally goes beyond the "how tos" of operating the soundboard to helping the student unpack how this is a ministry. They can continue in conversations like in 2D. The focus isn't just the ministry itself, but another opportunity for the adult and student to learn and serve together with shared experiences.

6th Degree (6D)

Formal mentoring occurs at this stage. We define this as intentional, intensive, time-defined explorations of God's directives for that individual. Let's break this down:

- Intentional: Both the student and mentor understand the purpose of gathering.
- Intensive: They realize this may delve into appropriately "hard" moments as the student moves deeper into her own faith and exploration.
- Time-defined: Most mentors cannot commit to being "mentors for life". There is an understanding between the student and mentor on how long this particular context will last.
- Explorations of God's directives: Mentoring isn't about going through a curriculum or a set of learning objectives (although that may be part of it). It's helping students hear and understand what God is saying to them. Mentors are to help facilitate and create space for God's directives to become as clear as possible.

The point of this is to intentionally focus and assist students in uncovering what God's revealing, whether through Scripture, through everyday circumstances or through in-depth self-reflection. Bo Boshers has a great book called *The Be-With Factor* that explains this process well.

These personal mentorship relationships are extremely influential and important, but mentorship is broader than these levels of engagement. Communal mentorship really takes the form of Sharing Life. Sharing Life is about a whole community engaging in holistic discipleship. It's not a program to implement; rather, it is a culture a church as a whole embraces and the adults take ownership in doing their part. It is imperative to build those relationships with the support of the parents. This isn't to say the adult reports to the parent, but the adult builds the parent's trust as that individual walks alongside the child. Through it, the adult becomes another voice that child trusts. The mentor cares for the child, models a life following Jesus and is there for the child as he takes the next steps in his faith journey.

3. The Role of Parents: To Nurture the Faith of Their Children

Parents are the primary faith influencers in the lives of their children. In addition to resourcing children's and youth ministries, we strongly believe that churches must intentionally resource and support parents in their role as the primary faith influencers in their child's life¹⁵. Parents need encouragement for the small and crucial steps along the way. The following are suggested resources that may encourage and equip parents to grow in their own faith, in the parenting of their children, and in their families' overall spiritual health.

¹⁵ We recognize that families come in a variety of configurations and there are situations where a parent may be neglectful or absent in a child's life. For our purpose, "parent" will also refer to the legal guardian of that child.

While Children Are 2 to 8 Years Old

While children are very young, it is important for parents to model and establish healthy rhythms of growth in their own walks of faith. This sets the tone for how they interact with their children about God, faith, discipleship and growth. Here are a few recommended books to assist parents in this step.

- *My Monastery Is a Minivan*, Denise Roy
With a relaxed and appealing writing style, Roy discusses the many times when she has noticed the divine presence operating within the very ordinary and daily experiences of a middle-aged woman with four kids, a mortgage and ten extra pounds, as she describes herself.
- *The Practice of the Presence of God*, Brother Lawrence
The Practice of the Presence of God is a book of collected teachings of Brother Lawrence, a 17th-century Carmelite monk. The basic theme of the book is the development of an awareness of the presence of God, which Brother Lawrence reflected on as a dishwasher. It is a good encouragement for parents during their own monotony of laundry and diapers.
- *The 5 Love Languages of Children*, Gary Chapman
This book can help parents discover their child's primary love language. It shows parents what they can do to convey unconditional feelings of respect, affection and commitment in a way that will resonate with their child's emotions and behaviour.
- *Boundaries with Kids*, Henry Cloud and John Townsend
Many well-intentioned attempts to disciple children get lost in tangled family systems without boundaries. This book helps parents set limits and still be loving parents. This resource will help parents define legitimate boundaries for their family. Above all, it teaches parents how to instill in their children the kind of godly character that is the foundation for healthy, productive adult living.
- *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, Peter Scazzero
This resource explains a deep, beneath-the-surface spiritual formation paradigm that integrates emotional health and contemplative spirituality. Ultimately, children will be able to respect the faith that their parents profess if it is coming from a mature and healthy source.
- *Sacred Rhythms*, Ruth Haley Barton
Spiritual disciplines are activities that open us to God's transforming love and the changes that only God can bring about in our lives. Picking up on the monastic tradition of creating a "rule of life" that allows for regular space for the practice of the spiritual disciplines, this book examines seven key disciplines along with practical ideas for weaving them into everyday life. A healthy spiritual rhythm in parents' personal lives will overflow to the family system as a whole.

While Children Are 8 to 12 Years Old

During these tween years, parents are in the trenches of the biggest transition

that children will go through: early adolescence. It can be a confusing time with all the hormonal, cognitive and spiritual changes their children are starting. This is where the axiom “it takes a village to raise a child” is most evident (as discussed in section two). Bringing other trusted adults into a student’s life benefits both the child and the parent. It is vital for parents to build a network of supporting peers and trusted mentors to help navigate early adolescence. The following books help provide context and some practical steps with tweens.

- *The 5 Love Languages of Teenagers*, Gary Chapman
Children at this age start to receive and express love differently than when they were younger. It is important that parents adapt alongside their children, so their parenting and discipleship can be rooted in a well-communicated affection and love.
- *A Love Worth Giving*, Max Lucado
Often when parents feel like they are burnt out and low on love for their kids, they grit their teeth and “try a little harder”. Lucado encourages the weary giver to spend time receiving love before attempting to pour it out. The premise of this book is to “receive first, give second”.
- *The Gift of Being Yourself*, David Benner
Sometimes parents can get stuck in the rut of functioning as “parent” or “teacher” to their child. This book encourages parents to stay attuned to the unique individual God has wired them to be. Kids will reap more in their relationship with parents if they are staying true to the person God has designed them to be.
- “*Tween Us*” blog, Shannan Younger
This is one of many parent blogs that highlight the adventures of living with a tween. Parents may find humour and encouragement by taking a few minutes to tap into these sites and help discern which battles are worth fighting along with other tween parents.

While Children Are Adolescents and Into Adulthood

As kids begin to push the boundaries of their independence, parents want to appropriately prepare them for adulthood. This becomes the final stage before their children take their own societal-contributing, independently thinking, on-their-own life path (although it may take several years before it comes to fruition).

In section two we discussed the different players in a child’s faith formation. As a child gets older and starts puberty, this is a key time for parents to connect the child with another trusted adult. The default is to expect the children’s ministry leader or youth leader to be that person. While those ministry leaders are a vital asset in a child’s faith formation, the burden cannot be completely shifted to them. Rather, parents can “diversify” the voices of influence to include people who are not ministry leaders to be in those Sharing Life relationships. It becomes the parent’s responsibility to help involve those key adults in their child’s life.

As my (Alvin's) two children are close to the start of adolescence, my wife and I identified three adults per child who we believed would be key influencers. We invited them to become involved in our children's lives with the Sharing Life paradigm. These adults were keen on doing what they could to invest in our kids.

Recognize that these relationships will take on a life of their own. Parents cannot (even should not) manipulate these relationships. Parents must trust that God will speak his truth through these adults and that their children will trust those other voices of influence. In time, a child's faith support network grows wider than what a parent can provide, which helps the child move forward into adulthood. These books help to unpack ways to engage adolescents and young adults.

- *Help, Thanks, Wow*, Anne Lamott
During the complexity of teenage parenting, parents can take refuge in simplicity. Straightforward prayers help them to hold onto Christ through any storm. Lamott clears through the rubble of her own life and offers up three simple prayers: "help", "thanks" and "wow".
- *And Then I Had Teenagers*, Susan Alexander Yates
Yates offers encouragement and guidance to parents of teens and preteens. Drawing from her experiences raising five teenagers, she offers parents a unique blend of stories, compassion and advice.^[16]
- *Boundaries with Teens*, John Townsend
Townsend gives important keys for establishing healthy boundaries—the bedrock of good relationships, maturity, safety and growth for teens and the adults in their lives. The book offers help in raising your teens to take responsibility for their actions, attitudes and emotions.
- *Tending the Family Heart*, Marie Hartwell-Walker
Hartwell-Walker highlights the importance of creating and nurturing the "heart part" of our families. The heart of the family is what transforms the very ordinary and repetitive tasks of daily life into expressions of mutual support and care. It is what celebrates the dailiness of love and belonging and helps everyone cope in times of challenges, separations and even tragedies.
- "Parenting Teens", Crosswalk.com
This Christian site contains many articles that can encourage parents along the journey and create a sense of solidarity with other Christian parents as they interact with their teenagers.
- "Teenagers", Dr. Laura Markham
This section of the "Aha! Parenting" website will help give insight to parents about their teenagers and the best ways to interact with them.
- *The Blessing*, Gary Smalley
Children crave their parents' blessing, and without it, they may become angry and driven or detached and empty. It is important that parents release children with a blessing to be the people they are wired to be. Smalley offers practical, effective methods to heal broken hearts and families.

16 www.amazon.ca/And-Then-I-Had-Teenagers/dp/0800787919

4. The Role of the Church: To Support Parents

Data collected by George Barna, a leading researcher in faith and culture, revealed the importance of churches empowering families to take the lead in the spiritual development of their children. He writes:

In situations where children become mature Christians we usually found a symbiotic partnership between their parents and their church. The church encouraged parents to prioritize the spiritual development of their children and worked hard to equip them for that challenge. Parents, for their part, raised their children in the context of a faith-based community that provided security, belonging, spiritual and moral education and accountability. Neither the parents nor the church have done it alone.

You can read more about this and other findings in Barna's book *Transforming Children Into Spiritual Champions*.

It is important for churches to recognize that simply providing good programs for children and youth is not enough. It is important that at each stage, churches connect with, equip and support parents and caregivers with the encouragement and tools they need to navigate and guide the spiritual transitions children are moving through. Good communication and partnership with families is critical. This is something that can begin right from birth, perhaps as churches connect with families through planning child dedications. A church understands its role in a child's life isn't to take over the spiritual development process, but to come alongside a parent in raising that child. While it's true that "it takes a village to raise a child", not all those voices are equal. The primary responsibility lies with the parent¹⁷. The Church becomes a support both for the parent directly and to facilitate the common objectives many of them hold together (similar to the baptistic idea of "interdependence"). This is where church programs can be an integral part of a child's discipleship, but cannot be the sole source for discipleship.

Practical Ways for Churches to Support Parents

1. Provide Parent Seminars

There are qualified experts who can provide a framework of understanding for parents as the culture and the developmental process affect their children. Contact any of the following professionals or visit their websites for more information about their fields of expertise.

- Marianne Deeks, Youth Unlimited
Preteen Girls; Adolescent Sexuality; Bullying; Anxiety; Self-Esteem
mdeeks@rogers.com
- Paul Robertson, Youth Culture Specialist at Youth Unlimited
Setting Boundaries to Build Character; How Technology Affects Family;

¹⁷ This is true in an ideal setting. However, if the parent is absent or neglectful in that responsibility, the church needs to supplement the discipleship process for the child.

Understanding the Tween to Teen Transition

paul@paulrobertson.ca

- Adam Clarke, Children's Associate at The Peoples Church Children and Social Media; Navigating the Adolescent Years
AdamC@ThePeoplesChurch.ca
- Deb Tempelmeyer, Director of Sales at David C Cook
Equipping Families and Churches with Materials for the Spiritual Formation of their Kids
Deb.Tempelmeyer@davidccook.ca
- Alex Street, Student Ministries Pastor at Springvale Baptist Church
The Tweener/Jr. High Transitions
www.linkedin.com/pub/alex-street/90/934/688
- Vivian Chu Chen, Youth Unlimited Youth Worker
Second Generation Issues; Chinese Families and Church
vivchuchen@gmail.com
- Brett Ullman, Speaker
Parents 101; The Sex-Talk
brettullman.com
- Dr. Karyn Gordon, dk Leadership
Bridging the Gap; Teaching Empathy in Kids; Lost in Translation
dkleadership.org
- Leanne Cabral, Speaker (Toronto)
Equipping Parents to Bring Faith Home and Lead Their Family with Intention
leannecabral.com
- Dr. Merry C. Lin, Family Issues Speaker
Life-Proofing Your Kids; Stress and Your Kids; Loving Your Kids Too Much: Healthy Parenting Strategies
drmerrylin.com

2. Communicate About Transition Points

Transition periods from one stage to another can be just as anxious (sometimes more) for the parent as they are for the child. Church ministries need to be on the same page on what the upcoming transition will look like, and discuss that with the parent. Section 4 will elaborate on this.

3. Provide Parent Resources

There are different types of resources that churches may want to encourage parents with at different points in their parenting journey. There are resources that will help them in the "big scope" of things; other resources may nourish them at different seasons in the path. It is imperative for parents to tend to their own spirituality as they journey with their kids. Kids will look to them for cues. If a parent is deeply drawing from Christ and building strong and clear communication with their children, it will be smoother for children to experience Christ through their parents.

The following are some "big picture" resources that help parents develop an understanding of their role as the primary faith-nurturers:

- *Connecting Church & Home* by Dr. Tim Kimmel is a helpful and practical book that shows how churches and parents can work together to make each other's efforts more impactful. Given the reality of our culture of busy churches and families, this resource presents a clear plan for passing on faith.
- *Revolutionary Parenting: Raising Your Kids to Become Spiritual Champions* by George Barna provides research on the lives of young adults with strong Christian faith and looks back at the steps their parents took to shape their spiritual lives as children.
- *Spiritual Parenting* by Michelle Anthony focuses on cultivating an environment for growing children's faith. A parent's own authenticity and relationship with Christ is what matters most.
- *Parenting Beyond Your Capacity: Connect Your Family to a Wider Community* by Reggie Joiner and Carey Nieuwhof is a great book for parents to recognize their role in leaving a spiritual legacy for their children. The family exists to communicate faith to the next generation and they present five values from which to parent in light of the Scriptural instruction in Deuteronomy 6:4-12.
- *Dedicated: Training Your Children to Trust and Follow Jesus* by Jason Houser, Bobby Harrington and Chad Harrington unpacks the simple, practical, and essential practices of spiritually parenting and discipling children in the home.¹⁸
- HomeFront (homefrontmag.com) is a free resource for parents, available through a downloadable app or email. Each month focuses on a different theme and it contains a lot of helpful ideas for building faith in the home.
- CBOQ Youth and Family Ministry monthly eNews for parents contains the top 10 web articles related to children, family and youth ministries. Parents can sign up to receive this monthly resource at cboqkids.ca/sign-up.
- "Out of the Nest" (stickyfaith.org/articles/out-of-the-nest) is an online article for parents whose children are moving out of the family home.

4. Provide Parental Care

If we believe that parents have the primary God-given responsibility for raising their children, the Church needs to affirm and support that premise in a God-honouring way. We can provide them with resources and cheer them on as champions in their own journeys of discipleship and their journeys alongside their children. We can also ensure that we don't leave them isolated, by having healthy and effective age and stage ministries and mobilizing the congregation to mentor those kids.



SECTION 4

¹⁸ www.zondervan.com/dedicated



SECTION FOUR

The Church and Children: Transitions They Travel Through Together

1. The Church's Discipleship Approach and Structure

As explored earlier, in most cases parents have the primary responsibility to tend to the faith development of their children. It is the Church's role to equip and mobilize parents in this endeavour and to provide the other players in that child's faith formation. We explored how the Church can equip parents personally with resources and tools. In this section we will look at practical ways churches can support families by creating spaces for children to explore their faith through two parallel "tracks".

First, each individual's faith journey is unique and distinct. While no one template works for every person, we will discuss some common approaches that can be customized to individual faith development. Remember these are descriptive, not prescriptive, approaches and guidelines. Within each child's personalized path, there are opportunities for leadership development and opportunities to share life (refer to page 12).

Second, we will explore transitions between ministry groups. Churches can create structured opportunities for children to explore their faith in different ways. While we won't look at the structural elements of programs themselves, we will explore the transitions between them. The focus of this section is what churches need to be aware of when considering structural elements in transitions with the understandings of each key age group.^[19]

The following resources are something to chew on as you process your church's engagement with children and youth. They are just a few resources that reaffirm the messy and wonderful journey of partnering with families to see their children grow in discipleship.

- "Bringing the Generations Together", Holly Catterton Allen (bit.ly/1ICfwdD)
- *Generations Together*, Kathie Amidei, Jim Merhaut and John Roberto
- *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton Ross
- Messy Church website (www.messychurch.org.uk)

It is important that we establish our values and approach to children in general, before we tackle the "how" of church structure. Children's ministry can no longer just be a form of babysitting. It is critical that churches intentionally invest into the spiritual development of children and equip parents to take the lead. While there are many different approaches to discipleship, the important thing is that churches affirm the presence and participation of children in our corporate bodies.

The next section will help you understand the different ages and stages of ministry, providing a framework to address the transitions between the stages.

¹⁹ See *ASAP: Ages, Stages, and Phases* by Patricia D. Fosarelli

2. Ages and Stages and the Transitions That Follow

It is our desire for churches to grow in their understanding of the characteristics and needs of children at different developmental stages. As we cultivate this understanding, and our understanding of age-specific discipleship, we can develop a deeper focus for each individual in those age groups. This section focuses on that customized, individual track mentioned on page 22. We will define characteristics of the stage, recommend some growth resources, offer possible leadership development opportunities and reference the applicable Sharing Life degrees.

For our purposes, we will define the stages as toddlers (2–4 years)^[20], elementary/grade-school children (4–10 years), middle school (10–13 years), high school (13–17 years) and young adulthood (18–25 years).

Ages and Stages

a. Toddlers: 2–4 Years

Toddlers are beginning to get a sense of their capacities and a feel for what their bodies can do. They are gaining an awareness of their surroundings and experimenting with relationships between people and between objects. Association (like understanding what labels represent) happens at the physical and spiritual level.

Growth Resources: To Help Kids Interact with Jesus Relationally

- *The One Year Book of Devotions for Preschoolers*, Crystal Bowman
- *If Jesus Lived Inside My Heart*, Jill Roman Lord
- *The Jesus Storybook Bible*, Sally Lloyd-Jones

Leadership Development

Toddlers are discovering their own autonomy. One key focus is responsibility for oneself, gradually extending to peers. Consistently giving them ownership of their actions and environment builds that self-responsibility. This can include helping with the set-up of a lesson or ensuring they are cleaning up their toys.

Sharing Life

A toddler's language and level of thinking is growing and generally very concrete. Focusing on the 1st Degree solidifies a relationship. At this point, being a consistent presence builds that trust and familiarity. Speak at the toddlers' level and ask lots of questions about them. Some toddlers may be ready for a deeper conversation.

There aren't always a lot of resources that acknowledge the relationship building that begins in the toddler room. However, children's ministry voices

²⁰ The nursery stage, while distinct as a ministry setting, is not included because the Sharing Life and leadership development opportunities are very similar to the toddler stage.

really affirm the seeds of relationship that are nurtured at this age. If you are unsure where to start with this age group, this article by Greg Baird can be of encouragement: childrensministryleader.com/7-ways-to-break-the-ice-with-kids/. It looks at the importance of eye contact with little ones, using physical touch (appropriately) to build connections, referring to them by name and joining them in play. These are the building blocks of a safe and secure relationship that has the capacity to continue growing over time.

b. Elementary Children: 4–10 years

We'll define childhood from ages 4 to 10 or 11 (i.e., from kindergarten to the end of middle school, which may be grade 5 or 6 depending on your school board). Developmentally during this stage, children are starting to make connections and correlations about the world they see. Language skills are reinforced. They're building key foundational blocks that will seem to be overturned when puberty hits. Some begin to phase into puberty with body changes, although cognitively they may still think and act "like a child". Tangible understanding helps to solidify key truths.

Growth Resources: To Help Kids Interact with Jesus Relationally

- *Jesus Calling: 365 Devotions for Kids*, Sarah Young
- *The Action Bible*, Doug Mauss, ed. and Sergio Cariello, ill.
- Seeds Family Worship website (seedsfamilyworship.bandcamp.com)
- "35+ Service Projects for Kids", Kid World Citizen (bit.ly/1dBsabc)
- "Serving Others and Service Ideas" Pinterest board (bit.ly/1QPOWAK)
- "The Compassion Series", StreetLevel (www.streetlevel.ca/program/education)

Leadership Development

Even as young as 6 years old, some kids exhibit leadership qualities. Not all children are built to be the primary leader (i.e., the up-front person taking charge). However, all children need to lead to some degree or another. Look for opportunities to begin to stretch them outside their comfort zone. Peer leading can be a key component. Encouraging them to direct or coordinate a group of peers allows them to practice both giving and taking directions from one another. The scale of that directing depends on the child. For some, the next step is more logistical (e.g., coordinating a group to move chairs from one location to another). Others can be given a bigger scope of responsibilities involving interpersonal supervision. For example, older children (i.e., 9+ years old) can also begin directing multi-aged groups and be responsible for them.

Sharing Life

With deeper language development and a broadening of extracurricular activities at this stage, adults can stretch towards the 2nd and 3rd Degrees of Sharing Life. As kids grow older, they're able to have lengthier conversations. Given recent studies on the effects of screen time and social cues^[21], having

21 See article from Newsweek: bit.ly/1lk98O9

opportunities for deeper conversation effectively develops their social engagement skills. Additionally, children are growing up in a very tumultuous world relationally. For a few ideas on how mentors can be the consistent, affirming adults, check out “Five Ways You Can be a Good Mentor for a Child”: bit.ly/1ATTTth1.

Also, as kids become involved in extracurricular activities and don’t require as much parental supervision, there are opportunities to step into their world. Maybe mentors will be able to attend their soccer games or piano recitals. Even if they’re not able to commit regularly, mentors should identify 1 or 2 key events in the coming year, and ask the parents if they’re allowed to attend. (They may choose to involve their own families as well.)

For kids this age, the world is starting to grow broader and deeper. Let’s make sure we’re on that journey with them.

c. Middle School: 10–13 Years Old

With the onset of puberty, for many tweens life will never be the same. They are beginning to test their independence, identifying their own gifts and passions, and wrestling with who exactly they are outside of their parents’ construct. With the earlier onset of adolescence, the sexualizing of preteens and the pressure to be vocationally successful (many grade 8 students are taking aptitude and career assessments and choosing courses that have a bearing on their post-secondary career), the stability and belonging within a faith community is crucial. Spiritually, kids this age begin questioning the faith of their parents and deciding whether they choose to internalize this faith.

Growth Resources: To Help Young Adolescents Interact with Jesus Relationally

In the same way that adolescents relate to each other differently^[22], they also relate to Jesus differently. We call these different languages or outlets spiritual disciplines. One child might relate to Jesus deeply through prayer, while another experiences God more vividly through worship and service. All of the disciplines are important for us as believers, but it is good for kids and youth to explore how they uniquely relate to God best.

Kurt Johnston’s book *Middle School Ministry Made Simple* has a chapter that summarizes key distinctions with this age group and ways to respond. He also includes concrete suggestions for how to involve parents effectively. The following is a list of a few spiritual disciplines and resource ideas that connect with both the discipline and the adolescent. For more reading on this subject, read the article “Dare to Disciplines” found on the Sticky Faith site: stickyfaith.org/articles/dare-to-disciplines.

- Bible Study: “Student Devos” website (studentdevos.com)
- Prayer: *God, Girls, and Getting Connected*, Robin Marsh and

²² The premise of Gary Chapman’s book *The 5 Love Languages* is people relay and receive love in different manners.

Lauren Nelson

- Service: A Rocha Environmental Stewardship website (www.arocha.ca/school-resources)
- Prayer: The God Girl Journey: A 30-Day Guide to a Deeper Faith, Hayley DiMarco
- Bible Study: "Devozine" online devos done by teens (devozine.upperroom.org)
- Scripture Reading: Manna & Mercy Graphic Bible (www.mannaandmercy.org)
- Scripture Reading: Manga Bible (bit.ly/1B12LRT)
- Scripture Reading: The Action Bible Study Bible (theactionbible.com)
- Prayer: Between God and Me, Vicki Courtney
- Service: CBOQ Family Compassion Experience (cboqkids.ca/experiences)
- Service: Salvation Army Toy Drive (Ontario) (www.salvationarmy.ca/tag/toy-drive)
- Service: "Teaching Kids to Care" article (huff.to/1FihcGw)

Leadership Development

Many middle schoolers are becoming more adult-like. Extending their responsibility skills allows for the testing of their gifts and also opportunities to develop, question, reject, embrace, succeed and fail in the context of a loving community. Their scope can begin to extend beyond one-off leadership opportunities to a more time-invested role and responsibility. They can serve in a short-term ministry role such as being a junior leader in the Sunday school or a staff member at VBS. These intermediate "stepping stones" of opportunity can enable healthy transition into broader ministry and leadership contexts as they grow in maturity and experience.

Sharing Life

Twins begin to seek some separation from their parents. They are gradually given more freedoms in what they can do and where they can go. It's also the time when they begin questioning life and faith. Having other adult connections beyond their parents and family is vital. Sharing Life can begin to extend up to 5D (see page 16). We must continue to enter their world intentionally, especially as their extracurricular activities broaden. Mentors can begin to include them in more areas of their lives. For example, a mentor could invite the tween's family for dinner, have the tween join in grocery shopping or serving needs in the community, or invite 2 or 3 tweens over for an afternoon of baking. Ministering together creates natural spaces to share life.

Because tweens start making a gradual separation from their parents, some parents may feel threatened by other adults who seem to be closer to their kids than they are. For this reason, it is valuable for those investing in tweens to connect with the parents regularly to understand where they believe God is leading this child. This isn't to say that mentors are just mouthpieces for the parents, but it affirms the parents' role as the primary caregivers and the mentors' support. Sharing Life adults will not be keeping secrets from parents, but appropriately encouraging children to be forthcoming about certain issues.

If possible, this role should not try to referee the parent-child relationship. There may be times when mentors feel inadequate while handling a situation. It's not their job to deal with those situations by themselves. Enlist the help of a pastor or another trusted, appropriately trained adult to address the situation.

There are many articles, surveys and tools out there for mentors of this age group. Good resources include:

- "3 Tips for Teaching the Bible to Middle School Students" article (bit.ly/KPtVbk)
- "Awkward! The tough transition to middle school" article (cnn.it/1vGR1Ct)
- "Getting inside the mind of a Middle School student" (bit.ly/13cR4fh)

d. High School: 13–18 Years Old

High school can be the most memorable and/or most tumultuous four years for many young people. There are numerous factors that impact a teen's development, including life, physical, spiritual, psychological, relational and external influences. Erik Erikson, a renowned psychologist, refers to this part of life as "Identity vs. Confusion" (i.e., the individual seeks to find his identity, and if he is not able to by the end of the stage, he will carry confusion until it is resolved)²³. While some of those identity questions have already begun with early adolescence, often they extend well into adulthood. Cognitively, they're stretching their abstract-thinking skills. Spiritually, their faith internalization continues, especially as they face more profound life issues and circumstances.

Growth Resources: To Help Adolescents Interact with Jesus Relationally

- *The Ragamuffin Gospel*, Brennan Manning
- *Jesus Calling: Enjoying Peace in His Presence*, Sarah Young
- *Make Me Like Jesus*, Michael Phillips
- *The Beautiful Disciplines*, Martin Saunders
- *Healing Emotional Wounds*, David Benner
- *The Irresistible Revolution*, Shane Claiborne
- *Simple Spirituality: Learning to See God in a Broken World*, Christopher Heuertz
- Coldest Night of the Year, an event where youth learn compassion for those living on the streets (coldestnightoftheyear.org/homeless)
- Servant leadership opportunities through CBOQ and LEAD 222 (bit.ly/1GbXVHF)
- YFC/YU's Project Serve, youth serving locally and globally (yfcprojectserve.com)
- "How Do I See Myself After High School?" bit.ly/1FF5GFj
- *The Be-With Factor*, Bo Boshers and Judson Poling
- "Tools for Mentoring Adolescents" article (bit.ly/1KaccH2)

Leadership Development

During this stage, teens are testing their burgeoning adulthood. With the

²³ See www.simplypsychology.org/Erik-Erikson.html

development of abstract thinking, they have the capacity to embrace more long-term roles. For some, this might be a role as a student leader shaping the youth ministry's direction. Many are able to take on significant responsibilities. There is still a safety net, as youth lead while receiving coaching and mentoring from caring Christian adults. These leadership opportunities are a step towards taking directorial responsibilities as adults.

Sharing Life

With the onslaught of developmental changes, adult friendships—especially with mentors—are crucial. These relationships provide space for teens to wrestle with life and faith questions as they internalize faith for themselves. These relationships become lifelines as teens sometimes feel like they're barely treading water. Teens have the capacity to engage in the 6th Degree of Sharing Life (i.e., mentoring defined as intentional, time-based exploration of God's directives for an individual). Even if teens are not in formal mentoring relationships, churches need to be aware of how their faith is shaping and provide space for them to work through the person and message of Jesus.

e. Young Adulthood/Post-Secondary: 18–25 Years

Reaching the age of majority, these former kids will soon have all the rights and responsibilities of an adult. Post-high school is a new chapter in life. For a variety of reasons (whether it's the individual, the parents or other influences), some people stagnate in adolescence²⁴. This stage is the final shift before they become independent, contributing members of society (some perhaps faster than others).

Growth Resources

- After High School online book (cboqyouth.ca/postsecondary)
- *Before You Say Goodbye*, David Sawler
- "Anxiety in the In-Between Stages of Our Lives" (bit.ly/1PKy6iE)
- "Vision Plans", Sticky Faith (stickyfaith.org/blog/vision-plans)
- "10 lessons to nurture faith beyond high school" curriculum lesson (bit.ly/1EKFEeU)

Leadership Development

Essentially, they can serve in any capacity just like any other adult. Granted, there may be other qualifications that determine a person's viability in a role. But age isn't a barrier because, as mentioned before, they are adults. Continue to find those next step opportunities in their development. For example, if they were assisting in Sunday school, provide an opportunity for them to teach a class. If they are already doing that, have someone apprentice under them or include them in higher levels of leadership like a Christian Education committee. You may even consider sending them into other ministry settings like a student exchange program to another church for learning opportunities, both for the individual and their sending churches. (See cboqyouth.ca/postsecondary for a template of this arrangement.)

²⁴ This trend has been thoroughly documented with both positive and negative consequences (e.g., in this NY Times opinion article: nytimes.com/2014/09/21/opinion/sunday/the-case-for-delayed-adulthood.html).

Sharing Life

The effects of age-specific, corporate programs become less influential as a person gets older. The availability of students do not always coincide as they may have before. The continuation of Sharing Life relationships is vital. The shift comes when that former teen becomes more of a peer than a mentee. But many of the Sharing Life principles remain, as people never stop shaping and reshaping their faith (until they meet Jesus one day). There may be higher highs and lower lows. It becomes that much more critical to continue these Sharing Life connections, even if the young adult has moved away from church.

3. Effectively Maximizing the Transitions Between Stages

Transitions are inevitable within systems and relationships. For many, transitions of any type can be stressful, but this stress need not cause the entire system to crack and splinter. The healthier the system, the less likely transitions will cause distress. In the Church, there are things that can be done from a leadership level to develop stability and unity, so that when change does happen (no matter the type), it causes healthy growth and not brokenness.

The following are a few resources that may assist your leadership team:

- *Simple Church*, Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger
- *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership*, Ruth Haley Barton
- *Smart Church Management: A Quality Approach to Church Administration*, Patricia Lotich
- "Transition Prayers", Sticky Faith template for church services addressing transitions (bit.ly/1cDwiLI)
- "Milestones of Faith", Sticky Faith article on understanding rites of passages (www.stickyfaith.org/articles/milestones-of-faith)

While it is important that churches and leadership teams grow in their unity of vision and spirit for the overall body, there are also action steps that they can take to support child and youth transitions effectively. The following are five significant transitions that children and youth encounter in their development and ways that churches can engage them within this constantly changing reality.

a. The Toddler to Elementary Transition

The transition between the toddler ministry and children's ministry can be a challenging one for young kids. It is important to note that while a church may set a certain age for when children move out of the preschool room, not all children will be ready at the same time and it may take months to fully transition. It is important for leaders to work with parents closely during this transition. Often parents have an indication of how their child will respond to change (some are reluctant to let it happen). Give clear instruction to parents as to what they can expect of the church ministry program and also what the church expects of them.

This can be a challenging transition because young children are often moving from an environment they are used to, perhaps since birth, to a new routine and structure. For some children this new environment can cause anxiety and stress. There are new leaders, a new room, a new schedule and new expectations. Some children are ready for this and some take a little longer to get used to it. Therefore, it is important for staff and volunteers to lead well through this transition. Some suggestions include:

- Using Consistent Teaching Tools Across the Age Groups: There are many curriculum tools that provide resources from infants into childhood. Using a familiar style and structure with children will help them adjust more quickly to new classrooms and leaders.
 - Tru*Blessings and Tru*Wonder: tru.davidccook.com/Age-Levels
 - First Look, 252 Basics and XP3: thinkorange.com
 - Godly Play (Church Montessori): www.godlyplay.org
 - Also, www.YourChurchZone.com can connect you with many more ideas.
- Orientation Sunday: Kids, perhaps with their parents, are invited to the new room and are shown the new routine and structure and meet the new leaders.
- Sharing Articles with Parents and Teachers: Short, encouraging articles like "Smooth Transitions" by Children's Ministry Magazine (bit.ly/1FikRUM) can help reassure and encourage the adults involved in the transition.
- Positive Reinforcement: As kids are learning the new routine, it is important to use positive reinforcement. Affirm them often as they learn and follow the new expectations.
- Presenting a Long-Term Plan: It is important for parents and volunteers to decide where to take kids in their growth process over the long run. In the book *Connecting Church & Home*, Dr. Tim Kimmel outlines how his church developed its philosophy of discipleship and mapped out a plan of how to walk alongside kids in growth.

Just like the transition from daycare or home-parenting to a more formal school structure, children need to gain confidence while entering this new chapter with affirmation from their parents, other adults and the church. Helping to make this transition a smooth one sets a good precedent for other changes ahead.

b. The Elementary to Early Adolescence Transition

The developmental transition into adolescence usually corresponds with a transition from learning environments at church; from children's ministry to junior high ministry or at school from elementary school to middle school. This is a very critical time in the life of young people. It is important to develop a transition strategy for moving up children to junior high ministry.

Some important details to keep in mind include determining when the transition will actually take place and then preparing for it through transitional mini-steps, beginning about 6 months before the actual transition. This will

help prepare each child socially and spiritually rather than making it a one-time event. There are a number of ideas churches can adopt to ease this transition. Look at how the educational system and other social services journey with children and adolescents in their transitions. Children and youth specialists have noted increased stress and risk for emotional distress in children and youth when transitions occur. Different agencies have investigated ways to nurture mental and emotional health in this period. Here are some resources that inform big-picture transitions:

- Helping Kids with Early Transitions, Best Start Resource Centre (Ontario's health promotion organization): bit.ly/1L71oap
- Transition Resources for Parents, Teachers, and Administrators, Matt Davis, Edutopia, George Lucas Educational Foundation: bit.ly/1guTKut
- Transitions to and from Elementary, Middle, and High School, UCLA Center, Mental Health in Schools, Program and Policy Analysis: bit.ly/1FilbCS
- Group and Transition Services, Geneva Centre for Autism, Children-Youth: bit.ly/1EKKucf

While these resources do not come out of a Christian background or church, they can inform Christian leaders about the stressors involved in transitions and the different needs that arise in children.

Functional Stepping Stones

There are also functional stepping stones for churches to consider as they explore the transition of children into adolescence. For some churches, this transition will mean starting up new ways of engaging kids as they develop. For instance, a smaller congregation that has not had structured experiences for youth, may begin to see each youth get mentored. This can be an exciting season of birthing new ideas for the same group they have been working with all along. Resources for churches in this situation include *Junior High Ministry* by Wayne Rice and *Middle School Ministry* by Mark Oestreicher and Scott Rubin. For other churches, the transition might have more to do with bridging between an established children's class or small group and the junior high ministry. In this scenario, churches may be looking for resources that consistently build on each other through the age groups and tie everything together. Examples of curricula that bridge between age groups well are the Tru* (truminsty.com), Orange (whatisorange.org), LIVE (live.simplyyouthministry.com), Flyte (bit.ly/1RP2V9z), and The Story (thestory.com). We all have different transition needs in our congregations. However, we all need some stepping stones to keep kids moving along the path of discipleship. Here are a few examples from churches that have provided for elementary kids transitioning into junior high:

"In our church the children meet in the church basement and the junior highs meet outside in a portable. 'Going to the portable' is an exciting transition time for our kids but it can be intimidating. Usually late spring we introduce grade 5 students to the portable environment by throwing a pizza party for them hosted by the junior high group. Then over the summer we have a few blended events where those

graduating elementary kids can socialize with the older junior high students”

-Elaine, Youth Pastor

In Elaine’s case, the challenges with transitions are largely environmental. Kids are intimidated to have to go to an entirely different place that operates much differently than what they are used to. By exposing them to this new environment and these new faces bit by bit in their last 6 months of being a part of the children’s group, they can adapt more naturally.

“In our church we hadn’t had a youth group for a few years so when a cluster of elementary kids reached pre-adolescence, we didn’t want to lose momentum and see them walk away. We first celebrated the end of a season with this group and the parents threw them a graduation BBQ. Then in the fall we started with having a once a month ‘hang-out’ for the kids to bond together as peers. Up until this point they usually had just seen each other in a classroom environment on Sunday morning. We knew that if we wanted them to solidify as a youth group they would need space to relate to each other as friend.”

-Patty, parent of a “new” junior higher

In this example, the graduation BBQ at Patty’s church is a rite of passage for the growing children. Additional ideas for this approach may be to host a time in a worship service with a prayer of blessing or a small gift to the students moving into junior high. If you have a separate children’s worship time, have younger children involved in blessing the outgoing children as they move into junior high ministry.

“In our church we have ‘youth ambassadors’ who come and meet with the incoming students and share what junior high ministry is like, what happens. We also try to have our older students involved in children’s classes Sunday morning and our summer VBS each year. Our hope is that by the time a child has developed into an adolescent they are completely familiar with older faces because they have related to and interacted with older kids all the way along”.

-Brandon, Family Ministries Pastor

In Brandon’s example, there is an effort to create cross generational relationships and connections between the children and youth. In this way, the hope is that kids will naturally continue progressing along the path of development in church and don’t walk away out of intimidation from having to join an older group of strange faces.

Whatever your church’s circumstances are when it comes to the elementary to early adolescence transition, there are a few practicalities to keep in mind.

First, remember to include everyone in the transition process: children, children’s ministry leaders, youth leaders and parents. Have a plan for good communication and connection. Partner with parents by sending a letter or

email that explains the coming transition. Include a note from the new leaders. Host an activity or theme night to explain the transition. In some cases, you may want to meet individually with parents to discuss their child specifically. Ensure parents are well aware of the changes and expectations of them and their children. Clear communication with parents is essential.

Second, friendship remains an anchor for adolescents as they are experiencing so much change. It is important to recognize that developmentally, children in this transition stage can be experiencing a challenging time with so many physical, emotional and social changes. Their friends are very important so it is crucial to connect kids and facilitate relationship building. With so many things in their world changing, it is helpful to create a sense of security and familiarity as much as possible in the midst of the program changes.

Finally, remember that post-transition is just as important as a transition event. Ensure there is follow up with the children that have moved into junior high ministry. Encourage former leaders from the children's ministry to check in with them. Ensure the new leaders intentionally invest in and connect the new students to the junior high ministry.

Some key stepping stones to ensure an effective transition include:

- Have a database of attendance as a reference for who is transitioning.
- Invite junior high workers to participate in the children's ministry, especially with the graduating class.
- Have some leaders move with the graduating class (like a cohort).
- Host a commissioning service where the graduating students are acknowledged in the Sunday service as they move into the youth ministry.
- Encourage some older junior high youth to "buddy up" with an incoming junior high student.
- Have a weekend retreat that includes some of your key junior high student leaders, adult leaders and all the incoming junior high students.
- Invite the children's ministry graduating class to a junior high meeting (before they move on from the children's ministry).

c. The Early Adolescence to Adolescence Transition

In many ways, this transition is similar to the previous transition. And, much like the transition from elementary to early adolescence, the success of this transition depends on the stepping stones put in place. Likely the change from junior high ministry to senior high ministry is not as much of a difference as when children transitioned out of children's ministry. These young teens are continuing to develop and grow in new ways in their thinking. Friends continue to be the more important influence in their lives. Identity formation and independence are shaping their thinking.

Some stepping stone ideas for this transition could be:

- Have a youth event to welcome the incoming students in late June.
- Involve older teens in planning and welcoming.

- Involve older teens as “youth ambassadors” who intentionally get to know and mentor new students who will be joining the group.
- Invite incoming students to join in the summer youth ministry activities and use them as the transition time.
- Mark the transition with a rite of passage in a worship service, as you recognize this move of young teens towards adulthood throughout the senior high years.
- Host a social event for both the junior high and senior high students
- Have a Sunday School class that overlaps between junior and senior high.
- Have some of the youth leaders “move on” with a group of students (like a cohort).
- Provide an overview of the transition to parents with follow-up questions they can use with their child.
- Host a “holy ground moment” event for students to debrief on their first few months in this new chapter (stickyfaith.org/blog/holy-ground-moments).

There are lots of ways these ideas could be tweaked and personalized. Some additional resources that may help equip you as you process the needs of your youth and their families at this stage are as follows:

- *Purpose-Driven Youth Ministry*, Doug Fields
- CBOQ Youth curriculum: cboqyouth.ca/curriculum
- Example of a youth parent ministry, Trailview Alliance Church: bit.ly/1E9k0AH
- “Transfusing Life”, EFC Roundtable: transfusinglife.com
- *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, Christian Smith and Melina Lundquist Denton

Simply put, remember to celebrate the small steps that kids have taken to get to this point. The steps forward can vary but consistency of approach and relationships are key factors.

d. The Adolescence to Adulthood Transition

As young people transition from high school to young adulthood it is important to recognize this as a new chapter in their lives, whether they will be leaving home and going on to post-secondary studies, staying home and working, or doing a fifth year of high school. Churches can signify this new change through a rite of passage, such as a recognition and celebration of high school graduation, as an important way to mark this transition.

Some stepping stones as they prepare for post-secondary life could include:

- Arrange a “senior summer” where recent grads can help the upcoming grads prepare (stickyfaith.org/blog/how-do-you-prepare-seniors-for-college1)
- Give a small gift from the church and a prayer of blessing.
- Plan a time of commissioning when the church community recognizes this move by praying and blessing the students who will be moving on.

- For students moving away from home, assist them in connecting with communities of faith in the new cities they will be moving to—this is a great way to continue to invest in these young adults. (Use the interactive campus groups map found at cboqyouth.ca/postsecondary, which lists all the campus groups for colleges or universities in Ontario and English-speaking Quebec.)
- Help them create an “emergency plan” for responding to crisis situations, especially when they are on their own (stickyfaith.org/blog/emergency-response-plans).
- Provide a “College Transition Package” for their first week away (stickyfaith.org/blog/back-to-school-college-transition-packages).
- For those staying home, facilitate connections, perhaps with other adults in the workforce who can offer wisdom and guidance. Connections could also be made with other local churches or ministries for a short period of time, to help young adults gain a different perspective and experience.
- Have a young adult exchange with another church to help mark a new chapter, as they will be experiencing a new church context (similar to their peers going to school out of town). This is not a “send them away from your church” moment but rather an opportunity to extend their faith experiences while maintaining a relational connection through those Sharing Life with them.

For more helpful articles about this area of transition, check out this page on the Youth Worker website: bit.ly/1ICcYdQ, as well as a transition strategy at cboqyouth.ca/postsecondary.

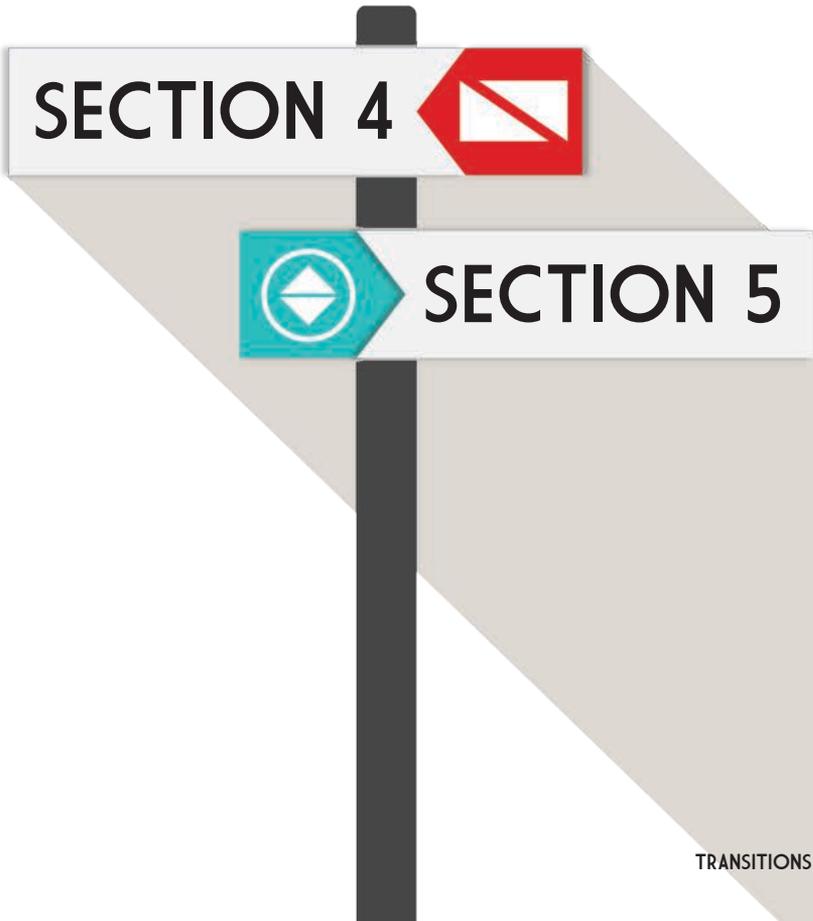
e. Children and Youth with Exceptionalities

There is an increase in students who have some kind of exceptionality designation (from physical exceptionalities to neurological ones like autism or ADHD). Transitions for these individuals become that much more individualized because no two children, especially those with exceptionalities, will transition exactly the same. Many churches do not have the resources to address all special needs issues adequately^[25]. However, churches can assist with some key steps in the transition of these individuals, complementing the previous guidelines:

- It is vital to gain understanding of the exceptionality from the parents. Those who are supporting their children will have the best knowledge of how to engage them and in what manner (especially if they have had the diagnosis for a long time). Adaptation and accommodation are key factors in working with parents to identify the most appropriate transition methods.
- Utilize other community resources. While not all agencies may have the capacity to assist you as a ministry leader, they may have guidelines to supplement the process. Some agencies may be able to provide training for your ministry staff and volunteers in this area.
- Seek potential financial funding from other agencies. Most churches do

25 This document will not be able to engage fully with the topic of special needs supports. One recommended resource is Stephen Bedard’s book *How to Make Your Church Autism-Friendly* (amzn.to/1ICxqve).

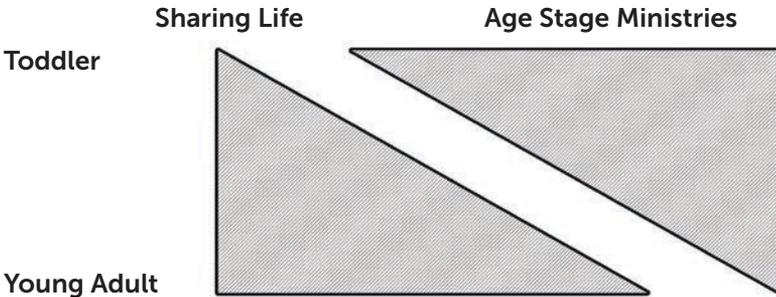
not have the expertise to manage special needs. Some individuals have access to respite funding. If you are looking to extend your ministry group uniquely to those with exceptionalities, there may be grants available through community agencies and possibly through CBOQ grants.





SECTION FIVE: Changing Influences

Traditionally, churches have focused on ministry programs as the primary way of ministering to people. Typically, these ministry programs are geared towards age-specific audiences. It seems to work generally when children are younger. However, as research has shown, as people get older, these ministry programs seem less and less effective. Anecdotally, many churches have unsuccessfully launched a young adult program, especially if they are not in a college or university town.



The diagram above demonstrates that a church can still have a great influence in a person's life, whether young or old. However, where those influences come from changes over time. On the left are the individual relationships (i.e., Sharing Life and a person's individual leadership development opportunities). On the right are ministry programs, and in particular the transitions between them. All things being equal, a church can have a significant impact on a young person's life throughout all stages. However, those collective ministry programs will likely be most significant in a child's faith development. The individual relationships, while important, will not yet be as impactful due to the nature of the adult-child relationship. However, notice as a child gets older, the ministry programs' impact begins to decrease. This is not to suggest that they aren't useful. However, their overall impact will not be as significant. Inversely, those individual developments (both in Sharing Life relationships and in their own leadership development opportunities) will have a larger bearing on that individual.

A few observations to note here:

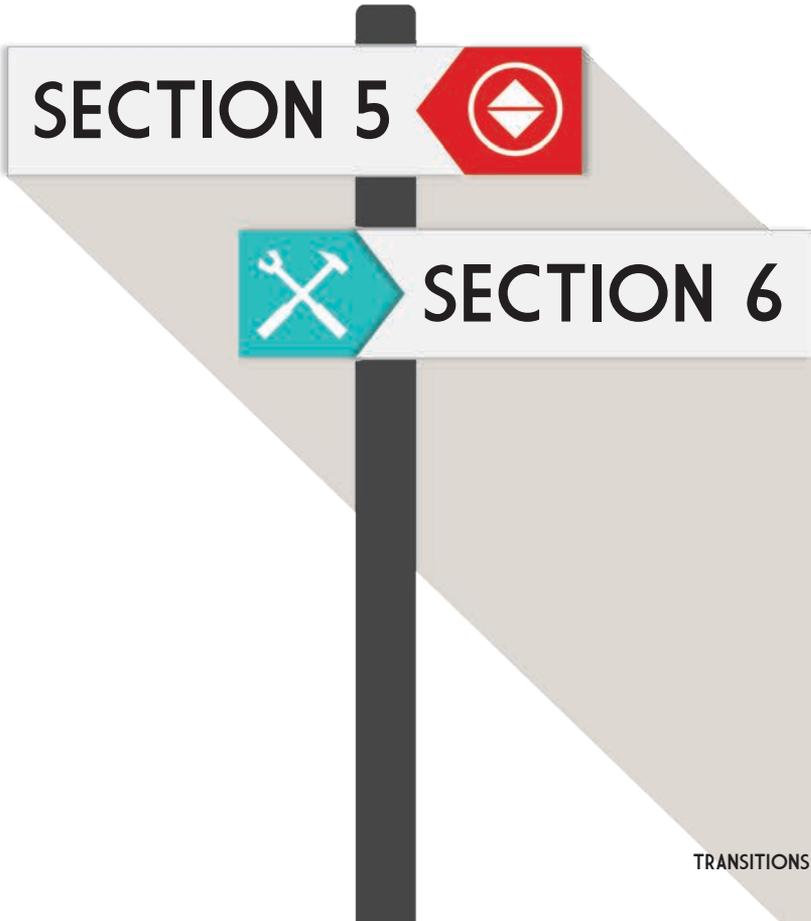
- Ministry programs are still worth doing and play a critical role despite the changing emphasis over time. Opportunities for collective learning and growth should be encouraged.
- Individual relationships are worth fostering at an early age. Adults can't automatically assume all teens want to enter a mentoring relationships when they turn 14 years old. However, by building that relationship at an early age, the level of trust needed has already been growing.
- Church leaders need to ensure there are sufficient energies in both areas to foster a faith-sustaining environment.

Final Word (For Now)

It is the desire of many of our CBOQ churches to see children and youth flourish in their faith as God created them to do. Ultimately, that relationship depends on individuals and their responses to the God who constantly seeks to draw them near as he redeems, restores and empowers. This document isn't meant to be the fail-safe in faith development and transitions. We cannot guarantee the faith sustainability of any individual. However, we can recognize what areas of responsibility God has entrusted us with and fulfill them honourably.

This is our prayer for you and with you:

May you as an individual and as a church guide this upcoming generation
to the Father who loves and created us,
to his Son Jesus Christ who redeems us through his death and resurrection
to the friendship, the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit,
now and forevermore, Amen.





SECTION SIX: Appendix of Resources

The following is an example of the “whole picture” of discipleship in a child or youth’s life. “Hemorrhaging Faith” identified four key drivers that influenced faith development: parents; experience of God; community; and the Church’s teaching. In correlating those four influences with the various stages of development, the hope is that we can create resources that will enrich a child’s faith formation along the journey of their development. The following is a list of resources that you may find helpful. This may also give you a template or idea for brainstorming your own resources.

Resources	Children 2 - years	Tweens 8 - 12 years	Young Adults 13 years into Adulthood
Big Picture			
Parents	Transforming Your Children into Spiritual Champions Parenting Beyond Your Capacity: Connect Your Family to a Wider Community Revolutionary Parenting: Raising Your Kids to Become Spiritual Champions Dedicated: Training Your Children to Trust and Follow Jesus Sticky Faith HomeFront Magazine Thriving Family Magazine		
	Parenting through Age-Specific Seasons		
	The 5 Love Languages of Children Emotionally Healthy Spirituality My Monastery is a Minivan Sacred Rhythms Boundaries with Kids The Practice of the Presence of God	The 5 Love Languages of Teenagers A Love Worth Giving Time Out for Parents “Tween Us” blog The Gift of Being Yourself Tending the Family Heart	The Parent of Your Teen Parenting Teens Help, Thanks, Wow And Then I Had Teenagers The Blessing Boundaries with Teens Youth Ministry: Now and Not Yet
The Corporate Relationship			
Community/ Mentorship	Messy Church “Bringing the Generations Together” Generations Together: Caring, Praying, Learning, Celebrating and Serving Faithfully Intergenerational Christian Formation		

	Personal Relationships		
	Five Ways You Can be a Good Mentor to a Child 7 Ways To "Break The Ice" With Kids	How Do I See Myself After High School The Be-With Factor	"Tools for Mentoring Adolescents"
Experience of God	God in their Day-to-Day		
	Jesus Calling: 365 Devotions for Kids The Action Bible The Jesus Storybook Bible Seeds Family Worship The One Year Devotions for Preschoolers If Jesus Lived Inside My Heart	Manna & Mercy Graphic Bible The Action Bible Study Bible Between God and Me Manga Bible The God Girl Journey Every Day Deserves a Chance	Jesus Calling: Enjoying Peace... Make Me Like Jesus The Beautiful Disciplines
	God in their World		
	35 Service Projects for Kids "Serving Others and Service Ideas" Pinterest board	CBOQ Family Compassion Experience Salvation Army Toy Drive (Ontario) "Teaching Kids to Care" A Rocha Environmental Stewardship	The Irresistible Revolution Simple Spirituality: Learning to See God... Coldest Night of the Year LEAD222 Project Serve (YFC/YU)
	God in their Hurt		
	Student Devos website God, Girls, and Getting Connected Online Devos done by Teens	Ragamuffin Gospel Healing Emotional Wounds Hurt: Inside the World of Today's Teenagers	

Big Picture

Program/
Christian
Education

Church+Home
Simple Church
Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership
Smart Church Management
Helping Kids with Early Transitions
Transition Resources for Parents, Teachers, and Administrators
Transitions to and from Elementary, Middle, and High School
Group & Transition Services: Children-Youth

Pieces of the Big Picture

Program/
Christian
Education

Tru*Blessings and
Tru*Wonder
Godly Play (Church
Montessori)
Relevant Children's
Ministry
YourChurchZone
Smooth Transitions

Tru*Story and
Tru*Identity
Flyte Curriculum
The Story Curriculum
LIVE curriculum
Junior High Ministry
Middle School
Ministry

A Ministry to Youth
Parents
Transfusing Life
Purpose-Driven Youth
Ministry
CBOQ Youth
Curriculum
Soul Searching
Youth Ministry: Now
and Not Yet



SECTION 6

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