

T.E.A.C.H.

CHILDREN MATTER TO GOD

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There are quite a few verses of scripture in the New Testament that capture the heart of Jesus for children. I don't need to compile that list here but you might find it an interesting study to revisit a few of those statements and then ask yourself this question. *"I wonder why Jesus placed such a high premium on children?"*

George Barna has compiled some very compelling information in regard to the urgency of developing ministries that really impact children. I wonder if Jesus didn't understand these concepts 2000 years ago.

Barna found that children between the ages of **5 and 13** have a 32% probability of accepting Jesus Christ as their savior. This is the highest percentage of all age levels. In fact it is about 5 to 8 times as much as any other age.

He also discovered that adults who attended church regularly **as a child** are three times as likely to be attending a church today as are their peers who avoided the church during childhood.

The study also revealed a person's moral foundations are generally in place by the time they reach **age 9**. Their fundamental perspectives on truth, integrity, meaning, justice, morality, and ethics are formed quite early in life.

His work also uncovered the fact that a majority of Americans make a lasting determination about the personal significance of Christ's death and resurrection by **age 12** and most of a person's beliefs are established in their pre-teen years. In essence, what

a person believes by the time they are **13** is what they will die believing. The focus after that age is absorbing religious teaching to gain reassurance and confirmation of existing beliefs rather than to glean new sight that will redefine faith foundations.

When I first become aware of these statistics a couple of years ago I found them to be both troubling and highly motivating. Our church began at that time to seriously ramp up our efforts in the arena of children's ministry. This commitment is continuing today even though we have since built a new Children's Ministry building and hired a Children's Pastor. We understand that the battle for the souls of our kids is a battle we must win.

I think Jesus understood that it is easier to shape a child than to rebuild an adult. My dad did concrete work for several years. Watching him taught me that cement or concrete comes in two forms: soft or hard. When it is just out of the mixer you can shape it with just about anything but if you wait too long it is difficult to even dent it with a jackhammer.

One of the reasons we must work aggressively with children is their pliable state. They are more open to spiritual formation during their early years than they will ever be at any other state of life. Now is the time to do our best to mold and impact their lives for Christ.

Tim Elmore has suggested, *"Leaders look for potential problems on the horizon to see if they can address them before they become major issues. Leaders are willing to try new*

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solutions, too. They are not afraid to take action to prevent problems from happening instead of just reacting to them once they have surfaced."

Dr. Bobby Clinton has also spoken to this aspect of leadership as well. He said *"The primary difference between a follower and a leader is perspective. The primary difference between a leader and an effective leader is better perspective."* Good leaders solve problems. Great leaders prevent them.

We will seldom be able to avert all the potential problems connected with children's ministry that are headed our direction but we need to do our very best because it really is a lot easier to shape a child than to rebuild an adult. Let me challenge you to give your very best effort to impacting the next generation for Jesus.

Mid-Ohio Church Life Conference
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Contact the CE Dept for info

Raising the Bar in Children's Ministry Rev. David A. Uhl

"Then little children were brought to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked those who brought them. Jesus said, *Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as those.*" (Matthew 19:13-14, NIV).

Children matter to God. We know this from the above, as well as the many other verses in the Bible that mention children. If children matter to God, 2 or 200 kids attending, churches should strive to have the best ministries possible for children. It is time that the church begins to commit its time, energy, and resources to RAISING THE BAR IN CHILDREN'S MINISTRY.

Given this fact, it is important that churches be purposeful and deliberate with regard to children's ministries. For example, does your church have a children's ministry vision/mission statement? Do you have goals for your children's ministry which are measured and evaluated? If we are going to raise the bar in children's ministry, we must ensure that we are planning our ministries strategically.

A mission statement answers the question, "Why do we exist as a children's ministry?" Are we simply here to be babysitters and diaper changers, or is there more? A mission will help us define why on earth we exist. Your mission should be an extension of your church's mission statement. For example, if your church's mission statement is to "Reach

people and help them find a life changing, lifelong relationship with Jesus Christ," then your children's ministry mission statement might be to "Partner with families to reach children and help them find a life changing, lifelong relationship with Jesus Christ." No need to reinvent the wheel, but some thought and effort in this area will help you and your team define why you exist and identify the purpose of your children's ministry.

A vision is a little different. Your children's ministry vision is a dream. It is a picture of what you believe God wants the ministry to become. Can you dream a dream? Can you look 2-3 years down the road and verbalize what your children's ministry could look like? That is a vision statement. It is a preferred future.

Goals are an important part of any ministry. Well developed goals allow a ministry to measure for effectiveness. Maybe one of your children's ministry goals is that every student profess faith in Jesus Christ by the time they leave your ministry. Maybe it is that they are systematically exposed to the entire Bible before they are 12 years old. Perhaps a goal of your ministry is that children understand and regularly practice tithing. Your goals will be specific to your ministry. However, it is important to have both long term and short term goals in order to ensure that the church is providing effective children's ministries.

Finally, what are your children's ministry core values? What are your quality characteristics? These are the non-negotiable principles of your ministry. They are the values that are present in every one of your ministries to children.

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When I was working on my masters degree, I did a research project on the quality characteristics of a healthy, growing children's ministry (under the premise that healthy things tend to grow). The results revealed 8 quality characteristics that I believe any children's ministry that is interested in spiritual and numeric growth will exhibit. Healthy, growing children's ministry are: application oriented, biblically based, child centered, volunteer led, grounded in prayer, relational, creative, and fun. Each of the ministries you offer to children should incorporate all of these characteristics. Think of one of your children's ministries right now. Does it incorporate all of these characteristics? If not, identify and address the gap. This will help further ensure we are offering effective, quality ministries to children. It will help us as we strive to RAISE THE BAR in CHILDREN'S MINISTRY.

May God bless you as you continue to minister to the youngest of children.

David Uhl is Senior Pastor at West Union CCCU. He also runs a volunteer training ministry called Matchstick Ministries. If you are interested in hosting a children, youth or adult volunteer training workshop, feel free to contact Dave @ 740-412-3957 or www.matchstickministries.com

Post-Modern Kids Spell S.P.I.R.I.T.!

by Ele Thompson

The story is told of D.L. Moody, that one night he came home after a late service, his wife Emma was already asleep. When he climbed into bed exhausted, she woke, and asked, "How did it go tonight?" "Pretty well," he replied, "two and a half converts." His wife smiled, "How sweet, how old was the child?" "No, no, no" Moody answered. "It was two children and one adult! The children have their whole lives in front of them. The adult's life is already half-gone."

Yes, children matter to God. That is very evident when we open the Word of God. In Deut. 6:5-9, God commanded parents to teach their children about Him. God explains that it encompasses your whole lifestyle, not just church on Sundays. In Ps. 78:3-7 we are commanded to tell the next generation the power of the Lord so they will put their trust in Him. It even says that they will in turn tell the next generation yet to be born. In Matt. 19:13-15 Jesus exemplifies how much children matter. He rebukes the disciples, who think children are not important. Then Jesus blesses the children.

So we have to conclude that children are of great value to God since He intentionally commands us to teach them and nurture them. In Group's new book, *Children's Ministry in the 21st Century*, we see the challenge that faces us. They say that reaching the post-modern kids spells S-P-I-R-I-T.

Let's take a look:

S—Sensory. Kids today learn through all 5 senses, not just their ears and eyes. So we need to teach by using their ears, eyes, smell, touch, and taste. Be "Jesus" with skin on.

P—Pluralistic. It's a "whatever" world. Truth is relative to them. We face the task of communicating that Jesus IS the way and His laws are absolute. For example, you violate the absolute that you cannot steal and you will face the consequences.

I—Image—Driven. CEF says "Children hear with their eyes." They want it Visualized! So use visuals! Pictures, costumes, skits, flashcards, bulletin boards, DVD's and so on.

R—Reality. Be REAL to them. Be honest with your struggles and pain, etc. You aren't always smiling.

I—International. We live in a global community. We have world-wide instant news. Help every child be a missionary! There are many ethnic groups around our kids that they can reach out to.

T—Teach reliant. Technology brings dangerous access. (pornography, chat rooms, dating websites and so on.) We need to help families and kids navigate past these landmines.

What can we do?

1. **DIALOGUE**—Talk! Talk! Talk! Kids today need to discuss things on a regular basis. Family conversations. Discuss their issues and the Biblical answers.
2. **DISCERNMENT**—Teach them why not doing something is the best choice. Help them recognize right from wrong.
3. **DISCIPLINE**—Dialogue and discernment are meaningless without a commitment to a disciplined life. Equip parents with resources for support. The family context is where a discipline life grows.

It's no secret! Kids matter! And you are "Jesus" to this generation. Go into the world!

Making Children's Ministry Safe

by Jeni Sanders

Making children's ministry a safe and secure place is a challenge for churches for all sizes. Churches of all sizes must take the welfare of children more seriously. (Sadly, when churches are held to the standards of our culture now expects for child-care facilities, most ministries fail to achieve even the minimum standards in terms of child registration procedures and documentation.) Our challenge today: is the church willing to do what it takes to meet and exceed all applicable child-care safe practices...not because we have to...but because we're committed to demonstrating to the world that its Christ's church that best loves and cares for children?

One of the most sought after capabilities within a modern church management system is the ability to provide for rapid children's check-in. Not only because of the need for security in this area of child custody disputes and not so trustworthy volunteers, but also because of the inconvenience factors primarily around parents' time involved with a manual process of handing off a child or children to care workers in the church.

First, a children's check-in system needs to provide security for the child against unauthorized pick-up. A children's check-in system should provide convenience that will allow to drop off their children and get to the worship service or Sunday School as quickly as possible. To accomplish this without compromising security can certainly be a challenge.

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The check-in system should also provide real-time attendance tracking and reporting. This allows the church staff to quickly assess who was present and who was not. By following up in a timely manner, parents are amazed that the church recognized that they were missed and that someone cared that they missed.

In summary, everyone knows that a children's check in system needs to provide top-notch security and be convenient to the customer. However, it is not WHAT a check-in system does that determines the value to church and its congregation, but rather HOW the system does it. Look closely at the processes of a check-in system before purchasing. Make sure that is easy to use for your volunteers. Look to see that it is integrated so that attendance reporting and ministry measurement is an integrated component.

Background checks have become a hot issue for churches today. To check-or not to check-is one of the many questions children's ministers are asking. Are background checks really worth the expense? How can I get my volunteers to see the need-without offending their good intentions? How can I get my volunteers to see the need-without offending their good intentions? And how in the world do I get started? Our church uses Church Volunteer Central offered by Group. At only \$17.00 each, you can order a background check for your volunteers. You can visit

www.churchvolunteercentral.com or call (800) 761-2095.

Take the Quiz

Determine if your ministry's registration procedures and documentation policies have gaps that could create legal liabilities and an unsafe environment for children. Write T for true or F for false in the blank beside each statement.

_____ We excuse children midway through a worship service, without parental supervision, to go to the children's ministry programs.

_____ We don't have parents check their children into and out of our classrooms or ministry areas.

_____ We excuse children from classes at a set time without parental check-out.

_____ We don't track medical and special care concerns.

_____ We don't track people who are authorized to pick up a child.

If you answered T to any of the above questions, your children's ministry could be on shaky legal ground.