

The Importance of Adult Involvement in Youth Ministry

A recent study by the [Search Institute](#) caught my eye and reminded me of an important truth for youth workers. The first line of the study caught my eye:

Bonding with a coach, mentor or other trusted adult can make a crucial difference in the way young people thrive in school and life.

Here are a few key quotes from an article in the [Erie Times-News](#) discussing the study findings:

- Teens show more academic achievement and hope for the future if they have positive adult role models in their lives.
- “‘Caring adults, beyond the immediate family, really do matter for a lot of the outcomes that Americans care about, including school success,’ said Peter Benson, president and chief executive officer of the Search Institute.”
- “‘Almost half the teens identified one or more adults as a mentor or someone who ‘really gets’ them. 27 percent mentioned teachers, 11 percent coaches and 8 percent neighbors.’”

This is really great stuff, important findings for those of us who work with and lead teenagers. But, it’s only further support for what we already knew.

In 2007, [Lifeway Research](#) conducted a study examining the church attendance habits of young adults. It examined the factors that helped students remain active in church as young adults. One of the factors? Meaningful adult relationships:

“Teens who had at least one adult from church make a significant time investment in their lives also were more likely to keep attending church. More of those who stayed in church – by a margin of 46 percent to 28 percent – said five or more adults at church had invested time with them personally and spiritually.”

Need more convincing that adults play a major role in the development (especially the spiritual development) of teenagers? (Probably not, but it’s fun info, anyway.) A [study](#) done by Luther Seminary and Southwestern Baptist Seminary examined the faith development of American teenagers. The study found that of the 10-12% of young people identified as those who “never [stopped] engaging in a faith community,” had at least three adult Christian mentors—coaches, employers, etc.—that played important roles in their lives.

So, here’s what we know. Here’s what can’t be denied: The students in our youth ministries benefit tremendously from meaningful relationships with adults. What does this mean for us youth workers? Here are a few thoughts:

- **For Many Of Your Students, You Are That Meaningful Adult**—Many teenagers do not have a meaningful relationship with a parent, or coach, or teacher. You may be

one of the only meaningful adult relationships that these students have. When you feel pulled in a million different directions, and your batteries are run down, let this realization encourage and empower you. You make a tremendous difference in the lives of your students.

- **We Can No Longer Neglect To Include, Encourage, And Empower Parents**—For too long, too many youth ministries have neglected to see parents as partners, to see families as foundational. How are you increasing parental involvement in your youth ministry? How are you encouraging parents to be disciplers of their teenagers? How are you equipping parents with the knowledge and tools they need to lead their children's spiritual growth?
- **Adult Volunteers Are Crucial**—Allowing opportunities for your students to develop meaningful relationships with other adults in your church may be one of the most important things you can do to foster spiritual growth in your students. How are you intentional in creating intersections between adults and teenagers in your church?

While their attitudes and mannerisms may sometimes say the opposite, the data is clear: teenagers want and need adult influence in their lives. How can you use your place of influence to help foster these relationship opportunities?

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