MINISTRY DIRECTION

Partnering with parents in the spiritual nurture of children is a rather novel idea for most congregations. Some congregations accept little or no responsibility for the spiritual development of the children, strongly adhering to the principle that spiritual instruction is the responsibility of the family alone. Other congregations recognize that social, economic, and spiritual stresses are preventing or hindering families from providing spiritual nurture. These congregations have done as Christian educator, Anna Mow, advised. "The church must finish what the family cannot do and it must compensate for wherever the family fails the children." But few congregations have recognized and tapped into the tremendous potential of partnering with parents in the spiritual nurture of children.

Is partnering with parents a Biblical principle? Definitely. The Old Testament model of nurture called for the family to provide instruction as stated in Deuteronomy 6:6. However, this instruction did not take place in isolation. It took place in the context of a loving, holy community. The Scriptural truths parents taught their children were reaffirmed by members of the community. The children's active participation in the life and worship of the community provided opportunities to live out Biblical instruction.

Today, the local congregation is that community of believers. The members of the believing community must recognize the family as the primary context for Christian instruction. However, the local congregation must also fulfill its Scriptural obligation to the children. It must affirm the spiritual instruction of the parents. It must help each child find his or her rightful place in the body of Christ. It must prepare the children for works of service and bring them to full spiritual maturity (Ephesians 4:11-16).

Partnering with parents may be a novel idea but it is definitely biblical! Let's work with parents to raise up an anointed generation of children.
IDEAS YOU CAN USE!

What do Parents think of Children’s Ministry?
Doug Murren writes in The Baby Boomerang, “We boomer parents want to know if your churches are ready to invest in our kids. If we boomers are going to stick around, we are really going to need your help with our children.” Find out what the boomer parents think of your ministry by asking each one to complete the following survey. After the surveys have been turned in, tally the results. Schedule a meeting of the children’s ministry staff to review the results. During the meeting discuss each item on the survey, determine areas needing improvement and decide what changes will be implemented to bring about improvement.

## PARENT SURVEY

To the Parent: Please fill out one form for each child and return the form to ________________________________.

Parent’s Name: ____________________________________________
Child’s Name: ____________________________________________

Your child’s teachers/ministers: ________________________________

Circle TRUE or FALSE:

1. I am convinced that the children’s ministry in our church is committed to children.

   TRUE                      FALSE

2. It’s obvious that our pastor loves the children.

   TRUE                      FALSE

3. I’m happy with the age grouping of children in my child’s class.

   TRUE                      FALSE

4. My child’s class is more than just babysitting.

   TRUE                      FALSE

5. My child’s teacher(s) understand and are sensitive to my child’s learning style.

   TRUE                      FALSE

6. Children’s ministry activities do not conflict with our family activities.

   TRUE                      FALSE

7. The children’s ministry program equips me to be a better parent.

   TRUE                      FALSE
8. I feel that my child is safe in children’s ministry.  
   TRUE                      FALSE

9. My child’s teacher(s) seem to genuinely love teaching children.  
   TRUE                      FALSE

10. My child is excited about the Bible because of the way it is presented in children’s ministry.  
    TRUE                      FALSE

11. My child is learning basic biblical content in children’s ministry.  
    TRUE                      FALSE

12. I can tell that my child is applying biblical principles to his or her life.  
    TRUE                      FALSE

13. I believe that my child’s teacher(s) know more about my child than just his or her name.  
    TRUE                      FALSE

14. My child’s teacher(s) let me know what my child is learning in class.  
    TRUE                      FALSE

15. My child’s teacher(s) give me insight into my child’s spiritual life.  
    TRUE                      FALSE

16. The children’s pastor or age-level coordinator communicates regularly and effectively with me.  
    TRUE                      FALSE

17. My favorite thing about our children’s ministry is  
    ________________________________________________________________

18. One thing I’d change about our children’s ministry is  
    ________________________________________________________________


**Communication Tools**

“Usually (parent involvement) is just a matter of communication. When that communication is processed, parents and children’s ministry workers can make a great team to develop a child’s heart for God.”  
-George Pryor, Christian Educator
Conversation. Take time for a brief but meaningful conversation when a parent comes by to pick up his child after your ministry. If possible, comment on the child and what you hope was accomplished during that ministry time.

Correspondence. Personal notes to the parent and/or the child encourage communication and the development of relationships. A child's absence should always be followed up with a note or phone call. Correspondence is also effective as an acknowledgment of good behavior, outstanding achievement or simply to affirm the child and/or his parent.

Forums. Provide opportunities for parents and children's ministers to meet together to discuss successes, needs, problems and goals.

Newsletter. Provide a quarterly, monthly or even weekly newsletter for parents. Use the newsletter to provide information of ministry goals, needs, opportunities for parent involvement and announcement of ministry activities.

Programs. At least once a year children's ministry should present a program to the congregation emphasizing the goals of the ministry, the impact on the children and the involvement of ministers and parents. Children's Day is an excellent opportunity to do this.

Curriculum information. Provide take home papers, quarterly outlines and other materials that keep parents informed of the Scriptural truths being presented in various children's ministry programs. Encourage the parents to reinforce this teaching during times of family instruction.

Parents on the Team!

Modeling
Parents are the examples most often followed!

Instructing
Parents are the child's first teachers and have been given the primary responsibility to teach.

Guiding
Parents guide the child's spiritual growth through spiritual conversations, family devotions, and discipline.

Advocating
Parents speak out on behalf of their children's needs.

Advising
Parents should be given the opportunity to provide input into the local
Serving
Parents are willing to serve on behalf of their children.

Ministering
Parents, when trained, are excellent ministers to children.

Supplying
Parents are willing to provide finances, materials and assistance to the ministries that bless their child.

Strengthen the Family!

Footsteps
Age Level: upper elementary

Use shoes to represent the role of each family member--Dad, Mom and child. Write the following verses on paper strips. Put the strips in the appropriate shoe:

Dad-Deuteronomy 6:6-7, Ephesians 6:4
Mom-Isaiah 49:15 and Titus 2:3-5
Children-Exodus 20:12 and Colossians 3:20

Form three groups and give one shoe to each group. Have groups read their verses to discover that family member's role in the family. After groups have finished, have a representative hold that group's shoe and tell what his or her group discovered about each family member's role.

No Family Feud
Age level: elementary

Form two teams. Have teams each list the top 10 ways a family can get along, according to Ephesians 4. After teams have completed their lists, collect the lists. Then have teams take turns guessing the answers that were on both lists. Afterward, discuss how easy or difficult it is to get along with family members and how the listed ways can help them get along better.