

Congregations have Supportive Adults



- Supportive congregations seek to connect every youth with at least 5 engaged Christian adults.
- Supportive adults deliberately invest and value long-term, inter-generational relationships.
- Supportive adults prepare for and respond to celebration, transitions and crisis.
- Supportive congregations have adults who champion young people and dedicate time and energy to developing teens as disciples of Jesus Christ for life.

In Baptism God brings a young person into His family full of supportive adults of many generations. While parents or guardians may be the most critical person in a youth's faith life, other supportive adults can play a significant role in walking alongside youth in their faith development. **72% of active LCMS Millennials said they had a safe person to talk to at church compared to 35% of those now unaffiliated with any church.**

Maybe you can think back to adults in your life who listened to you, prayed for you, and cheered you on. Hopefully you can remember supportive adults in your life who made a lasting impact, and you want to be that same kind of adult for other young people.

Congregations should seek to connect every youth with at least 5 engaged Christian adults. These adults should regularly check in, provide a listening ear, and develop mutual trust with a young person. They should model and encourage faithful worship, Bible study, and prayer. Supportive adults show consistent, genuine interest and find ways to celebrate and encourage them. All this helps each young person to feel seen and known by an adult who has their best interest at heart.

The role of supportive adult doesn't need to be complex or time consuming. Any number of adults can serve as supportive adults including parents and guardians, extended family, church workers, and older members of the congregation. Their connection to young people can come from deliberate program or develop organically. It is simple to gauge how many adults a young person is connected to by simply asking who they would feel safe turning to if they had a question, doubt or crisis.

Congregations should find ways to deliberately invest and value long-term, inter-generational relationships. Adults can have a meaningful impact on teen during a short season. However, long-term relationships are uniquely equipped to engage and re-engage youth during transition and crisis. These adults provide stability and a safe place for speaking Law and Gospel at appropriate times. There is great benefit when congregations systematically connect adults with the right capacity to help maintain quality relationships over time.

Supportive adults prepare for and respond to celebration, transitions and crisis. This means knowing a young person closely enough to anticipate transition, spot rising issues and engage them at critical moments. Being present at these key times helps young people to know these adults desire God's best for them. Knowing resources, encouraging timely conversations, a keep communication open can be powerful tools that God uses to keep youth in the community of faith. Through the Holy Spirit, these adults can pray for young people, provide mentorship and continue to show up in whatever way that young person needs.

Supportive congregations have adults who champion young people and dedicate time and energy to developing teens as disciples of Jesus Christ for life. These are special adults who are passionate about caring for the young people in your congregation and are willing to advocate for them. These youth leaders dedicate their time and energy to ensuring young people are have the place and space to grow as disciples for life.

As youth seek to better understand who God is and what God has done from them in Jesus Christ, they do not need to walk alone. **God has blessed youth with many adults who can share their experiences, help support their faith practices and encourage them to stay faithful.** The investment in each youth by faithful Christian adults is powerful for congregations and youth ministry.

Discussion Questions

For Youth Leaders

- How have you seen the impact of longevity or the lack of it in your ministries?
- List what children, youth and young adults you are actively supporting in your congregation.
 - What transitions or challenges might they be facing soon?
 - How are you praying for them?

For Youth Ministry Teams

- How are supportive adults investing in teens during transitional times? How can we plan to specifically care for young people in those times?
- How is your youth ministry encouraging long-term relationships, rather than short term ones?
- How are you engaging and connecting older adults?
- How are you keeping supportive adults engaged as students come in and out of youth ministry?

For Congregational Leadership

- How are you systematically surrounding young people with other faithful Christians who can build real, mutually respectful relationships with them?
- How is your congregation investing (training, resourcing, etc.) in adults who work with young people?
- What supports or limits longevity for leaders in your congregation?
- How can your congregation help create inter-generational connections that engage more supportive adults?