

Congregations Have **Supportive Adults**



- Supportive congregations seek to connect every youth with at least five engaged Christian adults.
- Supportive adults deliberately invest and value long-term, intergenerational relationships.
- Supportive adults prepare for and respond to celebrations, transitions, and crises.
- Supportive congregations seek 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. Data from LCMS Youth Ministry shows the value of supportive adults, including the 2016 study which showed 72% of Millennials who remained active in the church into their 20s said they had a safe person to talk to at church in their youth compared to 35% of who were not affiliated with any church at the same age.

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 young people. All this helps each young person to feel seen and known by an adult who has their best interest at heart.

The role of a supportive adult doesn't need to be complex or time consuming. Any number of adults can serve as supportive adults including extended family, Christian teachers and coaches, church workers, and members of the congregation. Their connection to young people can come from deliberate programs or can develop organically. A good place to start is to ask young people 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 a teen during a short season. However, long-term relationships are uniquely equipped to engage and re-engage youth over time through congregational leadership changes and a teens' transitions 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 crises. 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, partnering with parents, and keeping open communication 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 the young person needs.

Supportive congregations seek to have adults who champion young people and dedicate time and energy to developing teens as disciples of Jesus Christ for life. Youth ministry champions are advocates for teens across the congregation. These are special adults who are passionate about caring for the young people in your congregation, ensuring teens have a place and space to grow as disciples for life.

As youth seek to better understand who God is and what God has done for 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 child, pre-teen, teen, and young adult by faithful Christian adults is powerful for congregations.

Discussion Questions

For Individuals

- 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 intergenerational connections that engage more supportive adults?