

# EQUIPPING

for intergenerational ministry

## Encouraging Age-Specific Ministry



Establishing an intergenerational community does not mean eradicating age-specific ministries. As important as it is to embrace intergenerational values at a core level, it is also important to keep that in balance with age-specific ministry. It is key to realise that age-specific ministry alone may be working to a varying degree, but it has not proven sustainable for ongoing faith transmission. This is particularly applicable among young adults who have grown up exclusively in age-specific ministries. At the same time, all ages still need their own space to grow and develop at their pace.

Friendships and connections through peer relationships are vital for young people. As teenagers transition from childhood into adulthood, parents and mentors will need to take an active role in helping them make confident choices. Creating positive peer environments is an important step in ensuring our young people stay connected to their church, their families and a continued relationship with God as lifelong disciples.

We believe everyone needs to be part of a web of relationships that includes peers and members of other generations.

Reasons why peer relationships are valuable:

- Provide a safe place to try new things with others.
- Provide an opportunity to see how our responses affect others.
- Provide a shared history of a long-term friendship over time.
- Peers that reflect similar family values can be a strong influence as values are reinforced.

Important things to consider when rethinking your age-specific ministries:

- Provide opportunities to talk with young people about issues relevant to their age (i.e. wise choices, actions and consequences).
- Create spaces and topics where those of the same gender can openly discuss issues that affect them, and they can feel supported.
- Encourage families to open their homes to 'host' the youth group so their kids can have the opportunity to host their peers and provide a safe place to connect.

In the 21st century, faith formation needs to be seen as a lifelong journey of discipleship—a process of experiencing, learning and



practising the Christian faith. By providing opportunities for young people to learn with their peers, we are creating a safe place for them to explore their faith. We also need to provide opportunities for them to hear the faith stories and wisdom of other generations.

The overall aim of age-specific ministry is to prepare young people for a lifelong faith journey. One thing they will need is a network of intergenerational relationships. They need people of varying ages to come alongside them during the journey to encourage, listen, teach, help, explain and celebrate all that God is doing in their lives. This intergenerational network is available to all within the congregation.

Beyond receiving prayer and general support from the congregation, age-specific ministry is also an opportunity to connect children and youth with members who want to invest in young people. Some people may want to offer prayer or encouragement and a sense of belonging; others will have specific ministry skills to share such as reading scripture or praying, or other kinds of gifts and life skills like cooking or woodworking. Still others may be willing to be mentors.

When designing your age-specific-ministry consider ways you can integrate all ages in the leadership of these ministries.

Look to older generations to participate in ways that will help to build intergenerational connections and relationships. Ideas might include:

- Invite an older member of the congregation to share their faith-life story at youth group or confirmation when relevant to a topic your group is studying.
- Create intergenerational teams to lead your First Communion and/or Confirmation sessions.
- Encourage mentoring in your congregation as part of your youth ministry.
- Invite young adults to lead games or activities that are woven into your children's ministry or youth program.
- Invite a guest storyteller to your children's ministry event as a way of involving people with particular gifts.

Age-specific ministry is an exciting opportunity to connect young people with adults in the congregation other than their parents. There is compelling research about the impact adults can have on children and teenagers as they grow in their faith. This research found that teenagers who had five or more adults from the congregation invest in them during the ages of 15 to 18 were less likely to leave the church after high school. What better time to begin connecting adults and young people in meaningful ways.



Bringing people of other generations and backgrounds into your peer-ministry will deepen the discussions and cultivate intergenerational relationships.

If you would like more information about Grow Ministries, intergenerational ministry, or resources and training, please call **08 8267 7300** or visit our website: [www.growministries.org.au](http://www.growministries.org.au)



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