

6 Moments to Engage Families in Small Groups

It happened again.

You just made the same small group announcement.

Sure, it happened on a different Sunday, during a different series. However, you just made that same hope-full announcement and received that same life-less response.

All across today's church, leaders are saying more, yet somehow congregations are hearing less.

Every prop and trick lay used, relegated to a back-of-the-stage pile of ineffective effort. The funny videos made lots of people laugh, but no one dropped their carefully curated "perfect life" façade to live in heart-level relationships. The moving testimony video made plenty of people cry, but no one took that first, fear-fueled step into schedule-wrecking community.

Our best, most creative emphasis and announcement efforts bounce harmlessly off the Teflon-strong force field of the family calendar. For most in today's church, a crisis-level lack of family engagement in groups boils down to this: the felt-need of life in community has yet to surpass the real-pain of an over scheduled life.

All of the church-speak generic "*life together*" reasons for "*living in community*" through "*life groups*" ring hollow as cul-de-sac gatherings, travel team parent bonding, and friends (with boating benefits) deftly imitate true and Gospel-centered relational connection.

After all, **who needs yet another night away with yet another group of people?**

We make the announcements but fail to articulate the value of community, especially with other people experiencing life-change. We promote the seasonal sign-ups, but neglect the most natural entry-points during life-stages.

Consider the many, fear-inducing moments of change and seasons of adjustment that every family experiences. Most are perfect opportunities to leverage the wisdom and comfort of community as a **real and natural need** to be a part of a group.

Here are six life-stage opportunities to expand engagement in small group life:

Newlywed / Engaged Couples. The first friends as a couple are typically life-long. Leverage premarital counseling and intensive wedding preparation seasons to focus young lovers on building depth of community into their marriage, not simply crafting Pinterest-worthy moments into a ceremony.

Expecting Parents. Parents-to-be, especially when it is their first child, are usually scared to death and more open to asking questions and being influenced by parents who have "been there, done that." Working together, the preschool minister and groups leader have a natural opportunity to encourage and resource parents into group life.

Baby Dedication. More than preparing for a Sunday moment, this is a natural time to gather families in a small-group environment as a prerequisite to participation. Gather new parents to discuss a book or parenting bible study for 4-6 weeks before the Sunday morning ceremony. Church leaders can reinforce gathering in a home as more important than standing on a stage, and see those groups continue for years.

Kindergarten / Grade School. The tear-filled eyes of parents driving away from the campus after dropping their “couldn’t possibly be this old already” child at school are indications of shared emotions. They are also likely indications of an openness to prioritize time with other parents wiping their eyes as well. Giving parents a place to do more than cope or commiserate, groups in this life stage encourage connection and iron sharpening. Start the conversation by introducing parents to the children’s ministry while at the same time introducing them to other parents just as scared and hopeful as they are.

Middle / High School. Puberty, dating and social media... enough said. Parents with children entering middle school or high school need help, and quickly. As your next group of youth age-up into the student ministry, do more than just meet with parents and talk at them. Make it a goal to get those parents talking to each other and finding common ground together. Convene a round table on important topics, and spin off discussion groups that can grow into meaningful small groups or bible study classes.

College / Empty Nest. The last 18+ years have been spent focused on successfully getting their children out of the nest, and prayerfully staying out. Now these suddenly purposeless parents struggle to reconnect and establish the new normal once their baby birds finally fly off. Graduation Sundays offer a great chance to celebrate each student, but also a great connection with the parents wondering “what’s next.” What if leaders offered one or two strategic gatherings over the summer to prepare parents for this new normal, all the while pointing to a Fall season of group life?

Families in your church are physically, emotionally, and spiritually right where you have led them to be... in groups and not.

Now is the time to stop thinking about small groups in ways that work on a ministry calendar or for a pastoral preference.

Now is the time to start engaging families during the seasons and moments in life that actually matter to them.

Now is the time to truly engage people in meaningful Gospel-centered community, not just make that same small group announcement.

Learn more about engaging people in a Gospel-centered community: [Connect with an Auxano](#)

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