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#### FOR FAMILIES

- \* Ask your kids to name the adults, in addition to your family, who care about them, support them, teach them important skills and values, and would offer them a listening ear and good advice.
- \* Plan time with these adults at your dinner table or involve them in your child's activities or in a family service project. Give your child special time with them.
- \* Let these adults know that your child has named them as important. Invite your child to write a card or letter, thanking this adult for being important in their life.
- \* Take pictures of your child and their "other adults." Make two copies and frame them. One for your child. One for each adult.
- \* Invite those important adults to family milestone events.
- \* Go to your neighborhood picnic or night out. As a family, circulate and meet your neighbors. Go with some questions you'd like to know about these neighbors: How did you come to live in this neighborhood? Where else have you lived in your life? What did you like or dislike about those places? If you had a free airline ticket, where would you go and what would you do? What is something you know how to do that would surprise other people?

#### FOR CONGREGATION

- \* Let your VBS, Sunday school, confirmation, and youth program volunteers know how important they are in the lives of children and youth, not simply for what they teach but for who they are in the lives of children and youth.
- \* Make sure you recruit enough adults that all kids have a number of adults who know them by name, have time for conversation with them, and build an ongoing relationship with them.
- \* Let children and youth select an older person in the congregation whose faith story they would like to hear. Invite them to come for an ice cream social and give each pair a set of questions to discuss with one another.
- \* Wear name tags so that children, youth, and adults can call each other by name.
- \* Create cross-generational service projects to do together.
- \* Have children and youth teach older adults how to use computers and software.
- \* Invite older adults to teach children and youth about woodworking, sewing, quilting, knitting, cooking, and gardening.
- \* Use volunteers of every generation to lead in worship ... together!
- \* Develop a talent show that brings together all of the generations.
- \* Using a Story Corps format, have children and youth interview



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## THE ROLE OF "OTHER ADULTS" IN THE LIVES OF OUR KIDS

Wonderful news: Today, parents are spending more time with their children than they have in decades! We can all name multiple gifts that come with this time spent together - love, clear boundaries, encouragement, moral development, academic support, life skills, comfort, and so much more. So, this is good news.

Not-so-wonderful news: Today, children and youth have far less time spent with non-parent adults. Families are busy, busy, busy. There simply isn't time to braid other adults into the lives of their kids in longterm relationships. Or, we don't know other adults that we think are safe for our kids. In our age-segregated world, it is easier said than it is done. But is that really a problem?

Years ago, I was stopped in my tracks when Search Institute reported their research finding that children need at least five significant, non-family adults in their lives in order to truly thrive and grow into healthy adults! WHAT?

So, what are the gifts these "other adults" offer? They help kids

- \* Learn new skills and ideas.
- \* Expand their ideas about what their future might hold.
- \* See themselves through the eyes of someone who doesn't have to love them.
- \* Develop a sense of themselves and their gifts, distinct from their parents.
- \* Receive guidance and support that they may not be open to from their parents

What difference do they make? Children and youth with these "other adults" in their lives are likely to

- \* Be more engaged in school.
- \* Complete high school and go to college.
- \* Be more satisfied in life.
- \* Engage in good health behaviors.
- \* Engage in fewer high-risk behaviors, including drug use and violence.

And just where can we go about finding them? Remember, parents need to vet these adults, making sure they are safe, trustworthy, and share core values with the child's family. They might include:

- \* Extended family members
- \* Neighbors
- \* Baptismal sponsors
- \* Parent's friends
- \* Teachers
- \* Camp counselors
- \* Coaches
- \* Religious leaders
- \* Youth program staff and volunteers
- \* Friends' parents
- \* Employers

Who were the non-family adults who shaped your life as a child and youth and how did they do that? Mrs. McLaughlin lived next door to me when I was growing up and she shared her grown son's books with me, guided me around her flower garden, and told me about her work downtown. Mr. Fink ushered at the same service as my dad and he gave me his carnation every Sunday, a lifesaver out of his front pocket, and a book of lifesavers for Christmas. Miss Joy took care of me in the church nursery until I was three, but continued to ask me about my life, what I was learning about Jesus, and how she could pray for me. Miss Kirk sat next to me before worship and let me prattle on, week after week, remembering what I had told her and inviting me to her house for a real tea party. Mrs. Bratnobar, a neighbor, the mother of four children, an artist, a member of the school board, spoke to me seriously and with interest; I went to her college, because I had such respect for her!

None of these were olympic feats, but they shaped me to be the person I am today, taught me that I mattered, and opened a larger world to me. Now, it is our turn to do the same for the children in our world.

#### NEED SOME HELP?

Do you need some help gaining perspective, evaluating your ministries, reestablishing your priorities, discerning

your elders about their lives. Help develop questions and coach the interviewers. Record and share with the congregation.

where God is calling your congregation now, and engaging all to participate? This might be the time for coaching with Marilyn Sharpe, a ministry partner who will focus, inspire, and walk with you and your ministry team to follow where God is leading.

CALL OR [EMAIL NOW!](#)

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**P.S.** This e-news did not write itself. In fact, after I had chosen this topic and set a deadline, the deadline passed without a word being written. Then, I had one astonishing day that taught me the importance of "other adults" in the lives of kids.

First, my dearest friend invited me to spend the morning with her and her precious ten month old grandson. To this precious child, she introduced me as Nana Sharpe ... and I was hooked. She invited me to snuggle, love, and nurture her beloved grandson. I am planning to live to be old, old, old and I am counting on many opportunities to make memories with this darling boy.

Then, that afternoon, at a congregation I am coaching, a volunteer receptionist came out to offer me a glass of water while I waited for a meeting. When she saw that I was reading a book on children's ministry, she paused to ask, "What can you do for a child that might not go to church?" It was a bigger story. There is a boy, the grandchild of her best friend, that she had cared for every Friday for the first four years of his life. Then, her friend died of cancer. The boy's mother remarried and didn't want this woman in her son's life "because she was too much like a grandma." Now, she cannot see the boy, call him, or give him gifts. She has started a college fund for him and she prays for him every single day. Will he know how much she loves him? Oh, yes. Three years have passed, but when he spotted her in a store recently, he called out, "I haven't stopped loving you!" "Me, too!" she replied.

Know that you matter in the life of a child or youth. Know that they will matter to you. It is God's big idea to weave us together into cross+generational communities of caring. Open your child's life to "other adults." Open your life and heart to the gift of a child or youth.

We don't just GO to church. We ARE the church, wherever we go. So, look for opportunities to love one another as Jesus has first loved you. That is our call!

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