



REACHING OUT TO NON-CUSTODIAL PARENTS

By Wayne D. Stocks

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In children's ministry we believe, at least we should believe, that parents are important to the spiritual upbringing and nurture of their children. This is, after all, the basis of the entire "orange" theory of children's ministry – that the church and parents working together can have a greater influence on a child's life than either one working independently. We strive to find ways to encourage and engage parents. We talk about leveraging our time with the children at church by equipping parents to continue the conversation at home. We minister to families and parents, all in an effort to help parents lead their kids at home. This, of course, is a scripturally sound idea. We need look no further than Deuteronomy 6 for God's plan for passing on spiritual truth:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. [Deuteronomy 6:4-9 ESV]

When the church partners with a father and a mother in the spiritual nurture of the children God has entrusted to them, there is no doubt that the influence is magnified and God can be more glorified. However, when it comes to children of divorce this strategy can face serious challenges. Many children of divorce lose one parent and are left with one who is so overwhelmed by the ins and outs of everyday life that they have little left to give in the way a spiritual encouragement. So, do we give up on the idea entirely? Of course not, but it does mean that we need to take this into account in ministering to the children in our churches.

We will deal with helping the stressed out custodial parent in another article, but today I want to address a parent that many churches all but ignore – that is the non-custodial parent. Most of the things we do with parents in our churches (things like classes, take home papers, etc.) are geared toward the parent who drops off and picks up the child each weekend. We largely ignore one-half of parenting team of the children in our ministries. We miss out on the opportunity to leverage the influence of that parent, and perhaps more importantly, we miss out on knowing a vital part of the lives of the children in our churches. So, how do we get involved with the non-custodial parents?

1. **Pray.** Prayer should be the beginning of everything we do in ministry. So, start your efforts by praying. Pray that the non-custodial parent would be receptive to working with you.



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2. **Talk to the Custodial Parent.** The following suggestions for involving the non-custodial parent are important, but the first step should be to talk to the parent who does bring the child to church. Explain to them how important it is to have both parents involved in the spiritual life of the child and let them know that you would like to talk to the other parent.
3. **Introduce Yourself.** Make a call or send a letter to introduce yourself to the non-custodial parent. Let them know that you care about their child and it is important to you to get to know them as well.
4. **Make two copies of take-home papers.** This is an easy way to get the non-custodial parent involved. Send a copy of whatever you send home with the parent who brings the child to church to the other parent.
5. **Multiple Crafts.** This is a simple thing, but make sure that you have enough supplies that kids can make an extra craft for their “other” parent. It is a simple way to let that parent know that you are thinking of them in the day-to-day activities of your ministry.
6. **Invite Them to Classes or Seminars for Single Parents.** Who better to invite to such events than the parents of the children who are already in your ministries. Make certain that these events are planned as a means of educating and equipping these parents and not for the purpose of drawing them into your house. You want the non-custodial parent (that doesn’t go to your church) that your primary concern is their child’s relationship with God and not the attendance at your church.