

# Oh, You Meet The

altogether. I think some parents fit nicely into categories so here are a few of mine. You may recognize them.

## **The Controlling Parent**

*Some parents can't be content to let the youth worker run things.*

These parents, perhaps rightly, see areas where he or she could do the job better, and they want to get in there and change things—invited or not.

A new family came to our church recently, and the mother right away wanted to get involved with the youth ministry. We thought she should relax and get to know us a little bit before plunging in. She hadn't been with us for a month when she decided that the middle school pastor could use someone to be his spiritual sounding board and that she fit the bill for that job. She was miffed when he declined to submit to her wisdom.

The final straw was the time he took a bunch of kids to see the Simpson movie. The mom in question went berserk and tried to put together a lynch party. We ended the drama by letting her know that the whole leadership team thought the movie was hilarious and many of us planned to buy it on DVD when it was available.

The family left the church in a huff.

## **The "Not My Kid" Parent**

*Some parents have no idea what their own kids are really like.*

Kids are smart. They know how to play a parent to get away with what they want to get away with. The problem is that some parents never catch on to this game, or they refuse to even consider if there is a game going on at all. Their kid is a perfect angel and if maybe they get into trouble—well, it is not their fault. It is those rotten kids who have taken advantage of the sweetness of their child and tricked him. It is the fault of the unfriendly youth group or uncaring youth leader.

I remember the parent of one particularly troublesome high school girl coming to me and complaining that our Youth Group meetings were not spiritual enough.

"What?" I asked, "Who told you that?"

Her daughter was the source. Unknown to this mom, this girl got into every party in town and ran with a loser wolf pack of guys. The kid had zero interest in what we were offering and came to church only under duress.

I told the mom "I really don't think the problem for your daughter is that we are not spiritual enough. We may be way more spiritual than she cares for us to be."

Naturally, this was not what she wanted to hear or was ready to accept. The kid was trying to get out of coming to youth group, and the mom accepted an

## *I have a confession to make.*

In the decades that I have been working in youth ministry, I have often intentionally disengaged from the parents of my youth. I don't mean that I ignored them, spoke of them negatively, or in any way worked against them. I just chose NOT to involve them in the life of the youth ministry.

I did so for a good reason; *some* parents are sand in the gears of youth work. They don't get the picture of what is happening in the lives of teens or the culture of teenagers. They push for their own agendas or, in worst-case situations, for the exaltation of their own kid. They can't keep their mouth shut. They freak out about some molehill while missing the mountain we are trying to surmount. Some of them brushed aside my many years of experience with teens and insisted that since they were now the proud new owners of adolescent kids, they knew better.

In short, some parents were a headache I could do without. Yes, I know I am flying in the face of the latest youth ministry trend, but hear me out. There always are some parents who are gems and a delight to work with, so please don't think I am suggesting that we throw the baby and bathwater out together.

I have developed an intuitive sense of which parents were going to be an asset and which would be better left in background support roles—or left out

# Parents

excuse designed especially for her ears—cunningly crafted by the little varmint. (Who, by the way, dropped out, got into drugs, got pregnant—and guess whose fault THAT was. Yep, the youth ministry.)

## **The Agenda Parent**

*Some parents ride a hobby-horse that they can't get off.*

- Them: "Do you have the parental permission waivers signed?"  
 Me: "Uh, we are only going out to get ice cream."  
 Them: "But if there is an accident, having waivers is important so that the church isn't liable."  
 Me: "Look, it seems this is a bit overkill. Besides, we are going this evening and there isn't time to get waivers and stuff."  
 Them: "Then you need to cancel the event."  
 Me: "We are only going FIVE MILES! I will risk it."  
 Them: "Well, you know my responsibility is to report this to the board."  
 Me: "Did you know that the children's department is desperate for help? Would you like me to call them for you?"

## **The Stupid Parent**

*Some parents get around a bunch of teens and turn into one themselves.*

Kids are dumb enough on their own and don't need a supposedly wise adult to give them ideas. One of our parents had a girls' overnighter at a hotel and encouraged the girls to sneak down to the pool late at night and go skinny-dipping! Kids may come up with this idea themselves, but for a parent to pitch it to the kids is not helpful.

## **The Gem**

*The parent I like best is the one who listens, watches, helps out, and earns the right to be heard.*

I don't mind suggestions, but I think that someone needs to be in the trenches of youth work with me to earn the right to be heard. Merely being a parent is not always good enough.

Some parents know how to keep their mouths shut so as not to embarrass their own kids—which I find very helpful, especially to the kid. Some parents are friendly, fun and sweet to be around. They love other people's kids just like their own and they are more than willing to see their kid in a realistic light.

You can't make a parent this way. They either are, or they aren't. But, when you find them, work hard to keep and affirm them. You have a gem!

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