

Partnering with Parents for Hard Conversations

***Note, the word “parent” is used quite a bit in this Quicksheet. Please know that the publishers/writer/editors of Quicksheets intend for all caregivers, guardians, and parental types to be included in the single word “Parent”.*

As youth ministry has evolved over the last decade and then suddenly at the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, youth groups gather less often, and we might miss the opportunity to give an immediate faith response to a critical cultural moment. As we see our young people less often and with longer gaps of time between gatherings, partnering with parents has become even more important. Within the span of a year (2020-21), we faced George Floyd’s murder and countless demonstrations across the country, followed by a very public trial and conviction. There was a contentious election and then the capitol riots. Other types of local events include a prominent community member being arrested, when a peer dies, or a disaster changes your community. Parents are valuable partners in ministry and play a vital role in processing world events; so how do we support parents in this important faith work? When partnering with parents, we can equip and encourage them to set time apart with their youth, pause, say a prayer together, share a meal and talk about what is happening.

Here are some steps to empower parents and initiate responses through the lens of faith after major events in your community, our country or world:

- As youth leaders, volunteers, or staff, remember you speak from a specific faith-based perspective. So, frame this event through a faith lens for parents. Name what our reformed faith says about the deeper issues at play: death, injustice, power, corruption, disaster, and brokenness. Then also name what our faith says about kindness, healing, hope, and compassion. Point to scripture that comforts and challenges. Here are some basic theological concepts and scripture that might be helpful to share with parents:

- Jesus experienced the brokenness of our world and is with us in the broken times.
- Nothing can separate us from the love of God, not even death. *Romans 8:38-39*
- God did not make this happen. Humanity is broken. God calls us into the remaking of it by seeking justice and sharing God’s love.
- John 14:16-17 CEB - “I will ask the Father, and he will send another Companion, who will be with you forever. This Companion is the Spirit of Truth, whom the world can’t receive because it neither sees him nor recognizes him. You know him, because he lives with you and will be with you.” The Google definition of companion is, “a person or animal with whom one spends a lot of time or with whom one travels.” The Spirit is our friend, accompanies us, spends time with us and goes with us, travels with us wherever we go, even into the hard, unimaginable, devastating, and sad experiences of life. God’s gift to us is the Spirit, and the Spirit is with us.
- John 11:25 - “Jesus wept.”
- Micah 6:8 - “What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”
- Psalm 46:10a - “Be still, and know that I am God!”

- Invite adults to embrace hard conversations where they as adults might have to do some unlearning and learning. These hard conversations are holy and invite us to see what our faith might have to say in these moments. Offer some specific discussion questions that parents can use with their young people around a meal, on a walk, or in the car to get the conversation started. Here are some general ones to consider and adapt based on events:

- Immediately, invite parents to acknowledge what is going on in the news with their youth.
- Ask your youth to interpret what they see going on and have heard from their friends, school and so on, and gently correct any misinformation and fill in left out important details.
- Ask youth if they have any questions or need clarification about the event details and/or how it relates to history, structural systems, and culture.
- Ask youth how they feel about it and share how you feel about it.
- Talk about where you see the helpers, and who they are and how they are helping.
- Where is God in all this? What do you think God would say to each of us at this moment?
- What actions might we take to reflect our values after the recent event? Is there something tangible we can do that allows us to be helpers, advocates, justice seekers and/or compassionate responders?
- Pray. Pause as a family and say a prayer together aloud or pray together in silence.
- Hold space for the bigness of life and that all family members might not agree on how they see or interpret the events happening. Be sure to keep doors open, speak lovingly, and listen a lot. Invite parents to truly hear their youth's perspective and invite parents to lovingly share their own. There is an unavoidable power imbalance between adult/minor & parent/child and parents often take up a lot of the power and space. So, invite parents to listen more and be open to the idea that their youth might have a different response and reaction than they do. Both might still be faith filled understandings. Try to identify where some things might be unifying even in the uncomfortable disagreements.

-Check-in with parents to see if they have ideas to share with each other or need a safe place to connect with other parents to equip and empower each other.

- Wait a few weeks and check back in with your parents. Often, major current events are marathons not a sprint. So, this isn't just a one-time response, but continued responding, reflecting, growing, and taking actions. Parents may offer feedback and ideas and will continue to need the support of the church.

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