

# Using Teens In Ministry

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Teens can be valuable in any children's ministry (CM) programs. Teens bring energy, excitement, and vibrant smiles to the CM. They also bring a "risk" due to the fact that they are not independent and their lives are complicated with school work, friends, and plenty of emotions. The three most critical aspects in using teens in the CM are: screening, supervision, and accountability. If any one of those three critical aspects are neglected, you could face a "teen nightmare" for you or the CM.



Before you consider using teens in the CM, you need to identify the age limits for a teen, and the difference between a "teen" and an "adult" when it comes to the CM team and the "Never Alone" CM policy. Here are some critical questions to consider with your CM team and your supervising church administrators:

1. At what age can a teen apply to serve in the CM?
2. What is the application process?
3. What role does the youth ministry (YM) play in the application or recommendation process?
4. How are the teens screened?
5. How are the teens prepared/trained to assist in the CM?
6. How are the teens placed into the CM? Can they serve in the same area as a sibling?
7. How are the teens supervised while serving in the CM?
8. If the teens need to be corrected or disciplined, who does that? Is the YM pastor/director involved?
9. How are the teens removed from serving in the CM if necessary?
10. During how many services can the teens serve per week?
11. How do you assure that the teens are attending the YM studies or services?
12. What is the process for advancing teens to leadership positions?
13. At what age do teens become "adults"?
14. When teens become "adults," how do they become adult CM team members? Is there a screening?

**Screening** the teens means that you either "hand pick" them yourself, or have them recommended to you by the YM pastor/director. Teens will naturally want to get involved in the CM, but often for the wrong reasons. Screening your teens with some basic qualities or steps will protect you:



- His/her age? (this fits in the standards that you set)
- The length of time that he/she has been a Christian? (this fits into the standards that you set)
- Letters of recommendation from church staff and friends? (especially from the YM pastor/director)
- GPA in school?
- His/her involvement in the YM? (as confirmed by the YM pastor/director)
- His/her Christian testimony?
- A personal interview with you?
- His/her completion of an application form
- His/her attendance at a children's ministry orientation meeting, etc.?

**Supervising** the teens while involved with your children's ministry is critical for teens. Even the "most committed" teens are still teens! They may appear to be "older," but they will always need an adult supervising them. The "Never Alone" rule (*No CM adult or teen is ever alone with children.*) is not "satisfied" by a teen in the room. A teen is not an



adult, so if a teen and an adult are with children you should consider that adult as being "alone" with children. Teens are connected with a supervising adult who monitors the teen's actions and performance while with the children. This protects the children's ministry, the children, and the teen. Parents are very cautious about the environments in which their children are placed while at church functions.

**Training** teens should be no different from training adult volunteers in your children's ministry. You should do an initial training in:

- God's view of children
- The children's ministry vision
- Community/family demographics and needs
- Child safety policies and procedures
- Relationships with parents
- Child-targeted conversation techniques
- Child "evangelism" and discipleship
- Emergency procedures

You should also create age-specific training in the various departments or program areas:

- Age-group characteristics
- Learning styles
- Classroom schedules and procedures
- Lesson components (review of curriculum used)
- Classroom management
- Specific safety policies and procedures
- Specific parent needs and relationships

**Accountability** protects the teens from spiritual stagnation. If a teen volunteers to serve in the children's ministry, at the expense of his or her involvement in a YM Bible study or program, that teen may eventually "plateau" spiritually. Teens should be actively involved in YM programs. This demands a healthy relationship with the YM pastor/director or other YM personnel. Be careful not to take the responsibility of mentoring the teens away from the YM pastor/director. Yes, we share in that responsibility, but the YM team members are called and gifted in that specific age group. Accountability can be maintained by creating ministry evaluation forms that are filled out by the supervising CM team members. Copies of the forms are reviewed by both the CM pastor/director and the YM pastor/director. Someone from the YM should review the evaluations with the teen during a one-on-one discipleship meeting. You can also add an additional level of accountability by requiring a certain GPA standard for the teen's school grades. Parent involvement may also be a critical addition to the accountability factor. Basically, you want the teens to sense that involvement in the CM is a serious commitment that is "watched" by many adults who care for both the teen and the children.



Teens can be an awesome source of energy for your ministry. They can be a great boost to your ministry/mentorship of your children. BUT, they can also be a huge drain of both of those things as well! If you use teens, do it with determination and purpose. Don't incorporate teens simply as "fillers" of needs on your team roster. If done correctly, with God's guidance and wisdom, you can actually create "senior teens" who raise up to a supervisory level over other incoming teens. This is a very healthy goal, but it comes with much work, planning, and patience.