

# Knowing The Needs & Trends And using them!

Steve Alley

Jesus taught us to be aware of the people and culture around us. He was always “mixing in” with the people to become more connected and significant. Knowing the needs and trends of those to whom you will minister is a critical step in creating a fruitful ministry.

## Definitions & Differences

**trend** \ *noun* 1. A general direction in which something tends to move. 2. A general line of orientation. 3. A general tendency as of opinion. 4. The popular taste at a given time.

**need** \ *noun* 1. A condition requiring relief. 2. Anything that is necessary but lacking. 3. The psychological feature that arouses an organism to action; the reason for the action. 4. A state of extreme poverty or destitution.

*Webster's Online Dictionary, websters-online-dictionary.org*

The major differences between “needs” and “trends” is in the word “necessary.”  
A “need” is necessary; a “trend” is a popular tendency.

## Assessing The Needs

### Observe – The Community

1. Economic “culture”
2. Crime level
3. Family stats (divorce, etc.)
4. Neighborhood conditions
5. Children playing?
6. “Walmart walk-through”



### Observe – The Church

1. Number of children in adult service
2. Population of children’s ministry programs
3. Visible presence of the children’s ministry
4. Family-focus?

### Ask / Listen – The Community

1. Casual inquiries
  - a. “How do you like living here?”
  - b. “Do you like the schools here?”
  - c. “Is this community safe?”
  - d. “What is the #1 need?”
2. At the post office
3. At the gas station
4. At the grocery store
5. At local fast-food restaurants
6. At local “sit down” restaurants
7. At local schools



### Ask / Listen – The Church

1. Ask, “Is this your home church?”
2. Ask, “Do you like the programs offered here?”
3. Ask, “What do you think of the children’s ministry here?”

## Assessing The Trends

### Evaluate The Trend

1. Fashion or passing fad?
2. Connected to a belief or moral choice?
3. Connected to a spiritual choice?
4. Lead children to bad lifestyle choices?
5. Is home environment effected?
6. Is a child’s self-concept affected?
7. Draws a child away from the Lord?
8. What is risked if ignored by church?

### Address The Trend

1. Basic “ingredients” of trend? (pride, etc.)
2. What does God offer instead?
3. Train/empower parents to protect/teach their children.
4. Teach/prepare the children to resist the trend.
5. Close communication with parents.
6. Specific additions to curriculum if needed.
7. Parent seminars and pamphlets
8. Parent support online.

## Using The Trends To Minister

There is nothing more damaging to your ministry significance with children than being viewed as “boring” or “out of touch.” This reputation is often connected to “being old,” but I’m sure you have known people who are “old,” and yet very popular with children and teens. The “secret” is often in how you speak and what you talk about. Here are some thoughts on how to be, and how not to be, viewed as “old.”

### “Old” People Usually...

1. Use terminology that is obviously out of date.
2. Talk about items or technology that is out of date.
3. Are harsh and expect children to “sit still and listen.”
4. Don’t laugh very much.
5. Don’t understand about the children’s world (at home, at school, etc.)
6. Aren’t very good listeners.
7. Are just plain boring and not fun.

### “Connected” People Usually...

1. Use kids’ terminology.
2. Talk about the challenges, the toys, the possessions that kids have.
3. Have classroom standards, but also let the children move and interact with each other.
4. Are always ready to laugh (at jokes, at themselves, or at silly stories).
5. Refer to the “real world” of the children (at home, at school, etc.) often.
6. Are excellent listeners – they will pause a lesson to listen and talk about a question.
7. Are very fun to be around.

### Infuse Every Lesson With The Children’s World

1. Follow every scripture with a current application of it.
2. Connect scriptures and lessons to everyday child situations (at home, at school, etc.)
3. Ask questions about the Bible story or lesson and encourage them to place the story or lesson into their world.
4. “Translate” Bible verses into today’s language and situations.
5. Create serious or fun role play situations for the children to enact.
6. Set aside a portion of each class or period for “Questions you’ve never been brave enough to ask.” As you answer, don’t preach! Answer humbly. Tell them you’ve thought about the same thing!

