

Understanding Participants and Parents

Stage of life development and transitions from home

Baby adults

A term to remind ourselves that, yes, our participants are considered adults but there is a big learning curve in many areas for them, as it was for us. Yet there is a balance to letting them know what their responsibilities are and expecting them to meet them.

- Establish early on that this will not necessarily be a year “off.”
- Expectations are high but perfection is not one of those expectations.
- They are moving towards adulthood but have not attained it.

Making connections

Young adults are most interested in making connections with individuals and forming relationships. A large part of the young adult's life is centered on questions such as, "Who am I to others?" and "What kind of person do I want to be in relationships which are important to me?" All aspects of relationship-building are important to this age group.

- Connecting with people their age (or not) outside of the unit is sometimes very difficult but those connections can be very helpful when household dynamics are difficult.
- It is important that household relationships are worked at since they spend so much time together.
- Relating with people who are not their age is a great life skill and can be helpful as they test of their ideas for the future.

Transitions

Even though our participants are roughly the same age, they come with their own baggage (as we all do) and from different life experiences. We quizzed our past participants about how we can help ease the transition and this is what we learned.

- Doesn't matter how welcoming you are, it still takes time to get used to the changes. So the old saying holds true . . . Give it time!
- Some have spent so much time with their peers that they have not developed the skill of how to relate with adults. If they are not responsive right away, they likely do not hate you! Helpful self-reminder: Q.T.I.P. = Quit taking it personally!
- Allow for some increased contact with friends or family during the first few weeks as they adjust. At the same time, let them know the best cure for homesickness is to have less contact from home.
- Keeping busy is helpful but with some down time allotted.

Developmental stage – Who am I?

Conflict of Identity vs. Identity Confusion Stage; Erik Erikson

- Process of forming into a unique adult with an important role in life
- Trying to make sense of the world
- Intolerance of differences is a classic defense of identity confusion
- Identity confusion may be expressed by reverting into childlike behavior to avoid resolving conflict or impulsive behavior
- Developing a desire to maintain commitments, i.e., outgrowing fads for more consistent behavior
- Developing identity is often portrayed through intimate relationships; the adolescent will offer a tentative identity to the partner and see how well it is reflected in the loved one
- Peer approval is crucial; adolescents often tend to be happiest among peers
- Parental relationships are often strained; participants will be breaking away from parents; interesting to see how parents respond

Practical Applications

1. Homesickness – individual adolescents respond very differently, but this is very normal – it should subside after a few months
2. General Insecurity – putting other people down to build yourself up; try to stop this before it starts (Example of how to do this: Pet Peeves and Praises)
3. Cliques and gossiping – comfortable to pair off with people most similar to self
4. Different ways of relating physically – some participants are very touchy-feeling; others are not
5. Needing a lot of sleep – irregular sleep patterns and not having a good sense of the importance of a regular sleep schedule
6. Eating and exercise – may need to educate about nutrition and the importance of a healthy body, this is often taken for granted until this stage of life
7. Lack of organization – not knowing how to plan ahead; schedules up to this point have been planned by someone else; helping to develop initiative is a great goal

Case Examples

1. The unit (leaders and participants) has agreed to invite the pastor's family for dinner. The participants called the pastor's family one week in advance to offer the invitation. The participants

know that they are collectively responsible to clean the house before the guests arrive. Ten minutes before the time of arrival you (the leaders) enter the participant's quarters to find newspapers strewn throughout the living room, three-day old dirty dishes on the table you are going to eat on, dirty underwear on the sofa, a soda spilled on the floor, and the air conditioning on high with all the windows open. What do you do?

2. There are many fun, challenging and stretching things to do in your city/town/village. At the beginning of the year, you post the many activities on the bulletin board in the participant's quarters and even show them how to do a few of the activities. After the first three months, the participants are still renting movies every Friday night, unless the leader initiates and organized the event. You continue to suggest new possibilities, but still see no initiative on the participants' behalf. You feel as if the year is being wasted and the participants are not being challenged. What do you do?

3. Several of the participants continually stay up late talking with one another. They manage to get to work on time (or just late enough that it doesn't really matter) but come home from work exhausted and fall asleep. One oversleeps and does not have dinner ready at the appointed time. The next night, it's time for learning component and they are not awake. You wake them up and start the session but realize that they are obviously not concentrating or getting anything out of the experience. You have been trying diligently not to micromanage their schedule, to allow them the freedom to make mistakes and learn from them, and to gain the necessary independence from authority. With this in mind, how do you address this situation?

Faith development stages

- based on information from James Fowler's Faith Stage Development Theory adapted by Michele Hershberger

Fowler suggests there are five basic stages in personal faith development. He asserts that even "non-religious" persons go through faith stages. Faith stages define a distinguishable pattern for how person's move through "the force fields of their lives". The stages are moved through chronologically. No stage is "better than another", there is value and there are dangers in each developmental area.

Since we are working primarily with young adults, I will outline the stages most likely to occur in this life stage.

Stage 2 - age 7 to adolescence (some adults)

- Live in an orderly, linear, dependable world
- Need for proof
- Work at sorting real from make-believe
- Basic belief in a reciprocal, fair God
- Story is key to learning
- Can construct perspectives of others, but still see world, self, and others through structure of one's own needs

Stage 3 - adolescence

- First significant relationships outside of family - how one knows oneself in context of family system is examined
- Identity crisis
- Can envision many possibilities without seeing them
- Can become dependent on the "tyranny of They"
- Peer group extremely important for reflecting self
- I am my relationships

Stage 4 - generally not before young adulthood

- Painful disruption of deeply held worldview
- Can't rely on external sources of authority anymore
- Owning one's own faith - critical reflection
- Become individualistic instead of differentiated
- Realization that persons are shaped by their social class, group histories, etc...
- Often happens when one move's away from family, but if one joins others in stage 3 group often they remain there

Stage 5 - usually not before mid-age

- New beginning that reclaims and reintegrates strong points of childhood faith
- Realization that you're not so good at critical thinking and self-differentiation as you thought
- Attends to the interrelatedness of things
- Alive to paradox
- Justice for everyone, not just my group
- Can become cynical or passive to overwhelming nature of paradox
- Sense of strength in ecumenical thought while deeply committed to your own faith and practices

Strategies for helping in faith stage development and transitions:

Stage 3

- Image of God as friend important
- Talk about issues
- Begin global awareness
- Utilize mentors

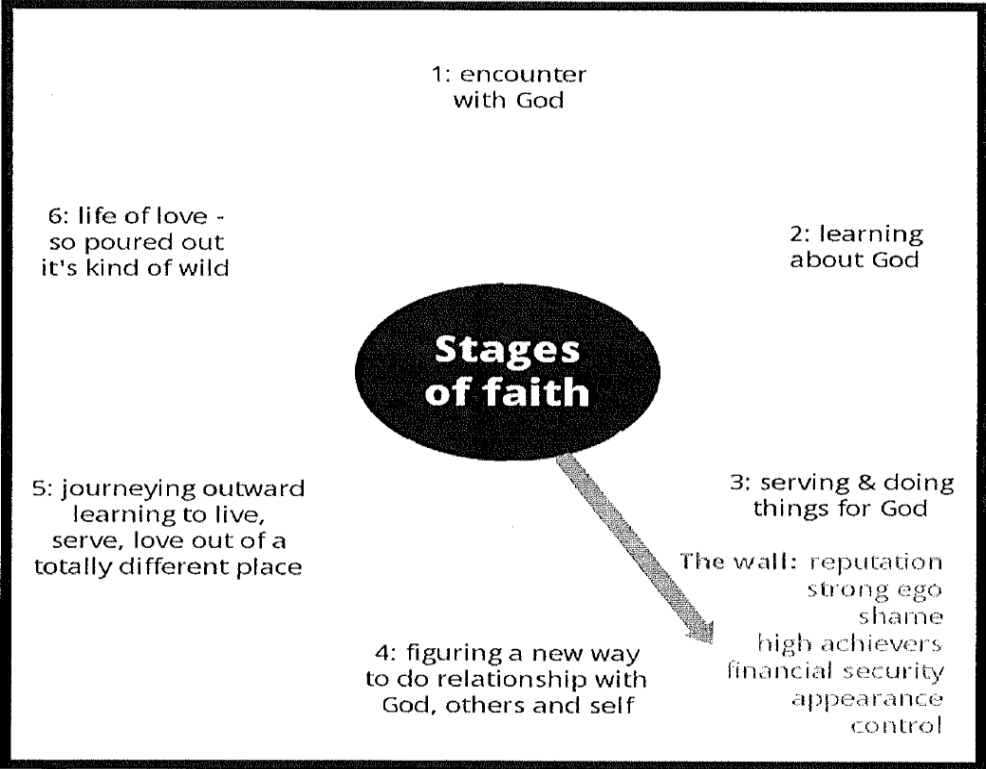
Stage 4

- Need permission to hold faith at arm's length - And still feel your love!
- Don't be threatened by questions and doubts. This is owning faith, not un-faith. Let intellectual discussions flow.
- Need intimacy
- Need spiritual disciplines

Stage 5

- Let them experience other faith traditions

- Mystery important
- Encourage them to work through the past
- Need opportunities to do peace, justice, and service
- Spiritual direction



Fowler’s stages of faith

Stage	Age	Characteristics
Pre-stage: Undifferentiated faith	Infant	Trust, hope, and love compete with environmental inconsistencies or threats of abandonment.
Stage 1: Intuitive-projective faith	Toddler-preschooler	Imitates parental behaviors and attitudes about religion and spirituality.

		Has no real understanding of spiritual concepts.
Stage 2: Mythical-literal faith	School-aged child	Accepts existence of a deity. Religious and moral beliefs are symbolized by stories. Appreciates others' viewpoints Accepts concept of reciprocal fairness.
Stage 3: Synthetic-conventional faith	Adolescent	Questions values and religious beliefs in an attempt to form own identity.
Stage 4: Individuative-reflective faith	Late adolescent and young adult	Assumes responsibility for own attitudes and beliefs.
Stage 5: Conjunctive faith	Adult	Integrates other perspectives about faith into own definition of truth.
Stage 6: Universalizing faith	Adult	Makes concepts of love and justice tangible.

Data from Fowler, J.W. (1981). *Stages of faith: The psychology of human development and the quest for meaning*.

Johnston, B.S. (1996). *Psychiatric mental health nursing: Adaptation and growth*.

Parents

Lawnmower parents

Move over, helicopter parents – there is a new group of parents that are taking over, and not in a good way.

In the last few weeks, you may have heard the term “Lawnmower Parent” which has gained steam after anonymous middle school teacher shared a story with a “lawnmower dad”. The unnamed teacher shared her story of being called down to the main office in the middle of her planning period to pick up an item the teenager forgot. “Thinking it was something like an inhaler or money for dinner, I was happy to go retrieve it.”

The teacher was shocked to find that a father went out of his way to deliver an insulated water bottle for his teenage daughter. The father had texted his daughter back that she could use the water fountain, but the teen “had to have it out of the bottle.” The teacher was so floored that she felt she needed to [write a post](#) about parenting today, and lawnmower parents.

Exactly what are lawn mower parents? “Lawnmower parents go to whatever lengths necessary to prevent their child from having to face adversity, struggle, or failure. Instead of preparing children for challenges, they mow obstacles down so kids won’t experience them in the first place,” the teacher wrote.

Lawnmower parents will do things for their children, even though their children are old enough to handle things on their own... for example, forgetting their homework, lunch, or water bottle at home and expecting their parents to drop everything to bring it to them. Or asking their mother or father to contact the teacher and ask for an extension on an assignment rather than the student asking themselves.

“In raising children who have experienced minimal struggle, we are not creating a happier generation of kids. We are creating a generation that has no what idea what to do when they actually encounter struggle. A generation who panics or shuts down at the mere idea of failure. A generation for whom

failure is far too painful, leaving them with coping mechanisms like addiction, blame, and internalization.”

This new-ish term reminds me of the term “bulldozer” style of parenting introduced a few years ago. [The Bulldozer parent](#) will forge ahead before their child, removing all obstacles, ensuring success at every turn. While well-intentioned and meant to “protect” the child from short-term harm, a bulldozer style of parenting ultimately results in a psychologically fragile child, fearful and avoiding failure, with never-learned coping strategies and poor resilience.

What do you think – do you agree with this anonymous teacher? Or do you think she’s exaggerating?

Find this article at: <https://anotherworld.com/tag/bulldozer-parents/>

Bulldozer parents

What Bulldozer Parents are Doing to Our Gen Z Workforce by Karin Hurt

I’ll be honest. I didn’t even know bulldozer parents were a thing until Friday night. When did helicopter parents become bulldozer parents? Are they really bulldozing at work?

I had to Google the whole “bulldozer parents” thing after having dinner with some HR execs who were attending the keynote I was giving the next day. Every single person at the table had at least one story of a bulldozer parent. Most had more. It made for a sad, twisted sort of entertainment. But there’s nothing really funny about what overly protective parents are doing to our future workforce.

“Don’t you hate it when a parent comes to the interview AND ANSWERS ALL THE QUESTIONS?”

“Or when you are doing new hire orientation, and the mom comes too, AND proceeds to supply all the answers? AND then when I suggest to mom that their child needs to take responsibility... the mom gets the gist and gets quiet... and the kid doesn’t have a clue what to say next and keeps looking at Mom?”

“Or when the Dad pulls strings to get his child hired. And then, AFTER ALL THIS ADVANTAGE, the child keeps screwing up... and said Dad then intervenes AGAIN to defend the behavior... Exactly how is this helpful... for anyone?”

Dear Bulldozer Parents,

I get it. You want the best for your kids. So do I. You’ve learned a lot the really hard way and you want to save your kids some steps.

Despite all your best intentions and deep love for your children, your helping is hurting. All this extra support is undermining your children's confidence and credibility. The last thing you want is HR recruiters comparing notes talking about you and your kid.

Of course, you can help. Give them interview pointers, help them turn their experiences into stories for the situational interview, and when they screw up, give them a big hug and encourage them to try again.

Build confidence and competence

If they're lacking confidence encourage them. If they think they know it all, coach them on their blind spots. If they're strong and full of confidence, challenge them to go for something bigger. And if they're struggling with the basics, don't coddle, take a step back and teach them the basics.

Your turn. Are you facing bulldozer parents intervening in their children's careers? Are your Gen Z employees struggling with the basics? What advice do you have to help parents better prepare their children for today's workforce?

Find this article at: <https://letsgrowleaders.com/2018/08/09/bulldozer-parents-gen-z-workforce/>

Sample letter to parents

Hello!

We want to thank you so much for sending your young adult to Service Adventure in Johnstown! We have just finished our second month as a Service Adventure Team here. Already we have taken a trip to Philadelphia and Harrisonburg, been on several hay rides, canned over 30 quarts of tomato juice, attended 5 different churches, and shared in many wonderful conversations. I hope you have heard about some of this already from your son or daughter. In the next few weeks, we anticipate attending a church youth retreat and going to a hockey game together. Though we are not always faithful in this, we do post pictures and updates on the "Service Adventure Johnstown" Facebook page, if you want to keep up with us in that way.

We want to tell you also a bit about us as leaders. Our role here is not easily defined; it is something between parent, mentor, and friend. Our aim is to encourage each one to find and develop their gifts/passions as well as encourage them to step outside of their comfort zone. As for us personally, we decided to become unit leaders because this program combines many of the things we are passionate about: faith, simplicity, intentional community, youth ministry, and service. We grew up not far from here in Mount Pleasant, Pennsylvania. Growing up, we spent much of our play time outside, and still we enjoy doing most anything outdoors...camping, biking, hiking, etc. We also love music, game nights, and crafting. After studying Disaster Management and Bible & Ministry at Hesston College, Leah (age 27) lived in an intentional community in GA for a while where they focused on offering hospitality to refugees and sustainable agriculture. I (Krista, 25) also studied Disaster Management at Hesston and then transferred to Eastern Mennonite University, where I studied Liberal Arts, Peacebuilding, and Spanish.

Also, we encourage sending letters and care packages; however we would ask that care packages include things that can be shared by the entire unit. Each participant receives \$40 per month and we strongly hope to live within that limit, both thinking about living in solidarity with those living in our neighborhoods as well as wanting everyone in the house to have the same resources available to them. We would appreciate if you would pass this information on to anyone you know might be sending a package our way.

The house address is:

640 Somerset St.

Johnstown PA 15901

We genuinely feel very blessed to be able to share this year with your children. We hope you are proud of what they are doing here this year.

Thank you for all of your prayer and support this year! And please feel free to contact us if you ever have questions, concerns, or comments.

Leah and Krista Rittenhouse

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