



Ministering to Children and Youth

All adults, no matter their calling, can support the development of children and youth in their ward.

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A loving Heavenly Father has given each of us unique talents, gifts, passions, and interests. These talents allow us to minister to those around us as we seek to become “of one heart and one mind” in following Jesus Christ (Moses 7:18). This includes our ministering efforts to children and youth.

Whether you’re a Primary teacher, a youth leader, or a ministering brother or sister, or you simply interact with children and youth at church, you have the capacity to inspire, encourage, uplift, and help children and youth become all that Heavenly Father intends them to be.

Your encouragement and ministering can be part of Church-supported aspects of home-centered efforts, remembering that parents have the sacred, primary role for guiding and supporting their children’s growth. That’s true even if the parents aren’t members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or if they aren’t active in the Church. So, what can that Church support look like, and how can each of us contribute?

These four ideas can help:

1. Get to know the children and youth.

It’s difficult to support others until you know what support they need. Do you know the children and youth around you well enough to know what goals they’re working toward,

what help they may need, or what matters to them? On the flip side, do you also know their strengths and interests so that you can help individuals connect when an opportunity for them to support each other arises?

For example, Jessica Ocampo from Guatemala offered to watch her friend Lisbett’s son David while Lisbett served at Young Women camp. Jessica asked if there was anything she could do to help David during that time, and Lisbett said that David had never learned to ride a bike. Jessica invited her sons to help, and they taught David to ride a bike. They also knew that David was playing on the ward’s basketball team and preparing for a tournament, so they spent the day helping him prepare. David may not have gotten better at basketball in that one day, but, he said, “they showed me they really care.” He also added, “I still have the video on my phone when I learned to ride a bike.”

Other Ideas

- Make sure you have parents’ permission for any interaction with their children outside of a Church class or activity. Avoid one-on-one situations with children and youth. Having one of the child’s parents present as you support their child is ideal. Care should also be taken to promote safety measures.



- Greet children and youth and their parents at church. Learn their names and ask them about their week.
- Ask those you minister to and their families about what they're most excited about, nervous about, or interested in. Know what things they are preparing for. Then talk with them and also pray to know if there's anything you can do to support them.

2. Share your talents and look for connections that could involve others.

You've spent a lifetime developing skills and talents. You've had unique experiences that give you insights and knowledge about a variety of topics. Can you share your talents and wisdom with children or youth to help them in their development plans? Can you help them recognize opportunities that will help them with their desired growth?

For instance, Olalekan Babatunde from Osun, Nigeria, practices law. His stake participated in early testing for Children and Youth. When he heard that it had inspired one young man in his ward to become a lawyer, Olalekan reached

out to him to offer support. Olalekan is helping him learn what to do to prepare for law school.

Maria Vashchenko from Kyiv, Ukraine, noticed the impact of a woman who became aware of her 13-year-old son's music abilities. The woman invited him to play the piano for the cultural celebration before the dedication of the Kyiv Ukraine Temple. He had been strongly considering quitting music at the time, but he agreed to accept her invitation.

"This was a turning point in my son's life," said Maria. "The concert was great! Afterward, we told our son that he could now quit music, but he replied that he would not. He graduated from music school with excellent grades, mastered several more musical instruments, began to write music and songs, and created a music group. When he went on a mission, he organized musical activities, played hymns at sacrament meeting, conducted a missionary choir, and taught investigators to play the guitar and piano. We will always be grateful for the sister who helped our son develop his talents." The influential sister made a difference simply by knowing the young man's skills and inviting him to use them to bless others.

Other Ideas

- Offer to teach children and youth your skills in one of their activities, or have them share their talents with the Relief Society or elders quorum.
- Review your patriarchal blessing to reflect on your talents and gifts of the Spirit that could support others in their development—even gifts that may not be as visible as others, like being a good listener.
- Create a list of individuals' strengths—yours and others'—so you're ready to support others who could benefit from another's knowledge. This may be especially helpful for families, ward councils, and youth class and quorum presidencies to do together.

3. Be interested and give encouragement.

Remember when children or youth have something big coming up; then follow up. Send a note of encouragement. Ask how things went with their plans that week. Be excited for their growth and encourage them to keep going even in disappointments. You don't need to know details to let them know you're supportive.

Once, when I was trying to develop a habit of getting to bed early, a ward member heard me talk one Sunday about my hope to get more sleep that week. He asked me what I was going to do to make it happen. I committed to go to bed by my desired time at least one night that week. "I'll ask you about it next week," he said. I believed he would, so I kept my commitment.

Sure enough, the next week at church he asked if I had met my goal (I had!), and he asked if I would do it again the next week. I knew he would follow up, so I did it. The next week, he encouraged me to meet my goal twice that week. And the next week? He committed me to three nights. He kept encouraging me each week until my plan was a real habit.

Years later, I told that story to another friend at church because I had fallen out of my good habit and knew I needed to start again. "I'll help you be accountable," she said. So each week she followed up with me until I developed a habit of good sleep again. Over the years, family and close friends have helped me with goals to get enough sleep, but the two times it has been most effective were when ward members—with whom I wasn't especially close—helped me set and keep a goal and then followed up with me in an encouraging way.

Other Ideas

- If an individual is sharing their skill during a performance or game, attend and cheer them on.
- Notice growth in others and praise them for their efforts, such as with a Church talk or lesson, an activity they helped plan, a service project they participated in, or a school achievement you heard about. Your words can provide an important motivation for them to keep pursuing their goals on the difficult days.
- If you plan family activities to help your children learn new skills, consider inviting others to join, especially if it relates to their goals.

4. Follow the Holy Ghost

Above all, seek the Holy Ghost. Heavenly Father and the Savior know your strengths and others' needs. They know your capacity to bless the children and youth in your life. Pray to know how you can support and bless those individuals. Then act in faith. The Spirit will guide you in your small and simple efforts to bring about miracles (see Alma 37:6).

The Savior's call to be "of one heart and one mind" (Moses 7:18) invites us—young and old—to be united in our efforts to become like the Savior and follow in His ways. As we minister to children and youth and seek to help them grow, we might find that we grow just as much in return.

Other Ideas

- Live worthy of the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost.
- Set aside time weekly to ponder how to support the growth of your children or children and youth in your extended family, ward, or community.
- Rely on the Spirit in working on your own personal development. Learn from and keep progressing through failure, seeking the Holy Ghost to help you as you grow. ■